

University of Macau
Department of History

Guidelines for Writing a BA Senior Thesis

In order to complete the requirements of the BA programme in History at the University of Macau, each senior student is required to write a thesis in which you demonstrate that you have mastered the academic skills necessary to receive your Bachelor degree in History. The BA Senior Thesis is a written document of between 25 to 30 pages (8,000-10,000 words) in length and has the weight of six course credits. The senior thesis is written in the fourth academic year of the BA degree and is generally submitted for formal grading at the end of the second semester. During that time, you will be expected to write your thesis on any area of history that broadly connects with the research and teaching specialities of the full-time academic staff within the Department of History's degree programme. In writing your senior thesis you will work closely with an assigned research supervisor who will determine your working schedule and timetable for completion.

Getting Started

1. Most historical research begins with a question. Think about what topics, themes and theories you are interested in and what you would like to learn more about. Think about the topics, people, civilizations, cultures, events, institutions, movements and ideas that you have studied in the history programme. Is there any question that you think the body of literature/knowledge on that particular topic does not answer adequately?
2. Once you have a question in mind, begin looking for information relevant to that topic and its theoretical framework. Then read as much as you can – articles, books, newspapers, diaries, official documents, letters, literary works, blogs, internet postings – on that topic.
3. As soon as you become well-informed about your topic and the prior research on the topic, your knowledge should allow you to devise a purpose for your thesis. When you can articulate this purpose clearly, you are then ready to write your research proposal.

Research Proposal

1. This document specifies the purpose and broader significance of your study. It should seek to address the following questions:
 - Why is your research important?
 - What methodology will you employ and why?
 - What will be the outcome/result of your research?
2. As a rough guide, your Research Proposal should be about 500-600 words in length. The proposal can be longer or shorter depending on the scope of the research and the formal approval of your thesis supervisor. All students studying for the BA degree in History must submit their research proposals in English unless otherwise instructed by your research supervisor.

3. Your Research Proposal should include the following elements:
- *Title.* A clear and precise title indicating the scope of your proposed work. The title should be a window into your research project that tells the reader, in a few words, what it is all about. You do not need a title to begin writing a proposal. You can come up with it after you have defined all the parts of your research project. It will be clearer than what the title should be.
 - *Thesis Statement and Justification.* The thesis (or hypothesis) is one or two sentences placed at the beginning of the proposal that tells the reader what you want to accomplish and why the research is important. The thesis (or hypothesis) is what we refer to as “your argument”. It tells the reader, in a brief statement, what you want to find out or prove, and the problems or questions you intend to answer. You should begin this section with a general statement of the specific research problem or question. The general statement is followed by the rationale or justification for choosing this problem or question. The justification clarifies to the reader why you chose this problem or question and why it is important that you answer it.
 - *Clear and Concise Overview of Your Topic.* The main body of your proposal should describe your topic of research. Clearly describe the major issues or problems you want to examine in your study. Explain what is involved in this topic. Define clearly the chronological framework. Focus on the importance and on your rationale for selecting this topic. Include definitions of key concepts or historical terms you plan to use in your research. What is your approach? Who or what will be the object of your research? What are the key questions driving your research? You should also describe the main sections (or chapters) of your research project.
 - *Survey of Previous Literature.* In this section, you briefly summarize what studies (secondary sources) have been done before on the subject. Depending on the topic, you do not necessarily need to mention all of the previous studies, but it is important to talk about the most important ones. You should mention the main scholars who have contributed to our current understanding of your topic, and briefly describe their major research findings and contributions. It is important to discuss how these previous studies are related to your study, and how they help you in your understanding of your research project. You need to show how the previous studies that you cite are relevant to your own study; if they are not relevant do not include them in your proposal. After summarizing what has been done before, then state how your research will be different. Your study should be new and original and not simply repeat what others have already said and done.
 - *Sources and Methodology.* This part makes clear to the reader the sources you will use and how you will approach them (methodology). Here you should list the main primary sources that you will use and where they are located (libraries, archives, etc.). You should also state why these sources are important to your research. If they have been used before by other scholars, then you should state how your approach to them will be different from theirs. The approach (methodology) you use will affect the outcome of your work, so you should think carefully about this. Will you go through the sources in chronological order? Topically? Or just select randomly a number of entries? Will you employ a qualitative analysis? Quantitative analysis? Comparative analysis? If you are going to employ a method used in other related disciplines, such

as economics, sociology, anthropology, literary theory, or art history, then you should state it in this section. After describing the sources and the methodology, then you should explain briefly why you have chosen this approach. How will it help your research and argument?

