



DEPARTMENT OF  
**ENGLISH**  
at **PRINCETON**

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# INDEPENDENT WORK HANDBOOK

# Table of Contents

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
AY 2024-2025 Calendar .....	2
Introduction to English .....	3
Overview of Independent Work .....	4
The Thesis .....	5
• Six Types of English Thesis .....	6
○ Literary and cultural analysis .....	6
○ Literary and cultural history .....	7
○ Literary and cultural theory .....	8
• Alternative Critical Theses .....	8
○ Critical edition .....	9
○ Long-form journalism .....	10
○ Critical-Creative .....	11
The Process .....	12
• Getting Started: The Question .....	12
• The Thesis of the Thesis .....	13
• Writing and Rewriting .....	14
• How to Submit Your Thesis .....	15
• Late Policy .....	16
Resources .....	17
• Your Advisors .....	17
• Firestone Library .....	17
• The Writing Center .....	17
• Writing Workshops .....	18
• Research Support .....	18
• Independent Work Mentor Programming .....	18
• Office of Undergraduate Research .....	18
Style and Citation .....	19
• How to Format Your Thesis .....	20
Assessment .....	22
Grading Standards .....	23
Important Contact Information .....	24



# AY 2024-2025 Calendar

## JUNIORS

Topic Sheet

Abstract and Outline

Junior Paper Deadline

University Deadline to Submit Junior  
Independent Work

## DATES

October 25

December 12

April 21 by Noon

April 29

## SENIORS

Topic Sheet to DropBox

20 Page Installment to DropBox

Senior Thesis Due

University Deadline to Submit Senior  
Thesis

Reflection Paper Due

Senior Oral Exams

## DATES

October 25

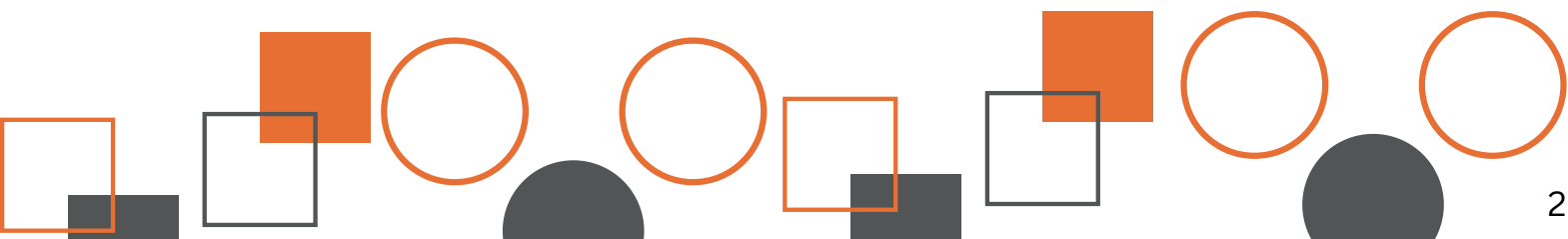
December 12

April 21 by Noon

April 28

April 28 by Noon

May 7 & 8

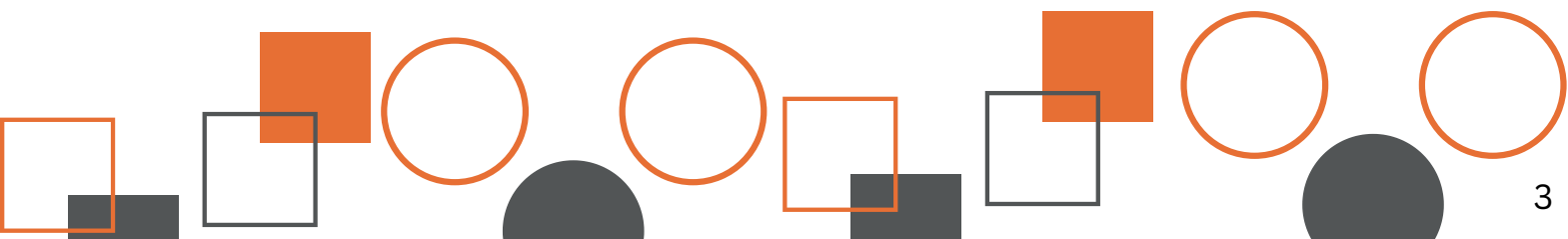


# Introduction to English

In the English Department, we understand the world first through words. Our students read widely in the literatures written in English, over its long history and across its global reach. They test the boundaries of the category of literature itself, in relation to other media and to the broader category of culture. We cultivate a common critical vocabulary and join in debating enduring questions about the interactions of art, language, and society. We are united by a great love for works of the imagination, for thinking about what and how they mean and the difference they make in the world.

Diversity is among our strengths. Departmental course offerings encompass not only poetry, prose, and drama, but film, music, art, architecture, and technology. What is more, the field is interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary. In addition to two special tracks within the major, Theatre and Performance Studies and Creative Writing, we welcome and encourage all concentrators who wish to pursue interdisciplinary work through certificate programs. The interdisciplinary nature of the field means that students learn how to compare and contrast different kinds of evidence and critical methods, and how to make their own connections and arrive at their own conclusions. In the classroom and in their independent work, students learn how to think for themselves, and, critically, how to express what interests them clearly and how to defend that interest to others.

One skill is at the heart of training in English: how to make an effective argument—an articulate, thoughtful, powerful, and persuasive argument. The department's diverse courses, its interdisciplinary programs of study, and the concentrators' independent work all share this focus. English concentrators become skilled rhetoricians, incisive readers, convincing writers, and cogent thinkers. They carry with them a lasting ability to take informed pleasure in all forms of literature, in the process of writing, and in the meanings and powers of culture. Graduates go on to become leaders in such fields as education, law, medicine, journalism, creative arts, politics, and business. Simply put, knowing how to make a successful argument, to read closely and to write fluently, are some of the most valuable skills graduates can bring to the world's work





# Overview of Independent Work

Independent work is central to the English Department. English concentrators undertake two separate independent projects with the department: the junior paper (JP) due in the spring, and the senior thesis.

Concentrators write one junior paper (JP), which is begun in conjunction with the fall junior seminar but completed in the spring semester of the junior year with the seminar instructor continuing as adviser throughout the spring. The JP, which does not have to engage with the texts in the junior seminar, combines original research with an extended critical argument, usually engages with around ten secondary sources (books, articles of criticism, theory, historical sources, etc.), and is about 20-30 pages long.

The Junior Seminar (JRS) is a 3-hour methods and skills-based writing and research seminar taken in the fall of junior year that focuses equally on course material and on students' critical writing and the development of their junior papers. The course provides students with the research, writing tools, and opportunity to write the JP confidently, and to be ready to tackle the thesis. Concentrators list their preferences for one from a menu of four to five seminars when they sign into the department as sophomores. The courses are organized thematically (ranging from, for example, Speculative Fiction to Reading Bodies), but all of them involve intensive practice in the reading and writing of literary criticism.

During the junior fall, students should plan a program of departmental courses for the next two years. The planned course work for the junior spring and senior year should be discussed with the junior seminar leader, who is the junior adviser.

