



Franciscan School of Theology  
at the UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

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**Master of Arts  
Thesis Guidelines**

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## MASTER OF ARTS

## THESIS GUIDELINES

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## OVERVIEW OF THE MA THESIS

The MA thesis is a requirement for the MA degree. It should demonstrate the ability to develop a coherent, sustained theological argument reflecting an in-depth study of a theological topic.

- Your thesis should demonstrate skill in developing a theological framework to situate a topic within the commitment of faith, and the ability to develop a theological argument. As such it will contain a thesis statement, coherent organization of data, evaluation of evidence, and a cogent argument brought to a conclusion.
- Your thesis should demonstrate a general academic knowledge of the Catholic theological tradition construed broadly enough to include the interrelationship of a specialized interest with other theological disciplines. For example, if the thesis is primarily in Moral Theology, it should be able to show the Biblical, Historical, and/or Systematic foundations for it.
- Your thesis should demonstrate skill in the interpretation and use of theological sources relevant to the topic. Not all theological writers carry equal weight; therefore, you are expected to be aware of recognized authoritative sources (both those that agree and those that disagree with your view of the subject), to make sound interpretation of their contributions, and to document accurately your use of them.
- Your thesis may include an experiential component integrating personal, professional, and pastoral concerns. For example, you can give the personal or pastoral context for your project by including a statement about what first interested you in this project, as well as a statement that identifies what might be happening in this area that makes your project worth pursuing.
- Your thesis should demonstrate skill in the proper use of notes, references, and bibliographical materials normally according to [\*A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers\*](#) by Kate Turabian (unless another style has been approved by your thesis committee).

***Introduction or First Chapter.*** The Introduction or first chapter of the MA thesis must delineate the main lines of your entire thesis. It should contain at least:

- A statement of the thesis, crafted as succinctly and precisely as possible. (“I argue that...”)
- The significance of the thesis. There should be a statement as to why this topic is worth pursuing.
- The setting and background situating the thesis in its historical, cultural, religious, pastoral, and personal background.
- The method of the argument. What academic disciplines will be used? What will be the flow of your development? What major resources will you use? What are the major divisions of the topic? What is your likely conclusion?



**Enrollment Requirements.** You must be enrolled in thesis in the fall and/or spring semesters to work with your thesis committee members. There is no thesis enrollment in the summer.

## STUDY SKILLS RESOURCES

**Study Skills Workshops.** MA students are required to complete workshops in academic research and writing offered through the FST Study Skills Organization on Blackboard. Each topic has a certificate of completion, which the student must sign and submit to the Office of Student Services.

Topics include:

- How to Read and Write at the Graduate Level
- How to Write and Survive a Thesis, Part I
- How to Write and Survive a Thesis, Part II

**Research Guides.** Become familiar with and use the following research guides that are endorsed by the FST faculty:

- Kate Turabian, [\*A Manual for Writers of Research, Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers.\*](#)
- Anne Sigismund Huff, *Writing for Scholarly Publication*. This book offers an excellent overview of the process of developing, researching, and writing an academic study.

**Existing Theses.** You may borrow copies of former students' MA theses for reference.

## FORMING YOUR THESIS COMMITTEE

During the Fall or early Spring semester of the first year of your MA program, you form your thesis committee. The committee consists of a thesis director and a second reader who work with you on your research project. Your academic advisor can help you identify appropriate faculty members to approach.

To identify the members of your committee:

1. Interview professors who are expert in the field you wish to study, and with whom you feel you could work effectively.
2. Ask whether the faculty member will be available in the time frame you have set for completing your thesis.
3. Once you have the agreement of your committee members, complete a [\*Request for Approval of MTS Thesis Committee\*](#), obtain signatures of your director and second reader, and submit it to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for final approval.

You may request to change your academic advisor to your thesis director if he or she is not already your advisor.

**Changes in Committee Membership.** You may request changes to your committee membership up until the beginning of the semester in which you expect to finish your thesis.

Changes must be negotiated with the Vice President for Academic Affairs in consultation with the current committee members.



