

Thesis or Dissertation Beginner's Guide

This checklist emphasizes many of the first concerns that thesis and dissertation students have when they begin preparing to write a thesis or dissertation. Much of the information from this checklist comes from the [TAMIU Thesis and Dissertation Policy Manual](#). It is not a substitute for the *Thesis Policy Manual*. TAMIU's Advancing Research and Curriculum Grant program, through the TAMIU Graduate School office, provides both guides and a template for creating your thesis, and we suggest that you use those. Please submit all required forms to your committee chair to be further submitted to the proper departments of your college's Dean, and the College of Arts and Sciences Office of the Dean. For additional help and resources, contact the TAMIU Writing Consultant at ARC, at writingconsultant@tamiu.edu.

[General Information \(Proposal, Thesis, and Dissertation\)](#) | [Getting Started](#) |
[Choosing Your Committee](#) | [Research Approval \(IRB, IACUC, and Biosafety\)](#) |
[Formatting and References](#) | [Presentation and Defense](#) |
[Submission Deadlines](#) | [Publication and Copyright](#)

General Information

- A thesis or dissertation is a capstone manuscript that is written by graduate students on a topic selected by the student and their Graduate committee/chair, who are instructors of the student's choosing. This manuscript often involves a research component, the synthesis of resources and information into a piece of writing that contributes to the student's academic field.
- All students developing a Thesis will enroll in two classes in their major, 5398 (Proposal) and 5399 (Final). Sometimes, students do not complete their manuscript within the undertaking of two classes, and in these events, students can continue to take 5399. Dissertation students take a similar equivalent of 6398/6399.
- All thesis and dissertation students must select a Graduate Advisory Committee before a Proposal course can be created for them. Students must have a [Request for Service on a Graduate Advisory Committee](#) form signed by 3 Graduate Faculty members plus 1 chair (in some scenarios, Committees may be led by a pair of co-chairs).
- Students must meet all Thesis and/or Dissertation requirements to graduate, including meeting page length, formatting requirements, committee defense approval, and Graduate School deadlines.

Proposal

- All students enrolling in Thesis and Dissertation will complete a Proposal, typically lasting 1 semester.
- Proposals must be defended (presented) to the student's committee for approval before the student may move to their Final manuscript course of 5399 or 6399.
- Proposals must be at least 10 pages in length in the narrative body of their text.
- Once defended, Proposals must be submitted to COAS and the Graduate School along with a [Thesis or Dissertation Proposal Cover Sheet](#).

Thesis (Final) and Dissertations

- All students enrolling in Thesis and Dissertation must have completed their Proposal, which should be on file at the Graduate School, before they can enroll into this class.
- If the student is engaging in research or experiment, the research project must meet all safety guidelines and requirements (see below).
- Final Manuscripts must be at minimum 40 pages in length in their narrative body of text.
- Final Manuscripts must include proper references and citations.
- Final Manuscripts must be successfully defended before and approved by the student's committee in order for the student to graduate.
- Committees typically set defense dates, and the deadline for committee approval is typically 5 weeks before the Graduation Date for that semester.
- Once defended, Final Manuscripts must be submitted to COAS and the Graduate School along with a [Written Thesis \(M.S. / M.A.\) Approval Form](#) or [Written Dissertation \(Ph.D.\) Approval Form](#).
- All Final Manuscripts must be approved for formatting by the Graduate School before the student can be approved for graduation. (See Deadlines below.)
- If a student does not successfully defend their manuscript in the given semester, the student may continue to be enrolled in 5399/6399.

Getting Started

- Determine whether you are *required to*, *want to*, or *cannot* write a thesis or dissertation. Some majors (for example, English) are always required to write a thesis. Some majors have the option to write a thesis but can choose to do another project instead. Some majors (for example, online Education majors) do not have the option to write a thesis. All PhD students write a dissertation in order to graduate.
- Determine what you want your topic to be. You can check out our [Prospectus](#), [Brainstorming](#), and [Research Question](#) activity sheets to help you through this process!
- Determine the shape you want your manuscript to be. Do you want to do research? Do you want to do an experiment? Are you mostly going to be working with theories and analysis? If you are going to be working with humans or doing research that requires biosafety, you should prepare for the idea that your project will likely take more time both to gather data and to get approval.
- Set some early goals. How long do you want to take to write your manuscript? How long do you want it to be? What would you like to do with it afterward? You can use our [Goalsetting](#) activity sheet for this!