The senior thesis is the capstone of a concentrator's career in the department, most often a long work of literary or cultural criticism that combines original thinking and scholarly research. Like the junior paper, it is written under the supervision of a faculty adviser, who is assigned at the end of the junior spring. In consultation with the senior thesis adviser, a student may revise his or her junior paper toward the senior thesis. Rising seniors often contact advisers in the spring and begin work over the summer on their theses.

Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the JP and thesis boot camps, which meet at least once in the fall and once in the spring in order to address concerns about and workshop drafts of the JP and the thesis. These boot camps are designed to provide ongoing communal and writing support for students and encourage their increased independence.



# The Thesis

The senior thesis in English is above all an occasion for you, the student, to become an expert, not only an expert on a particular idea or body of work, but also an expert at making an effective argument. The thesis may begin with a hunch, a curiosity, even a nagging confusion; you will gradually give it the shape of a challenging question. Over the course of a year, by a combination of original analysis and deep research, it will become an argument, and, eventually, a cogent thesis. You will have the guidance of a faculty adviser from the English Department. The success of the thesis, however, will depend on your initiative, the appointments you schedule with your adviser, the hours you spend reading primary and secondary sources and perhaps exploring archives. The thesis is the culmination of Princeton's curriculum of independent work, and we in the English Department take that independence seriously. We will offer practical help all along the way, but the curiosity and the passion for the topic come from you.

What makes for a good thesis topic? The range of possibilities is wide; here we list six basic types advised within the English Department. The types are not meant to be exclusive. Following this list, we offer some reflections on the process of writing the thesis, including what makes for a strong thesis for your thesis (i.e., how to make a claim that brings all your ideas and interests together). Last, we will provide a survey of the criteria that will be used to evaluate your thesis.

But first, one general piece of advice: challenge yourself. The thesis can be daunting; you may be tempted to elect a topic that feels familiar and approachable. But do not be afraid to be extravagant, as Emerson might say—to look far into the past, freely across the social landscape, deep into the language. If you end up close to home, discipline yourself to see home from a distance. You may never again have an opportunity like this one to follow your curiosity so purely and freely. Launch out! Be bold!

Now, the six types.

# Six Types of English Theses

## I. Literary and Cultural Analysis

Many theses in the English Department fall under this very broad category: a project that brings the tools of close reading and of literary and cultural theory to bear on a text or set of texts, developing an argument that will help a reader see new meaning there.

Your question: every good thesis has a good question behind it, one that illuminates a complicated and difficult text that yields a non-obvious answer that reveals why a text is worth reading. Many theses begin with a problem, some aspect of a text that doesn't seem to make sense: exigent or perplexing passages, contradictory arguments, obscure allusions, counter-intuitive reception histories. Some recent examples:

- What is the relationship between Milton the poet and Milton the pedagogue, especially as it is discoverable in *Paradise Lost*?
- What is the function of the photograph in cinema (through the films *Rear Window*, *Amélie*, *Funny Face*, *Memento*, and *Titanic*); why does the photograph continue to haunt cinema, making countless cameo appearances, when motion pictures would seem to have left its stillness behind?
- How are J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* imaginative responses to the crisis of subjectivity and national identity triggered by World War I, World War II, and the dissolution of empire?

Sources: first of all, your primary text or texts, which you are reading for the subtleties of their language and structure. Second, criticism: a thesis should be in conversation with twenty to thirty works of criticism, be they articles or books. Some will necessarily be more important than others. Third, theory. You may find that your interests are guided by a particular strand of literary or cultural theory, for example Marxism or critical race theory. If theory will play an important part in your writing, you will want to identify the theoretical book or books with which you are in most direct conversation.

Structure: the thesis usually has an introduction, three or four chapters, and a conclusion. (One standard format: three twenty-page chapters and a ten-page introduction and conclusion.) Each chapter should address a different aspect of your central question or argument. Sometimes that means that you will consider a single work from three or four different angles; sometimes, that you will examine a different work in each chapter, in pursuit of a question that they can all illuminate. A typical chapter is a great deal like a fifteen- to twenty-page paper, and should have a self-contained question of its own. As you begin to imagine the shape of your thesis (the work of the months of October and November), you will want to plan or sketch those chapters, each with its distinctive focus and contribution to the larger inquiry. It is often instructive to consider an essay of criticism or theory that appeals to you, and to think on its shape and method. Models and exemplars are important as you work through successive drafts of each chapter and begin giving shape to the thesis as a whole.

# Six Types of English Theses

## II. Literary and Cultural History

Not always sharply distinguished from literary and cultural analysis, this type of thesis locates its texts in historical and cultural contexts that illuminate their meaning and importance. This type of thesis often requires original archival research, and we encourage you to explore the possibilities offered by archives at Princeton and elsewhere.

Your question: here your question will require both analysis of your primary sources and an investigation of their contexts. It may be generated by your reading of a primary text, or a question that the text itself cannot answer (for example, what was Ben Jonson's relation to the Sidney family when he wrote "To Penshurst"?). Or it may come out of exploration of an archive, to see what unsolved puzzles are buried there. Some recent examples:

- What does Betty Smith's novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, suggest about the relationship between gender and architecture in turn-of-the-century working-class urban spaces?
- Looking at Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* alongside its historical paratexts (including the illustrated, serialized *Tess* in the *London Graphic*; the Macmillan "Wessex Edition"; Herman Lea's "Pictorial Postcards"; and Hardy's own map of "Tess's Wanderings"), one thesis asks: together with the historical *Tess*-tourism phenomenon, how does the novel construct the reader as a tourist who seeks out *Tess*'s suffering, and to what ends?
- What can we learn about black agency and performance by analyzing Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* within the context of the New York Public Transportation system and New York City real estate in the first decades of the twentieth century?

Sources: once again, the primary text or texts; questions of their language and structure remain central. Second, primary sources—including archival sources—related to your primary texts, writing from their surroundings that can help illuminate their ideas, interests, or discourses. Third, historical writing that provides a broader account of the situation (not necessarily writing specifically about your primary text). Finally, criticism directly about your primary texts, if it is available.

Structure: the structural possibilities for a literary or cultural history thesis will be very like those for literary or cultural analysis (again, the types are often not so sharply distinguished). They typically consist of three or four central chapters framed by an introduction and a conclusion. The chapters may be organized again by a series of different examples, or chronologically (if you are following the development of an author or an issue), or according to different frameworks or vantage points (for example, three different contexts for the reception of Emerson's "American Scholar" address or Douglas's "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro").





# Six Types of English Theses

## III. Literary and Cultural Theory

The theory thesis reverses the priority of the first two types: where, in those cases, you might be thinking with a theory to help you understand a primary text, here you are thinking with literary or cultural texts to help you understand or elaborate a theory.

Your question: a theory thesis is in close conversation with a particular theorist or theorists and with particular theoretical problems. It may be an attempt to critique a position in the existing literature, or develop it further by considering it in relation to new texts.

Sources: the works of theory with which you are primarily in conversation, critique of and comment on those works (in articles and books), and proof texts or cases (literary, cultural, historical etc.).

