

School of Communication and Arts

Thesis Prospectus Guidelines

Aims

- Develop oral and written communication and presentation skills and research planning skills.
- Present a detailed research proposal that articulates the component parts and organisation of MPhil and PhD research projects with a view to identifying potential strengths and limitations.
- Receive expert and constructive advice about the project's scope, feasibility, and approach.

Procedure and timing

- Approximately five months after commencement (full-time equivalent), MPhil candidates are to submit a formal written thesis prospectus document following the guidelines below. PhD students should submit their written prospectus document (and a sample thesis chapter) approximately eleven months after commencement of candidature.
- Email the written prospectus and thesis abstract to your confirmation chair for circulation to expert readers, one month before the oral presentation and the anticipated date of confirmation.
- Deliver a presentation of your thesis project to members of the research area and other interested parties, followed by questions and the opportunity for respondents to complete written feedback forms. After question time the audience leaves and the milestone committee meeting commences.
- The candidate, advisors, chair, and expert readers discuss issues raised in written and verbal responses to the prospectus, agreeing on a revision plan.

Oral Presentations

The oral prospectus presentation required for confirmation of candidature is a 20-minute public talk (using PowerPoint or Prezi, if appropriate) adapted from sections of your written prospectus. It should provide an intelligible and clear account of what your project entails and how you propose to organise and analyse the research material. You are encouraged to rehearse to ensure your presentation is well paced and timed. Your presentation should total about 2000 words, depending how fast you speak. Aim to enliven the material and present it in an engaging manner rather than reading the entire presentation from a script. The presentation is followed by 10 minutes of questions and feedback.

The oral presentation draws on and selects from material in the written prospectus document. The oral presentation should include:

- A succinct, informative statement of the central argument and the research question;
- Well-defined key concepts and a critical review of the relevant academic literature;
- A rationale for the thesis, its significance, and its contribution to the field;

- A research approach or methodology;
- Chapter outlines or an overview of the thesis components.

Written Thesis Prospectus Guidelines for MPhil and PhD Candidates (Excluding Creative Writing)

Length

The written prospectus should be approximately 2500–3000 words for MPhil candidates or 3500–4000 words for PhDs. The bibliography is not included in the word count.

Components:

State project title, names of candidate and advisors, degree, discipline, and date.

1. Thesis Statement

Provide a succinct and cogent synopsis of the research project (about 250–400 words). What is the research question or critical issue and how will it be addressed? State your argument: one sentence in this section must begin with “I will argue that...”

2. Key Concepts

What terms need to be defined or clarified in order for readers to understand what the thesis is about? For example, “X authority in the field coined the term ‘multiculturalism’/ ‘subjectivity’/ ‘postfeminism’/ ‘discourse’ and defined it as follows...”; “When I use the term ‘mass communication’/ ‘aesthetics’/ ‘speculative fiction’/ ‘autobiography’/ ‘dramaturgy,’ I use it to include ...”

3. Literature Review

The literature review situates the project in relation to the appropriate critical, scholarly, or historical literature. What are the key texts for your study? What is the state of knowledge in the field?

4. Thesis Rationale

Explain why your thesis is important and identify the niche or gap that your research fills. How will you critically engage with, build on, or contest aspects of the literature you have reviewed? What contribution to the discipline do you aim to make?

5. Methodology: Research Design, Conceptual Framework, and Analytical Techniques

As you explain your research method, justify the design and scope of the study (e.g., the temporal and geographical parameters, selection of case studies, or collection of data). Set out the conceptual framework or theoretical grounding of your project and the techniques you will use to conduct your research and analysis. What are the main theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that will be used, critiqued, or adapted? What is the nature and scope of the archival, empirical, biographical, or historical research; the research travel or fieldwork; exhibition or creative writing; the interviews, textual analysis, case studies, or data selection and analysis that needs to be done?

6. Statement of Ethical Clearance

Is ethical clearance required for research involving people (e.g., interviews, oral histories, or surveys)?

7. Provisional Chapter Outline

Give a short outline of the proposed contents, research question, and argument of each chapter, demonstrating how you plan to structure the material. Write about one paragraph for each chapter.

8. Potential for Publication

Identify important conferences, publishers, and journals and set appropriate goals regarding the potential for publication in your field.

9. Bibliography

Append an accurately referenced provisional bibliography, using MLA, Chicago or Harvard, depending on your discipline. This should list works cited and works that you anticipate that you will need to read. Mark items still to be read with an asterisk. Depending on the discipline, include a separate filmography (or similar).

