



MALS Thesis Proposal

Guidelines

Before you embark on your thesis, you are expected to have completed six (6) regular courses, including your independent study (IS) and research methods module, that will specifically prepare you for your thesis.

FORMULATING AND PRESENTING THEMATIC OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **Engage with existing scholarship.** Writing a thesis means entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation. Familiarize yourself with the discourse on your topic before attempting to contribute to it.
2. **Avoid overly broad beginnings.** Do not attempt to address an entire field or discipline at once. Beginning “with the big bang” requires exhaustive knowledge of all prior research, which is neither feasible nor productive.
3. **Anchor your study in a concrete object.** Identify a specific object of analysis—such as a novel, a film, a painting, a story, or a theoretical framework—around which your theme or question is developed.
4. **Define a specific research question or theme.** Clearly delimit the focus of your thesis. State explicitly what you will examine and what you will exclude. Provide, where possible, a rationale for such exclusions to demonstrate methodological precision.
5. **Ensure feasibility.** Keep your research question narrow enough to be manageable. The broader the question, the greater the volume of reading required, since scholarship presupposes familiarity with existing literature.
6. **Avoid trivial or empirical questions.** Do not frame your research around questions that can be answered by simply consulting a factual source. Scholarship should address unresolved issues and contribute to ongoing debates.
7. **Survey prior scholarship.** Conduct a preliminary review of how other writers/researchers have addressed (or neglected) your theme/question. This situates your work within the broader field and ensures systematic coverage of the relevant discourse.
8. **Use the introduction strategically.** Do not analyze your research question in detail in the introduction. Instead, raise and justify the central themes/questions your thesis will address, explain their significance, and delineate the scope of your project.

CONCENTRATION-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

CREATIVE WRITING:

Your thesis should generally be in the genre of the independent study you have completed. *Exceptions may be made if a student has done outstanding work in more than one genre. Students should not expect approval to write a thesis in a genre in which they have not taken a course or completed an independent study.*

1. What is the genre of your thesis? Explain how this project fulfills the genre's conventions. Are you writing a novella? A set of short stories or personal essays? Poetry, screenwriting? Etc.
2. Address the literary models you will draw on and explain how these models will inform your craft.
3. Identify any challenges you anticipate and describe how you will confront and respond to them. What is the central theme of your thesis? Summarize the plot as you now envision it, or the sequence of poems or essays.
4. How does this thesis project relate to your coursework in the MALS Program?
 - How have your courses contributed to the development of this thesis proposal?
 - What background do you have in areas related to your thesis?
5. Discuss the relationship between your Independent Study or electives and your thesis plans.
6. Bibliography.

CULTURAL STUDIES or GLOBALIZATION STUDIES:

1. Introduction:
 - Begin with a concrete example related to your research topic.
 - Explain why this example is particularly interesting or significant.
 - Show how this example connects to broader issues by linking it to similar or more general cases.
2. Literature Review:
 - Provide a concise overview of how scholars have previously approached the problem.
 - Highlight key debates, methods, and findings in the field.
3. Research Question and Approach:
 - Explain your central research question in detail rather than simply stating it, and describe:
 - The material or data you will analyze,
 - The theoretical framework (if applicable) you will rely on,
 - The methods you intend to apply.
4. Thesis Structure:
 - Outline the chapters of your thesis, briefly describing the focus and purpose of each, and include tentative titles.
5. How does this thesis project relate to your coursework in the MALS Program?
 - What prior background do you have in these fields (within MALS or before MALS)
 - How have your courses in MALS contributed to the development of this thesis?
 - If related to your Independent Study, how do you differentiate your thesis work?

Submitting Your Proposal

You **MUST** submit your proposal to the MALS Office for review by the Curriculum Committee the term before your research is to begin. The student, not the faculty advisor, is responsible for ensuring a complete proposal is submitted to the MALS Office by the deadlines below. Late or incomplete submissions will not be reviewed. Please plan ahead.

Plan of Study form

You **MUST** also submit a Plan of Study form. This form should include:

- Course titles,
- Instructors name(s),
- Grades earned,
- Terms completed, and
- Any final courses required to complete your coursework.

Proposal Submission Deadlines:

- April 15 for theses beginning in the summer term
- August 1 for theses beginning in the Fall term
- October 15 for theses beginning in the Winter term
- February 1 for theses beginning in the Spring term

Thesis Proposal Decisions:

Once the review of your proposal has been completed, you will receive a decision letter from the MALS Office.

Thesis Research (MALS 137):

Upon approval of your thesis proposal by the MALS Curriculum Committee, you may request to be registered for MALS 137: Thesis Research during pre-enrollment; the MALS Registrar will enroll you when Course Registration opens. Enrollment in Thesis Research requires you to complete a [**MALS Thesis Research and Residency Agreement**](#) to communicate the number of terms you anticipate taking to complete your thesis research and writing. This form should include the approval of your thesis advisor.

You may register for MALS 137: Thesis Research for up to 4 terms (one academic year) without paying tuition. These 4 terms may, or may not, be consecutive. However, if your registration in thesis research extends beyond 4 terms, regular tuition (and scholarship) if apply (see the MALS web site for further details: <https://mals.dartmouth.edu/academics/thesis>). Thesis research is graded credit/no credit (CT/NC).

Defending and submitting your final thesis in your final term:

As you approach the end of your thesis research and writing, you must work with your advisor and other members of your thesis committee to determine which term your final thesis will be ready to defend and submit. Send your draft to your full Thesis Committee by the dates below, according to the term you are planning to defend and graduate. Once this has been determined, you will notify the MALS Office of your intent to defend and submit.

Once you have notified the MALS Office of your intent to graduate, you will begin receiving email notifications informing you of the next steps to take as you work toward your final submission and Thesis Defense.

Thesis Completion (final term of Thesis Research)

Graduation Term	Date formatted draft due to readers	Draft of Thesis due to Amy Gallagher for formatting review	Submit Final Thesis to MALS Office	Final Thesis submission date (no exceptions)
Summer	6/1	8/1	8/18	8/20
Fall	8/1	11/1	11/18	11/20
Winter	12/1	3/1	3/18	3/20
Spring	2/15	5/1	5/18	5/20