Structure: a theory thesis seeks a clarifying division of its central question in order to provide it with a chapter structure. So, the theoretical position might be elaborated in relation to three or four test cases or texts; or, the thesis might begin with a chapter establishing a position, proceed by exploring three different critiques, and conclude with a statement that takes account of those objections; or the thesis might explore three different approaches (by three different theorists) to a single question; and so on.

## Alternative Critical Theses: Types IV, V, and VI

For students who wish to write a non-traditional thesis, or a thesis with a creative component, the three basic types, IV, V, and VI, are listed below. In keeping with our emphasis on imagination and interdisciplinary, we welcome creative approaches to the thesis, especially those that reflect a student's attempt to be creative in his or her scholarship. We encourage our students to write in ways that demonstrate inventive engagements with texts, and we welcome ways of writing that don't conform to the habits of conventional academic prose. At the same time, we remain committed to textual analysis as well as theoretical and methodological awareness.

A student who wishes to write any of the following types of theses must identify and secure an appropriate advisor early in the spring semester of the junior year (before spring break). Anyone who wants to pursue an alternative critical thesis option must be organized and thinking ahead, well in advance of senior year. Students should feel free to consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies about potential advisors. Having found an advisor, students submit a proposal to the department in the first week after spring break. Proposals for non-traditional senior theses of the types listed below will be read and evaluated in mid-spring, before advisors are assigned.

# Six Types of English Theses

## IV. Critical Edition

A critical edition prepares a text for publication, furnishing the necessary context and explanation for an unacquainted reader to read it with understanding. The proliferation of electronic archives (and the material holdings in Firestone Library and elsewhere) means that anyone with a Princeton email account has instant access to countless publications, and even manuscripts, from all periods, which have so far been untouched by scholars. There are few better ways of entering into questions of literary history than the work of providing a comprehensive apparatus for such a text.

Your question: the basic questions are along the lines of: Who wrote this text? When? Under what circumstances? The interpretive part of the introduction will function like an analytic essay, drawing on all of that information to provide a basic framework for understanding what the text means. What is most distinctive to the project of an edition, however, are the countless small research questions that arise every time the definition of a word is unclear, or a reference is lost, or the page is torn.

Sources: your primary source is of course the text you are editing; other sources will include historiography and criticism of your text (if available) and related texts, and any other historical or bibliographical material necessary to illuminate its blind spots.

Structure: a critical edition usually begins with an introduction, which establishes the text's date and the circumstances of its writing and reception, and provides an interpretation—laying out the major themes and significance. The body of the edition will consist of an annotated text, which both establishes the most accurate version of the work from available sources, and (by means of notes) explains whatever a modern reader, or a reader foreign to the work's context, cannot be expected to know.



# Six Types of English Theses

## V. Long-form Journalism

English majors who have studied journalism (having taken at least one JRN course) may apply to the department to write a piece of long-form journalism as a thesis. We will also permit a piece of literary or cultural criticism written as a long-form essay, incorporating elements such as descriptions of personal experience and/or reported conversations. These theses should combine wide research, original reporting, thoughtful analysis, and a style that is both accessible and sophisticated.

Your question: a good piece of long-form journalism usually begins with a question that can only be answered by a combination of reporting and research: a mystery, or a story that you will tell in the form of a mystery.

Recent examples include:

- An investigative analysis of the intersection of human rights abuses at the refugee detention center on the Pacific island of Nauru and environmental degradation as a result of phosphate strip mining on the island, and how that intersection is critical to Australia's current political debate on refugees.
- An exposé of the competition at Princeton for finance summer internships and the way those internships play out, asking the question: why finance? What are the short-term and long-term practices, costs, and challenges of this kind of recruitment and this kind of work?
- An examination of the development of MOOCs (massive open online courses) in academia in the last five years with a specific focus on the humanities, asking: what are the pros and cons of this new form, who benefits from it, what kinds of courses are especially suited for MOOCs, and what kinds of knowledge and approaches to learning might be left out of this development?

Sources: your main sources are likely to be original interviews, primary documents, and newspaper reports and other journalism. You should also become an expert in the scholarly background of your topic. Finally, here as in all theses, it is valuable to have a model or models for the kind of essay you want to write, a writer you can turn to for ideas about structure, pacing, tone.

Structure: here again, the chapter format serves most students well, and possible structures are many (chronological development; aspects of a question; the story of the journalist's investigations; and so on).

# Six Types of English Theses

## VI. Critical-Creative Theses

A critical-creative thesis is as critically rigorous as other options; the outcome may be different, but the research tools and process are very similar.

Theses composed entirely of fiction or poetry are restricted to students accepted into the certificate program in Creative Writing. We allow students to include imaginative writing in the thesis (a poem or short story, for example) to accompany a long piece of critical analysis, provided that a willing, qualified advisor can be found and that the creative component is coherently integrated with the critical writing.

English majors who have studied playwriting (having taken at least one course in playwriting through the Theater Program) may apply in the early spring of junior year to the department to write a play as a thesis. The application is on the department website under Independent Work. While it is not a requirement, you are encouraged to have public readings or workshops of your creative thesis as you develop it. If you are approved to pursue this option, your primary adviser and secondary reader will attend readings or workshops of your creative thesis whenever possible.

Your question: a good play begins with a question that can be answered effectively in theatrical terms. Recent examples include:

- What is the relationship between the complicated issue of anorexia—in the story of one girl's quest to make her body disappear—and the disembodied forces of the online eating disorder community?
- How do the ghosts of past romantic mistakes haunt and inform the present?

Sources: you will become an expert in the background of your topic, and your sources may include primary documents, journalism, interviews, plays, films, dramatic history and theory. It is especially valuable to have models for the kind of play you want to write, writers to whom you can turn for ideas about structure, characterization, plot, dialogue, audience, and storytelling.

Structure: the form of the play will be dictated by the question the script attempts to answer. These theses are original scripts, accompanied by supporting materials, often in the form of an introduction that offers an analysis of the materials and approach to writing the play.



# The Process

## I. Getting Started: The Question

A thesis usually poses a question about a significant and intriguing problem in a text or texts. Often before you have articulated a central question you may have a suspicion, a particular interest, a guess, or a general sense of something odd or noteworthy in a text. As you zero in on what piques your interest and what you want to pursue, you will also want to think carefully about whether and how this subject is of interest to anyone else. In the Writing Program, as you may remember, this justification for why the thesis is worth reading is referred to as motive. You will spend some time—perhaps even a month or two—developing and refining your question. In order to do this, you will read extensively and begin to put together a bibliography in consultation with your adviser. In the initial stages of research and reflection, as you begin to frame your question, you will be looking for answers to the following: why is this question important and interesting? And what are the existing answers to this question; what existing scholarship might help me develop my own answer?

Formulating a question is useful in part because it encourages you to keep considering alternative answers and the objections that you will have to overcome. As you begin to write, you will gradually begin to clarify and strengthen your answer to your question—your thesis or claim—as well as developing strategies for how you can show that you are right and others are not.

A good question is also useful because it often suggests a form for the thesis, and helps delimit its scope. For instance, consider the progression of one recent thesis: a starting question—why do so many plays take on questions of health and medicine?—leads to pairing two plays in each chapter that explore different sides of a medical discourse and type of illness (HIV/AIDS; disability; ovarian and breast cancer) in order to demonstrate why theatre is a medium particularly well suited to exploring perceptions of healthy and diseased bodies. A word on scope: a thesis needs to be fully supported by the evidence you include and thus its range must be limited to what you are able to prove through your analysis. Usually, if a question is deep enough, you don't have to worry about breadth.