### ***Thesis Committee Responsibilities***

- Faculty normally serve on an MA committee for 2 to 4 years.
- The thesis director normally reads chapters in draft form. The second reader normally reads only the completed thesis.
- The thesis director's comments will be in written form and will be sufficiently detailed to give concrete guidance for revision.
- The thesis director will typically respond within 2 weeks of receiving your chapters.
- When your thesis has been approved, your thesis committee will assign a letter grade and complete an *MA Thesis Evaluation* with their final assessment.

## **PREPARING YOUR THESIS PROPOSAL**

In preparation for writing your MA thesis at FST, you must develop a thesis proposal in consultation with your thesis director, and with the approval of your second faculty reader. Be sure that you have each committee member's approval of your proposal before you complete significant work.

It is recommended that you begin developing your thesis proposal in the Fall and early Spring Semesters of the first year of your program, and that you complete it by mid to late Spring Semester of the first year of your program or early in the fall semester of your second year.

***Preparatory Activities.*** In preparation for writing your thesis, identify your areas of interest, academic discipline(s), and the resources you will use to complete your thesis. The questions below will help you focus on the preparatory activities.

1. What are the subjects, themes, or questions that especially interest you?
2. What is the general topic of your thesis?
  - What academic discipline(s) will you use for your research? For example, consider the areas of study you engage in your coursework: History, Theology, Liturgical Studies, Biblical Studies, Ethics, Spirituality.
  - What courses are you taking or will you take that will lay the foundation for your thesis work?
  - What term papers or class projects have you already written on topics related to your thesis project?
3. What is a reasonable timeframe for you to research and complete your thesis given your personal, professional, and academic commitments? You may wish to consult with your academic advisor.

***Content of Thesis Proposal.*** Your thesis proposal must consist of the following elements:

- ***Thesis Committee.*** Indicate the members of your thesis committee.
- ***Analytical Research Question.*** Develop the analytical research question that will drive your research, that is, the question you will answer or the problem you will solve



in the course of your research.

- **Working Bibliography.** Identify and read sources that you will use in the course of your research including books and articles; primary and secondary sources. It may include multi-media sources depending on the nature of your project. Mark with an asterisk the principal scholars and/or works on which you will draw. Refer to Huff, *Writing for Scholarly Publication*, p. 49.
- **Working Title.** Choose a title that describes your work clearly.
- **Abstract.** In 50 to 100 words, describe what you will demonstrate in your thesis (the thesis question or statement) and how will you demonstrate it (the argument).
- **Table of Contents.** Develop a chapter map of your thesis, that is, the names of the chapters or building blocks of your argument, and a brief summary of the purpose and content of each chapter. Include a page number estimate for each chapter.
- **Other MA Theses:** Examine one to three other MA theses that could serve as a models or exemplars for your work.

## THESIS COMPLETION DEADLINES

**Deadlines for completing the MA thesis.** The deadlines for submitting a completed MA thesis are as follows:

- **May 1** for Spring Semester graduates
- **December 1** for Fall Semester graduates

“Completion” means that an electronic copy, prepared in accordance with the guidelines in this handbook, approved and signed by both thesis committee members has been turned in to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. In order to participate in the May graduation ceremony, your thesis must be turned in **no later than** May 1.



## THE MA THESIS PROCESS

The chart below delineates the specific steps you should take throughout the process of writing your MA thesis, and the due dates for each step. Due dates are provided for students starting the MA program both in the Fall Semester and those starting in the Spring Semester. Your advisor will track your progress through these steps.

### During the FIRST Year of Your MA Program:

Steps	Fall Start	Spring Start
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose a thesis topic.</li> <li>2. Choose a thesis director from the FST faculty who has competency in your area of specialization.</li> <li>3. Obtain your thesis director's signature on a <i>Request for Approval of MTS Thesis Committee</i> as his or her agreement to guide your thesis.</li> <li>4. Attend the four <a href="#">Study Skills Workshops</a>.</li> </ol>	April 1	November 1
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Consult with your thesis director to ensure that your thesis is manageable in scope and that there are adequate resources available for completing it.</li> <li>6. Select a second faculty reader and obtain his or her signature on the <i>Request for Approval of MTS Thesis Committee</i> as agreement to participate in guiding your thesis.</li> <li>7. Once your thesis topic has been determined, and your thesis director and second faculty reader have agreed to serve, obtain the Academic Dean's signature on the <i>Request for Approval of MTS Thesis Committee</i> as final approval, and submit it to the Dean's assistant.</li> </ol>	Between April 1 and May 1	Between November 1 and December 1



