

**FOR M.A. FRENCH STUDENTS
WHO ARE CHOOSING OPTION II**

GUIDELINES FOR THE PROSPECTUS AND THE THESIS¹:

1. **WHEN TO START THINKING ABOUT WRITING A THESIS?** It is a good idea to think about it early in your graduate studies. You are technically supposed to write it during your last semester, when you are enrolled in FR 898 (Master's Thesis), but you need to start working on your project much earlier, at least a year before, in order to have the time to choose a topic, reflect about it and exchange ideas, do research, fill up and turn in the required forms in time (see 2 below), present the prospectus describing the project to your committee (usually a semester before taking FR 898), and finally do the actual writing. Be also aware that writing often takes more time than planned, considering the need for revisions and final proofing.

2. **ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS.**
 - a) A semester before the end of your studies (before taking the last 6 units of courses necessary for the completion of your M.A.), you must file the **ACT form**, which is due early in the semester (check the deadlines). Go to <http://www.sfsu.edu/~gradstdy/current-form.htm>. Unload the ACT form for the French Program **Option II**. Fill the form on line and print it before having it approved and signed by the graduate adviser. Remember that if later you change the courses or the type of culminating experience indicated on your ACT, you will need to fill a new form.

¹ This document is based on the guidelines written by the English department of San Francisco State University for the graduate students in the Literature Program. If you are interested, you can consult these guidelines on the site of the graduate program of the English Program: <http://english.sfsu.edu/> . We adapted them to the specific requirements of the French Program and the specifications available on line on the site of Graduate Studies: <http://grad.sfsu.edu/>

- b) To the ATC you must attach another form: “**Culminating experience**”: **898 thesis** (No human/ animal subjects) (**Option II**) available on the same site. File this form on line and print it before having it approved and signed by the graduate adviser and the members of your committee. On this form, you will write a paragraph summary of your project, give the title of the thesis and list the members of your committee. Any change made later in the title chosen or the composition of the committee will require to fill a new form indicating these changes.

3. WHERE DO THESIS IDEAS COME FROM? Thesis ideas should come from your study of French and francophone literature, culture and language and from your special interests. You may develop a thesis out of a seminar paper or an independent study. Your research papers and/or the suggestions of professors may help you frame and develop a topic. You may also consult bound copies of theses written by French M.A. students in the Library or in the Graduate Reading Room (HUM 473). You should undertake considerable primary and secondary reading in order to convince yourself that your project has worth. The range of possibilities for an M.A. thesis is immense; however, it is preferable to choose a topic corresponding to the types of courses taught and/or interest areas of the French faculty, especially of your first reader. It is also important to think about your future goals, and to be realistic about your time and your abilities. Don't be overambitious.

4. HOW LONG SHOULD A THESIS BE? Long enough to develop in detail a focused and structured argument. The thesis should extend in scope and conception beyond the range of a seminar paper and be more concise than a dissertation or book-length study. The number of pages depends entirely upon the individual project, but, generally speaking, the range is around 60 pages or a little longer (not to extend beyond 100 pages).

5. HOW TO FIND MY READERS? Your thesis committee can have two or three members. They will most likely be made up of faculty from the French program and the first reader should be a member of the French program. But you may choose another reader from another department or program if it seems appropriate for your topic. Remember that your thesis must be written in French: all your readers should be able to read French. Initially, you must find a first reader from the French faculty who is interested in your general topic and responsive to you and your approach. Your first reader should have some specialization, or at least interested experience, in one or more of the areas of your topic. (For a list of faculty interests and specializations, see the program website) To find such a reader, you must appear with a fairly clear idea and some enthusiasm as well as flexibility. It is recommended that you write down a

short description of your project to present to prospective readers. This description should articulate your research questions, list some of the texts you wish to examine, and what you think you might find. Once you have found a first reader, you should discuss who might serve as second and eventually third reader on the committee. If, for any reason, you experience difficulty finding a first reader, you should consult the Graduate Program adviser or the Program Coordinator for advice.

6. WHAT IS THE PROSPECTUS? The prospectus is a written statement that establishes the main lines of argument and organization for the thesis. It should be developed from your initial description of the project and written in consultation with your committee. The prospectus should present the topic chosen, explain the purpose and significance of the thesis; the approach chosen by you; the selection of literary sources; and an overview of relevant scholarship and criticism." You should also indicate the time line for remitting each chapter and the final version to your committee. The format might look like this:

- Statement describing the project, its significance and the approach chosen*
- Chapter outline*
- Working bibliography of major primary and secondary sources*
- Time line for remitting chapters and final version*

A finished prospectus tends to be 8-12pp. in length but can be slightly shorter; a draft is usually submitted to your first reader for commentary and revision before going to the full committee.