# The Process

## II. The Thesis of the Thesis

Your thesis must have a thesis, a strong claim that responds to the question you have raised in a full and interesting way. A strong claim is substantive, specific, and contestable. A claim is meaningful or substantive to the extent that it introduces readers to a new idea or asks readers to change their thinking. A claim is contestable to the extent that someone is able to argue with it; the claim may question or complicate other arguments and should never be reducible to a simple or superficial interpretation. It may take weeks, or months, to develop a strong, compelling thesis. Moreover, the act of writing and developing your argument will change the thesis. Indeed, you will likely finalize your central claim last of all.

When you first draft a tentative main claim, you will want to anticipate your reader's doubts and list the points you can make to allay them. Gather your evidence (quotes, facts, theory, etc.) and consider whether it effectively supports the points you are making to counteract a reader's possible objections. If you cannot effectively counter a challenge, concede to it, and revise your claim. In most cases, you will assert your claim at the beginning of your thesis, then in the body of your thesis you will go on to demonstrate, challenge, and complicate the claim using all the relevant evidence you have amassed, and finally, in your conclusion, you will reassert your now revised, expanded, and strengthened claim.



# The Process

## III. Writing and Rewriting

Once you have articulated the first working version of your main claim, and have sketched an outline of possible chapters, or ways to address your question and assert your thesis, you are ready to begin writing. It's often useful to start at your original point of entry—with whatever sparked your interest in the first place. It doesn't matter where this chapter will eventually fall. Since your thesis is very likely to become increasingly sophisticated as you write, it's common to write the introduction and conclusion last.

Pace yourself. Successful independent work requires excellent time management. Learning how to use time efficiently is one lifelong skill that repeated independent work helps to develop. Form a schedule with your adviser at the very beginning of the fall semester senior year, and stick to it. Make sure you build in time to revise. With every draft of a chapter you produce you will want to leave enough time not only for your adviser to read and respond so that you can take those comments into consideration as you revise, but also so that you can step away from your work and return to it with your own critical enthusiasm heightened. You will be well on track if you have one or more chapters by winter break and a full draft of three to four chapters by spring break.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing a senior thesis is the management of information over a relatively long period of time. Your thesis will entail a great deal of reading and research over the course of two semesters. Keeping track of this information is crucial and better note-taking methods will make it easier for you to transform your research into a compelling and well-organized thesis. Some students prefer taking electronic notes that are searchable by keyword; others fill notebooks with handwritten notes as they progress. What matters most is that students develop techniques and strategies to remember and reflect as they work. Ask your professors or colleagues how they organize notes and manage information and you are likely to encounter a variety of ideas. The key is to develop note taking and drafting techniques that will help you write a compelling thesis. Indeed, these skills are as crucial to future endeavors as to the thesis itself.

The more reading you do, the more you will become familiar with the range and complexity of critical literature on your topic. You will need to figure out how to situate your argument alongside others. Sometimes this can be daunting. It may help to imagine you are taking your place at a table that is surrounded by critics engaged in your subject. Where do you want to pull up a chair? Which critics are immediately to your right and left? Positioning your argument is also partly a question of tone. When you encounter other critics who have tackled the same text or ideas, make sure to acknowledge, enjoy, and respect their company rather than being intimidated by it, ignoring it, or dismissing it. More than anything have the courage to pull a chair up to the table. There's room for you even if it seems like it's very crowded—if your subject is Shakespeare's tragedies, for instance, there will be much less elbow room than if you are writing about seventeenth-century poet John Davies—but there is always room for another thoughtful voice. Weigh in, stand up for what you think, push back, concur, debate; join in. Add to the critical conversation, and make it livelier than it was before you came.

For any piece of writing, and especially one this long, revision is critical. Each chapter in your thesis will be roughly twenty pages, or about the same length as a junior paper, and each chapter should have its own thesis that answers a particular part of your overarching claim. Writing a chapter will frequently cause you to adjust aspects of your larger argument. Often you will also find that you need to return to and revise evidence or claims in earlier chapters as your argument achieves a greater degree of precision and clarity in later chapters. When you are revising, pay close attention to transitions: point to point, sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and eventually, chapter to chapter. Once you have revised each individual chapter, step back and regard the thesis as a whole. About the introduction and conclusion, ask: does the introduction clearly set forth your argument and methods? Do all the pieces work together to build the argument to an original, cumulative, cohesive conclusion? Moreover, does that conclusion suggest why your argument matters beyond the specific topic you have addressed?

Finally, write for a real audience, a wide but intelligent and informed group of readers. Do not assume your reader is familiar with your material. Instead, identify and define necessary terms, ideas, plot information—remember to orient your reader—providing this information in the service of your argument. Proofread with great care. Last, but not least, don't use jargon or big words where plain and sensible ones will do. Get to the point. Be intellectually brave enough to boil down what you are saying to its essence. The goal: complex thinking in clear writing.

# IV. How to Submit Your Thesis

## **Junior Paper**

For AY 2024-2025, the department is requiring a digital submission to your Junior Paper Advisor and to the department Dropbox ([Junior Paper \(JP\) Dropbox Folder](#)).

