

MFA Thesis Guidelines

This packet was revised in September 2018 and supersedes all previous guidelines. Please check the website for most current information.

What is Thesis?

Thesis (also called Capstone) is the major creative project all MFA students complete at the end of their programs. Thesis requires two semesters to complete (Thesis I and Thesis 2). **All students begin Thesis I in the fall and complete Thesis II in the spring.**

In the capstone project, students are expected to demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes established within their chosen genres. When complete, the manuscript should be of sufficient quality that the student can submit all or part of it for publication, grants, The Loft Mentor Series, residencies, and other contests and awards. The completed manuscript may also provide the basis for a full book to be completed after graduation.

Prose: All prose capstones are limited to 80-100 pages. While students can certainly work on a full book manuscript while they are in the program, the capstone will focus on the writing and revision of 80-100 pages. Students are required to have written at least 50 pages of their project *before* registering for Thesis 1. Prose projects may be part of a novel or memoir, a novella, a collection of short stories, a collection of essays, a novella-length essay, or a hybrid work.

Poetry: All poetry capstones are limited to 48-64 pages. While students can certainly work on longer collections while they are in the program, the capstone will focus on the writing and revision of 48-64 pages of poetry. Students should have at least 24 pages of poetry completed *before* registering for Thesis I.

When Is a Student Ready to Register for Thesis?

As a general rule, students must complete all or most of their coursework before registering for Thesis 1. Students are required to take "Groundings in the Craft" and two workshops in their thesis genre **prior** to registering for Thesis 1. In the case of a multi-genre thesis, students are required to take "Groundings in the Craft" in at least two genres represented and two workshops, preferably one in each genre. The thesis should grow out of work written in the workshop(s).

The faculty have been in the process of revising the MFA curriculum. After this year, we will be eliminating the "Advanced" classes and offering Workshops in each genre (and some in multi-genre) instead. All students who were in the program before Fall 2018 can take a Workshop in their genre as their "Advanced" class. To register for thesis, these students should have

completed "Groundings" and their "Advanced" class (or a Workshop in their chosen genre) as well as one other class in their genre.

Thesis Timeline

Please read all 16 steps carefully.

Step 1: Submit Intent to Register

Deadline: October 1 of the year *before* you begin Thesis I.

The intent to register form is attached; it is also available online.

On this form, students should describe the scope and content of their intended thesis projects and indicate its genre(s). Students will select from a list of full-time faculty members those with whom they would like to work as primary thesis advisors and as outside readers.

While we will do our best to honor students' choices as indicated on the intent to register form, we cannot guarantee that students will be assigned to work with the primary advisors or outside readers that they select. If the number of primary advisors and outside readers exceeds capacity for full-time faculty, adjunct faculty will be considered.

Step 2: Receive Assignment of Primary Thesis Advisor and Outside Reader

Students will receive their primary advisor and outside reader assignments via email by the end of the fall semester when their Intent to Register Form was submitted.

The primary advisor is almost always a full-time CWP faculty member. Ideally, the outside reader is a full-time faculty member as well; if not, the outside reader may be a member of the adjunct faculty. Your primary advisor will have expertise in your thesis genre and will work with you throughout the thesis process. See the timeline below for more details on the role of the primary advisor and outside reader.

After receiving primary advisor and outside reader assignments, students should begin working on their thesis drafts and planning a prospectus.

Step 3: Form Thesis Study Groups (Optional, but encouraged)

Using the contact information of other students enrolling in thesis, sent out by the CWP office, students are encouraged to form thesis study groups with each other. Names and emails will be sorted by genre so students can form groups based on genre if they so choose.

Once the contact information is sent out, it is the responsibility of the students to form thesis study/support groups, meet, and make plans for critiquing work or any other writing group activities.

Step 4: Write Prospectus and Have Prospectus Meeting

Deadline: Before registering for Thesis 1 (usually in August before the fall semester begins, although some advisors like to meet with their thesis students in late spring).

The Prospectus is a written statement describing the scope and content of your intended thesis and the way in which it will be pursued. Please use the **Prospectus Guidelines** in preparing your Prospectus.

