

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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TO: Thesis Writers in Social Anthropology
FROM: Philip Kao, Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies
MEMO: Senior Theses for the Academic Year 2018-2019

What is a thesis? As the term implies, a thesis is a proposition or assertion that is supported by original research, factual evidence/data, logical arguments and critical analysis. While the focus of your thesis will be the discussion of some set of anthropological phenomena, it should not simply present information, however important and interesting that may be. Rather, and in addition, the thesis should represent an analysis of the phenomena, a theoretical and interpretive understanding (and framing) of them; in other words, it should have a critical argument.

Given these expectations, your thesis should have some theoretical component. You may simply utilize theoretical propositions and models to frame your argument(s), to elaborate and sustain the analysis, and to explain the phenomena. You may use your own data and interpretations to criticize existing theory. You may even be able to bring together various theories and formulate a more original model. The data you analyze can come from various sources. You may re-analyze data that have already been collected and published. Alternatively, you may undertake your own research, perhaps through a stint in the field or laboratory. In either case, you will probably want to supplement your data with library and archival/historical research. You will also need to balance comprehensiveness with creative interpretation, and the limits of time and other resources. Regardless of the kind of work you do, your goal should be to provide the reader with an understanding of the problem and data. What makes your essay a "thesis" is that you go beyond narrative and description to include analysis and argument. What makes it "anthropology" is the centrality of problems and phenomena related to the concerns – archaeological or social and cultural – of our discipline.

Organization. The analytical nature of the senior thesis has several implications for its organization. First, of course, the whole thing has to have a point, and there should be no doubt to the reader what that point is. Perhaps the best piece of advice here is to make *explicit* to the reader what is obvious and implicit to you, the writer, steeped as you are in your own material. Whether or not your research actually follows the "logico-deductive" pattern -- and some anthropological research usually does not do so in any straightforward manner -- when writing the senior thesis, you should try to arrange the material so that the reader will

understand the direction of the whole. In short, your thesis should normally have a beginning, a middle, and an end -- an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The introduction should state the problem and the manner in which you are going to discuss and analyze it. The body of the thesis should be presented in some explicit, logical order, so that the reader will understand the relevance or purpose of each section. Finally, the conclusion should summarize the points you have made, recapitulate the argument and its strengths and weaknesses, and perhaps address again the theoretical issues that were used in approaching and analyzing the problem. You should also explain how you have modified your view of these issues in the course of conducting the analysis. Furthermore, revising your introduction once you've completed your entire thesis draft is highly recommended. In other words, did you argue, analyze, and follow through with what you set out to do in the introduction?

Length. Social Anthropology theses will ordinarily be between 80-100 pages (maximum 25,000 words). You should be wary of exceeding these limits in either direction. Long, verbose theses in particular are often poorly written, edited, and argued. Consult closely with your advisor about the length and structure of the work while it is in progress.

Style. General Comments: You should address yourself to an informed general reader. Avoid repetition, unnecessary detail, and irrelevance in both data and analysis. Use your own style -- and use this opportunity to develop it -- but, in any case, write *clearly*. In the process of composing and preparing the manuscript, do not neglect the details of good expository writing. The pleasure and the understanding of the reader (and perhaps your grade) can be undercut by inattentiveness to style, form, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citations.

Two stages are essential. First find out how to do it right (read this memo and consult your advisors and Teaching Fellows); and then leave time for rewriting and proofreading. Common references on style are W. Strunk and E. B. White, Elements of Style (Macmillan, 1979) and K. L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations (Chicago, 1973). You can also consult The Chicago Manual of Style (University of Chicago Press: the latest edition is the 17th published in 2017). How to Write a Thesis (MIT Press) by Umberto Eco is a neat little book on the aesthetics and nuisances of writing a rigorous and eloquent research thesis. It's an old school classic.

You should also consult previous theses for examples of structure and format. The most recently submitted theses are in the Anthropology Department Undergraduate Office in Tozzer 103B; almost all previously submitted anthropology theses can be found in the Tozzer Library.

Finally, you are strongly encouraged to consult the new **Departmental Bok Writing Fellow, Ms. Zoe Eddy**(zeddy@fas.harvard.edu). In addition, **The Writing Center** (Room 019, Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, 495-1655, wricntr@fas.harvard.edu offers individual conferences to go over drafts of your writing. Check out their website: <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>. You'll find a specific link on this site for thesis writers, and they do strongly recommend that you contact them early in the writing process, not when deadlines are just around the corner.

Advising: Your advisor(s) should be able to guide you successfully through most phases of the thesis process. If serious problems do arise, however, it is your responsibility to contact the Head Tutor to discuss the situation and a possible resolution.

