
Thesis/Essay Guidelines

College of Arts and
Sciences

Office of Graduate Studies

Graduate Thesis/Essay/Creative Project Guidelines
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
John Carroll University

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Introduction

Purpose

The Thesis/Essay/Creative Project for Master's degree programs requires students to identify a worthy problem in their field, research and analyze that problem, and communicate their findings in clear and competent writing to an academic audience. Completion of this requirement signals to others the students' capability, integrity, perseverance and dedication to define and complete a complex project. Whether students choose to explore a professional issue or theoretical construct, their efforts will help them hone their abilities to identify and solve problems through a systematic research process that can address both theoretical and practical problems in professional, academic and personal settings.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty and ethical behavior, expected of every student, is essential to the process of education and to upholding high ethical standards. Cheating, including plagiarism, inappropriate use of technology, or any other kind of unethical behavior, may subject the student to severe academic penalties, including dismissal.

All work submitted for a thesis, essay, or creative project must represent only the work of the student unless indicated otherwise. Research material and data must be handled in accordance with standards set by the departments. Concerns about the propriety of obtaining outside assistance and acknowledging sources should be addressed to the advisor before the work commences and as necessary as the work proceeds.

The penalty for academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and unethical behavior as it relates to the writing of the final thesis, essay, or creative project may be dismissal from the program.

Thesis/Project Options

Students choose between *Plan A – Thesis* or *Plan B – Essay/Creative Project* according to department guidelines and when appropriate for the program.

Plan A thesis: The thesis must show capacity for original research. The word 'thesis' refers to a formal, scholarly investigation that is based first and foremost on a research question. Through the writing of a thesis students are able to demonstrate their ability to locate and synthesize theoretical and empirical knowledge about a given phenomenon, formulate an appropriate method for investigation, analyze related data, and arrive at an empirically-based solution. The thesis reflects original research in the sense that either previously unknown information is brought to light and presented or previously known information is presented in a creatively new way leading to new applications. In general, the thesis demonstrates research ability whose content shows originality, analytical skills, clarity of critical thought, and power of mature expression. This option particularly benefits those who are interested in research or who may be considering further graduate study at the doctoral level. A thesis is a significant undertaking requiring considerable initiative, responsibility and time management; therefore, students should carefully think through the advantages and disadvantages of choosing this option. **Consult with department guidelines as to the appropriate length of the thesis.**

Plan B essay: The essay provides the opportunity for students to present their own perspective on a subject or question of interest, supported by research into other perspectives. Ordinarily, this subject is

one that first came to the students' notice during their program of study and that captivated them from the outset. The writing of an essay demonstrates the students' ability to integrate and synthesize the coursework done during their program and to advance investigation of a problem using the tools of scholarly research. In its writing, students also learn to restructure and re-present arguments encountered during the course of that research. Clarity of thought and power of mature expression are expected as in the thesis. **Consult with department guidelines as to the appropriate length of the essay.**

Plan B creative project: The creative project is designed to demonstrate the students' ability to plan, develop, and carry out a project of significance. Application of theoretical principles to professional or practical situations is the focus of the project. Like the essay, the students conduct research on a topic so that they can create and present a project based on a personal perspective supported by the research in the field. In some cases students will conduct original research based on the demands of the project. Analysis, organization and clarity of expression are expected in the project. **Consult with department guidelines as to the appropriate length of the creative project.**

Note: There are no Essay/Creative Project options in the Biology, Education, and Counseling Programs. The Nonprofit Administration Program requires a *Capstone Project* of all students rather than a thesis/essay/creative project.

Thesis/Essay/Creative Project Guidelines

Note: The guidelines that follow are general guidelines for the thesis/essay/creative project requirements for the Master's degree. Students should check with their particular department or program for more discipline-specific requirements for their program.

