Graduate English Guidelines for the Preparation of Ph.D. Theses

Graduate English Department
University of Toronto

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to familiarize Ph.D. candidates, their supervisors, and advisors with current practices adopted by the English Department. These practices are reviewed frequently, and must always be adaptable to the demands of particular thesis projects. Accordingly this document will be modified as necessary, and to this end we invite suggestions from its users.

2 The Thesis Topic

The choice of topic is critical for the candidate.

Choose a subject that excites your curiosity and engages your interest. Even those candidates who enter the program with ideas about a thesis topic are advised to test them further against the current state of scholarship and available resources. Before making the intense commitment that a thesis demands, however, give careful consideration to the following:

- the feasibility and viability of the project, including time-constraints on your candidacy and funding (see section 7 below);

- the kinds of scholarly and intellectual resources that research for the thesis is likely to develop and demand;

- the long-lasting effects of the topic on opportunities for teaching, publication, and further research.

Even those candidates who enter the program with already-decided ideas about a thesis topic are advised to test them further against the current state of scholarship, available resources, and the other considerations listed above.
3 Finding a Supervisor

The Graduate English faculty is large in number and extraordinarily wide-ranging in its scholarship. Students are advised to investigate just how extensive the range of potential supervisors is. Every Ph.D. student is assigned a mentor, who is one source for information about potential thesis supervisors. Coursework offers the chance to explore intellectual affinities with potential supervisors, and the Director and Associate Directors of the graduate program can offer useful advice. Members of the Graduate Faculty are always willing to discuss thesis topics and supervision with candidates, and asking a faculty member to read and comment on a fellowship proposal is an excellent way to begin to gauge the potential of a supervisory relationship. Students should initiate discussion of a thesis topic with potential supervisors no later than the Spring of the first year of the Ph.D. program (or second year for Direct Entry students).

4 Submission and Approval of a Thesis Proposal

After securing a thesis supervisor and developing a thesis topic in consultation with that supervisor, the student submits a Preliminary Thesis Proposal (Form A) outlining the focus and approach of the proposed thesis, to the Department by November 1st of the second year (or third year for Direct Entry students). The student is urged to consult with at least three or four further members of the graduate faculty to gain additional perspectives on the design and viability of the project. The student lists the names of the faculty members consulted, and is invited to suggest the names of up to four faculty members to be considered as potential members of the supervisory committee.

The Preliminary Thesis Proposal is a statement of approximately 1-2 single-spaced pages (the length of a SSHRC proposal) that outlines the focus and approach of the proposed program of research. Students who have recently written a SSHRC and/or OGS applications may reuse the Plan(s) of Study from those applications. Successful proposals will be written in clear, concise prose, and will include the following:

- An overview of the current state of scholarship in the area;
- The goals of the proposed research; the questions to be investigated;
• and the anticipated contribution to the field;

• The library resources it demands;

• The languages required to conduct it;

• An annotated bibliography of recent relevant studies (10 or so titles).

The preliminary proposal, in short, demonstrates thoroughness in the preliminary investigation of a thesis topic and assures the Department about its feasibility. Make sure that your writing is clear, concise and coherent. Ask fellow students and faculty members to read your proposal and offer comments.

Also due November 1st is a Supervisory Report (Form B), submitted directly by your proposed supervisor to the Department. The Department circulates the preliminary thesis proposals to all members of the English graduate faculty and invites comments.

5 Ph.D. Supervisory Committees

After the preliminary proposal has been received, the Director and Associate Director, Ph.D., will determine the composition of the supervisory committee (the supervisor plus two additional members). During the next three months (November- January), the candidate must meet with the supervisory committee as a group, to discuss the proposal (including any comments received from other faculty members), to plan the Reading List for the Special Field Examination, and to set up a provisional schedule of work. If the committee recommends revisions, the student then revises the proposal. The student submits an Approved Thesis Proposal and Special Field Reading List (Form C), signed by all members of the committee, by February 15th of the second year of the program (or third year for Direct Entry students).
6 Procedures for the Special Field Examination

The Special Field Examination should be written in the fall term of year three although some students elect to write it in the spring term of year two. It should not be postponed to spring of year three except for documented medical (or similar) reasons. Before working with the supervisor to arrange optimal dates for the written portion and the oral examination, the student must determine potential dates that do not conflict with significant TAing responsibilities. Please do not try to schedule this examination until you have a good sense of what your TAing responsibilities for the fall semester will involve and when you will be most busy with marking. In some ways the exercise of the Special Field Examination positions the student at a threshold, looking back towards engagement with the basic landmarks in the field and looking forwards towards the student’s own future critical interventions. To strike a good balance between these two competing aims, the exam has been re-designed so that it has three basic parts. It requires:

