



BOSTON GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
Psychoanalysis

MANUAL
for Master's Paper & Thesis Writers

Policies, Procedures and Forms for Paper and Thesis Work



INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis or Master's paper is the culminating experience of the Master of Arts Program, whether that program is in Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalytic counseling, or Psychoanalysis and Culture. Completion of a thesis allows the student to demonstrate mastery of an aspect of psychoanalytic thought while conducting an empirical research study. This handbook reviews the major components of a thesis, describes the stages of conducting a thesis project, and suggests ways of resolving problems that may arise.

No handbook can answer every question about a process as complex as writing a thesis or Master's paper. Instead, this handbook should be used as a starting point and as a point of reference. Additional questions can be raised with your thesis advisor or PT1787 instructors.

THESIS VS. MASTER'S PAPER

There are two ways of fulfilling the research requirement for the Master of Arts Programs: completion of a *thesis* or a *Master's paper*. These projects are very similar in intent, structure of the study, and organization of the paper.

Thesis

The major difference between these two options is the process of developing and completing the project. The thesis is done under the supervision of a thesis advisor and is read and approved by a second faculty member as reader. The thesis may take several semesters to complete, depending on the commitment of the student and the nature of the study. The student registers for Directed Research to work with a research advisor.

Paper

Most Master of Arts Students complete the Master's Paper. The Master's paper is completed within a single semester, while taking the Master's paper course, PT/PC/CP 1787. The two faculty members teaching the 1787 course function as a committee assessing the student's work and sign off upon its completion¹.

In the 1787 course the two faculty instructors set clear deadlines for drafts of paper sections to be completed by a certain date. A complete acceptable draft must be completed and turned in at the end of class in order to receive credit for the course. At the discretion of the instructor, students may be given a few weeks after the end of class to produce a final draft acceptable to the instructor. There are no incompletes for this class.

¹ If the course is taught by one instructor, an external reader will be found for papers produced during the class.

Thus, if a student does not complete an acceptable paper in the allotted time frame, or if the student fails to revise the paper into its final format soon after course completion, (s)he must either take the class again the following year or register for directed research advisement and complete the study as a thesis.

So which is best for you, the thesis or Master's paper? One factor that should influence your decision is the type of study you wish to undertake. Some studies, by their nature, cannot be completed in one semester. If you are committed to conducting such a study, the thesis would be appropriate for you because the Master's paper must be completed in one semester.

The major difference however, has to do with which working style is best for you. By its nature, the Master's paper requires a concerted commitment of time and energy in one semester. You must meet strict deadlines. For many students, this provides a structure which helps them carry out and successfully complete their research project. These students should probably choose the Master's paper. If, however, you cannot make the commitment of time and energy in a given semester required for the Master's paper, or if you prefer thinking in a more leisurely fashion, the thesis route may be your best choice².

FORMULATING A PROBLEM

Every thesis begins by posing a research problem or question that the thesis then seeks to answer. Possible areas of study include developmental issues from observation of infants and children, residential care of the mentally ill, studies of an individual or group of patients presenting an interesting dynamic, or studies designed to explore a particular psychoanalytic question about motivation or character. Culture students may wish to examine the intersection of culture and psychodynamics in the production of a cultural product. Whatever the question, it should relate to some feature of psychoanalytic theory and practice, or its impact and effects.

What is of interest to you? Is the question psychoanalytically relevant? Do you like to pore over data in the library, conduct intensive interviews, or observe behavior? Participant observation may be most appealing, but the time required to gather the data may in some cases be prohibitive; perhaps an interview or focus group study can be conducted more readily. Patient data may be available at your fieldwork placement. You may want to consider using preexisting materials such as diaries, letters, or published psychoanalytic case reports, or even works of literature.

The initial identification of a research problem is followed by a process of refining the problem and specifying its meaning. A thesis project may be developed in reaction to a new theory you are learning at the school, or to observation in maturation courses, or to

² Because of the similarity, we use the term "thesis" in the following to include Masters papers as well.

the observation of mental illness in the field. Culture students may become interested in some cultural phenomena, such as film or television, or they may choose to study a social institution, such as a religious or work organization.

