



University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center Accelerated Master's Program in English Thesis Guide

In an accelerated master's program, you're tasked with meeting the same graduate thesis-writing milestones on a condensed timeline. As you might then expect, planning is key. To help you plan out your thesis project, here is a helpful guide to making the transition from undergraduate to graduate level writing through understanding their differences.

Undergraduate Level Writing

WHO? For an undergraduate writing assignment, you're typically writing for a specific instructor within a specific course. Given this narrow audience, you typically don't need to justify why you include what you choose to include, as the texts you draw upon are typically already predetermined by the instructor.

WHAT? The culminating writing assignment is typically a seminar paper around 15-20 pages with specific guidelines set by an instructor.

WHERE? This final assignment is usually contextualized by the specific class setting, and your work typically doesn't have a life beyond the classroom.

WHEN? A smaller paper might only take you two weeks, but a larger seminar style paper might be the final product of a semester's length of writing.



WHY? Your writing assignments typically ask you to prove your understanding of class material, if not also to demonstrate your ability to apply said material in a new way.

Graduate Level Writing

WHO? For graduate level writing, you're typically entering into a much larger critical dialogue existent within your field. Once you've established your specific niche within it, you are asked to justify why you include what you choose to include to a community of peers.



WHAT? The culminating writing assignment is typically a master's thesis around 65-85 pages. The topic, scope, and objective of the project are all set by you!

WHERE? This final assignment is usually contextualized by contemporary scholarship within your field, and your work might then evolve into future journal submissions or dissertation topics. As a result, you need to familiarize yourself with this larger context by reading deeply and widely around your chosen fields.

WHEN? A master's thesis is intended to be *the* product of your time in your master's program. For a typical two-year program, you first begin to conceptualize your project at the end of your first year through a proposed reading list. On an accelerated timeline, your "senior year" of your undergraduate degree is also your first year for your master's degree. As a result, you have less time to explore various fields before choosing your thesis topic, and you must more actively learn the discourse as you enter into it.

WHY? Your thesis project asks you to establish yourself as an expert in your chosen field and to contribute to its scholarship in a new way.

Here is the projected timeline for a master’s student in English:

First Year		Second Year	
Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
ENGS 350	Course	ENGS 391	ENGS 391
Course	Course	Course	Course
Course	Course	Comprehensive Exam (September)	Finish and Defend Thesis
(GTAs take ENGS 345 and begin teaching)	Develop thesis topic; Choose advisor and second reader	Submit Prospectus (November)	(GTAs teach)
	Submit reading list to DGS by the last day of the semester	Begin writing thesis	

For an accelerated master’s student, the first year counts doubly for undergraduate and graduate credit. Since students will have less time to explore possible theoretical and historical fields as they choose their thesis topic, they should ask their advisors for extra guidance in compiling their reading lists as to be sure to read all texts expected of them by members of their defense committees.

As listed on the graduate website, a typical reading lists entails:

- a 600-900 word description of the exam/thesis topic.
- a short list of questions to be addressed in the reading.
- a list of 25 to 35 primary texts.
- a list of 10-15 literary critical works bearing on these primary texts.

Generally speaking, your thesis project *will* evolve greatly from how you first imagine it. That is not only okay, it’s expected. Especially as an accelerated student, you will be learning your chosen fields as you attempt to enter into them critically. Given this condensed timeline, your initial goal should be to read as deeply and widely as possible as to enable you to establish your own niche. Later writing stages will proceed similarly to two-year graduate students in your program; however, at first, you should expect to work overtime to prepare yourself for this drafting process!