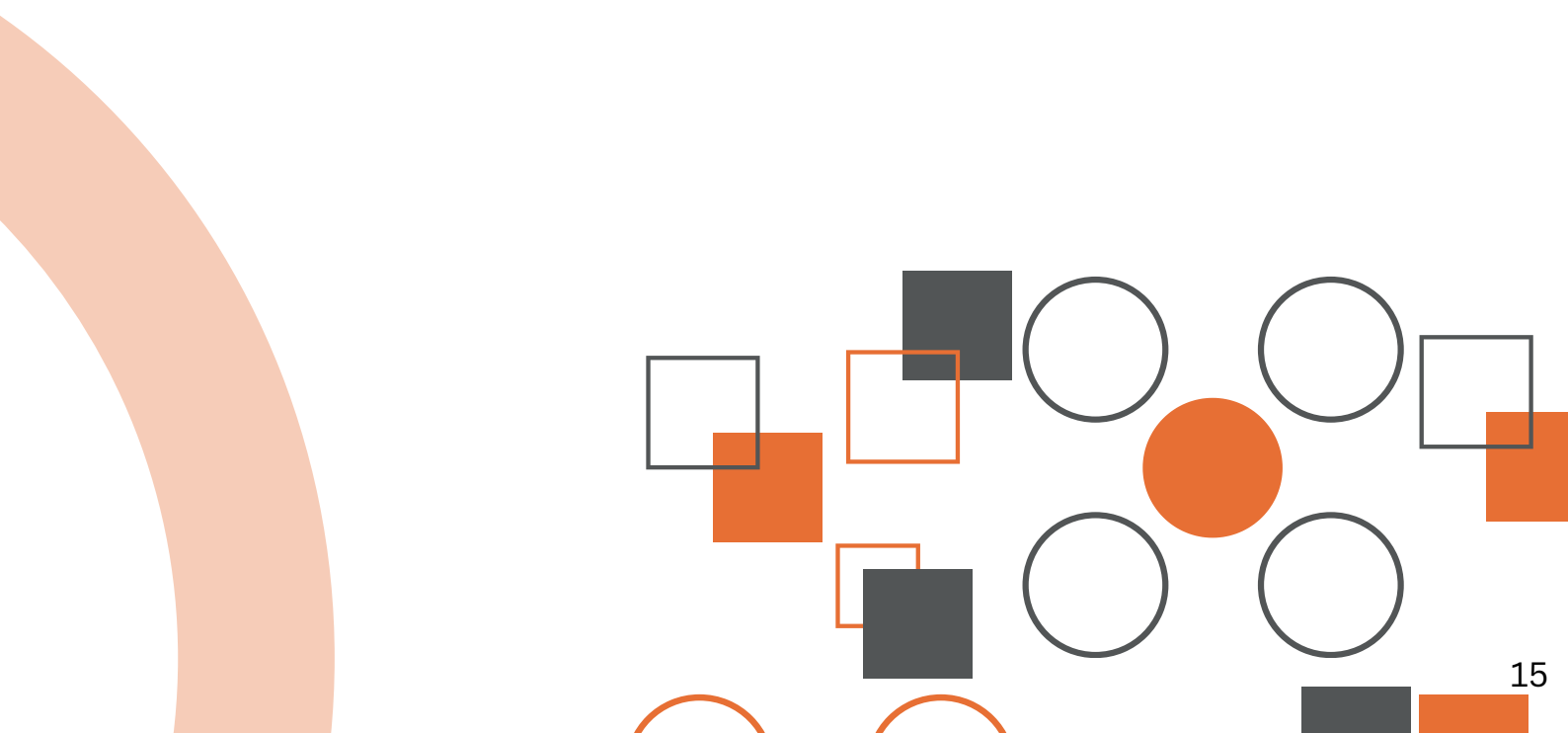
## **Senior Thesis**

For AY 2024-2025, the department is requiring a hardcover bound copy and an electronic copy of your thesis. Both the hardcover bound copy must be dropped off to the English Department office (22 McCosh Hall) and an electronic submission is due to the [Senior Thesis Drop Box Folder](#)([Link is external](#)).

This hard copy and the electronic copy will be circulated only between advisor and reader for the purposes of comment and evaluation. You won't receive marginal comments or corrections to these versions of the thesis. Once the thesis is graded you'll receive a formal written report from your advisor and reader.

You are also required to submit an electronic copy as a PDF file to Mudd Library no later than Dean's Date. The link to upload your PDF copy to Mudd is: <https://rbsc.princeton.edu/policies/senior-thesis-submission-information-students>([Link is external](#)).

[Peguod](#)([Link is external](#)), and [The UPS Store](#)([Link is external](#)), printing and binding instructions can be found here.

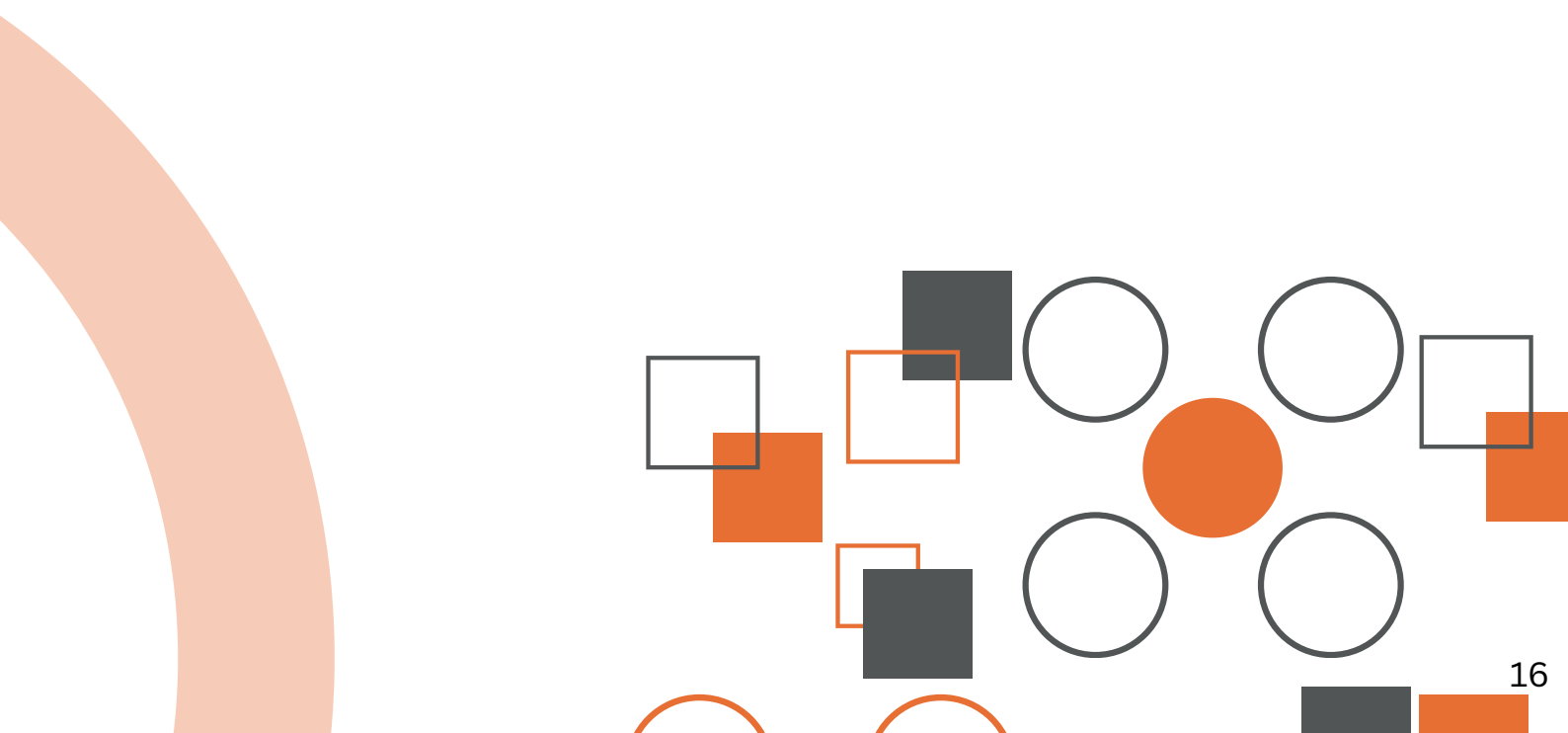




# V. Late Policy for Independent Work

Junior Papers and Senior Theses submitted after the departmental deadline without prior approval from the DUS and the appropriate Deans will incur a penalty of 1/3 grade per day (an average grade of A becomes A-, A- becomes a B+, etc.). This includes weekends. Theses submitted after the University deadline will receive an "F," reported as such on the transcript. Submissions beyond this point remain possible (with the approval from the DUS and appropriate Deans), and said theses will receive readers' grades (not comments), but the original failing grade will appear with the readers' grade on the transcript.