1. a written examination, which is focused on a reading list (this is a take-home exam, which the student is given approximately 72 hours to complete, and in which he/she answers two questions from a selection of 6 questions);

2. a short position paper, 3,000 words long, which relays the student’s most recent thinking about his/her thesis topic and articulates the argument and stakes of the thesis in light of the student’s preparation of the texts on his/her reading list (the student submits, at the latest, one week after the return of the written exam);

3. an oral examination (approximately two hours long) which is focused in part on the written examination, in part on the position paper, and in part of the Special Field reading list as a whole, of which the student should demonstrate mastery.

In contrast to the list for the General Examination, the reading list that is the basis for the Special Field examination will be composed by the candidate and supervisor and approved by the Associate Director, Ph.D. The reading list establishes the literary and disciplinary context for the thesis; it should not be a preliminary bibliography for the thesis itself, but rather should prepare the student to join a particular field as a scholar and teacher. (The examination, correspondingly, is something much more than a dry run for the thesis defense.)
The program of reading that his/her reading list sets out for the student involves either a comprehensive survey of the literature of a particular period or, more unusually, a broad survey of a genre. Period lists cover the literature (prose, verse, drama, fiction) produced over approximately fifty to eighty years. Genre lists normally cover three hundred years. A typical list devoted to the novel as a genre will, for instance, have about forty to forty-five titles. The rule of thumb for both kinds of Special Field list is that about sixty percent of the titles included will provide coverage directed at mastery of a particular area of knowledge (literary historical period or genre) rather than being specifically thesis-related.

Ten additional titles on the list (beyond the standard 40-50) should register the methodological/theoretical priorities of the student’s thesis project. These 10 texts are included as part of the Special Field reading list so as to encourage the student to think reflexively about his/her theoretical commitments and to become familiar with the contours of the critical debate into which he/she aims to intervene by writing the thesis. This list of texts may well overlap significantly with the list of texts comprising the annotated bibliography that accompanied the initial thesis proposal.

Samples of reading lists for the Special Field examination are available from the Graduate Administrator. Lists must be signed by the supervisor and given a title or rationale (e.g., Prose Fiction 1580-1900 or 1700-2000, Period list: 1870-1920). The rationale and the reading list, along with an approved thesis proposal, signed off on by all three members of the committee (Form C), must be submitted to the Department at least three months before the Special Field examination is taken, and before February 15th of year 2 for Ph.Ds, year 3 for Ph.D.Us. Both parts of the Comprehensive Examination must have been passed before the Special Field Examination is attempted. All coursework must be complete and grades submitted.

The written examination is a take-home, open-book examination. The student will receive the questions for the exam from the Graduate Administrator and will have approximately 72 hours in which to write up his/her answers to two of those questions. Upon request and with sufficient notice, the Graduate Office will provide office-space during regular office hours, for exam-writing to those students who would prefer to write their exams in the Department rather than at home or in campus libraries. Students will not be expected to go beyond the list to “research” their answers; nor will they be expected to attach a bibliography or include citations. There is a
strictly enforced word limit for answers; the two essays that students write in response to the examination questions should not under any circumstance exceed 3,000 words each.

The position paper that registers the student’s most recent thinking about the thesis topic is to be handed into the Graduate Administrator in electronic form with a hard copy also submitted the same day or the next business day. The Graduate Administrator then will provide copies of the exam answers and position paper to the supervisory committee at least one week prior to the oral examination. The student may choose to hand in the position paper earlier than one week before the oral, and even before the beginning of the written examination. It is assumed, however, that students may want to take advantage of the thinking they have done in preparing the written examination and do final revisions of their position paper in the brief interval between the written and oral examinations. In a sense, work on the position paper begins when the student begins the reading for the exam; while preparing the texts on the reading list, the student should also be thinking about the contours of the position paper, thinking that will direct that preparation.

Arranging the Special Field examination:

The student’s supervisor will arrange a time and place for the oral part of the examination. Once this has been done, the Candidate may contact the Graduate Administrator and set a date for the written part of the exam, normally 14-17 days prior to the oral examination. The Graduate Administrator requires a minimum of 3 weeks’ notice to set up the exam. Special Field Examinations may not be scheduled in July or August or during the December holiday break. Students and supervisors should be aware that it can be difficult to schedule committee members in late May or in June.

