

## Creative Writing Thesis Checklist

All English graduate students must complete a thesis for the M.A. degree. Consult the English Department website and the thesis website from the USA Graduate School for more specific information and forms:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/artsandsci/english/grad/index.html>

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduatemajors/graduateschool/thesis.html>

A creative thesis is required of all students in the Creative Writing concentration. The creative thesis is a substantial body of work of fiction, non-fiction, poetry or a combination:

**Poetry:** 40-45 pages of poetry with a 5-10 page critical introduction.

**Novel:** First 60-65 pages with an outline of subsequent chapters (not to exceed ten pages) with a 5-10 page critical introduction.

**Short Story Collection:** 60-65 pages with a 5-10 page critical introduction.

**Creative Nonfiction:** First 60-65 pages with an outline of subsequent chapters (not to exceed ten pages) and a 5-10 page critical introduction.

**Feature-Length Script:** 120-130 pages with a 5-10 page critical introduction.

**Television Script:** 60 pages if the television show is an hour in length and a series bible that consists of 10-12 pages detailing the main characters and describing the narrative arc of the next five seasons with a 5-10 page critical introduction. If the show is thirty-minutes in length, then submit the first two episodes as well as the series bible.

**Exceptions can be made for longer work with the approval of your thesis advisor.**

Students must complete an oral defense and submit their thesis prior to the Graduate School deadline prior in order to qualify for graduation that semester. For creative students, this defense will constitute their Comprehensive Examination evaluation.

### Procedures

The thesis is generally undertaken after the student has completed most coursework. The first step is to find a supervising professor to act as the thesis director, and with that director to enlist a committee (3-4 members, one of whom must be a Graduate Faculty member from a department other than English). The student then works with the director and committee to develop a prospectus, which must be approved in a prospectus meeting by the thesis committee at least one semester prior to graduation.

Creative writing students should begin working on their thesis during creative classes and workshops. During the final semester of course work, thesis hours are taken as a course, a total of three semester hours. Students who do not complete the thesis as planned can take additional thesis hours that will not count to the degree. Thesis credit ceases to be current after two years, and the student must be registered for at least one hour of credit during the semester in which the oral defense is conducted.

### Thesis Topic and Committee Chair

Thesis topic ideas usually emerge from classes and prior interests. Be sure to discuss possible project ideas with English faculty. To begin the process:

- Meet with a possible thesis committee chair or faculty in the area in which you plan to work.
- Meet with the graduate coordinator to discuss the thesis process and deadlines—and to help identify a mentor if needed.
- Plan for the thesis to take a minimum of two semesters of writing. If it is important for you to finish on time, start as soon as you complete 18 hours of course work.

## Thesis Committee

The committee should consist of

- Committee chair from English in thesis area, who will recommend other faculty to serve. The chair reviews all of your writing before it goes to the committee and grades your thesis work at the end of the process.
- Two additional English graduate faculty members, who give feedback throughout the process.
- Outside reader on the USA graduate faculty in another department, who gives feedback during the process or solely at the defense if he or she prefers.

Once you have contacted these faculty members and they have agreed to serve, you must fill out a Thesis Committee Form and submit it to the graduate coordinator.

## Creative Thesis Process\*

<http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/artsandsci/english/grad/creativewriting.html>

Prior to fall term or two semesters before graduation:

- Develop a schedule and general plan for completing the thesis with your chair.
- Submit a draft project description approved by the thesis chair and completed Thesis Committee Form to the graduate coordinator.
- If you were admitted prior to Fall 2016, enroll in three EH 599 thesis hours; otherwise enroll in a creative course. (Follow directions online to submit the EH 599 Form and Thesis Committee Form. Once you have approval, you must register for thesis hours through PAWS in the normal registration period.)

During fall term or one semester prior to graduation:

- Apply for graduation.
- Complete prospectus during the first month of the semester; hold prospectus meeting. Follow directions below to submit approved prospectus with signature sheet.
- Circulate revised drafts of thesis sections to the committee with the approval of the chair.
- Follow directions online to submit the EH 599 Form to enroll in thesis hours for final term.
- Provide the thesis committee chair a full version of your thesis before the semester ends.

Last semester:

- Complete thesis revisions by the end of February.
- Schedule defense with the agreement of your chair and committee.
- Defend thesis successfully, and complete revisions. Meet Graduate School submission deadlines.

**\*Note: For creative writing students admitted during or after Fall 2016, only three thesis hours are required, not six.**

## Creative Writing Thesis Prospectus

The prospectus is a formal written description of your thesis project that must be approved by your chair and committee. The creative writing prospectus requirements, which vary by genre, are appended to this checklist on page 5 and 6.

**Prospectus Meeting:** Students must schedule a prospectus meeting with all English faculty members on the committee (outside readers may attend, but they are not required to attend) prior to submitting the approved prospectus.

**Format:** Your prospectus should be in MLA format and double-spaced throughout. Use the template format provided by Graduate School for the signature sheet, and attach the final version of the prospectus to the signature sheet when you request signatures.

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduatemajors/graduateschool/thesis.html>

**Signature Page:** For the final version, begin with the formal signature page signed by the committee, Dr. Ellen Harrington (Chair, Department of English), and Dr. Eric Loomis (Graduate Director, College of Arts and Sciences).

**Deadline:** The thesis prospectus for the English MA must be completed and approved during the first semester of thesis hours (one semester prior to graduation).