General Guidelines

Degree programs requiring a thesis, essay, or creative project may have specific guidelines and requirements. The following guidelines apply to all thesis, essays, and creative projects:

1. One computer-processed original and one copy, revised as required by the advisor and other assigned readers, are to be filed in the Graduate Studies Office by the date specified in the University calendar. The signed copies must be in the Office of Graduate Studies by 5:00 p.m.
2. The thesis, essay, or project must follow the format regulations of the Graduate Studies Office, (copies of which are available in the Graduate Studies Office, in this document, and online) and any additional requirements specified by the departments.
3. Thesis and essays are placed in the John Carroll University library and are available for patrons' use. A student's thesis may also be recommended for Ohio Link's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Center. Guidelines are available in the College of Arts and Sciences' Office of Graduate Studies and in this document.
4. Essays should be carefully proofread after all corrections suggested by the advisor have been made and before they are submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Thesis Advisor:** The Thesis Advisor is a faculty member in the department/program who typically has particular expertise in the student's area of research or interest and who has primary responsibility for guiding the student through the research. In addition, the advisor ensures that materials are read by committee members (readers) in a timely fashion.
2. **Thesis Readers:** The student chooses two readers, preferably who have expertise in the area of the student's research and who also read and provide feedback to the student and/or advisor. It is the student's responsibility to seek out faculty to work with on the project. In addition, the readers participate in the completion of the thesis and certify that it meets the standards of the College and department. Students who choose to use an advisor or reader who is not a faculty member of John Carroll University must obtain approval from the department chair and the appropriate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Typically only one reader will be from outside of the University.
3. **Essay/Project Advisor:** The Essay/Project Advisor approves the proposal, reviews the progress of the paper along the way at specific intervals as defined by the advisor and the student. They provide advice and recommendations and are the main point of contact for the student for assistance and guidance. Upon completion of the paper, the advisor provides approval of the work as fulfilling the requirements of this element of the degree.
4. **Associate Dean for Graduate Studies:** The Associate Dean reads all manuscripts to make sure they are clear, coherent, and generally free of spelling and typing errors and adhere to a consistent format. Final approval of the thesis/essay/creative project is granted by the Associate Dean.
5. **Student:** The student is responsible for defining and managing his or her own thesis/project. The student is responsible for insuring that the paper conforms to the guidelines set by the College, department/program, and a particular style manual. Editing the paper for grammar and cohesiveness is the student's responsibility. The paper reflects the student's care and ability.

Approval Process

There are a number of considerations to keep in mind as the student develops, writes and completes the thesis/essay/creative project:

1. The dates for filing outlines or initial draft copies are set by the student's advisor. The student should be notified of these well in advance.
2. It is recommended that the student regularly provide the advisor and readers with new and/or revised sections of the thesis/essay/creative project on a timely basis so feedback may be provided.

3. A final draft of the thesis/essay/creative project should be given to the advisor and readers well in advance of the due date for submission to the Office of Graduate Studies. As a rule of thumb, the thesis/essay/creative project should be submitted at least one month before the deadline set by the Office of Graduate Studies so that the advisor and readers have sufficient time to read and provide feedback to the student and for the student to make necessary revisions.
4. Once the student makes the required changes to the thesis/essay/creative project based on the recommendations of the advisor and or readers, the student seeks the required signatures.
5. The final reader of the thesis/essay/creative project is the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. A manuscript that does not conform to acceptable standards will be returned to the student for correction. The student will then be allowed a specified period of time to resubmit the thesis/essay/creative project to the Office of Graduate Studies in order to meet graduation deadlines.
6. A formal letter of approval will be mailed to the student from the Associate Dean informing him or her that the work has been accepted.

Research with human or animal subjects

Students whose research involves human subjects or animals must apply to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) prior to the collection of data (see more detailed information in the Appendix section of this document.)

Thesis Course

Students register for the six-credit course (five-credit for Biology plus one credit for propos) designated as the Master's Thesis in the semester in which they intend to graduate. The grade for this course is CR. Students who do not complete the thesis in the semester in which the course is taken will receive a grade of PR (in process). The PR will remain on the student's record until the thesis is completed or until such time as the time limit expires (see the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for the policy on PR grades). Students receiving the PR for this course are unable to graduate until the thesis is accepted and approved.