As you are refining your research question, you should be reading relevant literature. This literature can help clarify your concepts, call your attention to topics of interest, and help you ground your study in the work of others. As you are reading the relevant literature, you should take careful notes. These notes will then become the basis of your literature review.

Frequent and early discussions with faculty should help in narrowing the topic. Some students might also benefit from listing the advantages and disadvantages of several possible approaches to the research problem, focusing particularly on the available opportunities for data collection.

In selecting a research problem, you should keep in mind that any project chosen must involve the collection or analysis of empirical data of some kind. This data might come from interviews, questionnaires, field observations, or might be derived from an analysis of existing documents, such as diaries, literary works, letters, or folktales. In general, purely theoretical theses are not acceptable at the Master's level.

RESEARCH AGREEMENTS AND APPROVALS

For many research plans, agreements must be secured prior to collecting data. There are two concerns:

- 1) Securing approval from those who control access to the potential subjects or data, such as administrators, archivists, or faculty;
- 2) Satisfying institutional and ethical requirements for conducting research on human subjects.

The types of agreements required vary among thesis projects. Analysis of secondary data may require no more than writing to someone to obtain the data, while interviewing delinquents may require developing a detailed informed consent form to be approved by the school's Institutional Review Board and signed by parents and the interviewees.

Current ethical standards regarding research on human subjects and other research issues appear in the school's Code of Conduct and in the Institutional Review Board Policies and Procedures handout. Pick up a copy of both documents and study them before writing the proposal. The school requires review and approval of your proposal by your educational and thesis advisors. Research conducted should be consistent with the Institutional Review Board Policies and Procedures.

Beyond institutional requirements, careful consideration of protection of human subjects –

those people you study – is an ethical imperative for all researchers. You have an obligation to work with your advisors to assure your study will not cause even inadvertent harm to those studied.

Don't be surprised if your research plan can't be carried out just as envisioned: unanticipated problems should be expected! Meet with an advisor or discuss with the course instructor for help with your plan.

▶ THESIS READERS (THESIS OPTION ONLY)

Students select a committee of two readers to provide guidance on their thesis project and to evaluate the final thesis product. The main reader is the Chair. It is necessary that a thesis writer stay in touch with his/her Chair through the process of developing and writing a thesis. The Chair helps the student with all aspects of the thesis, including whom to turn to about specific problems that may develop. When the student has selected a Chair for his/her Thesis Committee, and the Chair has agreed to serve, the student registers for Directed Research with this person.

The process of selecting a Thesis Chair can begin with a discussion about the issue with the advisor or with any other member of the faculty with whom the student has contact³. A faculty member may ask the student to submit some prior work or a preliminary statement about the thesis project before agreeing to serve as Chair. The thesis writer develops a tentative schedule for completing each stage of the thesis project and reviews this plan with the Thesis Chair after the thesis proposal is approved.

Thesis writers generally meet at least monthly with the Thesis Chair, registering for minimally three hours of directed research at a time. Students may register for more hours if desired. Most students meet six times a semester for half an hour at a time.

As the project develops, the student selects a second reader from the faculty. The second reader is asked if they would like to have input into the study design, or would prefer to become involved when a complete draft of the paper is available to read. If the latter, this reader reviews a complete *draft* of the study, provides feedback and requests revisions. If the student and reader do not agree on these revisions, the Chair may mediate. Most papers will go through several rounds of requested revisions from the readers before final approval. This is a normal part of the thesis process. It is important that students realize that readers will almost always request at least some revisions. Students should thus plan on this and allow time in their projected schedule for the draft to be read and revisions to be made.

³ Culture students should check with the director of the Psychoanalysis and Culture Program regarding the acceptability of a faculty Chair or second reader not from the Culture Program.

If the second reader would like to have input into the study design, the student discusses the project with the reader and submits any written material for review. In both cases, the student registers for a directed research with the second reader.