7. PRESENTATION OF THE PROSPECTUS. You will meet with your committee to discuss your project (based upon the completed prospectus) and to evaluate your readiness to start writing. This presentation should be scheduled during the semester before you intend to begin writing, usually towards the end of the semester (or earlier). At the latest, it could be done very early in your final semester but it is not recommended because in this case you may not have enough time to finish writing before the end of that semester. Expect that presentation to last about an hour. First, you'll be given a chance to explain how you chose your topic and your approach to it. You must be prepared to present and argue the case for a well-delineated plan of research. You will defend or modify your plan of study in response to questions and suggestions from your readers.

8. ORAL EXAM. Students who chose to write a thesis need to remember that they must also take a comprehensive oral exam where they are tested on their knowledge of French literature in order to receive their M.A. in French. The preparation of this exam should also be planned early, while taking graduate classes. It is the same for option I (written comprehensive exam) and for option II

(thesis). To prepare it, you have to select a specified number of readings from the French Reading list of the MA Program (see this reading list for more details on the preparation and the format of this exam). The oral exam lasts one hour and takes place with the three members of the French faculty (unless one of them is on sabbatical/unavailable. It should also be scheduled during the semester before you start writing; if not, at the latest, very early in your final semester. Talk with the graduate adviser in order to plan wisely the dates of the presentation of the prospectus and the oral exam.

9. MAY I CHANGE MY MIND CONCERNING THE CONTENT OF MY THESIS? Yes, if you mean that your thesis takes different twists and turns as you write. But, if you move completely away from the original proposed topic, you must write a new proposal, develop a new prospectus, and make a new presentation, which implies filling up new forms online.

10. WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE FIRST AND SECOND OR THIRD READERS? At some early stage – perhaps at the end of your oral – readers’ responsibilities will be clarified for your particular project. It may be helpful for the first reader to proceed through the complete manuscript before submitting it to the other readers; sometimes another reader will want to see drafts of chapters immediately after the first reader has perused them or at the same time. Check with your committee to formulate the most appropriate plan of submission. It is important to allow sufficient time for your readers to read and respond to your work, and to apportion time for your revisions and modifications (see 6 above).

11. LEVEL II WRITING ENGLISH REQUIREMENT? To meet this requirement, students writing a thesis must write a 15-page summary of their thesis in English. This summary will be submitted for evaluation to the French faculty. In order to fulfill this requirement successfully, discuss how to be best prepared for it with the graduate advisor early in the course of your graduate studies, especially if English is not your first language or if you have deficiencies in writing.

12. OTHER FORMS TO FILL? After your ACT and “Culminating Experience” forms have been filed, you will sign up for FR 898 (Master’s Thesis) in the first two weeks of your final semester. You will also need to fill out a “report of completion of specified graduate program requirements” and “an application for award of degree” in order to receive your diploma (see 2. above for the site).

13. HOW DO I SUBMIT MY THESIS? Be sure you know the thesis submission deadline for the semester you intend to graduate (check Graduate Division website). You will need to submit the final draft to your committee members with enough time for them to read it and for you to make any last minute

changes (usually 2-3 weeks before the published deadline). Theses should follow the latest *MLA Style Manual*, available on line, in the Library, the bookstore, or anywhere academic books are sold. Pay attention to the Graduate Division guidelines for formatting and submission. It can be downloaded from its website (look for "Thesis Guidelines" under "Graduate Forms"). You will need to take the final approved copy of your thesis to your readers for signature. Then you can file it. Remember that you will need to make an extra copy of the thesis for the archives of the Foreign Languages Department.

14. WHAT IF I DON'T MAKE THE DEADLINE FOR COMPLETING THE THESIS AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER THAT I SIGNED UP FOR FR 898?

You will be issued a grade of "RP," which indicates "report of progress". When you do finish the thesis, there is no new paperwork to file as long as there are no changes to either the original GAP or "Culminating Experience" forms you submitted. If your graduate application was approved but you did not finish your thesis, you will need to re-apply for graduation in the semester that you complete the thesis. Please keep in mind the university's 7-year limit for completing post-graduate programs: you should endeavor to complete the thesis within 7 years of the date of the earliest course work listed on your GAP form. You will not need to reapply to the university if you need an extra semester to finish your thesis. However, if it takes you longer, you will then have to reapply to the university.