

Checklist for the Honors Thesis in Comparative Literature, Arts and Media or Translation

- ☐ Meet with the faculty member teaching COMPLIT 495 or 497 to discuss your plans for an Honors Thesis.
- ☐ Look at Honors Theses on reserve in the Comparative Literature Library (physical copies.)
- ☐ Identify an Honors Thesis Advisor before you complete COMPLIT 495 or 497.
- ☐ Schedule preliminary meetings with your Honors Thesis Advisor to discuss ideas for your thesis and obtain a signature for your preliminary proposal.
- ☐ Submit your [Honors Thesis Preliminary Proposal](#) by the first day of the Winter term.
- ☐ Register for COMPLIT 496 (Honors Thesis Independent Study).
- ☐ Schedule a meeting with your Honors Thesis Advisor for final approval of your proposal, to make a timeline for turning in drafts, and identify a Second Reader.
- ☐ No later than February 16th, identify your Second Reader and submit the signed form of your [Honors Thesis Progress Report](#) to the Comparative Literature office.
- ☐ In January, February, and March, schedule regular meetings with your Honors Thesis Advisor (at least once every two weeks).
- ☐ On the first Monday after Spring Break, email the working title of your Honors Thesis to the Student Services Assistant in the Comp Lit office (complit.student.services@umich.edu).
- ☐ Prepare a 5-10 minute description of your topic to present at the Honors Thesis/Capstone project Showcase, hosted by the Department of Comparative Literature in April.
- ☐ No later than March 28, submit a complete draft of your thesis to your Honors Thesis Advisor and schedule a meeting to discuss final revisions.
- ☐ Get approval from your Honors Thesis Advisor for your abstract.
- ☐ No later than April 10, submit the [Honors Thesis Submission](#) form. This report will automatically route your thesis to both your Thesis advisor and your Second Reader for review, and they will complete their Evaluation Memos within the form.

Honors Thesis Forms

- [Honors Thesis Preliminary Proposal](#)
- [Honors Thesis Progress Report](#)
- [Honors Thesis Evaluation Memo](#) (for advisors; example only)
- [Honors Thesis Second Reader Memo](#) (for second readers; example only)

The Honors Thesis in Comparative Literature, Arts & Media or Translation

Why Complete an Honors Thesis?

Along with the breadth of a liberal arts education, thesis work offers the opportunity for the author to initiate a research project of special interest, and to present their findings. It is also an opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor and to connect with a community of Comp Lit majors in your senior year. This kind of academic writing is required in the majority of graduate programs and it develops skills that are greatly valued by employers. You will become an expert on the subject of your topic, having completed independent and substantive work, and it may well end up being the most valuable achievements and experience of your undergraduate education.

Registering for the Honors Thesis

A student usually writes an Honors Thesis in the winter term of their senior year, ideally right after taking the Senior Seminar (COMPLIT 495), the course in which plans for the thesis are generally formulated. The thesis course (COMPLIT 496) is an independent study class. The student will need to complete (and have approved) the [Honors Thesis Preliminary Proposal](#) in order to receive permission to register for COMPLIT 496. You will be registered under the independent study number of the faculty instructor (faculty member who has agreed to serve as Honors Thesis Advisor). Please note: while there is no penalty for not completing the Honors Thesis, if you are unable to do so, you will need to talk to your advisor about either withdrawing, or receiving an incomplete in the independent study, or working out an alternative plan for completing the independent study without submitting a thesis.

Description of the Honors Thesis

The Honors Thesis is a major essay, usually between 40-50 pages, focusing on a topic that reflects your interest in Comparative Literature. It should display evidence of substantial research, extended reflection and analysis, and grasp of the issues it raises. The thesis should not be merely a survey of relevant critical literature, nor a loosely assembled chronicle of your private musings on a given topic. You should think of it, rather, as a thoughtfully conceived and methodically presented contribution to a critical conversation. You should know the interpretive histories of the works you discuss: what have been the relevant issues, the hotly debated ideas, or the silences surrounding the works you are analyzing? How have these works been received or ignored? What are the issues most often raised in discussions about these works today? If your thesis is based in part on historical, cultural, or social events, or if you are pursuing an interdisciplinary topic, you should research these matters so that you can present your material in the most authoritative and compelling manner possible. Working with your Honors Thesis Advisor in COMPLIT 496, along with your work in previous classes and COMPLIT 495, should help you learn how to assemble and assess these materials.