As much as possible, Thesis Committee Chairs and second readers are available to assist thesis writers between June and August; separate summer registration may be required. However, students must realize that faculty schedules and commitments during the summer months are highly variable; be forewarned and prepared.

▶ THESIS DEVELOPMENT

BGSP does not require a formal thesis proposal. However, it is recommended that an informal proposal be developed by the student with input from their Thesis Chair. This is also helpful to the second reader if they wish to be involved as the study is designed. Students in the Master's Paper course develop the first three chapters as a proposal using the guidelines below, receiving input and feedback from the course instructor(s) as they go along.

A thesis proposal usually includes an introduction with a clear statement of the research question and much of the literature review and description of methods that will appear in the final thesis; this format is strongly encouraged, although not required. An average thesis proposal is about 3,000 words (10-12 typed pages); length is not necessarily a virtue, but the proposal must answer a number of critical questions:

- 1) What is the central question on which the project is based?
- 2) How might the project be characterized? A field report? A clinical report? An interview study? An analysis of historical or qualitative data?
- 3) What is the study's rationale or justification? Why is it worth executing? Is the project a contribution to theory or practice? Is it a reinvestigation of a previous research effort or an extension of an earlier finding?
- 4) What is the research plan or methodology for the project?
- 5) Is the project feasible in terms of time and effort, resources, data access, conformity with ethical standards, and the student's capabilities?
- 6) How does the proposed research relate to studies conducted in the past? (This information should be included in the literature review. Usually a proposal contains a brief summary of the literature review.)

Once agreed upon by the student and course instructor or Thesis Chair, the proposal should be referred to frequently throughout the project. But the proposal is not cast in stone. When problems require alteration in project plans, the thesis Chair or instructor is consulted.

Following is the Graduate School's formal process concerning thesis or Master's paper

development:

- 1) The student's advisor will review each student's performance upon the student's completion of the first year and a half of coursework. Input will be considered from all faculty who have taught the student being reviewed. This review will seek to assess the student's readiness to begin the research project and the format which is most compatible with their interests and needs (paper course or thesis). Input from instructors in PT 171 and PT 173 is particularly important.
- 2) Students who decide to write a thesis choose a Thesis Chair. All faculty are eligible to be a Chair or Second Reader.
- 3) Students enroll for one or more credits of Directed Research (3 hours meeting time, 3 hours reading time per credit) during the period of preparation of the proposal and additional hours of credit during the writing of the thesis proposal and thesis as needed. Students enroll in a separate directed research with the second reader (there is an option of one half a credit for 3 hours of reading time for the second reader). Course credit is not awarded until the thesis is completed.

▶ CONDUCTING RESEARCH

There are many ways to collect relevant information about people's internal and interactional worlds as data for a paper or thesis. Many projects derive from the student's coursework or internship, or an independent study project. Research may require arrangements to interview clients, staff or others in person. It may require obtaining access to agency records. Hospitals or child care facilities may provide data to the student from already-computerized files. The fieldwork externship or an internship may lead to an observational study or case focused study based on analysis of process notes. Discuss the possibilities in research courses and in thesis advisement.

Whatever the method of data collection, a number of issues will have to be confronted before the data are in hand. Getting clearance to use the data is important. Consult with the course instructor or thesis chair regarding this process.

It is most important to estimate realistically the time and effort involved in a thesis project; one semester is not enough time to develop a proposal, collect data, write and revise the thesis itself. The Master's paper course is structured to help students through this process in one semester. Potential problems with different approaches to collecting data should be considered in advance, or unanticipated changes in the project's focus may be required later.

Collecting data is followed by analyzing data; or, in some studies, these processes occur in a back-and-forth fashion. Be prepared: review your research texts and refer to them and other sources as necessary.

▶ WRITING & REVISING

A thesis cannot be written as if it were a last-minute term paper. Expect to spend more time revising and rewriting than in writing the first version of chapters. Take seriously comments from instructors or committee members about chapter drafts.