Fall Term Deadline: September 15  
 Spring Term Deadline: February 28  
 Summer Term Deadline: July 1

The English Department requires that the approved prospectus be completed in order for any MA student to sign up for the final semester of thesis hours. Once the prospectus has been completed and approved, please forward a copy of the prospectus to Dr. Harrington to be filed. Please note that you should follow the requirements for the thesis that are explained in the Graduate School guidelines:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduatemajors/graduateschool/thesis.html>

All theses require an introduction (usually 5 to 10 pages) and an abstract, as well as special formatting.

## Creative Writing Thesis Deadlines and Defense

The defense usually consists of a brief presentation on or discussion of the project by the student, a question and answer period with the public present, an optional closed session with only the student and the committee present, and a closed meeting of the committee in which the outcome is determined as each committee member votes on the thesis. Generally, the thesis director will not allow a student to schedule the defense if the project is not in an acceptable state to complete the degree.

- **In order to graduate on time, you must provide committee members with the final version of the thesis at least TWO WEEKS prior to the defense date.**

- You must defend the thesis and make all needed revisions completed prior to the Graduate School's First Submission deadline. This is a "first submission" only in the sense that the Graduate School is checking formatting; otherwise, it is a FINAL copy. Graduate School thesis deadlines:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduatemajors/graduateschool/resources/calendar.pdf>

- To schedule a defense, you must contact all committee members to set up a one-hour period when they can attend. You must then contact the English department staff to reserve a room during that time. You should also contact the graduate coordinator with your scheduling information, so the defense can be announced to the Graduate School and the department.
- At the defense, faculty must sign an approval form to record their votes, and the director and student must sign to attest that the thesis is not plagiarized. You can access this approval form (GS Form 7) and type in the required information. **The student is responsible for bringing a prepared copy of this form to the defense:**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/eforms/graduateschool/GSForm7T-Submissionform.pdf>

- You may also get signatures on a properly formatted title page (to be bound in the document) at this time. Please include the Graduate Director, Dr. Eric Loomis, and the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Harold Pardue, on your signature page and paperwork.
- After the defense and approval of the thesis, students must make any changes or revisions that are required by the committee. Students should allow a minimum of 1-2 weeks before the First Submission Deadline to complete these changes.
- Plan to meet with Dr. Eric Loomis, Graduate Director and Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, who must approve the thesis by signing the GS Form 7 **before** submission to the Graduate School on the First Submission Deadline. (Students must make an appointment with Dr. Loomis in advance.)
- After submitting the thesis to the Graduate School, you must make any formatting changes required by the Graduate School and meet the university deadlines and fee schedule.

## Criteria for Creative Writing Thesis Prospectuses

The creative writing thesis prospectus describes a specific creative project representative of graduate-level work. The prospectus thus serves as both a revisable plan of student action and a locus of committee discussion. Prior to submitting the prospectus to the committee, the student should submit a draft to the thesis chair for comment and approval.

1. Signature page as required by the Graduate School
2. Genre-specific requirements: In a narrative of 7-10 pages organized into sections, address each point clearly and in reasonable detail. Please contact Dr. Halbrooks for a sample if needed.

### Genre-specific requirements

#### NOVEL

1. Title
2. A one-page description of the novel's main character(s) and central conflict.
3. Description of the anticipated structure of the novel.
4. Reasoning for the point-of-view of the novel.
5. Explanation of why you chose this particular subject.
6. Craft analysis of one to three seminal works within the candidate's genre, and how they have specifically contributed to this novel.
7. Was additional research required? If so, describe the research process. What sources were used?
8. Which elements of technique are most important to this particular project? Discuss at least three (e.g., Imagery, Characterization, Voice, Setting, Dialogue, etc.).

#### CREATIVE NON-FICTION

- Same as novel with this additional question: How did the facts influence the structure of the work?

#### SHORT STORY COLLECTION

1. Title
2. How do you see the stories as connected? In what way do they belong together in this single manuscript?
3. Describe some of the structural decisions within a few of the individual stories and the reasoning behind them.
4. Explain why certain themes emerge more than others and why the writer chose these particular stories to tell.
5. Provide a brief craft analysis of one to three seminal works within your genre, and how they have specifically contributed to your stories.
6. Was additional research required? If so, describe the research process. What sources were used?
7. Which elements of technique were most important to you as you drafted these stories? Choose at least three (e.g., Imagery, Characterization, Voice, Setting, Dialogue, etc.).

#### SCREENWRITING

1. Title
2. A one or two sentence description (logline) followed by a description of the story's main characters and central conflict.
3. Description of the structure and the reasoning behind it.

4. A one-page outline of the story structure, identifying all of the primary action points and act breaks.
5. An explanation of the primary character arc(s). What does the main character want? What is s/he up against? How does s/he change throughout the story?
6. Explanation of why the student chose this particular story to tell.
7. Provide a brief craft analysis of seminal works within your genre, and how they have specifically contributed to your stories.
8. Was additional research required? If so, describe the research process. What sources were used?
9. Which elements of technique were most important to you as you drafted this screen play? Choose at least three (e.g., Imagery, Characterization, Voice, Setting, Dialogue, etc.).

## **POETRY**

1. Title
2. Provide a detailed statement about your intended subject matter and why you chose to write about these subjects.
3. Discuss the poetic forms you intend to employ and other craft choices, such as internal rhyme, metaphor, and associative play that will be featured in your thesis.
4. Describe how the poems in the collection will be unified and how the poems will be organized within the thesis (such as with named sections or not).
5. Provide a brief craft analysis of one to three seminal works within your genre, and how they have specifically contributed to your poems.
6. Provide a timetable for completion, and note which poems, if any, have already been accepted for publication.