

### **Best practices for writing an Undergraduate Honors Thesis**

The writing of an undergraduate honors thesis is invariably a collaborative, but also an individual process, one which evolves over the course of a full year. Here are some hints and suggestions which have proved useful over the years.

- 1) **Communicate with your advisor often**, both when things are going well and when they are not; together, you are a team working towards the same goal. What seems like an insurmountable problem might be easy to fix with some advice. Or, if it *is* insurmountable, it is better to know that as soon as possible and adjust accordingly.
- 2) **Schedule regular meetings** (ideally, once every two weeks). Prepare for those meetings, but do not cancel them even if you have not met your goals for those weeks.
- 3) **Be honest with yourself**. Set a schedule you can keep, and be sure to allow yourself some flexibility. Do not tackle a topic that is too big, and be prepared to narrow your focus in consultation with your advisor. Your advisor will be honest with you, too – so don't take it personally if you hear that your topic won't work for any number of reasons, or that you haven't left yourself enough time to do it properly.
- 4) **Be patient with yourself**, and also acknowledge that writing an honors thesis involves many steps, some of which you may not be very good at yet. This is all the more reason to start working early, especially if you have had trouble meeting deadlines or writing in the past. This is probably the most difficult thing you have done to date.
- 5) **Be ambitious, but be practical**. As you select a topic, you'll want to focus on what interests you, since you will be the one doing the research. Also pay attention to how feasible your topic is (consult with your advisor, but bear in mind that faculty might not always know the limits you may confront – this is one of the exciting and frightening things about doing *original* research).
- 6) **Know the deadlines and procedures** established by the Honors in the Major Program. It is your responsibility to know the various deadlines for submission and the requirements for the different stages of your project.

Your thesis will follow these general steps (but keep in mind that this is not a blueprint – you might choose to write throughout the process, or a final topic might not develop until you are in your second term):

- 1) Selection of a topic and outline of schedule
- 2) Preliminary research and refining of the topic
- 3) Outline of proposed thesis
- 4) Further research
- 5) Writing of first chapter
- 6) Editing of first chapter
- 7) Approval of first chapter
- 8) Writing of further chapters
- 9) Editing of further chapters
- 10) Approval of further chapters
- 11) Final research, if necessary
- 12) Final conclusions; preparation for defense

Plan to produce something written every two weeks, even if it is just notes or an outline. This keeps both you and your advisor on track, and avoids surprises (not to mention, it keeps you working throughout the term!). You and your advisor will decide together how involved other members of the committee ought to be; it is usually best to solicit their feedback only after you and your advisor agree that you have a topic you can do well, and after you have a substantial sample of writing to show to them.

**Revision is an integral part of this process.** You and your advisor should consult over multiple drafts, as this is how writing and thinking improve. Ideally, you should give your advisor at least a week to read a draft before meeting to discuss it, but it is a good idea to agree together about a workable timeline for receiving comments, since some times in the semester are busier than

workable timeline for receiving comments, since some times in the semester are busier than others (for students and for faculty). Expect to rewrite over and over again, and be willing to edit brutally; constructive feedback can be critical, but remember that criticism is of the work, not you, and reflects your advisor's investment in guiding that work towards its best form. Be committed to your writing and your arguments, but not so attached that you cannot "select all" and delete if need be.

Finally, keep in mind that **this is your accomplishment**, and thus you are the one ultimately responsible for monitoring and meeting deadlines set by the [Honors in the Major](#) program. If you encounter any difficulties, the Classics HITM liaison, Dr. Jessica Clark [[LINK TO HER PAGE](#)], is available to help.