Honors Thesis Advisor and Second Reader

It is important to choose an Honors Thesis Advisor early in your senior year, and certainly before you complete COMPLIT 495. Since an honors thesis advisor may, or ideally will, be a faculty member with whom you have taken a course, you should cultivate working relationships with faculty during visits to office hours. Your Honors Thesis Advisor may be any faculty member in Comparative Literature or in other departments at the University of Michigan. You may find it helpful to confer about your selection

with undergraduate advisors, or with the faculty member teaching COMPLIT 495. You will meet regularly with your Honors Thesis Advisor, who will help you frame and pursue your research and assist you in drafting your thesis. You may also confer with your Honors Thesis Advisor about suggestions for a Second Reader, who will read and evaluate your thesis after it has been submitted. The Department of Comparative Literature can assist in arrangements for a Second Reader.

Staying in Touch

During your senior year, when you are spending a good deal of time doing work on your own for the Honors Thesis, it is possible to lose touch with professors and other students. This is counterproductive, since you may be missing crucial guidance at precisely the point when it is most important for your project. You should take responsibility for making sure that you are meeting regularly with your Honors Thesis Advisor. This kind of contact is most difficult, of course, when your work is not going well, but problems with your work make it all the more important that you continue to have conversations with faculty who can help. Students who have taken COMPLIT 495 together may find it helpful to meet informally during the following semester to support each other's work. The Department of Comparative Literature will also organize a showcase meeting in April, offering thesis-writers an opportunity to present and discuss their thesis topics.

Drafting the Honors Thesis

Each Honors Thesis Advisor has their own ideas about planning a thesis, but here are seven questions to keep in mind in the process of drafting your thesis.

- **What is my title?** Early in the term in which the student writes the thesis, they should give the undergraduate advisor in Comparative Literature a working title. The title is something that you'll be tweaking throughout the writing process. The important thing is that the title accurately reflects what your thesis is about—not just in terms of topic but in terms of a **research problem**. Think of the title as a road map: for you as you write, and for your reader as they read. As you realize what you're really writing about (probably about half-way through), the title may well change.
- **What is my problem?** That is, the **research problem** to which you are responding, the question that your thesis seeks to answer. Other ways to think about it: it is the stone in your shoe, the grain of sand in the oyster that will generate the pearl that is the essay. The research problem is not the same as a "topic." A topic is a broad field, a theme; a problem is a precise *issue* within that topic area.
- **So what?** What's at stake in my research problem? What are the implications of my problem? Why is this something important to study? This is *very important*.
- **What is my method?** How will I approach this problem and try to solve it? You need to consider other scholars' work on which you are building, and with which your own project is in dialogue. This "method" question is very closely related to the next question...
- **What have I read?** What books and articles have I learned from in this project? Any major things I haven't read yet and need to read soon? Develop a select bibliography of the works that have been most useful to you so far, the basic reading for your problem.
- **What is my structure?** It's very important to have a mini-outline here, with a very brief (one-sentence) statement of *the work you think each section will do* in the Honors Thesis. Think of structure as a trajectory, a narrative if you like. There should be a feeling of connection between one section and the next, a connection controlled by your argument.

- **What is my deadline?** You need a schedule. This is *crucial*. Ask your Honors Thesis Advisor about making a time-line for your thesis and break it down week by week, task by task.

Research for the Honors Thesis

As you do your research, you will need to keep track of what you find and where you find it. You may want to consider using some kind of bibliographic software. Not only will this save you a lot of sweat when the time comes to format the thesis, its bibliography, and footnotes (see below), it will also help you organize your notes as you work.