Steps	Fall Start	Spring Start
8. <a href="#">Prepare a thesis proposal</a> and submit it to your thesis director and second reader for approval.	May 15	December 15
9. With your thesis director, establish responsibilities and scheduling of your program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Establish clear expectations regarding how work must be submitted, for example, must all footnotes be in proper form even in draft chapters?</li><li>b. Determine whether chapters must be submitted on paper, or whether email attachments are acceptable.</li><li>c. Agree on a meeting schedule. Typically, meetings are held every three weeks, but may be more frequent at the beginning of the process, tapering off as writing proceeds. Establish a schedule for submitting materials sufficiently far in advance of a meeting to allow time for your director to read and respond to your work.</li><li>d. Clarify issues such as the use of home telephone numbers and meeting at home, etc.</li><li>e. If your thesis director will be on sabbatical during your MA thesis program, clarify how you will work together. He or she continues to be responsible while on sabbatical; however, you may have to negotiate additional time for responding to materials submitted.</li></ul>	May 15	December 15





**During the SECOND Year of Your MA Program:**

Steps	Fall Start	Spring Start
10. Establish the timeline for submitting draft chapters to your committee members, and determine the role of each in reading and suggesting revisions.	September 15	April 15
11. Submit a completed draft of the full thesis to both committee members incorporating all major revisions recommended during the preparation of previous drafts.	April 1	November 1
12. Obtain approval of the completed thesis from both committee members. This version should require only minor revisions, if any at all. Send <i>MA Thesis Evaluation</i> form to thesis director.	April 20	November 20
13. Submit an electronic copy, in PDF format, of the completed, signed thesis to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.	May 1 for Spring graduation	December 1 for Fall graduation



## PHYSICAL FORMAT OF THE MA THESIS

**Number of Pages.** The MA thesis should be between 50 and 75 pages, 8.5 x11 inches, and contain at least three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion.

**Title Page.** The title page must conform to the illustration [below](#).

**Margins.** Observe the following margins:

Left	1.5 inches
Right	1 inch
Top	1 inch
Bottom	1 inch

**Spacing.** Double space the main body of the thesis except in those places where conventional usage calls for single space, for example, footnotes, indented quotations, tables, etc.

**Type Size.** Use 12-point throughout. Type size for charts, drawings, graphs, tables, etc., may differ according to format and space requirements.

**Print.** Print should be letter quality with dark black characters that are consistently clear and dense.

**Order of Materials and Pagination.** Organize the thesis and number the pages as follows:

Title page	not numbered (but included in prefatory pagination)
Preface, Dedication, Table of Contents, etc.	Numbered separately in lower case Roman numerals ( <i>ii, iii, iv</i> ) at the bottom middle of the page
Main Body of Text	Numbered with Arabic numbers at the top middle of the page except for the first page of each chapter, which should be numbered at the bottom middle of the page. Pagination of the main body of the text should include illustrations.

**Illustrative Material.** If photographs (positive prints) are used, they must be originals. Any original illustrative material should be rendered with permanent, non-water soluble, black ink. Reduced copies of graphs, charts and similar material must be:

- Reproduced on the same quality of paper as that used for the text
- Clearly legible
- Prepared using the archival process to ensure permanence and prevent fading

**Other Media.** The use and format of all other media must be approved by your committee members before submitting the thesis.

**Submittal format.** Submit electronic copy of the signed thesis, in PDF format, to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.



## MA THESIS TITLE PAGE FORMAT

(6 spaces down from top)

**TITLE IN CAPS**

(4 spaces)

**A thesis by**

(3 spaces)

**(your name)**

(5 spaces)

**Presented to**

(3) spaces

**The faculty of**

(2 spaces)

**Franciscan School of Theology**

(3 spaces)

**in partial fulfillment of the**

(2 spaces)

**requirements for the degree of**

(2 spaces)

**Master of Arts**

(3 spaces)

**San Diego, California**

(3 spaces)

**(month and year of filing)**

(6 spaces)

**Committee Signatures:**

**(typed thesis director's name)**

**Date**

**(typed second faculty reader's name)**

**Date**