Essay/Creative Project Course

For those programs that require a course related to the essay or creative project, students register in the semester in which they intend to graduate. The grade for this course is CR. Students who do not complete the essay or creative project in the semester in which the course is taken will receive a grade of PR (in process). The PR will remain on the student's record until the essay or creative project is completed or until such time as the time limit expires (see the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* for the policy on PR grades). Some departments may have other course requirements related to completion of the essay/creative project. Students should refer to the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* or their advisor for additional information.

Time Table for Completing the Thesis/Essay/Creative Project

It is never too early to map out a plan of study for the graduate degree. If a student is in a discipline that requires an essay, thesis or creative project, he or she should raise this subject with the advisor, if not during the first meeting, certainly during the first term in school. The advisor will give the student advice regarding when students in the program typically begin an essay or thesis, and how long it takes

to finish such work. Note that completing such work in a single semester usually leads to a sub-par project. As a rule of thumb, a student should expect to spend up to a year researching, drafting, and completing a project.

The following timeline is only a suggestion; not a requirement. It is not meant to be prescriptive but rather to provide the student ideas and guidance on how to proceed with completing this particular requirement for the degree. It does not apply equally to all of the programs. It is also developed with the student who completes the degree full time and within two years in mind. A student working part-time can modify these suggestions to conform to his or her own time frame.

Year 1

First semester:

- The student consults with the advisor about typical thesis or essays timelines that may be appropriate in their department/program.
- Students may begin to familiarize themselves with the requirements and the guidelines of these projects.

Second semester:

- Students may begin to define a project. Based on interests coming into the program or interests that emerge during the first semesters of coursework, students may begin to narrow down or discover more specific areas of interest. Often, essays and theses grow out of work done in a first or second semester course.
- For students conducting original research, this may be the time when students formulate their research question and begin to design the methodology.
- Students also begin to identify the faculty member that they would like to work with, and contact him or her regarding the possibility of establishing this relationship.
- Once students settle on an advisor, they work under that professor's guidance, creating a timeline for completing the project, developing an initial bibliography, and drafting a proposal, if a proposal is required (check with department specific guidelines regarding the proposal). The timeline should include due dates for specific steps in the process (first draft, etc.).
- Students also may want to ask advisors for copies of successful completed essays or theses.
- Students working on a thesis typically need a committee composed of the advisor and two other professors. Students may consult with their advisor about other committee members. Usually, the thesis director asks other faculty to serve on the committee.

Year 2

Summer after first year: Students begin work on the project. See "Order of Events" that follows.

Third semester: Students continue to work on the essay/thesis submitting drafts of the essay/thesis to the advisor/readers for feedback. See "Order of Events" that follows.

Fourth and final semester: Students complete the thesis/essay/creative project and submit it for approval (see Approval Process in this Handbook). Please note the following:

- Students on track for Spring graduation should be aware that the deadline for submission of the work to the Office of Graduate Studies is typically in April; for Winter graduation the deadline is typically in November; and for Summer graduation the deadline is typically in July. ***These are firm deadlines*** since the Associate Dean needs time to read the work and provide appropriate feedback and for the student to make required revisions prior to final approval.
- Being aware of the deadline for submission to the Graduate Studies Office, students need to complete and submit the work to the advisor and readers ***at least four weeks prior to that deadline*** so that there is sufficient time for faculty to read and provide feedback and for the student to make required revisions.
- For students planning to graduate in the spring semester, if the thesis/essay/creative project is not completed by the April deadline, it is possible, by way of exception and academic petition, to walk in the Spring commencement with the assurance that the thesis/essay/creative project will be completed by the summer deadline.

Order of Events: A Writing Process, Summer through Spring of Year 2

Another way to think about a timetable for completing the thesis/essay/creative project is to consider steps in the writing process. Like the timetable above, this is a suggestion for one way of thinking about organizing the work of writing the final paper. This process may vary by discipline, the student's and faculty member's schedules, the student's individual writing style, and the overall time frame for completing the degree. It does, however, highlight the major steps or benchmarks in the process that are important considerations for the student.