The [LSA Honors Program provides thesis support](#) through:

- Research and travel grants
- Honors Summer Fellowship Program
- LSA Honors & Sweetland Writing Center's Peer-led Thesis Writing Groups:
 - These groups are led by Sweetland-trained Peer Writing Consultants (PWCs), who are also working on their own theses and will work to assist students in whatever stage they're at. They are offered by term (email complit.student.services@umich.edu if you are interested.)

The U-M Library provides resources to help you throughout your project:

- [Information for Undergraduate Students](#)
- [Library Research Guides](#)
- [Citation Management](#)
- ["Ask A Librarian" Support Services](#)
 - Librarians can help you locate library resources, connect with a specialist, or find support at any stage of your project.

Formatting for the Honors Thesis

Theses are to be typed, double-spaced (not one-and-a half-spaced), with at least one-inch margins on all sides of the page. Leave the right margin unjustified (only the left margin should be regular). Set your essays in 12 point type and avoid using exotic or peculiar type-faces—even for the title page. Use a single typeface for the entire thesis. Print your thesis on one side of each page, and use a minimum 20 lb weight paper for the final copies.

Pages should be numbered at the top center or top right-hand corner of each page. The front matter before the Contents page should be on unnumbered pages. The front matter after the Contents page (this will include the "Short Titles" page(s) and, if applicable, the "Figures" page(s) should be numbered in small-case Roman numerals. The body of the thesis itself should be numbered with Arabic numbers. The first page of your "Short Titles" should be page "i." The first page of the body of your thesis should be page "1." If you wish, you may suppress the number on the first page of each new element of your thesis ("Short Titles," "Figures," "Notes," "Works Consulted," etc.)

Parts of the Honors Thesis

Make sure that your thesis contains all of these parts (except for those parts labeled "optional").

- **Title Page.** The title of your thesis comes first, centered, set in regular upper and lower cases. Subtitles go on a line below the main title. Below the title goes "by," lower-cased, on a line by itself. Your name follows on a line by itself, centered. Insert below these five lines: A thesis

presented for the B. A. degree / with Honors in / Comparative Literature / University of Michigan / April [current year].

- **Dedication Page** (optional). No heading on this page. Keep this simple.
- **Acknowledgement Page(s)**. Head this Acknowledgement (underline as shown). Make this page double-spaced. List here, in paragraph form, all those who have helped you arrive at your completed thesis. The best way to get an idea of how to write this page is to look at some examples in books you have read in your research. This page may expand to include part of a second page, but it should not be longer than two pages.
- **Abstract**. Head this Abstract (underline as shown). Make it single-spaced, but keep it set in 12 point type and your thesis typeface. This is one of the most important single pages of your thesis. Here you should give your reader a one-page (no more than 400 words) summary of your thesis. You should try to state the topic and what your argument about that topic is, and give a very brief structural overview of the sections into which your thesis might be divided and the conclusion(s) you reach.
- **Contents Page**. Head this with the word CONTENTS (in full caps as shown). Put section titles flush left; put page numbers flush right. The first entry on your contents page will be your first Short Titles page, marked with a lower-case Roman numeral “i.” If your thesis has figures, you will have a “Figures” page entry that will also be part of your table of contents, marked with a Roman numeral. If your thesis has no subdivisions, you will simply put the short title of your thesis at the appropriate place in your table of contents. If your thesis has been divided into sections or chapters, list the titles followed by the first page (Arabic) number for each section/chapter. Next comes “Works Cited” (not in quotation marks; flush left) and the first page of your bibliography (flush right).
- **Short Titles Page** (optional). Head this page Short Titles (underline as shown). Here will be, in correct bibliographic form, any texts that you cite more than five or six times in the text of your thesis. This page will differ in appearance from your regular bibliography only in that you will precede each entry with whatever the abbreviation for that text is (set in quotation mark or underlined, as appropriate). Follow each abbreviation with a colon (no space before the colon), two spaces after the colon, and then the full bibliographic entry for that text. You should also cite all of these texts in your list of “Works Consulted” at the end of your thesis. This page is merely to assist your reader in quickly discovering the abbreviations you use for the text central to your thesis.
- **Figures Page** (optional). If your thesis has figures (illustrations, maps, other images) you will need to list them on a separate page. Head this page “Figures” (but don’t put the word in quotation marks; underline it instead). Continue numbering it in lower-case Roman numerals. List each figure by some clear, short, descriptive “title”—generally the same as the title you assign to the figure on the page of the illustration itself. Follow that “title” with a comma, a space, and the number of the page upon which the illustration appears in your thesis.
- **Thesis Text**. Make this double-spaced, and number pages at the top center or top right corner. You should also double-space block (indented) quotations. Your text should conform to academic style as described in the [MLA Style Manual](#) or the [Chicago Manual of Style](#): both manuals are available through the U-M library. What is most important is to be consistent in following the academic style manual you have chosen.
- **Footnotes** (at the bottom of the page) should be single-spaced. Endnotes (at the end of the thesis) may be single or double spaced. Either form of annotation is acceptable. Note numbers (foot or end) should be in 12 point type and should be superscripted at the appropriate point in the text.