Creative Writing Thesis Prospectus: MPhil (CW) and PhD (CW)

Length

The written prospectus should total approximately 2500–3000 words for MPhil candidates or 3500–4000 words for PhDs. The bibliography is not included in the word count.

Components

The Creative Writing thesis prospectus document should follow the outline below, although particular projects may necessitate a different emphasis on certain sections. Begin with a cover page stating the project title, names of candidate and advisors, degree, discipline, and date.

1. Thesis Statement

Succinctly sets out what the whole thesis will be in about 250–400 words, describing the creative and critical components, stating how they are related, and explaining what each will address in terms of creative issues and critical arguments. Current disciplinary practices in Creative Writing studies suggest reflecting creatively and critically on practice and seeing the creative and critical components of your thesis as both arising from a single research problem. For the creative component, identify the genre, form, field, or tradition within which you are working. For the critical essay, formulate a research question and explain the issue you will investigate via practice and scholarship. At least one sentence in this section must begin with “I will explore how...” and/or “I will argue that...”

2. Key Concepts

What terms need to be defined or clarified in order for readers to understand what your thesis is about? For example, “By ‘multiculturalism’/ ‘subjectivity’/ ‘speculative fiction,’ I mean...”; “When I use the term ‘focalisation’/ ‘creative non-fiction’/ ‘autobiography,’ I use it to include ...” If these terms are problematic or at issue as part of the thesis project you should explain how so.

3. Literature Review and Context of Practice

Those undertaking practice-led research should be able to place their practice in a critical and historical context, articulating how they will build on and engage with related works. The literature review must critically engage with relevant scholarly work and examples of practice in the field. Articulate how separately and/or together the critical and creative components of your thesis are situated in their respective fields. Evaluate key antecedent texts (creative and critical) and contextualise the work historically and/or culturally as well as formally (in terms of its techniques and strategies).

4. Thesis Rationale

Explain why your thesis is important and identify the niche or gap that your creative practice and critical research will fill—or the way it contests current understandings or modes of practice. How do you situate your creative work in the field? What do you do the same or differently from antecedent texts and why are those interventions important? How will you critically engage with, build on, or contest aspects of the academic literature and the history of practice that you have reviewed? What contribution to the discipline do you aim to make?

5. Methodology

Your methodology is an outline of the steps you will take to complete the work. It is likely that the overall methodology is one of practice-led research. You should describe how you are taking up this methodology and the way in which it links both aspects of your project. As well as an explanation of the overall practice-led methodology, the methods for the creative and the critical components require separate elucidation. Because projects can differ markedly candidates need to develop appropriate categories for the methodology of the creative component, which may include:

- techniques and strategies (genre, structure, voices, plot/story, narration etc.)
- issues arising from the writing process, researching content, ethics clearance considerations for character studies and/or formal and informal interviews
- connections between research, theory, critical and creative writing
- discussion of number and nature of drafts.

The critical component methodology section follows the general MPhil and PhD Prospectus guidelines.

6. Statement of Ethical Clearance

Is ethical clearance required for research involving people (e.g., interviews, oral histories, or surveys)?

7. Provisional Outline of Chapters or Sections

Discuss the content of each chapter (or section) for both the creative and the critical components of your thesis. Each heading should be accompanied by a couple of sentences to indicate its provisional content. Provide a brief synopsis for the creative component, outlining whether it contains parts and how those parts function in the whole. For example, delineate how many chapters/sections/acts/poems you anticipate and how many words for each; state whether your creative work will contain multiple points of view, significant subplots, different geographical or temporal settings, and so forth. Chapter or section outlines for the critical component should be formulated to include a research question and a statement of your argument and/or the significance of the issues, techniques, and concepts you are investigating.

8. Potential for Publication

Note important conferences, book publishers, and journals in your field and set appropriate goals regarding the potential for publication of creative and critical work. Identify opportunities to present your creative work at festivals or submit written extracts to anthologies, or suggest publishers that might be suitable to submit the completed work to.

9. Bibliography

Append an accurately referenced provisional bibliography, using MLA or Harvard. This should list works consulted and works that you think will have to be consulted including antecedent creative works: the most useful way to set this out is as a single listing with the items still to be read marked with an asterisk (as the work proceeds, remove either the asterisks or the discarded items).