Choosing Your Committee

- Before you start your research for your manuscript, you should select your committee. Your committee is 4 members (3 members and 1 chair, or 2 co-chairs). All of your committee members must be Graduate Faculty.
- Your chair should be an instructor who you have worked with closely and who you trust to

help you develop your research and writing. Your chair is responsible for helping guide your topic and approve your final manuscript. They also sign forms and help you communicate with the University departments.

- Think about why you want to choose your chair and committee members. Many people meet with their chairs on a regular basis, although other students prefer a more independent approach.
- It is probably a good idea to select committee members who can help you with your topic or contribute to your manuscript in some way. Committee members do vote on your final manuscript to determine whether you pass or not.
- Many students select 1 committee member who is from a field “outside” of their department to make the reading more palatable to a general academic audience.
- It is a good idea to select committee members whom you can communicate with at least once a month to inform them of your progress.
- Even if your manuscript is in progress, you can reselect committee members, but you will need to submit a new [Request for Service on a Graduate Advisory Committee](#) approved by all members. In general, it is best to stay with committee members who are likely to help you finalize your manuscript.

Research Approval (IRB, IACUC, and Biosafety)

- Research or experimental design for manuscripts is typically carried out after one’s Proposal is defended.
- If your research project involves human subjects, it will need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
- If your project involves animal subjects, you will need Institutional Animal Care and Usage Committee (IACUC) approval.
- If your project involves biosafety, you will need Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) approval.
- Institutional committee approval MUST be granted before research can take place. Approval can take a short or long amount of time. You can use this [Thesis and Dissertation Research Approval Flowchart](#) to determine if you need approval, and if so, what kind.
- For questions, contact the Office of Research and Special Projects at (956) 326-3028.

Formatting and References

- All questions of formatting can be answered by the [TAMIU Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Manual](#). [We also have several guides for formatting found here.](#)
- All manuscripts must include citations and references, formatted using a style selected by the student and their committee chair.
- In-text citations and bibliographic references can be in any of the major recent popular styles (APA 7th Edition, MLA 9th Edition, Chicago style) or in a style matching a journal model from the student’s field of study.
- If the manuscript is using a journal model, it must be from a publication from within the previous 5 years, and it must have citations and references. If the student is using Tables and

Figures, your journal model must also use Tables and Figures.

- A copy of the Journal Model must be included when the Final Manuscript is submitted to Graduate School.

Presentation and Defense

- All manuscripts must go through two defense proceedings—one at the end of the proposal stage, and one at the end of the final stage.
- In both cases, in order to pass, the majority of the student's committee must vote to agree to pass the student's work for graduation.
- The Final Defense is a public speaking engagement that is open to the general public.
- The defense has NO time limit (it is usually scheduled for 2-3 hours).
- The committee deliberates and votes anonymously after the student's presentation ends.
- Our department has a defense and public speaking guide for preparing for [Proposal Defenses](#) and [Final Defenses](#).

Submission Deadlines

- Typically, your committee must see your completed manuscript 1 week before a defense date can be set. Be sure that your committee is aware of your intent to graduate in a given semester, and it is a good idea to keep them informed of your progress as well.
- Proposal Defense is usually set two weeks before the end of the semester.
- Final Defense is usually set 5 weeks before the end of the semester. [The Graduate School publishes deadlines on their website](#).
- There are no exceptions for late submissions. If the deadline for one semester is not met, the student will not be able to graduate until the following semester.
- ARC publishes an editable Thesis/Dissertation Calendar to help students keep track of their progress.

Publication and Copyright

- Upon completion, all manuscripts are published by TAMIU's Library through its Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Database through their RIO system. [Previous students' manuscripts may be found in the ETDS here](#). The time it takes for the manuscript to appear online varies depending on the Library's timeline.
- Students MUST submit a copyright form that informs the University about the student's decision to publish their manuscript in a digital format on the ETDS immediately or after a specified time has passed. This [Copyright and Availability Form](#) must be signed by the student and the committee chair. If the student wishes to, they may continue to submit copyright and availability forms before they expire in order to continue to push back electronic publication.
- The student may include a Copyright page in their manuscript. This optional page would be the second page in the student's manuscript.