

English Master's Degree  
University of South Alabama  
**THESIS Checklist**  
And Information on Comprehensive Options

All graduate students must complete a comprehensive exam equivalent to complete the M.A. Students in the Creative Writing concentration must complete and successfully defend a thesis; students in the Literature concentration may complete and successfully defend a thesis or pass a comprehensive exam to receive the degree. The guidelines for theses and exams are attached. Students who are about to begin this process or have any questions about it should contact the Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Ellen Harrington.

### **Thesis Topic**

Begin thinking about topic ideas as you are proceeding with coursework. Remember, most students need two semesters to complete a thesis, so you should factor this into your degree planning.

### **Director**

Once you have some ideas about your project, you can schedule a meeting with the Graduate Coordinator to discuss the thesis process and deadlines. You should also schedule a meeting with a faculty member that you would like to direct your thesis, someone on the graduate faculty whose specialty relates to your thesis area. If you are having trouble determining which faculty members might be in this area, the Graduate Coordinator or other faculty in related fields to yours can help you identify possible directors for your project.

### **Committee**

Each thesis committee consists of the director and two English graduate faculty members, plus an additional graduate faculty member from another department at the university. Your director and the Graduate Coordinator can help you identify other faculty to serve on the project; you may request faculty that you have worked with before or faculty that have a particular interest in your area. Once you have contacted these faculty members and they have agreed to serve, you must fill out a Thesis Committee Form and contact the Graduate Coordinator with the committee information, so that it can be put on record with the Graduate School. This must occur before the first semester of thesis hours.

### **Thesis Hours**

Once you have a general idea of the subject of your thesis and a director and committee in place, you can register for thesis hours. Students generally register for three thesis hours per semester in their last two semesters of coursework (though students who have already completed enough credit hours may register for fewer hours). Since students get credit hours for thesis work, each thesis student must have a director who will issue a grade for the work. Forms to register for thesis hours are available on the department website (see below) and must be approved by the Graduate Coordinator and the Department Chair. You must submit a form for each semester that you register for thesis hours. Once you have approval, you must register through PAWS in the normal registration period for the semester. In order to register for a second semester of thesis hours, you must have an approved prospectus (see below).

### **Registration for Thesis Hours Credit (clickable links for forms available on the English website)**

#### *First Semester of Thesis Hours*

1. In order to register for thesis credit, students must first obtain authorization from their supervising faculty member, then the approval of the Graduate Coordinator and Department Chair by submitting Thesis Hours EH 599 Request Form ([www.southalabama.edu/english/programs/Thesis%20Hours%20599%20Form.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/english/programs/Thesis%20Hours%20599%20Form.pdf)). Once approval is given, the student will receive an override to register for thesis hours in PAWS.
2. The English department also requires that the Thesis Committee Form be completed in order for any M.A. student to sign up for thesis hours. The form is available here:

[www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/GSForm4T-DCCommittee.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/GSForm4T-DCCommittee.pdf) To get information on Graduate Faculty status and date of appointment for the form, check here: [www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/faculty.html](http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/faculty.html)

### *Second Semester of Thesis Hours*

1. File a new Thesis Hours EH 599 Request Form (<http://www.southalabama.edu/english/programs/Thesis%20Hours%20599%20Form.pdf>). Once approval is given, the student will receive an override to register for thesis hours in PAWS.
2. The English Department requires that the Prospectus and the Prospectus Signature Sheet be completed in order for any M.A. student to sign up for a second semester of thesis hours. The Thesis Checklist contains specifications for the prospectus below and on the last two pages of this checklist. Information on formatting your signature sheet is available here: [www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/ThesisDissertationGuide.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/ThesisDissertationGuide.pdf)

### **Prospectus**

The prospectus is a formal written description of your thesis project that must be approved by your director and committee. You may complete this with the help of your director before or after you form the committee. The description of the literature prospectus from the guidelines is:

In addition to a description of the thesis project and an outline of research, the prospectus should include a justification of the contribution the thesis will make to the field of study in which it participates, and a discussion of how the thesis addresses the stated goals of the literature concentration.

The creative writing thesis requirements, which vary by genre, are appended to this checklist. The Thesis Prospectus must be approved by your committee and the college. **The English Department requires that the Prospectus Signature Sheet (see link above) be completed in order for any MA student to sign up for a second semester of thesis hours.** Once the prospectus has been completed and approved, please forward a copy of the prospectus to Dr. Harrington to be filed.

Please note that you should follow the requirements for the project that are explained in the Graduate School guidelines ([www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/ThesisDissertationGuide.pdf](http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/ThesisDissertationGuide.pdf)); all theses require an introduction (usually 5 to 10 pages) and an abstract, as well as special formatting.

### **Deadlines**

Remember to apply for graduation at the beginning of the semester before the one in which you intend to graduate.

The thesis must be defended and all needed revisions completed prior to the Graduate School's First Submission deadline. This is a "first submission" only in the sense that the Graduate School is checking formatting; otherwise, it is a FINAL copy.

To schedule a defense, you must contact all committee members to set up a 1-2 hour period when they can attend. (Defenses usually take about one hour but run a few minutes longer.) You must then contact the English department to reserve a room during that time. You should also contact the Graduate Coordinator with your scheduling information, so the defense can be announced to the Graduate School and the department. **In order to graduate on time, you must provide committee members and the Graduate Coordinator with a hard copy of the final version of the thesis TWO WEEKS prior to the defense date.**

The defense usually consists of a brief presentation on or discussion of the project by the student, a question and answer period with the public present, an optional closed session with only the student and the committee present, and a closed meeting of the committee in which the outcome is determined. Generally, the thesis director will not allow a student to schedule the defense if the project is not in an acceptable state to complete the degree.

At the defense, faculty must sign an approval form to record their votes, and the director and student must sign to attest that the thesis is not plagiarized. Students can access this approval form (GS Form 7) and type in the required information here: <http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/GSForm7T-Dsubmissionform.pdf> **The student**

**is responsible for bringing a prepared copy of this form to the defense.** Students may also get signatures on a properly formatted title page (to be bound in the document) at this time.

After the defense and approval of the thesis, students must make any changes or revisions that are required by the committee. Students should allow a minimum of 1-2 weeks to complete these changes. All First Submissions must go through Dr. Varghese for his approval on GS Form 7 **before** submission to the Graduate School on the First Submission Deadline. (Students must make an appointment with Dr. Varghese in the A&S Dean's office by calling 460-6280.)

After submitting the thesis to the Graduate School, students must make any formatting changes required by the graduate school and meet their deadlines and fee schedule.

Description of required formatting and Prospectus Approval Form:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/ThesisDissertationGuide.pdf>

Graduate School thesis deadlines:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/calendar.pdf>

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OPTIONS: LITERATURE CONCENTRATION

### Literature Option #1: Procedures for the Literature Thesis and Oral Examination

Candidates for the M.A. in English with a concentration in literature may choose, as an exam option, to write a Thesis, an extensive research project which may draw on students' previous written work in courses, but which must also involve substantial further research under the supervision of the Thesis director. Students who have chosen the Thesis option will take 3-6 credit hours of thesis work towards the graduation requirement, leaving a minimum of 30 credit hours of course work.

The Thesis should be a sustained piece of writing, at least 50 pages, containing original scholarly work and an explicit discussion of methodology and of relevant critical history.

After completion of the Thesis, an oral examination will be scheduled with the Thesis committee, to serve as a defense of the Thesis and to demonstrate that the student's M.A. work has fulfilled the comprehensive objectives for the literature concentration. In addition to articulating the assumptions and objectives of the Thesis project, the Thesis writer should be prepared to demonstrate a broad knowledge of the fields relevant to the Thesis at her/his defense.

According to the graduate school's *Guide for Preparing Theses and Dissertations*,

The master's thesis and the doctoral dissertation represent major achievements in graduate study. The thesis/dissertation is a learning experience for the student and contributes to the body of existing knowledge in a given field. Students completing the thesis/dissertation research project or creative endeavor demonstrate a mastery of their fields that reflects the ability to function effectively and independently in the creative or problem solving process.

The quality of the thesis/dissertation is a reflection of the standards of the Graduate School and the University. While creativity and individuality are encouraged, there is a need for the format to be internally consistent.

#### Procedures

The thesis is generally undertaken after the student has completed most course work. After identifying a Thesis director who can support the Thesis project, the student will write a prospectus, which must be approved by the Thesis committee, made up of three members from the English department, including the Thesis director, and one outside member. In addition to a description of the thesis project and an outline of research, the prospectus should include a justification of the contribution the thesis will make to the field of study in which it participates, and a discussion of how the thesis addresses the stated goals of the literature concentration.

When the student is actually ready to begin devoting regular work to the thesis, "thesis hours" are taken as a course, a 3-6 semester hours, which may be taken in any combination over a period of four semesters. **N.B., thesis credit ceases to be current after two years, and the student must be registered for at least one hour of credit during the semester in which the oral defense is conducted.**

#### Registration for Thesis Hours Credit

In order to register for thesis credit, students must first obtain authorization from their supervising faculty member, then the approval of the Graduate Coordinator or Department Chair. These course designations will show 0 spaces open on the computer but will actually be available by an override obtained in the manner described above.

#### Submission Procedures and Deadlines

Each semester, the Graduate School publishes a deadline for submission of theses, generally about a month before the end of the semester. The departmental oral examination must be completed at least two weeks in advance

of the Graduate School deadline. To that end, copies of the thesis must be in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the oral exam.

**N.B.:** However, the student is eligible for a courtesy check by the graduate school office for format and style if the deadlines are all pushed up two weeks to provide for one final draft to be brought in at least two weeks prior to the final deadline, so that any required changes can be made before the final submission deadline.

Failure to submit the thesis for the courtesy check puts the thesis in peril of not being approved in time for the degree to be awarded in the semester it is submitted.

## **Literature Option #2: Procedures for the Written Comprehensive Examination**

Candidates for the M.A. in English with a concentration in literature may choose, as an exam option, to take a comprehensive written examination on British and American literature. Each student will have two English faculty advisors for the Comprehensive Exam; each advisor will work with the student on one of the two exam fields. Each field, worth 50% of the exam, is chosen by the student with the approval of the advisor.

Each field must be in a different rubric (Period, Genre, Topic) and will cover a list of 15-25 primary and secondary texts, approved by the advisor. Fields should not overlap. For example, a student could choose the period modernism and the genre poetry, but the poetry list should not favor modernist poets. List will be approved by the Graduate Committee and filed in the department for reference. The advisors will assist the student in preparing for the exam.

The Comprehensive Exam is a written exam will be given at the end of the fall and spring semesters: the exams will be administered twice per academic year, no later than four weeks before the date when grades are due each semester. Students will write their exams on offline computers at a location to be determined by the program. Students who prefer not to use a computer may petition the Graduate Committee for exemption. In case of failure, the exam can be retaken once, generally at the end of the following semester.

Each advisor will prepare essay questions for his or her area to test the student. The total exam time is four hours; the student will answer two out of three questions provided in each field. The entire examination will be scored by the two advisors and an additional faculty member chosen by the department chair or the graduate coordinator within three weeks of the exam. The specific criteria for exam evaluation are: clear, coherent writing, close reading, coherent application of a critical method/theory, and synthesis of appropriate scholarly sources. Evaluation of exams will be on a 3-point scale, viz.: 4–Excellent, 3–Good, 2–Weak, 1–Unsatisfactory. (4) and (3) are passing scores, (2) and (1) are failing scores. Students must receive a passing score on both exams (i.e., in both fields, though not necessarily on all four questions). If a student receives an average score below (2) in a field, the student must re-take the exam for that field, answering two new questions.

Once validated by the Examination Committee, examination results are final and may not be appealed. Students will be notified officially by mail as soon as the results are final. Successful candidates must pass all sections of the exam. A failure on any individual section constitutes a failed attempt on the exam as a whole. Those who fail one or more sections, however, need retake only the failed sections when they attempt the exam for the second and final time. Should they fail any individual section on the second attempt, they will be dismissed from the program. A student who starts writing the exam, as a first attempt, and does not, for any reason, complete all the appropriate sections will have failed and must write all the required sections on the second and final attempt. Should this occur on the final attempt, the student will have failed and cannot take the exam again.

## THE CREATIVE WRITING THESIS

A creative thesis is required of all students in the Creative Writing concentration. The creative thesis will be a book-length work of fiction, non-fiction, poetry or a combination. An oral defense is required at least four weeks prior to the anticipated graduation date. For students pursuing the 12-course option, this defense will constitute their Comprehensive Examination evaluation.

According to the graduate school's *Guide for Preparing Theses and Dissertations*,

The master's thesis and the doctoral dissertation represent major achievements in graduate study. The thesis/dissertation is a learning experience for the student and contributes to the body of existing knowledge in a given field. Students completing the thesis/dissertation research project or creative endeavor demonstrate a mastery of their fields that reflects the ability to function effectively and independently in the creative or problem solving process.

The quality of the thesis/dissertation is a reflection of the standards of the Graduate School and the University. While creativity and individuality are encouraged, there is a need for the format to be internally consistent.

### Procedures

The thesis is generally undertaken after the student has completed most coursework. The first step is to find a supervising professor to act as the thesis director, and with that director to enlist a committee (3-4 members, one of whom must be from a department other than English). The student then works with the director and committee to develop a prospectus.

When the student is actually ready to begin devoting regular work to the thesis, "thesis hours" are taken as a course, a total of 6 semester hours which may be taken in any combination over a period of four semesters. **N.B., however, thesis credit ceases to be current after two years, and the student must be registered for at least one hour of credit during the semester in which the oral defense is conducted.**

### Registration for Thesis Hours Credit

In order to register for thesis credit, a student must first obtain her or his thesis director's authorization. Next, the student must receive the approval of the Graduate Coordinator or Department Chair.

### Submission Procedures and Deadlines

Each semester the Graduate School publishes a deadline for submission of theses, generally about a month before the end of the semester. The departmental oral defense must be completed at least two weeks in advance of the Graduate School deadline. To that end, copies of the thesis must be in the hands of all committee members at least two weeks prior to the oral defense.

**N.B.: However, the student is eligible for a courtesy check by the graduate school office for format and style if the deadlines are all pushed up two weeks to provide for one final draft to be brought in at least two weeks prior to the final deadline, so that any required changes can be made before the final submission deadline.**

Failure to submit the thesis for the courtesy check puts the thesis in peril of not being approved in time for the degree to be awarded in the semester it is submitted.

## Criteria for Creative Writing Thesis Prospectuses

The creative writing thesis prospectus is a document of several parts that outlines and describes in a provisional but organized fashion a specific creative project representative of Masters-level work. The prospectus thus serves as both a revisable plan of student action and a locus of committee discussion.

Prior to submitting the prospectus to one's entire committee, it is advisable that the student submit a draft to her/his thesis director for comment.

### **Parts**

1. *Cover sheet* (in memo format): Include your name, date submitted, title of project/proposed work, names of committee chair and members. Briefly state the issue at hand/desired action, and the nature of the attached document(s). 1-2 double-spaced page in length.
2. *Genre-specific requirements*: Whether presented as a list or a narrative, address each point clearly and in reasonable detail. 7-9 double-spaced pages in length + Bibliography.

### **Genre-specific requirements**

#### NOVEL

1. Title
2. A description of the overall theme
3. Reasoning for point of view choices—which speaks to structure
4. Genre in which the novel fits (i.e. literary, Southern gothic, mystery) and how this thesis contributes to that genre
5. Why the student chose this particular story to tell for his/her thesis
6. Was research required? If so what kind? Sources?
7. Brief discussion of elements the student has chosen to use (i.e. balance of narrative summary to immediate scene, frame set-up, telescoping time, humor, action, etc.)
8. What is the character arc?
9. Which writers influenced your work and how?

#### CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Same as novel with this additional question—

1. How did the facts influence the structure of the work?

#### SHORT STORY COLLECTION

1. Title
2. (If appropriate) What theme connects the stories—or how are they connected?
3. Is the point of view consistent with one character throughout or multiple? If multiple, how are these characters inter-related?
4. Define the types of stories in the collection (i.e. experimental, traditional, etc.) and how this thesis fits into the genre.
5. How much research, if any, was involved?
6. What elements have you chosen to use in the stories? (i.e. shifting back and forth in time with each story, character progression, balance of immediate scene with narrative summary, humor, etc.)
7. Is there a central character arc or is the collection more of a thematic arc?

8. Who were your influences as a writer?

#### SCREENWRITING

1. Title
2. A two-line description (Log Line) of the story's main character, initial setup, and central conflict.
3. Genre into which the screenplay fits (e.g. romantic comedy, action, noir, etc.)
4. A one-page outline of the story structure, identifying all critical action points: status quo, inciting incident, first act break, midpoint, second act break, crisis and resolution. Briefly identify all major characters.
5. Character Arc: what does the main character want? What is he/she up against? How does he/she rise to the challenge? What's at stake? How does he/she change throughout the story?
6. What makes the student want to tell this story? Why should we, the audience, pay money to see this movie?
7. What idea, theme, or dramatic question serves as the core of the script?
8. What research will be required, and how does the student plan to undertake that research?

#### POETRY

1. Provide a detailed statement of intent including subject matter and your prospective manuscript's influences (historical or other).
2. Discuss prospective poetic forms.
3. Describe how the poems in the collection will be unified.
4. The prospectus should contain a general description and/or outline of the final manuscript.
5. The prospectus should contain a sample of work to be included (suggested minimum: 20 pages.)
6. 50-70 pages of revised and approved work for completed manuscript.