Please note carefully the following details of format and presentation:

Copies/Binding: You must submit **1 printed copy** of the thesis on good quality acid-free paper (which most good printer/xerox paper reams are these days), bound in the traditional black spring binder, and one pdf copy of the work via secure electronic transfer. The pdf copies of the theses will be distributed to your three assigned readers (one of whom will automatically be your advisor) on your thesis committee. The printed copy of your work will ultimately reside permanently in Tozzer Library.

Page Formatting: Leave 1-inch margins at the top and bottom of the page and on the right. Be sure to leave a 2-inch margin on the left to allow for the spring-binders! All pages need to be double-spaced on one side of the page only.

Font: Use 12-point fonts, preferably Times or Times New Roman.

Title Page: A sample title page is attached. Please follow this format in centering and spacing the appropriate text for your thesis.

References, Notes and Tables: For references, you may use the bibliographic notation system of the American Anthropological Association, the *American Anthropologist*, or another system with the approval of your advisor. If you use the AAA system, you should be aware that it distinguishes between *citations* and *notes*. Citations should be made *in text*, with reference to works listed at the end of the work. Notes providing additional information may appear at the bottom of the page (the preferred method) or alternatively, may be gathered in a convenient place, either at the end of each chapter or at the end of the text, just before the References Cited. Consult your advisor concerning the style most appropriate for the content of your thesis. Whichever citation method you adopt, please ensure that you are consistent with that method throughout the entire thesis.

For tables and charts we ask that you do *not* follow the AAA system, which requires that they be placed at the end of the text. This may be appropriate for articles, but it is a problem for larger works. Charts, tables and figures should be placed within the text, at the appropriate place. The pages on which they appear should also be numbered or given some other systematic identification, and a list specifying page numbers or locations should be provided in the table of contents.

DEADLINES:

Hard dates for the various writing deadlines will be communicated to you during the first two classes of 99a in September 2018. Required writing deadlines due to your advisor and your 99a instructors include: 1) A draft outline of your thesis. This draft should answer three important questions: what? why? and how? 2) The actual first full chapter 3) a draft of the second chapter 4) a draft of the third chapter and 5) a complete DRAFT of your entire thesis for final revisions by you and your advisor(s).

Note: These outline and chapter deadlines also apply to those writing a joint thesis with social anthropology as secondary field.

IMPORTANT: Completed and bound theses are due in the **Tozzer Atrium** by **1:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 14, 2019**. This deadline is *firm*. If you think you will have travels plans or a scheduling conflict, please be prepared to turn in your completed thesis before March 14th, 2019.

Late theses will be penalized one grade step per day, counting weekends. These penalties will be waived only in cases of emergencies. Students should contact their Head Tutor **immediately** in that event. Crashed computers, malfunctioning printers, and scheduling problems at the Science Center are *not* considered valid excuses.

Oral Examinations: The thesis committee normally consists of the advisor and two faculty readers. This same committee will conduct the oral examination, which is normally scheduled during Reading Period in early May. The examination takes about one hour and focuses on the thesis, occasionally bringing in broader issues from the student's course work that are relevant to the thesis and the interests of the student. It is *not*, however, a general examination.

Grades: *After your thesis oral* (no Anthropology student sees her/his evaluations prior to the oral defense), you will receive three separate evaluations for your work. First is the transcript grade for Anthropology 99z, which is given by your advisor. Unlike those of some other departments, the senior tutorial in Anthropology is letter-graded. You will receive only a SAT/UNSAT evaluation at mid-year, but the final full course grade will be a letter and will reflect your diligence in the entire tutorial process, as well as the quality of the final product. The thesis itself will be evaluated along the honors scale, (honors, high honors, highest honors, which parallels the College honors scale, *cum -/+*, *magna -/+*, *summa -*) with the readings of each member of the committee being averaged to produce an overall mark. A separate evaluation will then be made for the oral examination, in the same manner. These two grades will then be converted to the 4-point scale used in computing grade point averages, and combined with your concentration grades to calculate an overall evaluation of your record. This composite grade and its various components will then be used by the faculty in making the Department's recommendation for your degree.

Questions about this process may be addressed to the Head Tutor or the Undergraduate Coordinator.

Most of all:

Have a great time with your thesis. For all the attendant angst, writing a thesis is a very rewarding intellectual and creative experience.

Title Page Format:

[Title] (centered approximately 1/4 down the page)

A thesis presented by

[Name]

to

the Department of Anthropology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree with honors
of Bachelor of Arts

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts
[Month and Year of Submission]