Once you have prepared your Prospectus, you should schedule a Prospectus meeting with your primary thesis advisor. This meeting must take place *before* you register for Thesis 1 so your advisor can sign your registration form. You should provide a copy of your Prospectus document by email at least one week prior to the meeting. At the Prospectus meeting, you and your primary thesis advisor will discuss the subject, methodology, and process for your thesis, and s/he may make suggestions for improvement or expansion. You and your advisor also will develop a plan for the semester. The Prospectus document will then be signed by your primary thesis advisor and placed in your MFA file.

Students must have at least 50 pages (prose) or 24 pages (poetry) of a rough draft completed before registering for the Prospectus meeting, although they do not need to submit it at the meeting. The primary thesis advisor will not read it at the beginning of Thesis 1.

Step 5: Register for Thesis 1

Deadline: Immediately after Prospectus meeting (ideal); absolute final deadline is one week after the first day of the fall semester. See graduate academic calendar for this date each year.

Students should have their primary advisor sign the Thesis 1 Registration Form at the end of the Prospectus meeting. **The thesis registration form must be turned in to the CWP office.**

Step 6: Statement of Intention to Graduate

Deadline: November 1

Students must submit their **Intent to Graduate & Degree Completion Form** by November 1 of semester they begin Thesis I.

Step 7: Turn in a Complete Draft to Your Primary Thesis Advisor

Deadline: November 1

Students can turn in a draft at any time during the fall semester, up until November 1. The primary advisor will read the thesis manuscript and provide critical feedback for revision in Thesis 2. Students are encouraged to continue working beyond this date, but the deadline gives faculty the time to read and critique their assigned thesis projects by the end of the semester.

Since the primary advisor's responsibility in Thesis I is to determine whether the work is likely to pass with revision, it's important that the student turn in as much of the manuscript as possible by November 1 in order to be read by the primary advisor. The full draft (80-100 pages of prose, 48-64 pages of poetry) must be done by the end of fall semester.

Step 8: Feedback Meeting

Deadline: This meeting should take place before winter break.

At this meeting you and your primary thesis advisor will discuss the Thesis 1 manuscript. Your primary thesis advisor will identify strengths and weaknesses in the work and will provide constructive critical feedback for revision.

Step 9: Register for Thesis 2

Deadline: First day of the spring semester.

Students can register for Thesis 2 after receiving a passing grade for Thesis 1. Students should fill out a **Thesis Registration Form for Thesis 2**. **Thesis registration forms must be turned in to the CWP office.**

Step 10: Schedule a Capstone Conference and Submit a Capstone Conference Notification Form

Deadline: As soon as possible after registering for Thesis II.

It is the student's responsibility to coordinate a day and time for the meeting with his/her primary thesis advisor and outside reader, **and** with the CWP office. **The capstone conference must take place before May 5.** The capstone conference lasts about one and a half hours.

Upon receipt of the capstone conference notification form, the CWP office staff will reserve a conference room in the CWP House or another suitable location on campus.

Step 11: Turn in Final Draft to Primary Thesis Advisor and Outside Reader

Deadline: A *hard copy* of your Thesis 2 draft must be delivered to your primary thesis advisor and your outside reader by March 1.

The Thesis 2 draft should be a complete body of revised material that demonstrates a solid understanding of the elements of craft within the genre and is at a level that is ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors. It should address the craft issues raised by the primary thesis advisor in Thesis 1. The draft must be in hard copy, carefully edited and proofread, and must meet standard MLA guidelines. Any manuscript that contains significant grammatical errors will be returned to the student unread and will need to be revised. (If the revision cannot be done and the manuscript read by your primary thesis advisor within the semester timeline, you will have to register for another semester of Thesis 2.) The student is responsible for arranging the delivery of the hard copy to the primary thesis advisor and outside reader.

Step 12: The Artist Statement

Deadline: At least one week prior to your Capstone Conference

The Artist Statement is an essay of 10-20 pages required of all graduating MFA students. Think of this essay as "The Conscious Artist Statement" in which the writer deeply explores and conscientiously conveys what s/he has learned as an artist in the process of completing the thesis manuscript. This can include reference to texts or other literary influences that helped to guide or shape the project. The Statement serves as a kind of self-recognition and closure in which insights and lessons are arrived at that can benefit future writers. The Artist Statement should not be essential to the reader's comprehension of the thesis. It is a separate document (though it will reside as a preface to the final copy of your thesis.) While the essay may take the form of a traditional essay or a more experimental lyric essay, it must be a well-written, unified piece of writing. You should give a hard copy of your Artist Statement to your primary thesis advisor and your outside reader at least one week prior to your Capstone Conference.

