

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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TO: Thesis Writers in Archaeology (Anthropology)  
FROM: Richard H. Meadow, Head Tutor for Archaeology  
RE: Senior Theses

Below you will find information that should prove useful to you as you develop and write your senior honors thesis. Also included is information about deadlines, the evaluation process, and related requirements.

**Three basic rules for writing a successful thesis:**

- 1) *find out* how to do it right;
- 2) *consult* with your advisor frequently and submit drafts regularly for review;
- 3) *leave time* for rewriting and proofreading, and do not leave the conclusion until the last minute!

**Advising:**

Your advisor should be able to guide you successfully through the thesis writing process. *If problems do arise, however, please contact me, your Head Tutor.* To help you along, all thesis writers and I will meet together once a month from September through February to review progress and to provide a forum for discussion about common issues and concerns.

**What is a thesis?**

As the term implies, a thesis is a proposition or assertion that is supported by logical arguments and factual evidence. 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 of them. In other words, the thesis should have an "argument."

Given these expectations, your thesis should have some theoretical component. You may simply utilize theoretical propositions and models to frame the argument, to elaborate and sustain the analysis, and to "explain" the phenomena. You may perhaps then 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 may come from various sources. You may reanalyze data that have already been collected and published. You may have undertaken your own research in the field, in the laboratory, and/or in a museum. In any case, you will want to supplement your data with library research. You will also need to *balance* comprehensiveness with creative interpretation and the limits of time and other resources. Regardless of what you do, your goal should be to provide the reader with an understanding of the problem and of the data. What makes your essay a "thesis" is that you go beyond narrative and description to include analysis and argument. What makes it "anthropological" is the centrality of problems and phenomena related to the concerns – archaeological or socio-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, when writing the 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 deal with it in the remainder of the thesis. 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. Often the body will include sections on methods and materials, the data, and discussion of those data. Finally, the conclusion should summarize the points you have made, recapitulate the argument and its strengths and weaknesses, and 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 and indicate what further work could usefully be carried out on the topic in the future.

**Length:**

Senior theses range anywhere from 35 to 100 pages (double spaced) in length (8750–25,000 words), not including front matter, bibliography, or appendices. Laboratory theses or those with heavily quantitative analyses may be shorter, while those with discursive arguments tend to be longer. You should be wary of exceeding these limits in either direction. Long, verbose theses in particular are more likely to be poorly written, edited, and argued than are more concise theses. *Consult closely with your advisor about the length and structure of the work while it is in progress.*

**Style:**

You should address yourself to a well-informed 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.

Common references on style are W. Strunk and E. B. White, Elements of Style (4<sup>th</sup> edition, Longman, 1999 (2000 pbk) and K. L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (7<sup>th</sup> Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007). You can also consult The Chicago Manual of Style (University of Chicago Press: the latest edition is the 16<sup>th</sup> published in 2010. It is available online for a fee).

Most anthropological archaeology theses use the style guide of the Society for American Archaeology. It is available for download at:

<http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/Publications/StyleGuide/tabid/984/Default.aspx>.

Also consult the style guide for PhD dissertations from the Harvard GSAS:

[http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/current\\_students/form\\_of\\_the\\_phd\\_dissertation.php](http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/current_students/form_of_the_phd_dissertation.php).

If your thesis is on a topic much of the literature about which is in another style, you may use that style. Check appropriate style guides (often journals in the discipline have such guides).

You should also look at other honors theses for examples of structure and format. All previously submitted anthropology (including archaeology) theses can be found in the Tozzer Library or Harvard Depository. Check HOLLIS. There is a list of more recent ones on the Anthropology Department website: [http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~anthro/under\\_honors.htm](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~anthro/under_honors.htm).

Finally, you are encouraged to consult with counselors at the Writing Center (Room 019, Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, 495-1655). The Writing Center offers individual conferences to go over drafts of your

writing. Check out their website: <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k33202>. They recommend that senior thesis writers contact them by telephone to arrange for an appropriate tutor instead of using the on-line scheduler. They also have a number of hand-outs on format, style, and other aspects of writing.

### **Formatting, Printing, and Binding requirements for Archaeology theses:**

Formatting guidelines (note: for a joint-concentration [between departments] or cross-wing concentration [within Anthropology], you should follow the guidelines of your primary field):

Paper: 8.5 x 11 inch white paper;

Margins: 1.5-inches on the left side, 1-inch top, right, and bottom;

Header and footer: 0.6-inch;

Font Size: 11-, or 12-point font;

Spacing: text double-spaced; footnotes, lengthy quotations, tables, figure captions, and bibliography may be single spaced, although in the bibliography you should leave an extra space between entries; footnotes, tables, and figure captions may use smaller font (9- or 10-point);

Page numbers: consecutively in Arabic numerals with the title-page being "1" (although using the "first page special" header-footer formatting option you do not print the number on the first page). To keep things simple, do not use Roman numerals for front matter;

Place the page number in the center of the footer. Use the consecutive page-numbering feature of MS Word or other word processor;

Print on one side of the page only.

One copy of the thesis is *required* to be on high-quality *acid-free paper*; this copy will ultimately reside in Tozzer Library. It must be single-sided and bound in a black spring-binder – NOT stapled, punched, or pierced in any way.