The candidate’s examination script and position paper are photocopied at the Department, where the members of the Supervisory Committee pick up copies. After the oral examination, a single mark of Pass, Fail or Distinction is assigned by the Supervisory Committee to the whole examination, oral and written. The supervisor notifies the candidate of the result shortly after the oral examination and also notifies the Department, in writing.

A second attempt at the Examination (in two parts, as before) is allowed. It must be made within four months or, if the Summer intervenes, in the following September.
7  Beginning the Thesis/Prospectus/Annual Meetings

The position paper will give the committee a basis on which to decide what the student’s next step following the examination should be. Many committees will recommend that the position paper be converted into a prospectus complete with a chapter-by-chapter outline. A few may recommend that the student immediately begin drafting a chapter.

The candidate meets with the supervisor and individual committee members according to the schedule they have established, but the candidate must meet with the full supervisory committee at least once every year in order to meet SGS registration requirements. This report is based on a meeting of the candidate with the Supervisory Committee and is signed by both supervisor and candidate.

It will be necessary for the supervisor to inform the candidate about research leaves or absences that might interrupt supervision, and to make arrangements with the candidate, the Department and a temporary supervisor, if such is called for. It is generally understood that a supervisor will offer support not only in the thesis research and writing but with applications for funding and advice on such professional concerns as publication and job applications.

8  Supervision: Candidate, Supervisor, Supervisory Committee

a)  The Candidate

The thesis proposal is an undertaking to produce an original contribution to scholarship. Candidacy for the Ph.D. of this University also implies that the research and dissertation will conform with the scholarly and stylistic requirements of the Department and the University, and that it will be completed in a timely fashion. In all respects the primary responsibility rests with the candidate. The supervisor, the Supervisory Committee and the Department also have definite obligations.

In particular, the candidate is responsible for maintaining contact with the supervisor and, as necessary, the Supervisory Committee and the Department. The faculty concerned must know
how to reach the candidate by mail, email or telephone, and the candidate and the supervisor should come to an agreement about how, how often, and under what conditions they intend to consult.

It is important that the candidate and supervisor establish at the outset their expectations about consultation, about the kind and amount of direction that will be given, and about the mechanics of it: whether or not it is to be based on draft chapters or sections submitted by the candidate, for instance; or whether progress is to be gauged by reference to a plan or timetable for the work. Expectations about frequency of consultation should be well understood from the first.

Unless it is otherwise agreed, draft work should be legibly printed and accompanied by notes. Finished copy is always the responsibility of the candidate: the supervisor and Supervisory Committee should not be expected to proofread at the final, or any, stage of the work.

b) The Supervisor

It is critical to the success of the working relationship between supervisor and candidate to develop an initial agreement about the method and scope of the research, and to clarify the expectations of supervisor and candidate: about the kind and amount of advice that the candidate wants and the supervisor is able and willing to offer; about the involvement of the members of the Supervisory Committee; about the frequency, regularity and contents of consultations; about an appropriate time scheme for the completion of the thesis; and about the way draft work is to be submitted.

b) The Supervisory Committee

The candidate finds a supervisor for the thesis, and the Director of Graduate Studies and the Associate Director Ph.D. appoint the two further members of the thesis Supervisory Committee. Their role is to offer advice on particular areas of the research, the method and presentation and, very likely, on particular chapters. The Supervisory Committee is also required to monitor the candidate’s progress. All members of the Supervisory Committee act as examiners for the thesis defense.

The School of Graduate Studies publication, “Graduate Supervision,” is available on the SGS website. www.sgs.utoronto.ca
9 Time Constraints and Funding

The University of Toronto (like most Canadian granting agencies, such as OGS and SSHRC) expects that the Ph.D. thesis will be submitted within five years of first registration in a Ph.D. program. Consequently, fellowships are not renewable after this period, and candidates still working on their thesis in the sixth year are often much distracted by financial exigencies. These timing expectations thus create important constraints on the scope of a thesis project, and should be considered seriously during the early stages of topic formation. We urgently advise candidates to undertake research and writing of a scope that can be completed within the second half of a five-year candidacy.

10 Presentation: the Form and Style of the Thesis

The School of Graduate Studies Website publishes on-line guidelines for the production of Ph.D. theses under Producing Your Thesis:
http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Producing-Your-Thesis.aspx. Please note that thesis templates, along with detailed specifications, are available under Formatting:
http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Formatting.aspx. The Department recommends slightly larger than minimum margins: left-hand 38mm (1.5”); other three margins 26mm (1”).

