

SUGGESTED OUTLINE FOR MA THESIS PROPOSALS IN RHETORIC / COMPOSITION

A Master's Thesis in Rhetoric and Composition addresses **a problem, question or issue concerned with literacy acquisition. Its purpose is to contribute to the field of Rhetoric and Composition by extending knowledge.** When members of the Graduate Studies committee read your proposal, they should think, "that is a topic worth addressing."

The **proposal** identifies the problem, question or issue and argues that the project is worth doing in terms of contributing to disciplinary knowledge, that a solution or answer can be found using the approach specified, and that the project can be completed in the time allotted.

The outline below is intended as a guide to writing your proposal. Please use the questions to focus your thinking, and in terms of style, please choose accessible diction, use jargon sparingly, and define terms where necessary. It is also important to edit the completed proposal so that it is concise, coherent, free from mechanical or grammatical error, and readable.

LENGTH: 5 PAGES

REQUIREMENT: A statement of the purpose of your thesis should appear on the **first** page. Here is an example of a statement of purpose:

This thesis will examine three different response methods—written feedback, tape-recorded comments, or on-line feedback—to determine which will most effectively inspire students to revise.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Background / Context:

- What is the background or context of the subject you will examine or the problem you will investigate?
- How does your thesis fit into and contribute to the field or discipline (or sub and related disciplines) of Rhetoric and Composition?
- What relevant studies contribute to your study or upon which you can draw for resources?

Problem / Purpose / Task Statement:

- What is the purpose of your research project?
- What is the rationale for your thesis or research and question?
- In broad terms, how will you proceed to prove your thesis, answer the research question, or investigate the problem?

Methods and Materials:

- What approaches or methods will you use in your research?
- If human subjects are involved, what guidelines will you follow?

Methods and Materials, continued:

- What procedures will you follow?
- What materials will you need, examine, or collect?
- If data are involved, how will you analyze them?

Review of the Literature:

Please review relevant literature, showing how your study or analysis will contribute to that body of knowledge.

Discussion:

- What do you expect to find out as a result of your study? What outcomes do you project? What applications?
- What limitations or constraints are there on your study and conclusions?
- If your study is based upon a research question or investigation of a problem, what findings or conclusions do you expect?
- If applicable, what recommendations will you make as a result of your study?
- Will a statement of further research needs or possibilities be necessary?

Bibliography:

The bibliography that accompanies your thesis proposal should be selective but indicative of the scope of your research. The bibliography that accompanies your completed thesis will need to be more comprehensive.

General Issues Regarding Thesis Proposals:

Thesis proposals may be returned to students for revision. When proposals are returned, the graduate advisor meets with the thesis director and the student to communicate advice from the committee on revising the proposal. Students have a short deadline (generally two to three weeks) to revise in conjunction with their director and resubmit the proposal along with a one-page discussion of how they revised. If the proposal is still not passed by the committee, it may be revised only one more time. Second revisions will be turned in the following semester, on the deadline for that semester's proposals. If the second revision is not accepted by the committee, the student may not propose the same project again. He or she must choose a new topic; rhetoric and composition option or literature option students may wish to consider taking the MA exam in these cases.

Possible reasons for returning the proposal for revision:

1. Project is too large and thus not appropriate for an MA thesis
2. Proposal is too narrow and thus the student will not be able to write the minimum of 80 pages
3. Point of the project is not clearly articulated and supported
4. Project is vague
5. Project is not clearly situated within literary or theoretical traditions
6. Proposal is disorganized
7. Proposal displays grammatical and/or stylistic errors
8. Project is not clearly situated within the field of English studies