Thesis Info for English Majors Considering Honors

- Should you write a thesis?
- What does a thesis entail?
- What is the process for proposing a thesis (applying for honors)?
- What is the process for writing and submitting a thesis?
- How are theses graded?

**Baseline Requirements:** 3.3 GPA in major plus thesis proposal approved by thesis advisor.

**What is a thesis?** – There are two kinds of theses: An analytic thesis is a sustained relationship with *a research question* that you’d like to explore/investigate, not a “proof” of an already determined argument. A creative thesis explores a central question or topic or form. (See more on these below.)

An English Department thesis is a *substantial independent scholarly or creative work*: 40-80 final pages (resulting from many more pages than that which have been drafted and revised and cut).

- Do NOT choose to do a thesis just because you want “honors” on your transcript.
- A thesis is not a “seminar paper on steroids,” but a sustained commitment.
- Ask yourself: Is there an intellectual or imaginative question that engages me?
- Your thesis will be *in conversation* with other writers - critics, theorists, scholars, authors.
- Love is a reason to write a thesis . . . What question or topic consistently matters to you?

**Applying for honors**

Consult with your major advisor and the Honors Director to identify a potential thesis advisor. It is the job of the faculty to direct theses, so you’re not asking for favors, but seeking someone to direct you in your scholarly or creative project.

Be in touch with your desired thesis advisor about your ideas for a thesis, sooner rather than later, to verify their willingness to serve as your thesis advisor and to confirm the shape of your project.

We recommend taking, in your junior or senior year, a literary theory course such as ENG 285 or WLT 300 for learning about different critical theories that will prepare you for advanced Honors work.

Whether you’re at Smith or abroad, it’s preferable to apply by the end of the spring of your junior year, so that if your initial proposal isn’t approved, you can revise over the summer and resubmit. If you miss the May deadline, it’s possible to apply in September of your senior year, but after that point no resubmission is allowed. Once your thesis proposal is approved, you can do advance work on your research over the summer, which gives you a head start in the fall.
Thesis proposals

- Let the Honors Director know as soon as possible that you’re thinking about a thesis, so that you can receive advice about possible advisors and constructive ways to focus your proposal.

- The next step is to check in with both your major advisor and your thesis advisor about your plans and time-frame for completing the thesis proposal, because it requires both of their signatures.

**Analytic theses**: Identify a research question and method. You don’t need to present an argument, but you DO need a question and a method, supported by a bibliography.

**Creative writing theses**: Explain the nature of the work to be undertaken (such as questions you’re exploring), and include evidence of past work (sample short stories or poems). Approval is typically granted for projects that have thematic or other coherence, such as poems/stories that sketch a narrative of some kind or explore a form in a sustained way, as well as the excellence of your writing.

The proposal includes both a statement outlining your project, and either a bibliography (analytic theses) or a writing sample (creative theses). You need to complete these in time for your thesis advisor to suggest revisions, and then to approve the revised copy before signing off on it. Usually the statement is no longer than two pages (ideally a single page), plus the bibliography or writing sample.

Write your thesis proposal (see below) in consultation with your thesis advisor, along with feedback from the Honors Director, and hand it in either at the beginning of May or beginning of September. It will be reviewed for approval at last spring Department meeting and fall meeting.

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**Nuts & bolts for proposal submissions**

All the information required to complete an honors thesis proposal/application is on the class deans' website (not the departmental website): [https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/class-deans/honors-apply](https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/class-deans/honors-apply)

A) Contact honors@smith.edu to request the Calculation of GPA Requirements for Departmental Honors; fill in the Credit and Course Points columns.

B) The GPA calculation form needs to be reviewed with and signed by your major advisor.

C) The thesis proposal form needs to be signed by your thesis advisor.

D) Submit the completed thesis proposal to the Honors Director by the deadline (early May or early September), so that it can be scanned and distributed to the Department before the faculty vote at the last (spring) or first (fall) Department meeting of the semester.
**Logistics for approved thesis writers**

Each semester, seniors writing a thesis will take an honors course (ENG 430D) for 4 total credits, in addition to their three other courses. You can register by semester; if you haven’t yet received departmental approval, you can sign up for a fourth course and be ready to drop it and enroll in ENG 430D once the thesis is approved.

The grade from your thesis advisor at the end of the fall semester is superseded by your final thesis grade at the end of spring semester. The overall honors designation is calculated from your thesis grade (HHH, HH, H) plus your oral presentation grade, plus your Department GPA (60/30/10% allocation).

There is NO LIMIT to the number of thesis proposals accepted by the Department each year, so you’re striving for individual excellence, not competing for a limited number of slots.

**Timetable for completing the thesis**

**End of third week of spring semester:** *Completed thesis draft* submitted – 2 clean copies, for the thesis advisor plus a second reader.

**Two weeks after draft submission:** You will receive the advisor’s and second reader’s written comments and will meet with them to discuss their suggestions for revision. *(Revision is where the rubber hits the road, where a first draft becomes a compelling thesis.)*

*At this point, you have the option of switching your thesis to a special studies if so advised by both readers.*

**Beginning of 10th week of spring semester** (excluding spring break): *Final version of thesis* due – no extensions.

Readers have two weeks to submit final reports.

**Mid-April** (penultimate week of classes): *oral presentations on thesis project* for faculty and other Smith students. 15-minute presentation and 10 minutes for questions.

The Honors Director will meet with presenting seniors as a group in the week before the scheduled presentations for a rehearsal, so honors seniors can listen to each other and give/receive feedback on thesis presentations.

**Beginning of May:** College deadline for all students to submit *final corrected copy of thesis* in PDF on Moodle ([http://moodle.smith.edu](http://moodle.smith.edu)).