Extensions are rarely granted for independent work. Extenuating circumstances, for which extensions may be granted, include illnesses for which a written medical excuse must be provided or a family emergency. In such cases, the student's Residential College Dean must approve extensions and then forward this written extension to the Director of Undergraduate Studies, who will communicate this to the advisor and department administrators. The student's advisor cannot grant extensions for independent work.



# Resources

## I. Your Advisors

You will have an adviser for each of your two independent projects. Working with an adviser is often one of the most useful, memorable, intellectually stimulating, and exhilarating elements of independent work within the department. As advisers, we delight in your work and ideas and we take them seriously.

Your JP adviser will each create a schedule with you to help you manage your time, guide you in how to identify your topic, frame your question, prepare a research bibliography and topic sheet, and write and revise the JP. Your adviser will also go over your course selection with you to come up with a course plan that complements your independent work, satisfies departmental and university requirements, and allows you to pursue your other interests while having enough time to complete your independent work. If you are abroad, your adviser will work with you by e-mail to make sure that you are on schedule. While your adviser is happy to provide consistent individual attention, you are responsible for generating and refining ideas, raising concerns, articulating goals, meeting deadlines, communicating regularly with your adviser, and staying on top of all of your requirements.

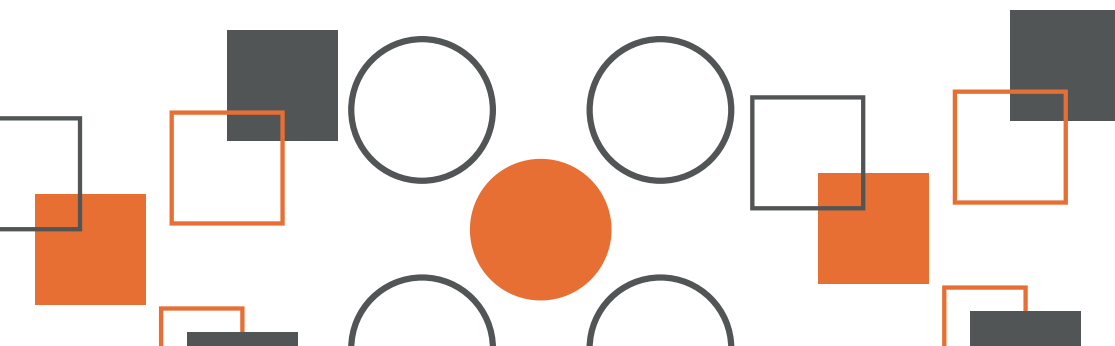
Late in the spring of your junior year, you will be assigned your senior thesis adviser, on the basis of preferences and fields of interest. If possible, before leaving for the summer you should meet with your thesis adviser about preliminary thesis ideas and research. If you are applying for summer funding, your adviser will be an important person to approach about resources and letters for applications. Your adviser will also be able to direct you to resources on and off campus for research materials and writing support. Early in the fall semester, you and your adviser will establish a working schedule that you will adjust together as you proceed with the thesis. The number of times you meet will vary, but in general it's a good idea to be in regular contact throughout the year, and to meet at least once a month in the fall and every couple of weeks in the spring.

## II. Firestone Library

As part of your junior seminar in the fall of your junior year, you will receive training in how to use Firestone library, archives, and other campus and online resources. You will also be introduced to the some of the research librarians who are available to help you.

## III. The Writing Center

The Writing Center is an important resource on campus. Located in Whitman College, the Writing Center offers individual conferences with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. At any point in your independent work, you can schedule 80- minute conferences with a graduate student fellow from English or a related department. The Writing Center also holds 50-minute regular conferences seven days a week, and offers drop-in hours Sunday through Thursday evenings. Please plan your appointments in advance ([www.princeton.edu/writing/appt](http://www.princeton.edu/writing/appt)).



# Resources

## IV. Writing Workshops

Boot camps, or writing workshops, for both the JP and the thesis meet at least once in the fall and once in the spring in order to address concerns about, and work on, the JP and the thesis. These workshops are led by faculty members and/or advanced graduate students and offer an informal yet still structured environment for students to work together and meet deadlines. The workshops offer an opportunity to present and revise writing with your peers, receive feedback, share, advise, and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow seniors as they go through this process with you.

## V. Research Support

A number of opportunities for funding for independent research exist at both the departmental and the university level. Within the department, we have several funds that offer support to students to do thesis research, including the Maren, which is not competitive and has a rolling deadline, and the A. Scott Berg Award, which is awarded to rising seniors for independent research and writing undertaken in the summer between junior and senior year. The spring deadline for the Berg application will be announced in fall.

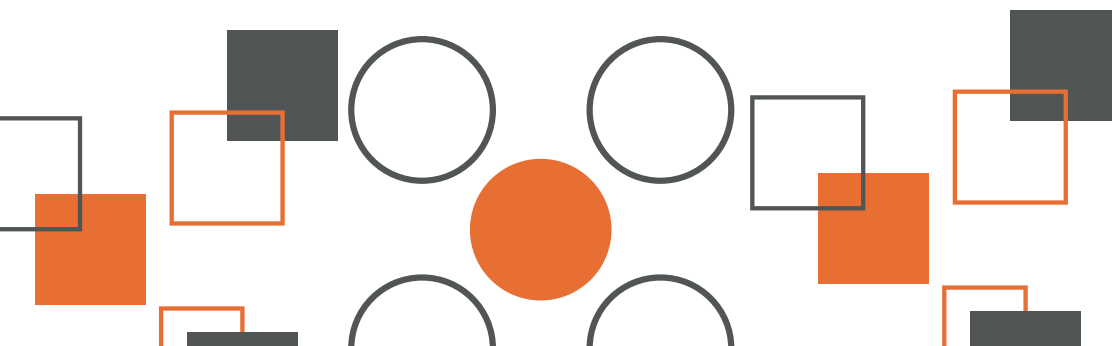
## VI. Independent Work Mentor Programming

Recognizing the challenges and solitude of independent work, Independent Work Mentors from the [Writing Center](#) prepare workshops and programming to aid juniors and seniors in their research. Students should regularly check the [Princeton Undergraduate Research Calendar](#) (PURC) on the website of the [Office of Undergraduate Research](#) for upcoming programming and workshops, which cover topics ranging from preparing funding proposals to note taking, and from making an argument to draft review.

Independent Work Mentors can help interested juniors and seniors form writing groups as a forum to discuss challenges they are confronting in their work and brainstorm strategies for dealing with various issues.

## VII. Office of Undergraduate Research

The [Office of Undergraduate Research](#) serves to inform, engage, connect, and support currently enrolled undergraduates on matters related to research at Princeton; to enhance independent work through campus-wide initiatives and departmental collaborations; and to promote students' research achievements through research symposia and written and video communications. Their website is the central hub for information about undergraduate research including student-authored [research advice on the PCUR blog](#), departmental Independent Work Guides, [funding opportunities](#), and subscribe to [PURC](#), the central calendar for upcoming events and deadlines.





# Style & Citation

All independent work submitted to the English Department must follow either MLA or Chicago style for notes and for bibliography. (Your junior paper and senior thesis require both footnotes, or endnotes, and a bibliography.) The bible for the Chicago system is *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Adequate for almost all student needs is Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). A minimal guide to Chicago style can also be found at the website, [Once you have articulated the first working version of your main claim, and have sketched an outline of possible chapters, or ways to address your question and assert your thesis, you are ready to begin writing.](#) It's often useful to start at your original point of entry—with whatever sparked your interest in the first place. It doesn't matter where this chapter will eventually fall. Since your thesis is very likely to become increasingly sophisticated as you write, it's common to write the introduction and conclusion last.

The department generally recommends that students use parenthetical citations for frequently cited texts, per Turabian (16.4.3.2). That means that if you are writing about *Middlemarch*, the first citation will be a footnote or endnote as follows:

1 George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 2003), 102. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses in the text.

Thereafter, as long as it is clear what text you are quoting, you can simply give the page number in parentheses in the body of the text after the quotation, as follows:

"I have always been in favor of a little theory' (17).

The same goes for act, scene, and line numbers for plays, and line numbers for poems. See Turabian for further details, including proper punctuation around notes or parenthetical citations.

Turabian should also be your source for all questions about capitalization, abbreviation, and other niceties. There are concise discussions there of such building blocks of style as punctuation and spelling. Particularly valuable is the discussion of "Incorporating Quotations into Your Text" (25.2). Whatever your doubts and curiosities, in short, that book is the first place to turn.

# I. How to Format Your Thesis

Length: (60-75 pages).

Margins: 1-1.5 inches on all sides. We recommend a wider margin (not to exceed 1.5") on your left side, to accommodate binding.

Font: For everything (body, notes, quotes, etc.), a 12-point font should be used (Times, Times New Roman, Helvetica, Courier are all standard). Titles may be underlined or italicized.

Single sided

Double-space: All text; inset quotations and footnotes may be single-spaced.

Page numbers: Pages must be numbered; place the numbers where you like.

Style: Capitalization, hyphenation, and other points of usage should follow the guidelines in EITHER Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), OR the *MLA Handbook*, 8th ed. (MLA, 2016). The MLA style guide is summarized here: [style.mla.org](http://style.mla.org). You should use one style or the other, not a mixture of the two.

Title page:

*By You*

*A senior thesis submitted to the Department of English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts*

*Princeton University*

*Princeton, New Jersey*

*Date*

Acknowledgments: This page, thanking friends, family, teachers, mentors, advisors, librarians and libraries, etc. may follow your title page.

Table of Contents: List chapter titles, appendices, bibliography, with starting page number.

Pledge: The pledge must be typed and signed. It may be on a separate sheet, placed at the beginning or end of your thesis. "I pledge my honor that this senior thesis has been written in accordance with University regulations."

Footnotes/Endnotes: You may use footnotes, chapter endnotes, or endnotes to the whole. All independent work submitted to the English Department must follow Chicago OR MLA style for notes and bibliography. You can find the Chicago rules in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). A minimal guide to Chicago style is to be found at the [Turabian website](#) (Link is external) (Link opens in new window). You can find the MLA rules in the *MLA Handbook*, 8th ed., or at Senior Thesis

# I. How to Format Your Thesis

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“I have always been in favor of a little theory” (17).

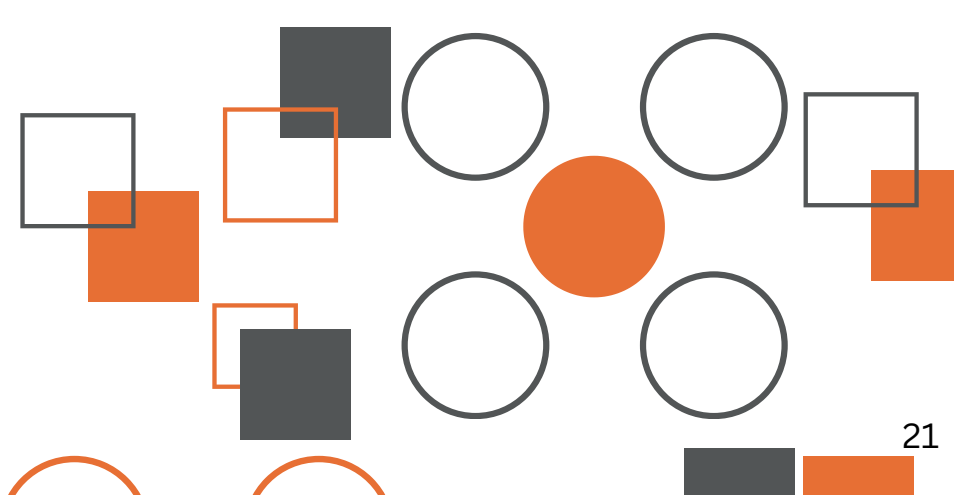
The same goes for act, scene, and line numbers for plays, and line numbers for poems. See Turabian for further details, including proper punctuation around note numbers or parenthetical citations.

**Bibliography:** a complete bibliography or list of citations, in Chicago or MLA style, should follow your text. Again, consult Turabian or the MLA Handbook for format.

**Quotations & Citations:** All quotations over three or four lines in length and all poetry over three lines should be quoted as an indented block; with no quotation marks, unless these are internal. For other guidelines see Turabian or the MLA Handbook. Particularly valuable is the discussion of “Incorporating Quotations into Your Text” (25.2).

**Documentation and attribution of credit:** All material which is quoted directly from or paraphrased from any external source, whether published or unpublished, must be precisely credited and documented. General indebtedness to an idea, a line of argument, an image, particularly compelling wording, and so forth must be noted. For example: as Critic X has argued . . .; The argument in this paragraph follows the reading presented by Critic Y . . .; in a pertinent discussion, Critic Z suggests that . . .; One influential reading, put forth by Critic M, argues that . . .

N.B. Written examples of past senior theses are available online at Mudd Library.



# Assessment

Your JP advisers grade your junior independent work. Your adviser's comments will explain the rationale behind the grade and offer productive suggestions about the central claims of the paper, pointing out what works well and what needs improvement. If you submit drafts according to a schedule you establish with your adviser, your adviser should provide you with feedback on those drafts as you go. Remember that the better developed your drafts, the better your adviser will be able to respond to your work. This process of review is extremely useful for improving your writing. At the same time, the final grade for independent work does not reflect the writing process or your improvement, but only the final product.

The senior thesis is graded by your thesis adviser and a second reader, another faculty member. The second reader writes a 2-3 page report that discusses and evaluates your work in detail. Your adviser and second reader will then reach a consensus about your grade. You will not know who the second reader is until the report and your grade have been submitted. You will receive your report and your grade with your thesis when you hand in your final Comprehensive Exam.

Creative independent work that takes the form of a drama or screenplay is evaluated similarly. Additionally, every effort is made to ensure that the senior adviser and second reader are familiar with the project and its history, including attending a reading or a workshop performance if such an event occurs. Creative theses are accompanied by supporting material, usually in the form of an introduction, that makes explicit the questions and ideas about the arts and language that the work aims to convey. As with any thesis, in evaluating the project, your adviser and second reader will take into consideration the effectiveness with which you convey your ideas.

# Grading Standards

An A+ thesis is exceptional even for an advanced student. In other words, an A+ thesis from an undergraduate shows the depth and insight that would earn an A for a graduate student.