Candidates are advised to regard the normal length of a Ph.D. thesis as 75,000 words. The Department imposes a limit of 100,000 words (inclusive of prefatory matter, appendices, bibliography and all) and this length may be exceeded only with special permission from the Department (in the case of editions, for instance). Please note that the length is expressed in words not pages and that the number of pages is immaterial in this respect.

Theses are normally divided into chapters and sometimes further sub-divided into parts. These may be titled or otherwise but should be listed with pagination, on a Contents page. There is no rule regarding the number of thesis chapters, but be aware that it can be difficult to manage an argument successfully if chapters are over-long. Most theses benefit from a conclusion – even a
short one – and this is especially the case when chapters deal with discrete topics (e.g. different authors or works).

With respect to style, it is important that the candidate adopt one particular citation style (e.g. MLA style; Chicago style) and follow it consistently throughout the thesis. The question of which citation style is adopted should be determined through consultations between the candidate and the supervisor. Footnotes are to be preferred to endnotes. The Department requires that the bibliography be of “Works Consulted” (not “Works Cited”, which is insufficient in this context). The Department also recommends the use of footnotes (located on the page to which they refer); and that quotations from non-English sources be given in the original language, with full translations in the notes. In matters for which there is no readily available model, use discretion and be consistent.

The Department has made Canadian English the standard for all Ph.D. dissertations. Candidates should consult the Canadian Oxford English Dictionary and make sure that spellings are consistent throughout the dissertation.

Acknowledgements should be made to previous scholarship and for material assistance (including funding) that has enabled the research; personal acknowledgements may be inserted after the oral examination.

A current Vita should accompany each copy of the thesis. It should conform to the model appended to these guidelines.

Although candidates must work with an editable version of their theses (e.g. MSWord), note that unless otherwise instructed by the Graduate English Office, when sending a digital copy of a thesis to anyone including the Director, the Department, or a printer, the thesis should be emailed or shared in Portable Document Format (PDF) format. A PDF will ensure the preservation of the original formatting, and provide each person receiving the file with an identical copy of the original. Every individual computer regardless of platform or brand may read a text document in a slightly different manner, altering your formatting, leading to potentially frustrating mistakes and costly reprinting.
11 Submission of the Thesis to the Department

The candidate submits six copies of the thesis, printed single-sided and not stapled or bound, to the Department (including the supervisor’s copy). Boxes for this purpose are available from the Graduate Assistant for $1.50 each. EACH COPY OF THE THESIS SHOULD BE CAREFULLY PROOFREAD AND CHECKED FOR COMPLETENESS BY THE CANDIDATE. The supervisor emails the Director of Graduate Studies, stating that the thesis is ready for examination and suggests names of at least three external examiners and two potential departmental examiners. The candidate also emails PDF copies of his/her Curriculum Vitae and Abstract to the Director and Graduate Assistant. The Abstract must be no longer than 350 words in length (excluding title, name, etc.) and should not list the degree or date until after the Oral Examination has been successfully completed and the candidate is submitting the dissertation to the School of Graduate Studies. However, the candidate’s Academic CV may include his/her prospective PhD degree, thesis title, supervisor, and committee members. The Abstract and CV are used to secure an external appraiser and therefore should include any related academic activities.

The oral examination takes place, under normal circumstances, about ten weeks after the submission of the thesis to the Department. The summer months and the holiday break in December and January create major exceptions to this timing: note, especially that oral examinations are not scheduled in July and August except for emergency situations, and that it can be difficult to schedule committee members for late May or for June.

Other factors may influence the timing of the oral examination, including delays in securing an external examiner, and the external examiner’s own schedule. Candidates are advised to speak with the Director of Graduate Studies at least several months before the planned submission date, so these and other factors may be discussed.

12 The Oral Examination

The Oral Examination committee is appointed by the School of Graduate Studies on the advice of the Department, which makes arrangements for the examination.
The Oral Examination Committee consists of the following:

- **Chair**: a member of the graduate faculty from another department; ensures that the rules are followed and that the candidate is treated fairly.

- **External Appraiser**: an expert in the field from another university, who writes a short appraisal of the thesis: the appraisal will state definitely whether or not the thesis is acceptable “in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.” This report is submitted at least 12 business days in advance of the oral defense, at which time a copy will be given to the candidate, and the examining committee.

- **Supervisor**: usually asks a leading question or two at the beginning of the oral exam.

- **Voting Member**: members of the thesis Supervisory Committee.

- **Departmental Examiner**: a member of the Department with the same functions as the External Appraiser, except that there is no written report.