Step 13: The Capstone Conference

Deadline: Prior to May 5 for spring registration.

At the end of the thesis process, MFA students participate in a Capstone Conference attended by the primary thesis advisor and the outside reader. At the conference, students should be prepared to make a formal presentation (approximately 15 minutes) about their thesis. This could include discussion of influential books or writers, instructors or courses, process, turning points, obstacles, goals for the future, etc. The presentation may cover topics addressed in the Artist Statement. After this presentation, both advisors will address the strengths of the thesis project, may pose questions, may ask for mandatory revisions, and may make suggestions for future revision.

Step 14: Final Formatted Copies

Deadline: Two weeks after your Capstone Conference

All students should submit an electronic copy of the final, revised thesis to Hamline Library's Digital Commons (www.digitalcommons@hamline). Digital Commons is a Hamline University-hosted portal providing an open-access online repository for scholarship and artistic works written by our MFA students. You retain the copyright for all material submitted to DC. It is important to note that you have two options for access. Most writers will check **Restricted Access Thesis**, which means that only current HU students, alumni, faculty, and staff will have access to the work. Authors retain the rights to first publication and distribution. This is very important for those students hoping to publish their thesis work. The second option, **Thesis**, provides open access to the work in electronic form to anyone who wishes to read it.

CWP will bind a copy or copies of your thesis (final copy with any revisions required by your primary advisor and/or outside reader) for your personal use. The unbound copy or copies is due in the CWP office two weeks after your Capstone Conference. Each copy costs \$25; please include a check to cover the cost of your bound copy or copies. Format your title page according to the **MFA Capstone Title Page Template**. See the **MFA Capstone Writing Guidelines** for style and format information.

Step 15: The CWP Graduate Revels

The Graduate Revels, which usually occurs on a weekday evening before graduation, is a banquet and reception where students, faculty, and staff of The Creative Writing Programs gather to celebrate the work of that year's graduates. This annual event is a highlight of the

academic year, and all graduates are encouraged to attend.

Please note that all students in Thesis 2 are required to turn in a “one-liner,” abstract, and words of wisdom before Revels. More information on these requirements will be emailed to graduating students in March.

Step 16: Graduation

Once all steps have been successfully completed, the student is ready to graduate! Information on graduation will be sent to students closer to the date, including information about The CWP Graduate Revels, Commencement, gown ordering, etc. Hamline University holds one commencement ceremony each year in May. Students who complete their degrees in summer or fall will have their transcripts updated and a diploma ordered after their capstone conferences. Summer and fall grads are welcome to participate in the May graduation ceremony and will be listed in the commencement program.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it possible to register for Thesis 1 in a spring semester or in the summer?

No. All students must register for Thesis 1 in the fall and Thesis 2 in the spring.

Can I make arrangements with a faculty member to serve as my primary advisor or outside reader before turning in the Intent to Register form?

No. Students may not make arrangements with any faculty members to serve as primary advisors or outside readers. All primary advisors and outside readers are assigned by the CWP office.

Are there exceptions to these rules?

No.

What are the expectations for the final Thesis 1 manuscript?

In order to pass Thesis 1, the full arc and vision of the project must be visible in the manuscript, it must demonstrate a basic ability to execute the forms and elements of the craft within the genre, and it must meet the length requirement. Necessary revision work must be possible within the framework of Thesis 2. The draft must be proofed carefully for correctness and must be readable as a draft. Manuscripts that require more than minimal copy editing will be returned.

Students whose work does not meet these requirements will be required to register for a second semester of Thesis 1.

What are the expectations for the Thesis 2 manuscript?

The goal of Thesis 2 is to complete a body of revised material that demonstrates the ability to execute the forms and elements of craft within the genre and is at a level ready to be submitted for contests, grants, agents, or editors. The Thesis 2 manuscript should address the craft issues raised by the primary thesis advisor during Thesis 1. Manuscripts must be carefully edited and proofread and must meet university guidelines. (See all posted guidelines on The CWP web site.) Manuscripts that require more than minimal copy editing will be returned.