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Guidelines for Writing a BA or MA Thesis

A BA or MA thesis is intended to demonstrate that a student is capable of undertaking a sustained piece of independent work. The following FAQ is meant to provide some basic orientation for prospective candidates in the field of early modern literature:

Do I *have* to write a BA thesis?

Students can choose between writing a BA thesis or a one-hour oral exam in order to complete their capstone experience (Module 8). If you are not sure which one is the right option for you, discuss your concerns with your potential supervisor. An MA thesis cannot be replaced with an exam.

If you intend to take the oral exam instead of the BA thesis, please consult [the reading list](#), from which you can choose your texts for the exam. Your supervisor will discuss the process in more detail with you, but generally, you should plan a preparation period of a whole semester for the oral exam, just as with writing a BA thesis.

Who can supervise a thesis in early modern literature?

BA theses can be supervised by either Prof. Schindler or Dr. Jackson, MA theses currently only by Prof. Schindler. Students are advised to have attended at least one seminar taught by the teacher they wish to ask to supervise their thesis, or to at least have written a seminar paper in the field in which they intend to write their thesis.

When should I approach my potential supervisor?

Before writing their thesis, students should attend the obligatory thesis workshop (organised by the department in every semester). It is recommended that you contact your potential supervisor early, at least 2-3 months before the start of the semester in which you intend to write your thesis, so that you and your supervisor can plan the major milestones well in advance. At this point, you should have an idea what you want to write about, but you are not expected to have a fully fleshed-out thesis statement ready. Your supervisor will discuss the precise details of the topic and structure of your thesis with you.

How should I go about finding a suitable topic?

1.) You don't have to reinvent the wheel, build on what you like and what you know. Reflect on your studies so far and what kinds of texts and/or critical approaches you enjoyed the most. 2.) You can choose primary texts and/or critical approaches that are related to what you have studied in seminars and/or lectures – but do not simply reproduce your seminar papers! 3.) The more specific your topic is, the easier it will be to make an original contribution, so try to come up with specific research questions, and not just general themes, that you intend to apply to your chosen primary texts.

When and where do I need to sign up?

Students must register for a BA thesis with their supervisor on [myunifr.ch](#) at the beginning of a semester and submit the completed thesis at the end of the semester. Should you require an extension, the next possible date for having the thesis accredited would be the end of the following

semester. MA theses are not registered on myunifr.ch but submitted directly to the Dean's Office and subject to faculty guidelines, which you should study carefully in advance:

<https://www.unifr.ch/lettres/fr/etudes/cours-et-examens/travail-de-master/>

How long is my thesis supposed to be?

A BA thesis is about 30 pages long (double spaced, excluding bibliography). An MA thesis is about 60 pages long (double spaced, excluding bibliography).

What guidelines do I need to follow in referencing primary and secondary sources?

The usual guidelines of the departmental style sheet apply:

https://www.unifr.ch/english/en/assets/public/Cours_et_horaires/Style_sheet_Lit_16May_2017.pdf

Early modern texts are often out of copyright and available online on platforms such as Project Gutenberg or Wikimedia Commons. While such easy access is tempting, make sure that you use reliable and scholarly editions (such as Arden Shakespeare or New Mermaids) which provide a carefully established text and indispensable explanatory notes.

How does the interaction with my supervisor work?

This may differ depending on a candidate's individual needs, but there are a number of steps that are common to all BA and MA theses:

Step 1: Discuss a possible topic and a working schedule with your potential supervisor for the following steps before you sign up for the thesis. It is your own responsibility that you meet deadlines on which you have agreed with your supervisor, who will not be responsible for reminding you of them.

Step 2: Submit a two-page thesis proposal with a general description of your ideas as well as a breakdown into chapters. In addition, submit a list of secondary sources that you intend to use. These may be subject to revision at a later stage, but a provisional plan is always better than no plan.

Step 3: Submit a sample chapter to the supervisor. The supervisor will comment on the draft and make suggestions as to how to improve the quality of your work. The draft chapter submitted by the student should be carefully structured, well formulated, and fully documented with the relevant primary and secondary sources. Only when the supervisor has given their approval to the direction that the thesis is taking can the student continue with the thesis.

Step 4: Submission of the complete version. Only when the supervisor has given their approval can the thesis be submitted.

Step 5: The supervisor will grade the thesis and, in the case of an MA thesis, write an evaluatory report that will be made accessible to the student. Keep in mind that grading takes time and that the thesis should be submitted well before the date by which your thesis needs to be accredited in order for you to obtain your BA or MA degree, respectively. Failure to submit the thesis by the date agreed with your supervisor may therefore lead to a delay in the awarding of your degree.

Step 6 (only applies to MA theses): MA students defend their thesis in a one-hour thesis defence. This means that they will present a summary of their thesis and its major findings (c. 20 minutes), to be followed by a discussion with the supervisor and a co-examiner, who will ask questions about more specific aspects of the thesis and the literary and cultural contexts of the literary works on which you have written (c. 40 minutes).

You are encouraged to contact your supervisor at any point in the process of writing your thesis if you have specific questions about any aspect of the thesis or if you feel that the working schedule needs to be revised.