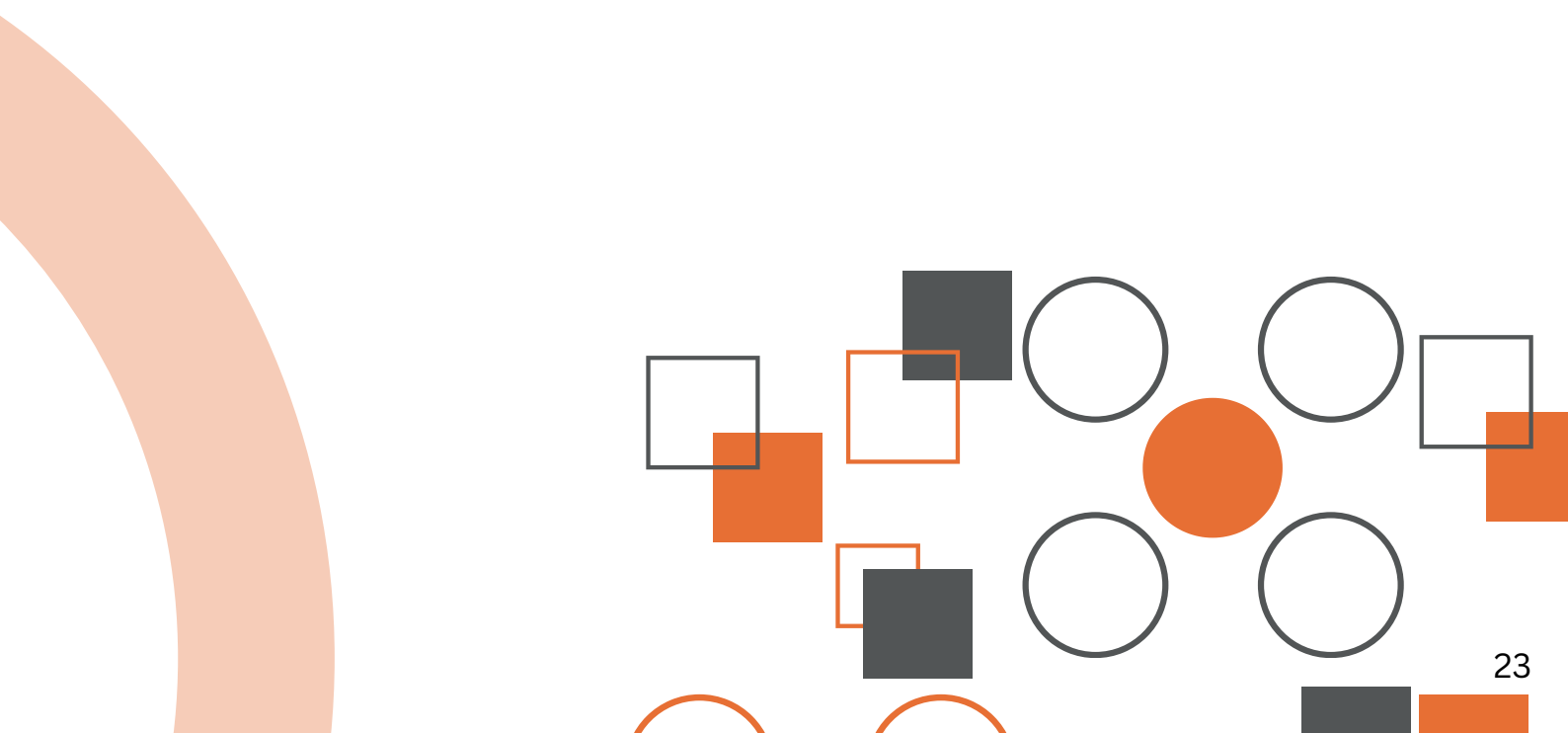
An A or A- is awarded for exceptional work that displays grace and a high degree of mastery over the fundamentals of academic writing: it advances an interesting, arguable thesis; establishes a clear motive to suggest why the thesis is original or worthwhile; employs a logical, coherent structure; analyzes evidence insightfully, specifically, and in depth; draws from well-chosen sources, reviewing and engaging the relevant scholarship; demonstrates intellectual creativity; relates its conclusions to a larger context; and is written in a clear, sophisticated style. An A or A- thesis indicates that the professor has learned something from the paper.

A B+, B, or B- thesis resembles an A-range thesis in some ways, but falls short of it in any of the following ways: the argument, providing a vague, uninteresting, or inconsistently argued thesis; the motive, by not clearly answering the question, "so what?"; the structure, which may be generally logical but somewhat disorganized or undeveloped; the evidence, which may be inconsistently effective, or well-chosen but sometimes unanalyzed and undigested; the sources, which may be used incorrectly or incompletely; or the writing, which may be unclear, unsophisticated, or grammatically problematic.

A C+, C, or C- thesis lacks a cogent argument or offers a confusing, simple, or descriptive thesis; provides a simplistic motive or none at all; lacks a coherent structure; fails to present enough evidence or adequately analyzed evidence; contains frequent factual, grammatical, or syntactical errors; uses sources inconsistently or without properly contextualizing or citing them; is written in a generally unclear, simplistic, or technically flawed style; or presents some combination of these problems.

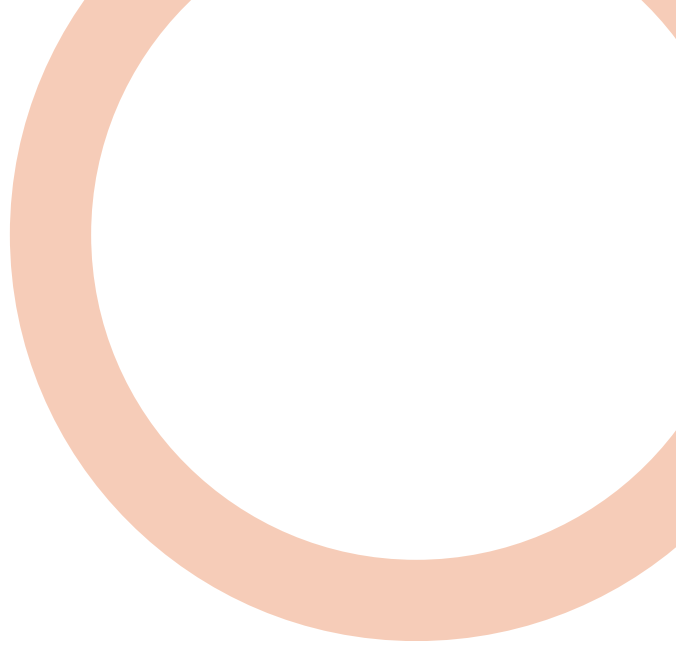
A D thesis has a purely descriptive, obvious, or absent thesis; lacks a motive or a coherent structure; draws on very little analyzed evidence and few sources. A D thesis demonstrates serious deficiencies or flaws in the student's command of the material and construction of an argument.

An F thesis fails to demonstrate competence in the research materials or the construction of an





# Important Contact Information



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Lauren Romano	Undergraduate Administrator	lr8380@princeton.edu