- **Director of Graduate Studies or a delegated member of the graduate faculty in English.**

13 Submission of Thesis

As of Fall 2009, the School of Graduate Studies requires all Ph.D. students to submit the final corrected version of their thesis electronically. However, it is a requirement of the Department of English that one bound copy of the thesis MUST be submitted to the Department no later than one month after the defense. (For more information, please see Section 14, “Submitting the Bound Copy of the Dissertation.”)

Electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) will be housed in the digital library repository (“T-Space”), the institutional research repository for the University of Toronto community: [http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx](http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx). Theses must be converted to Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF) before submitting as a single file that complies with the SGS Guidelines for thesis file format and naming.
convention: [http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx](http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx). Files are submitted through a self-submission process complete with vetting procedures and web input forms that allow documents to be uploaded into a repository. The digital copy of the ETD in the institutional repository will be considered the “official” version of the thesis. Each ETD will be assigned a permanent URL that will not change, ensuring reliable access to the digital version.

As it is the University of Toronto’s intention that there be no restriction on the distribution and publication of theses, theses will be released after each convocation, and will be freely available to the public in an online environment.

However, in exceptional cases, you may wish to consider delaying thesis publication. Typical reasons for embargo include:

- currently seeking publication of part of your thesis in a journal, or publication of the thesis as a book;
- content of a sensitive nature in the thesis, the publication of which might endanger the wellbeing of the author or of persons associated with the work;
- a patent in process.

If you intend to restrict the release date of your ETD, please submit a restrict thesis release date form to SGS (dated and signed by your graduate unit chair), and include a copy bound inside the front cover of the bound paper copy for the Department. Please see *Emargoes on Thesis Release*: [http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx](http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Electronic-Thesis-Submission.aspx).

N.B.: When uploading through the ETD site, you may be prompted to order printed copies of your thesis through the site as part of the submission process. If you have requested an embargo on your thesis, do not order printed and bound copies through the ETD site. The system will charge you for the copies and debit your card, but will not release your thesis or produce the printed copies for the duration of your embargo. You will not be able to submit a bound copy of your thesis produced through this method to fulfill your Departmental requirements.
Style templates (Word and Latex) and workshops have been developed to assist students with the production and submission of ETDs. There is a computer in the Information Commons equipped with Adobe Acrobat to enable thesis conversion that has been designated as an ETD workstation, and the Help Desk at Information Commons is available to respond to technical enquiries. Please see the School of Graduate Studies website under Producing Your Thesis: [http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Producing-Your-Thesis.aspx](http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Producing-Your-Thesis.aspx)  Full instructions and publishing guides are available through the ETD website at: [http://www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=623](http://www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=623).

14 Submitting the Bound Copy of the Dissertation

It is a requirement of the Department of English that one bound copy of the thesis must be submitted to the Department before convocation and no later than one month after the defense.

This bound copy must be printed single-sided, with slightly larger margins as outlined in these guidelines, Section 10, “Presentation: the Form and Style of the Thesis.” If you intend to restrict the release date of your ETD, a copy of your restrict thesis release date form must also be bound inside the front cover of your thesis.

Although students may choose to use any binding/printing service, the Graduate Assistant can answer questions about the Department’s thesis printing and binding requirements, and will provide contact information about the University of Toronto thesis binder.

15 Access to the Thesis -- towards publication?

At the end of the examination, a successful candidate has to indicate in writing whether access to the thesis by other scholars will be restricted for a certain period. The decision as to whether a restriction is prudent or unnecessary will depend on the nature of the research and whether the candidate intends to publish the thesis. Previously unknown material may need to be protected.

As to publication, the criticisms and suggestions of the examiners will often be made with this in mind, for it is seldom that the thesis, though in principle publishable, is already in book form.
One of the uses of the Oral Examination -- particularly when there is a high level of satisfaction all round -- is to encourage and assist the candidate with that next project.
Copyright Acknowledgements (if any)
Sample Curriculum Vitae

Note that these titles indicate the sections only and the minimum information required on a candidate’s CV. Candidates should include any academic papers, publications, conferences, or teaching that relates to their degree and/or thesis topic. Typically an academic CV submitted by a candidate should be a minimum of two pages in length, and no more than four pages. The CV is emailed to the Director and Graduate Assistant as a separate PDF, along with a PDF of the Abstract, and hard-copy of the CV is submitted with and included in the thesis boxes, printed one side only and not stapled.

VITA

Name:

Place of Birth:

Post-Secondary Education and Degrees: [this should include thesis title and members of supervisory committee]

Honours and Awards:

Related Work Experience:

Publications: