

Literature Thesis Checklist and Capstone Options

English graduate students in literature have the choice of completing either the literature thesis or a capstone project to complete the degree. Consult the English Department website and the thesis website from the USA Graduate School for more specific information and forms:

<https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/artsandsci/english/grad/index.html>

<https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/graduateschool/thesis.html>

Before graduation, English M.A. students in the literature concentration must successfully meet their comprehensive examination requirement by completing either a literature thesis and oral thesis defense or by completing a capstone option.

Literature Thesis

The literature thesis is the preferred option for students who plan to enter a doctoral program in English. Students write a thesis, which may draw on a student's previous written work in courses, but which must also involve substantial further research under the supervision of a thesis director and should be at least 50 pages long. Students take three to six semester hours of credit toward the graduation requirement, which will be granted upon successful completion and defense of the thesis, leaving a minimum of thirty hours of credit to be accomplished in course work. An oral exam or defense, which will situate the thesis in the comprehensive objectives of the literature concentration, will be required one to two weeks prior to the Thesis First Submission Deadline for the Graduate School.

Literature Capstone

Students produce a capstone project, either the Research Essay or the Multimedia Teaching Presentation Option, which may draw on a student's previous written work in courses, but which must also involve significant further research, meeting the comprehensive objectives of the literature concentration under the supervision of a capstone mentor. In their last semester of graduate study, students take three semester hours of Directed Study credit toward the capstone requirement, leaving a minimum of thirty-three hours of credit to be accomplished in course work. Each capstone requires an annotated bibliography, a major researched essay or an essay/digital presentation, and a presentation in the department. In order to qualify for graduation, all capstone work must be completed by April 15 (spring) or November 15 (fall) and receive the approval of the capstone mentor and the Graduate Committee. Departmental presentations will be scheduled between the deadline and the end of semester.

Literature Thesis

Thesis Topic and Committee Chair

Thesis topic ideas usually emerge from classes and prior interests. Be sure to discuss possible project ideas with English faculty. To begin the process:

- Meet with a possible thesis committee chair or faculty in the area in which you plan to work.
- Attend the spring semester Thesis Workshop in English or meet with the graduate to discuss the thesis process and deadlines—and to help identify a mentor if needed.
- Plan for the thesis to take a minimum of two semesters of writing, starting the previous summer. If it is important for you to finish on time, start as soon as you complete 18 hours of course work.
- Starting from scratch rather than building on previous work normally adds a few months of work.

Thesis Committee

The committee should consist of

- Committee chair from English in thesis area, who will recommend other faculty to serve. The chair reviews all of your writing before it goes to the committee and grades your thesis work at the end of the process.

- Two additional English graduate faculty members, who give feedback throughout the process.
- Outside reader on the USA graduate faculty in another department, who gives feedback during the process or solely at the defense if he or she prefers.

Once you have contacted these faculty members and they have agreed to serve, you must fill out a Thesis Committee Form and submit it to the graduate coordinator.

Literature Thesis Process

Prior to fall term or two semesters before graduation:

- Develop a schedule and general plan for completing the thesis with your chair.
- Submit completed Thesis Committee Form to the graduate coordinator.
- Enroll in three EH 599 thesis hours. (Follow directions online to submit the EH 599 Form and Thesis Committee Form. Once you have approval, you must register for thesis hours through PAWS in the normal registration period.)

During fall term or one semester prior to graduation:

- Apply for graduation.
- Complete prospectus during the first month of the semester; hold prospectus meeting. Follow directions below to submit approved prospectus with signature sheet.
- Circulate revised drafts of thesis sections to the committee with the approval of the chair.
- Follow directions online to submit the EH 599 Form to enroll in thesis hours for final term.

Last semester:

- Complete thesis revisions by the end of February.
- Schedule defense with the agreement of your chair and committee.
- Defend thesis successfully, and complete revisions. Meet Graduate School submission deadlines.

Literature Thesis Prospectus

The prospectus is a formal written description of your thesis project that must be approved by your chair and committee. Your prospectus should be in MLA format and double-spaced throughout. An English MA prospectus contains the following section:

- I. **Introduction** (one page): Discuss the period and subject of your project. Identify the literary texts you will treat, and describe your general approach. Give a broad thesis statement of one to two sentences. What are the major issues that you will consider in your project?
- II. **Literature Review** (two to three pages/essay format): Identify and discuss some of the important scholarly texts that will serve as the basis for your project. Show the broad critical foundation for your analysis and approach.
- III. **Organization** (one to two pages/essay format): Show how your thesis will be organized into chapters. What general material will you cover in each chapter, and how are the chapters related? What is the starting point for your consideration in each chapter? What critical questions are central to your developing project?
- IV. **Working Bibliography** (two pages)

Prospectus Meeting: Students must schedule and convene a prospectus meeting with all English faculty members on the committee (outside readers may attend, but they are not required to attend) prior to submitting the approved prospectus.

Signature Page: Use the template format provided by Graduate School for the signature sheet, and attach the final version of the prospectus to the signature sheet when you request signatures.

<https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/graduateschool/resources/prospectusguide.pdf>

Deadline: The thesis prospectus for the English MA must be completed and approved during the first semester of thesis hours (one semester prior to graduation):

- Fall Term Deadline: September 15
- Spring Term Deadline: February 28
- Summer Term Deadline: July 1

The English Department requires that the approved prospectus be completed in order for any MA student to sign up for the final semester of thesis hours. Once the prospectus has been completed and approved, please forward a copy of the prospectus to the graduate coordinator to be filed. Please note that you should follow the requirements for the thesis that are explained in the Graduate School guidelines (<https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/graduateschool/thesis.html>); all theses require an introduction (usually 5 to 10 pages) and an abstract, as well as special formatting.

Literature Thesis Deadlines and Defense

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 as each committee member votes on the thesis. 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.

- **In order to graduate on time, you must provide committee members with the final version of the thesis at least ONE WEEK prior to the defense date.**
- You must defend the thesis and make 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. Graduate School thesis deadlines: <https://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/graduateschool/thesis.html>
- To schedule a defense, you must contact all committee members to set up a one-hour period when they can attend. You must then contact the English department staff 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.
- 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. You can access this approval form (GS Form 7) and type in the required information. **The student is responsible for bringing a prepared copy of this form to the defense:** <https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/eforms/graduateschool/thesisdissertationsubmissionform.pdf>
- You may also get signatures on a properly formatted title page (to be bound in the document) at this time. Please include the Graduate Director, Dr. Eric Loomis, and the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Harold Pardue, on your signature page and paperwork.
- 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 before the First Submission Deadline to complete these changes.
- Plan to meet with Dr. Eric Loomis, Graduate Director and Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, who must approve the thesis by signing the GS Form 7 **before** submission to the Graduate School on the First Submission Deadline. (Students must make an appointment with Dr. Loomis in advance.)
- After submitting the thesis to the Graduate School, you must make any formatting changes required by the Graduate School and meet the university deadlines and fee schedule.

English Department Capstone Policy

Capstone Options

The capstone requires 33 English Course Hours plus 3 capstone hours/presentation. Students must submit a capstone form to the graduate coordinator for approval by the Graduate Committee by October 15 or May 15 the semester before the capstone. Capstone classes are conducted in fall and spring. Upon approval, students will register for one semester of EH 598: Literature Capstone (3 cr.) with a mentor. The English Graduate Committee must approve the final project.

1. Research Essay

For this option, the student takes a successful seminar paper from a graduate class and, working with a mentor, uses it as the basis for a revised and expanded essay of 25-30 pages.

Fall/Spring Schedule: The student must meet with the approved mentor during the first week of the semester.

September 1/February 1:

- Annotated Bibliography (6-7 pages) due to mentor
- Proposal for revisions due to mentor

October 1/March 1: Revised and expanded essay (25-30 pages) due to mentor for revisions

November 1/April 1:

- Final essay submitted to mentor
- Student works with mentor on formal paper presentation

November 15/April 15:

- Completed essay submitted to Graduate Coordinator for approval by Graduate Committee
- Student makes a 15-minute formal paper presentation at department forum

2. Multimedia Teaching Presentation Option

For this option, the student researches an area that the student has previously studied in graduate-level English courses and applies this research to produce theoretically-sound pedagogical materials for one area of a college-level course, such as modernism in a literature survey. The main product will be an essay and digital presentation such as a narrated, animated PowerPoint slide show of about 15 minutes. Note: students electing the Multimedia Teaching Presentation option must work with a mentor in the mentor's area and must take responsibility for learning the necessary software.

Fall/Spring Schedule: The student must meet with the approved mentor during the first week of the semester.

September 1/February 1: Annotated Bibliography (6-7 pages) due to mentor

October 1/March 1: Research paper (12-15 pages) that will serve as the basis for narrated, animated PowerPoint slide show due to mentor

October 15/March 15:

- Annotated outline or shooting script of slide show due to mentor and emailed to Dr. Halbrooks
- Sample homework or class questions due to mentor

November 15/ April 15:

- Completed narrated, animated PowerPoint slide show of about 15 minutes submitted to mentor with sample homework or class questions
- Completed unit submitted to Graduate Coordinator for approval by Graduate Committee (unit consists of essay, slide show or voice thread, and sample homework or class questions)
- Student presents enhanced slide show or voice thread presentation at department forum (5-minute introduction and 10-minute segment)