- *References.* At the end of your proposal you need to provide a brief Bibliography of the primary and secondary sources you plan to use in your research.

Carrying out Research

Once you have written a formal Research Proposal and you have discussed it with your research supervisor, you may then progress to carrying out research for your topic. Typically, this will involve gathering as much information (source material) about your topic as possible. For historical research there are generally two main forms of source material: primary and secondary.

1. Primary sources are original materials used as evidence in history writing. They can be classified as any artifact, document, recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study. Primary sources are distinguished from secondary sources, which cite, comment on, or build upon primary sources. In history, primary sources can include documents such as official reports, speeches, pamphlets, posters, or letters by participants, officials, and other contemporary eyewitness accounts. In a broader sense primary sources may also include artifacts like photographs, newsreels, coins, paintings or buildings created at the time.
2. Secondary sources are defined as any documents or recordings that relate or discuss information originally presented elsewhere. Generally, accounts written after the fact, with the benefit of hindsight, are regarded as secondary sources. A secondary source contrasts with a primary source, which is an original source of the information being discussed; a primary source, for example, can be a person with direct knowledge of a situation, or a document created by such a person. In contrast, secondary sources involve generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information. Examples of secondary sources in history writing include published books, journal articles and reviews.

The Writing Process

After you have successfully completed carrying out your research on your chosen topic, your research supervisor will instruct you to begin writing your thesis. He/she will assume responsibility for providing you with an appropriate writing structure and timetable for completion. Generally, most writing will take place in semester two of year four once your thesis proposal has been put together and once you have successfully completed your research activities.

Supervisions

Supervisions constitute an important part of the overall assessment of your BA Senior Thesis writing project. Each research supervisor is responsible for determining how often, when and where supervisions are undertaken. Generally, most supervisors will arrange a meeting with their students every two-three weeks. However, it is your

responsibility to make sure that you contact your supervisor regularly to update him/her of your progress, and to request any extra supervision if needed. Please be reminded that your research supervisor will be busy during the teaching semester and you must make sure to submit any work in plenty of time before supervisions take place.

Grading

There is no set guideline for the grading of senior theses. Generally, the final grade that you will receive for your thesis will be awarded at the discretion of your research supervisor who is considered the best person placed to comment upon and grade your work. However, as a useful guideline, the following is a breakdown of the four principal grading points (A,B,C & D) that may be used when assessing the overall quality and final grade awarded for senior theses.

Letter Grades	Grade Points	Percentage	Characteristics
A	3.7-4.0	88-100	<p>Made excellent statement of the purpose, significance and scope of the research</p> <p>Developed and sustained an original, logical and coherent argument throughout</p> <p>Evidence of judicious use of relevant primary and secondary source materials</p> <p>Presented research findings in a logical, coherent and very well-written manner</p>
B	2.7-3.3	73-87	<p>Clear statement of the purpose, significance and scope of the research</p> <p>Evidence of a central argument and an attempt to sustain the argument throughout the thesis</p> <p>Good use of primary and secondary sources</p> <p>Satisfactory presentation of thesis with adherence to accepted conventions in relation to writing and referencing</p>
C	1.7-2.3	58-72	<p>Unclear statement of the purpose, significance and scope of the research</p> <p>Summarized some points</p>

			<p>of central topic but without significant use of primary sources</p> <p>Lack of central argument or failure to adequately address research questions</p> <p>Poorly presented, unstructured and badly written</p>
D	1.0-1.3	50-57	<p>Incoherent and confused statement of the purpose, significance and scope of the research</p> <p>Failure to summarize major points of topic and make adequate use of both secondary and primary sources</p> <p>Unfinished work that is either poorly written or badly structured</p>