Step 1

- Begin evaluating primary and secondary sources;
- Take extensive notes on the reading;
- Brainstorm ideas individually or with others for topics, problems, and ways of addressing them;
- Work on shaping a thesis and structure for the thesis/essay/creative project;

Step 2

- Meet with your advisor to (a) discuss sources/thesis/structure, (b) determine if more research is needed and in what area, and (c) set a deadline for submission of a partial draft or a few sections;

Step 3

- Continue research, if necessary;
- Construct an outline with major sections and sub points, noting where each source fits;
- Begin writing first draft;

Step 4

- Submit drafts and sections to your advisor at regular intervals;
- Discuss revisions, issues, and progress with your advisor on a regular basis (i.e. weekly or bi-weekly)
- Maintain adherence to deadlines for sections to be completed;

Step 5

- Revise draft;

- Submit revisions to your advisor for overarching comments and larger concerns;
- Visit the Writing Center for any questions about organization and content (Writing Center consultants can act as “as second pair of eyes” providing another perspective on the work;

Step 6

- Revise again;
- Submit revisions to your advisor;
- Evaluate the coherence and cohesiveness of original and revised text;

Step 7

- Prepare final draft;
- Visit the Writing Center if you have concerns about grammar, punctuation, or citations;
- Adjust margins and add page numbers;
- Prepare title and signature pages;
- Pick up Pressboard from Graduate Studies Office;
- Take essay to JCU Copy Center for copying on acid-free, 20-pound weight bond paper with watermark;
- Bind, obtain signatures, and submit to advisor (and readers) at least four weeks prior to deadline;

Step 8

- Submit to the Office of Graduate Studies by stated deadline for final approval.

Formatting Requirements

All theses/essays/projects must satisfy the requirements set forth by the Office of Graduate Studies.

Students should check with their departments/programs early in the writing process so that they are aware of any program/department specific format requirements.

The Office of Graduate Studies does not require the use of any particular style, although some departments/programs do. Students are encouraged to consult a style guide relevant to their discipline (see Additional Information section of this document).

Following are general requirements. Documents that do not conform to these requirements will not be accepted.

1. **BINDING:** Each document must be placed in a Smead Genuine Pressboard Cover No. GY129, available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Only the document designated as original will be bound at University expense for the Library. The copy will be sent to the department as submitted.
2. **STYLE:** Theses, essays and creative projects must conform in style to these instructions and the regulations and style manual of the student's major department. The student obtains this information from the advisor or department. If the department has no guidelines, students should follow APA. Refer to the style guide used regarding double/double spacing. Format must be

consistent throughout the whole paper, for example if a chapter title is in bold print, all chapter titles must be bold.

3. **FONT:** The appropriate font size is 12. The font style should be plain and simple such as Times New Roman or Arial.
4. **PAPER:** The final original and copy are to be printed on suitable thesis paper: **acid-free, 20-pound bond with watermark.** This paper is available in the JCU Copy Center.
5. **PRINTING AND PHOTOCOPIES:** Acid-free, 20-pound weight bond paper with watermark, is required. The print must be black. It is necessary to produce a sharp, clean print. All corrections must be invisible. Professionally produced, black on white photocopies, are acceptable as a second copy but must also be produced on the same paper. Students should be aware of certain features of photocopying that can affect the quality of copies. Machines not carefully and regularly maintained will produce spotted or streaked copies. Such copies are unacceptable. Most copying companies will include only a lesser quality copying paper in their charge. There is usually an extra charge for acid-free, 20-pound weight bond paper with watermark. For these reasons, students may want to consider having their documents copied at the JCU Copy Center. The equipment is serviced regularly, and the correct bond paper is provided at a small extra charge. If the work was created in Microsoft Word and contains only black and white pages, the JCU Copy Center can work from a flash drive or CD rather than hard copies; however some versions of the software can alter margins when opened. Most importantly, the work is guaranteed; if the copies do not meet the Office of Graduate Studies requirements because of any defect in the machine or the copying process, it will be redone for the student. The author must certify which document is the original and which is the copy with his or her signature on each signature page (see example).
6. **DRAWINGS/ILLUSTRATIONS/PHOTOGRAPHS:** If ink drawings or illustrations are to be submitted, use waterproof black ink. Photostatic or photographic copies or black-line prints will be accepted in lieu of the original drawings. All photos or drawings must fit within the specified margins. Photographs are usually black and white with one photograph per page. They may be printed directly on the same 20-pound, acid-free bond used for the rest of the paper or may be printed on lightweight photographic paper or professionally lithographed. If using digital photographs, they must be printed with appropriate resolution with a high-quality Laser printer. Color Ink-Jet printers do not produce acceptable copies.
7. **ORGANIZATION:** The thesis or essay should be organized in a sensible, logical and coherent manner. The specific content, organization, style, and appropriate length should be determined by close consultation with advisor.
8. **TITLE PAGE:** The title page of a thesis, essay, or creative project must conform to the example included in the appendix. All words should be center-aligned. **Regardless of the style manual used, no page number should appear on the Title Page.** (see sample in Appendix)
9. **MARGINS:** **Regardless of the style manual used,** all pages, including the Title Page, appendices, tables, and illustrations shall have **one inch** margins on the **top, bottom, and right** side. The **left** side shall have a **one and one-half inch** margin. The page numbers **must** be