Most importantly, expect criticism. All good writers spend most of their time revising their own work. The ability to evaluate critically your own work, without running it down, and then to revise accordingly, is the key to long-term success as a writer.

▶ SECTIONS AND CONTENT

A Master's Paper or thesis often has the following format:

- 1) Abstract
- 2) Introduction/Statement of the Problem
- 3) Literature Review and Theoretical Orientation
- 4) Methodology
- 5) Results or Findings
- 6) Discussion
- 7) References
- 8) Appended Materials

This format is ideally suited to presenting results from a discipline-based study--that is, a study that tackles a problem or question identified in the extant literature. Most theses are written most easily with this format; most articles in the professional literature follow this format.

In some circumstances the conventional format may be altered without lessening the quality of the final product. Occasionally, another format may be better. A review of the literature, for example, may focus primarily on documents or agency records rather than on the extant literature. Even in this case, however, the material needs to be linked to the psychoanalytic literature or even to the basic assumptions relevant to the questions raised by the project. Again, the findings may be split between a descriptive section and an analytic section, or a separate chapter may be included that describes the research setting. Any modification in format requires approval of your chair.

The introduction or early sections of the thesis are critical, for they lay the foundation for

the rest. You should clearly state the problem and justify it as interesting to study. You should review what already is known about the topic, drawing upon psychoanalytic, research, and other relevant human and social science literature. Extant literature on the research problem is an important source for ideas and inspiration. Renew your acquaintance with the library and with the relevant journal literature. In many cases, the literature review will also reflect a general theoretical orientation to the thesis. Will the thesis generate hypotheses derived from conflict theory, from object relations theory, from cultural theory, or from modern psychoanalysis? Will the student attempt a project seeking to generate hypotheses about the motivation behind observable behavior?

All literature included in your literature review should be relevant to your study. One mistake that students frequently make is to include all literature they have read in the literature review, whether or not it winds up being relevant to the student's study. It is essential that the literature review be organized by theme and not by authors cited. If you find that many paragraphs start with the names of authors, it is an indication that you have not done enough to draw out critical themes and organize the review around these themes. The literature review should clearly link the themes identified in the literature to the particular study being conducted. In many cases the literature review ends with a section discussing the implications of the literature reviewed to the current study.

The methodology section must convince the reader that the findings to be presented will be defensible. Of course, many different methods could be used. What is critical is that the methodology section be clear on what procedures were followed and review issues of the quality of evidence: validity, reliability, and the constraints of assumptions, bias, access, and resources.

The results chapter presents the results of your analysis of your data, drawing out a series of specific conclusions. The evidence for each assertion should be clearly presented, using interview or session-note quotes, tables, figures, or other tools. At the same time, this chapter should tell a story of what you found in your data, clearly linking your inferences to your data. You should not just present a series of quotes as if the inferences were obvious. Rather, you should do the data analytic work and clearly present it to the reader so that the reader can follow your reasoning. The careful reader may not agree with all your conclusions, but he or she should conclude reading this section feeling that your conclusions are plausible inferences from your data.

The discussion is where you relate your specific findings or results to the broader issues raised in your introduction and literature review. Are your results consistent with prior theory or research, or do they suggest revisions, limitations, or amplifications? Are there clinical implications of your results? Might they suggest changes in social or institutional policies? The discussion is a place for creativity, though, as throughout the paper, all your statements should be justified by appeals to evidence or carefully reasoned argument. It is also a tradition for the discussion to include a section on Limitations of the Study. In addition to just listing limitations -- e.g., small sample size; difficulty making inferences about unconscious processes -- you should briefly discuss how these limitations might

have affected your results.

In general, research writing is very precise, carefully reasoned, and modest in its claims regarding the implications of the empirical evidence. All assertions are justified by citations from the literature, appeals to evidence, or carefully reasoned argument. Research writing never claims to “prove” something. Rather, researchers say their evidence “suggests” or “supports” a conclusion. Careful attention is paid to plausible alternative explanations of the data. It is not always possible to decide between alternative explanations. This is fine. Just acknowledge the existence of these alternative possibilities using such language as “It may be that...However, another possibility is...”

