

The Master's Paper: A Short Guide

The first two steps should normally be taken in the semester before you plan to write your Master's paper:

First, decide on a topic. Find two English faculty members, both of whom should be members of the Graduate English faculty, who will serve as your first and second readers. If you have a potential topic and do not know who you might work with, please consult the Graduate Coordinator for help in choosing readers.

Second, obtain a Master's paper proposal cover sheet from the Graduate Secretary. Then write a proposal for your Master's paper. The purpose of a Master's paper proposal is, first, to provide specific, detailed information to your first and second readers, and to the graduate director, about the subject of your Master's paper, and second, to encourage you to think through the proposed scope and structure of your paper. Construct your Master's paper proposal in close consultation with your readers. Your proposal should normally include the following:

- identification of the specific area of study, perhaps including the authors, works, or issues you intend to study, a theoretical framework, a short rationale for study, a working thesis or hypothesis, and / or a discussion of what you hope to accomplish with your thesis
- the proposed structure of the thesis (i.e., a breakdown of sections of the argument, divisions of the paper, or the like)
- a working bibliography, typically including both primary and secondary works
- a proposed calendar for submitting sections of the paper or drafts
- any other information you deem relevant to the proposal

Two to five pages are normally sufficient, though some proposals may be longer or shorter. You should submit copies of the proposal to the first and second readers, and get their approval (in the form of their signatures on the proposal cover sheet) before proceeding. In some cases, you may need to revise the proposal to account for suggestions and criticisms. Once the proposal is approved, file a copy of the cover sheet with the English Graduate Office (52 Hamilton-Smith), so we can place it in your permanent file.

NOTE: A Master's paper proposal is a working blueprint of your project, not a hard-and-fast contract. As research and writing proceed, you may (indeed, often will) find it necessary to modify the scope, structure, or even main topic of your project. This is a natural part of the evolution of a scholarly project. Even so, you should make such modifications in consultation with your first and second reader.

Without exception, Master's paper proposals are due at time of preregistration.

These two steps should be taken in the semester you will write the Master's paper.

Third, at the beginning of the semester in which you will write the paper, register for four credits of ENGL 998 The Master's Paper. Although you should probably consult with the second reader several times in the course of writing the paper, you will work most closely with your first reader. Plan to submit your completed draft of your Master's paper to your two readers one month before the last day of classes. This deadline will allow your readers to read it carefully, and you to make significant revisions.

Fourth, submit the final copy of your Master's Paper to both readers by the last day of classes for the semester you plan to complete the paper. (Please consult the Time and Room Schedule for this date.) At this point, your paper should be in its complete and final form, one copy to each of your readers. You will need to present one copy of the Master's paper, with approval signatures of both readers, to the graduate secretary on the last day of classes, so please plan ahead for this deadline. The Master's paper is evaluated on a pass / fail basis.