centered on the bottom of the page. The bottom of the page number must be at the one inch margin. It is suggested that students initially print just one or two pages prior to printing the entire document. Use a ruler to check margins carefully and adjust as needed. In Microsoft Word, the height of the page numbers is adjusted in the footer section. Please see the Office of Graduate Studies if instructions for adjusting the footer height are needed.

10. **SIGNATURE PAGE:** The Signature Page should be placed immediately following the Title Page and be prepared in conformity with the examples included in the appendix. Regardless of the style manual used, no page number should appear on the Signature Page. The signature page of both the original and copy should bear original signatures (signatures should not be copied).
11. **PROOFREADING:** Papers are to be proofread with care, so that all errors have been corrected before submission of the final documents to the Office of Graduate Studies. Students should not expect their advisors or readers to correct spelling and grammar. Please note the following: Foreign words or scientific notation should appear with the accents and diacritical marks as used in the respective language or notation.
12. **APPENDICES AND TABLES:** Check style guidelines specified by the department for the format, pagination, and titles of appendices and tables. Ordinarily, appendices are paginated sequentially.
13. **DOCUMENTATION:** All sources for direct quotations and paraphrases must be documented. Students may use any of the standard citation styles subject to the advisor's approval, provided a single style is followed consistently throughout the thesis or essay.

Note: In those cases when a thesis is being submitted for publication the student may follow the guidelines for the particular journal to which the manuscript is being submitted. A copy of the journal's publication guidelines should be included when submitting the thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Appendix

Graduate Programs with Thesis/Essay Options

The following graduate programs in the College of Arts and Sciences require the thesis or essay in partial fulfillment of the master's degree (2012-2014 Graduate Studies Bulletin):

Education (Masters of Arts)
History
Humanities
Theology and Religious Studies

The following graduate programs in the College of Arts and Sciences require the thesis, essay, or creative project in partial fulfillment of the master's degree (2012-2014 Graduate Studies Bulletin):

Communication Management
English

The following graduate programs in the College of Arts and Sciences require the thesis in partial fulfillment of the master's degree (2012-2014 Graduate Studies Bulletin):

Biology (Master's of Science)

The following departments/programs have department specific policies regarding the final paper:

Mathematics: Master's of Science – Research Paper
Master's of Arts – Expository Essay
Nonprofit Administration – Capstone Project

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversees research projects which involves the use of human participants. Projects are evaluated to ensure (1) the protection of the rights of the individual and (2) the quality of the research protocol since a flawed study may needlessly expose participants to risk. Potential participants should not be contacted nor should any data be collected until IRB approval has been given. If your research involves the study of human subjects you must seek and receive IRB approval before beginning the research. For questions regarding the IRB, students may contact the IRB administrator (397-1527) or visit their website: <http://www.jcu.edu/research/irb/index.htm>.

