

English Honors Thesis Advice

The thesis project is the major capstone requirement of the English Honors program. [You can find guidelines for the thesis project here.](#) The following tips were compiled, in part, from student commentary. If you have a suggestion to add, please contact the Director of the English Honors Program at [**englishhonors@memphis.edu**](mailto:englishhonors@memphis.edu).



Developing a topic:

- Look to papers you have written (or are now writing) for your Upper Division English courses to identify work you might expand into a thesis. Upper Division courses, particularly when taken for Honors credit, should help you define research problems and identify approaches pertinent to your subject.
- If you already have a research topic in mind, consider contracting a related course for Honors credit in order to pursue a special research project that would lead to an Honors thesis in a later semester.
- If your thesis research is based on a study begun in one of your Upper Division courses, you might ask the instructor of that course to be your Director or Second Reader.
- Pick a subject that you really like; it will be with you for quite a while!



Scheduling:

- Get started early. It's best to select a subject you have already started working on in your coursework.
- In one of your first meetings with your Director, make a schedule: set up appointments, make sure your Director knows all your deadlines, etc. Then, keep track of your progress. Your Director can help you think about how to schedule your work, because your Director has more experience in determining how long you will need to spend on the various stages of research, writing, and revising. Your Director will not, however, supervise you to see that you meet deadlines; that is your responsibility.
- Plan to spend considerable time reading and conducting research in addition to the actual writing.
- Don't start to write your paper until you are sure you have a clear focus and know what your argument will be.
- Meet with your Director regularly.
- Treat self-imposed deadlines and appointments with your Director just as if you were going to a class meeting. Do not allow yourself excuses for not completing work or skipping meetings.
- Remember: you will receive a letter grade (A-F) for the thesis course.
- Reward yourself in some small way for meeting each goal you have set.



Methods:

- Save time in bibliographic searches by using the bibliography and footnotes in one or more of your sources. This will lead you quickly to primary and secondary sources. Note the source where you found the item listed.
- Be sure you are familiar with common databases such as the MLA Bibliography and JSTOR.
- Follow MLA style for literature papers.



Working with your Thesis Director:

- Your Director is an advisor, consultant, and resource person. The Director expects a student to make changes in response to suggestions about the direction, scope, and methodology of the study. But the Director is neither parent nor taskmaster. You are responsible for your own scholarship, the organization and production of your draft, your ideas and conclusions, and adherence to instructions and deadlines. (However, your Director must approve of and will grade your work.)
- Your Director has agreed to serve in this capacity because they believe in your ability to carry out the work. Your Director receives no tangible reward for enabling you to conduct this project within the framework of the English Honors Program, none, that is, other than the pleasure of observing your success! Please respond appropriately to your Director's efforts on your behalf by taking initiative in your work, keeping your appointments, and recognizing that your Director is investing their time in you and your success.



Opportunities:

- As you're working on your thesis, don't forget to participate in the opportunities afforded by [the Helen Hardin Honors College!](#) The Student Research Forum provides opportunities to present and receive feedback on your work right here at the University of Memphis, and you can also travel to present your research at [Posters at the Capitol](#) or the [National Conference on Undergraduate Research](#), with financial support from the University.
- Members of Sigma Tau Delta can present at the [annual convention](#) and can publish their work in the [Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle](#) (creative writing) or [Sigma Tau Delta Review](#) (critical writing).
- Consider publishing your thesis through [QuaesitUM](#), the undergraduate research journal published by the University of Memphis.