The process of writing a Master’s Paper or thesis is time-consuming, with a number of suggestions and revisions involved. Potential problems can be resolved by students committed to finishing their papers or theses. Most potential problems can be avoided with advance planning.

▶ COMPLETING YOUR PAPER OR THESIS

When a complete draft of the paper or thesis is available, it is submitted to the course instructor or the Thesis Chair. When the instructor or Chair gives overall approval, a draft is submitted to the Second Reader (who may be the second course instructor). As noted above, the paper will usually go through one or more rounds of revision at that point. The thesis is approved when both the Chair or instructor and the second reader judge it to be completed as signified by their stated willingness to sign it.

When approved, three copies of the paper or thesis, with signatures by both readers, must be filed with the Registrar. Formatting requirements are appended. The project is completed when the paper or thesis has been not only approved but duly filed. Once approved, the paper or thesis is placed in the library for general circulation.

Course credit is granted for the Master’s Paper or thesis work only after the thesis has been filed with the Registrar.

STYLE GUIDE

All research projects must be typewritten, double-spaced, edited, and corrected, with the following uniform page margins: left margin, 1-1/2 inches; right margin, at least 1 inch; top margin, at least 1-1/4 inches; bottom margin, at least 1 inch. References must conform to the style of the *American Psychological Association Style Manual* (fifth edition). Pagination must be consistent, either in the right-hand corner or centered at the bottom. Twelve-point Times New Roman or similar font is recommended for the text.

When references in the text of the manuscript refer to authors, the year of the original publication of the article or the book is indicated with parentheses.

Example: Several authors have claimed [...] For example, Freud (1900) said, "[...]"

If the author's name does not naturally appear in the sentence of the text, the name of the author is followed by a comma and the year of the original publication, in parentheses.

Example: As several authors (Hartman, 1939; Hartman and Lowenstein, 1962; Greenacre, 1960, 1964; Jacobson, 1953a, 1953b) have stated, "[...]"

In sentences such as:

In 1924 Freud said, "[...],"

no additional reference is needed.

REFERENCES OR BIBLIOGRAPY

In constructing one's References, it is a good idea to consult the *American Psychological Association Style Manual* (fifth edition) for instructions on how to reference different types of materials; for example, books, journals, newspapers, and web sites.

The authors' names are arranged in alphabetical order, followed by the year of the original publication of the article or book, name of publication, volume number, beginning and end pages, and, if the year of original publication does not coincide with the edition referred to (as will always be the case with the *Standard Edition*), year of publication of the edition referred to.

When several papers by one author are referred to, they should be in chronological sequence. When an author has published several papers in the same year, the date is followed by a, b, c, etc.

The first letter of each word of a book's title is capitalized and the title underlined. Only the first letter of the first word of the names of articles and/or papers is capitalized; the rest of the title is in lower case.



BINDING

Master's papers and theses may not be spiral bound. For the proper format, students formerly bind their thesis with a dark blue binding and gold lettering.

THESIS EXAMPLE TITLE PAGE

(Margin at least 1 1/4" from top)

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT
IN CAPITAL LETTERS**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis**

**In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the
Completion of the Master of Arts Program
in Psychoanalysis**

by

Candidate's full name and academic degrees

Committee Chair

Date

Reader

Date

(Margin at least 1" from bottom)
(Page number and BGSP logo are not necessary)

MASTER'S PAPER EXAMPLE TITLE PAGE

(Margin at least 1 1/4" from top)

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT
IN CAPITAL LETTERS**

**A Master's Research Paper
Presented to the Faculty of
the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis**

**In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the
Completion of the Master of Arts Program
in Psychoanalysis**

by

Candidate's full name and academic degrees

Reader

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Date

(Margin at least 1" from bottom)
(Page number and BGSP logo are not necessary)