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)

John Carroll University established the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee in 1998 to oversee JCU's animal program, facilities, and procedures. Students who conduct research with animals are subject to the policies and procedures of IACUC. For more information student may contact the IACUC administrator (397-1527) or visit the website: <http://www.jcu.edu/research/iacuc/index.htm>.

OhioLink Electronic Dissertations/Thesis (EDT)

OhioLink's Electronic Dissertations/Thesis Center is a free, on-line database containing electronic versions of master's theses from participating OhioLink member schools. Electronic submission of the thesis to this database has a number of advantages including wider dissemination and access of the work and experience in electronic document preparation and an understanding of digital libraries. Students who are interested in submitting their work to the EDT Center should consult with their advisor and contact the JCU Liaison Librarian, Jie Zhang (jzhang@jcu.edu; 397-1693).

Style Guides

The Office of Graduate Studies does not require the use of any particular style; however, many of the departments/programs do require a specific style. Students should consult their departments to find the appropriate guide for their work. Students are encouraged to consult a style guide relevant to their discipline if the department does not mandate one. Manuals are available in the JCU library or purchase in the JCU Bookstore. Information may also be found at the following websites:

- *Publication Manual of the APA* (7th Ed) www.apastyle.org
- *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th Ed) www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html
- *Modern Language Association* (MLA; 7th Ed) <http://www.mla.org/style>

JCU Writing Center

The JCU Writing Center offers free, one-on-one consulting services to all members of the John Carroll community: students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Trained Writing Consultants can assist writers of all skill levels; they can provide help on any aspect of writing, at every step in the writing process, and on most kinds of texts. The Writing Center is located in O'Malley 207. Consult the Writing Center's website for their schedule (<http://sites.jcu.edu/writingcenter/>). Services are available on a first-come-first-served drop-in basis, or by appointment. To schedule an appointment, contact the Center by phone at 216-397-4529. Students may schedule 30-minute or 1-hour long appointments.

Common Thesis/Essay/Creative Project Format Problems

This section provides a list (not at all exhaustive) of some of the common mistakes that readers find in final drafts of thesis/essays/creative projects. It is meant to serve as an aid for students in proofreading their work.

- Page numbers (location; mismatch with Table of Contents)
- Margins not as indicated in Thesis/Essay/Creative Project Guidelines
- Headings (placement and font as per style guide)
- Text citations (i.e. not enough citations in text; not in format of style guide; direct quotes missing page numbers)
- Reference List (i.e. missing citations in reference list; not in format of style guide)
- Grammar and spelling errors (i.e. inconsistent verb tense; missing words; sentence structure; incoherence; incorrect word use; punctuation)
- Lack of clear statement of purpose; lack of clear statement of the research problem or question;
- Lack of organization (consider headings and subheadings)

Sample Title and Signature Pages

This is an example of the **Title Page** for an essay. Substitute the word “Thesis” or the words “Creative Project” and the appropriate degree designation as necessary. The title of your paper should be in CAPITAL LETTERS.

HOW I SPENT MY
SUMMER VACATION

An Essay Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
John J. Example
2004

} One inch margin

} Center-align
this
paragraph
vertically

} One inch margin

This is an example of the **Signature Page** of an *original* document using the formatting for an **essay or creative project** (please make sure to use the appropriate word). Note that this page certifies the document as the *original*. The signature page of the *copy* should state, “I certify that this is the copy of the original document.”

The essay of John J. Example is hereby accepted:

Advisor – Donald R. Faculty

Date

I certify that this is the original document

Author – John J. Example

Date

Center-align this paragraph vertically

One inch margin

One and one half inch margin

One inch margin

This is an example of the **Signature Page** of an *original* document using the formatting for a **thesis**. Note that this page certifies the document as the *original*. The signature page of the *copy* should state, “I certify that this is the copy of the original document.”

The thesis of John J. Example is hereby accepted:	
_____ Reader – Donald R. Faculty	_____ Date
_____ Reader – Maryanne S. Teacher	_____ Date
_____ Advisor – Peter Professor	_____ Date
I certify that this is the original document	
_____ Author – John J. Example	_____ Date

Center-align this paragraph vertically

One inch margin

One and one half inch margin

One inch margin