- **Works Consulted.** This is your bibliography, though you give it the title Works Consulted (underline as shown). Double space and number these pages (the numbers should be continuous with the thesis text itself). This title signifies that you're putting works in this bibliography that you have read (or read in part) for your thesis, but that you do not necessarily cite in your notes. Be sure to follow the MLA or Chicago style manual in preparing your bibliography.

Submission and Evaluation of the Honors Thesis

Deadline for submission

Your thesis must be completed and submitted no later than April 10. Once you have completed any edits required by your Thesis Advisor and Second Reader, you will submit the final copy, your abstract, and permission for the department to display your thesis with our collection using the [Honors Thesis Submission form](#). To ensure sufficient time for faculty to read and evaluate theses, **late submissions of the Honors Thesis will not be accepted**. The Department will keep a copy of your thesis in the Comp Lit library as part of its growing repository of undergraduate theses.

Evaluation of the Thesis

The Honors Thesis Advisor for COMPLIT 496 recommends a level of honors, determines a grade for the thesis itself, and submits a grade for the thesis course, taking into consideration all aspects of the research and writing. These grades may or may not be the same.

Second Reader

The Second Reader will submit comments on the thesis and recommend a level of honors.

In the event of a discrepancy between recommended level of honors, the thesis will be read by the acting Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), who will act as tiebreaker and be given final say in the determination. In the case that the DUS is also the Honors Thesis advisor, the tiebreaker will instead go to the department Chair (for Comparative Literature, Arts, and Media majors) or the Translation Advisor (for Translation majors).

Level of Honors

The Thesis Advisor and Second Reader base this decision upon the student's grades from the required Comparative Literature courses (495 and 496); their own evaluation reports of the thesis; and both the overall and major undergraduate GPAs. The LSA Honors Program's recommendations for evaluating level of honors should generally be followed:

- **Honors.** The thesis (more or less) does what the student proposed and what the department or mentor expected; the thesis involves a substantial amount of work, demonstrating a competent use of methods or approaches acceptable in the discipline and engagement with the appropriate literature; the thesis is acceptably written.
- **High Honors.** The thesis goes beyond the basic expectations in at least one substantial way:
 - It uses more than one method (e.g., a content analysis and an experiment).
 - It involves substantially demanding data collection (e.g., original large-n dataset, substantial fieldwork, multiple archives).
 - It engages an unusually large or diverse set of literatures.
 - It is particularly well written.

- **Highest Honors.** The thesis goes beyond the basics in at least two and possibly more ways, or presents a genuinely significant original contribution to the relevant scholarship (e.g., it might be publishable in a professional peer reviewed scholarly journal).