The remaining three copies should be single-sided as well, but velo-bound with a black plastic back cover and transparent plastic front cover (bound to allow you to read the title page through it, i.e., no blank page between the title page and the cover). The velo-bound copies will be given to your readers to evaluate – and to keep if they wish to.

It would be a good idea for you to have a fifth, unbound, copy for yourself, particularly if your advisor nominates you for a Hoopes or other prize. (For information on prizes, see [Secretary of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Prize Office](#) ).

You can have your thesis printed and velo-bound at, for example, FlashPrint (99 Mt. Auburn Street) or at another commercial photocopy shop. One spring-binder per student should be available FREE from Penny Rew. Check with her closer to time (WJH 352; Tel: 617-495-3814; email: [rew@wjh.harvard.edu](mailto:rew@wjh.harvard.edu)). Arrange for your binder IN ADVANCE so that you will actually be able to get one (whether free or by purchase). And do not wait to the last moment to have your copies made and bound, either!

**REMEMBER:** back up all computer files relating to your thesis on a regular basis!!!! AND on more than one device!

### **Deadlines:**

A full draft *outline* and at least *one chapter* acceptable to your thesis advisor must be submitted *to your advisor* by **Sunday, December 11, 2011** (the end of Reading Period). To receive a satisfactory grade in Anthropology 99 and continue with the thesis, you must meet this requirement.

Completed and bound theses are due in the **Undergraduate Office, William James Hall 352**, by **1:00 p. m. on Thursday, March 8, 2012** (the Thursday before Spring Break). This deadline is *firm*. To ensure that you make it, *we recommend that you have the first draft of your thesis finished by mid-February and allow at least three weeks for revisions, printing, proofreading, copying, etc.* You should take advantage

of J-term to work on your thesis without conflict with other classes; consider requesting permission to stay on campus during J-term.

**REMEMBER:** *leave time* for rewriting and proofreading, and do not leave the conclusion until the last minute!

Late theses normally will be penalized one grade step per day, counting weekends. These penalties will be waived only in cases of serious extenuating circumstances. Students should contact me **immediately** in that event. Crashed computers, malfunctioning printers, and scheduling problems at the Science Center or at a copy center are *not* considered valid excuses. **Plan ahead!**

Finally, you must send a copy of your complete and final thesis in PDF format to the Head Tutor for Archaeology ([archtut@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:archtut@fas.harvard.edu)) within two weeks of submission.

### **Evaluations:**

For thesis writers whose only or primary concentration is archaeology (anthropology), your thesis will be evaluated by a thesis committee, which will be composed of at least three readers who are also the examiners at your oral defense. At least one of the readers is your thesis advisor, with the Archaeology Head Tutor normally choosing the remainder. ***Oral defenses are scheduled to take place before the end of Reading Period.*** By mid-April you should be informed of the names of your readers and the date, place, and hour of your exam. We expect you to be available through all of Reading Period, at least until you know the date for the oral.

The oral defense in Archaeology is in the following format:

- a) a 10-minute presentation of the highlights of your thesis (problem(s) addressed; material and methods; interpretations and conclusions). Preparing this presentation (in PowerPoint or the equivalent) is good practice for giving a paper at a professional meeting and at the annual Anthropology Club Thesis Symposium to which we expect each archaeology honors candidate to contribute (see below).
- b) ca. 40 minutes of questions from your committee. These questions will concern your thesis itself, the attendant research, and directly related matters. Only your thesis committee and the Archaeology Head Tutor (if possible, or person acting in his place) will be present during the exam (i.e., this is not a public defense).

NOTE: Archaeology thesis writers do not have access to their readers' reports before the oral exam, but anonymous copies of all evaluations (thesis and oral) will be given to you shortly after the departmental degree meeting (see below).

### **Grades and degree of honors:**

You will receive three separate evaluations for your work. First is the transcript grade for Anthropology 99, which is given by your advisor. Unlike those of some other departments, the senior tutorial in Anthropology is letter-graded. You may 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. Second, the thesis itself is evaluated along the honors scale (*cum, magna, summa*) with the readings of each member of the committee being averaged to produce an overall mark. Third, a separate evaluation is made for the oral examination, in the same manner. These two grades (thesis and orals) 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 in the concentration.

When all of the oral exams are over, the Anthropology faculty meets to determine each candidate's final level of departmental honors, and shortly thereafter, you will be informed in writing of their decision. The possible degrees of "English Honors" recommended to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences are Highest Honors, High Honors, Honors, and No Honors. As noted, these are determined based on your

concentration grade point average, the degree of honors awarded to your thesis, and the degree of honors awarded to your oral exam. The final degree of honors that you are awarded by the FAS depends first on the predetermined percentage category that your overall (all course) grade point average puts you in and second on the departmental recommendation. The FAS degree of honors may be the same or less than the departmental recommendation, but never greater, and the FAS faculty may not award any honors even though the department has recommended honors.

**Other stuff:**

You will need to put together a Powerpoint (or equivalent) presentation for your oral exam and to give at the Senior Thesis writer's symposium. In addition, following on the successful effort made by thesis writers last year, you will probably be asked to prepare a poster as well. More about all of this later, including guidelines and suggestions.

**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. I found it so (Harvard College Class of 1968), and I think that most everyone who came before and followed after did as well.