



Writing Your Bachelor Thesis in Literature: A Rough Guide

Due in part to diverging disciplinary traditions, the Bachelor Thesis module is organized rather differently in Literature and in Linguistics. However, the overall workload expected from students remains the same (15 ECTS), as do the overall learning outcomes and the required level of quality. This guide will help you to prepare for writing your thesis, for instance how to go about your research, and how to structure the thesis. For information about the thesis module (such as how to register and submission deadlines), please go to:

<https://www.es.uzh.ch/en/bachelor/advanced/modulecatalog/modulesalphabetical/bachelorthesis/bachelorthesisguidelinesliterature.html>

What is a BA Thesis?

Your final thesis is a chance to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that you have acquired over the course of your degree. Your thesis should demonstrate evidence of the following skills:

- Independent research and critical thinking. This is an opportunity to explore a topic in detail, outside the structure of a seminar or lecture.
- In-depth critical analysis. Make sure to dedicate enough time and space in your thesis for literary analysis of your chosen texts. This is your chance to showcase the critical thinking skills that you have been developing during your degree.
- Engagement with primary and secondary material. A successful thesis will demonstrate your ability to engage critically with primary texts, and to make considered use of secondary and theoretical material. From this you should be able to develop a coherent and convincing argument.

The Content of a BA Thesis

The most daunting aspect of the thesis module is usually the size of the thesis. 10,000 words is considerably longer than a seminar paper, but in many respects the main building blocks are the same. The difference is that you have a chance to increase your scope or your topic, or perform a more detailed literary analysis. As a research orientated piece of work, this is also your opportunity to perform more substantial academic research than for a seminar paper. The expectation is that you will get a good overview



of the literature already available on your topic (for instance through academic databases), and be able to make critical decisions about which sources to use.

Scope (Choosing Your Topic)

When choosing the topic for your thesis, there are two main things to consider. Firstly, 'am I interested in this topic?', and secondly 'is it feasible?'. As well as being feasible, you will need to ask yourself if the topic is relevant, and makes a contribution to academic discussion. The first area is really up to you, and can be drawn from a seminar course, from an idea sparked by your minor, or from material you have come across outside of your courses. It is important that you discuss your idea early on with your supervisor, as they will be able to advise you on the feasibility of the idea, and give some guidance on how to make it work for a BA thesis. A good rule of thumb when deciding on the scope of your topic is 'breadth or depth'. A broader, or survey-based thesis might start with a particular critical theory, and use a range of primary texts to interrogate different aspects of the theory. An in-depth thesis will focus on a single text or small selection of texts, and spend time on detailed close readings of that text in order to make critical statements.

The Building Blocks

There are several crucial features that make up a well-executed thesis. There is of course lee-way in exactly how you structure your own thesis, and again, your supervisor can help you to decide what is feasible. However, in a general way, a literature thesis will have the following components:

- **Introduction.** This is where you 'lay out your stall', and let your reader know what you will be doing in the rest of the thesis. The introduction is the place to make your thesis statement and also to justify its relevance. It is here that you describe the research questions that are at stake in your thesis. Crucially, this is where you establish your theoretical framework for the thesis, identifying which critical materials you will be using, and defining how you will use specific terminology. (Some theses have the introduction and theoretical framework as separate sections.)
- **Analysis.** This is the main body of the thesis, and is usually divided into two or three 'chapters'. (The organisation into chapters/subsections should be clear and represented by a table of contents.) The chapters should be organised according to different areas of your discussion, but should ultimately all contribute to your overall thesis statement. For instance, you might divide your chapters by character, and explore similar themes in each, or you might identify different aspects of a critical theory, and discuss each



one in its own chapter. Each chapter should ultimately feed back into your overall argument.

- Conclusion. The conclusion should not simply be a round-up of what you have written, nor is it the place to introduce new arguments. In the conclusion, you will draw together the different aspects that you have covered, in order to give your reader a 'big picture'. Don't forget, literary analysis is an exploration of texts, not a judgement – you are not required to 'prove' or 'disprove' a statement about a text, but to discuss the viability of using a particular approach to read that text.
- References. The references may seem like the simplest part of the thesis, but be careful not to get sloppy here. Your reference list should include all the texts that you have mentioned in your thesis. Don't include background texts that you read but did not cite. There is no need to pad-out your references to demonstrate your research. If you have performed extensive research, this will come across in your thesis. A well-chosen list of relevant citations looks much more impressive than a long list of irrelevant or ill-considered material.
- Formatting. Details about style guides and how to format your thesis can be found in the Literature Guide, <https://www.es.uzh.ch/en/studies/Downloads.html>.

Supervision

The Role of a Supervisor

Your supervisor will help to guide you through the process of researching and writing your thesis, and will assess the final result. While the thesis should be an independent piece of work, your supervisor will help you to focus your idea into a workable topic, and can suggest alternatives if the idea turns out not to be feasible. They will also offer starting points for further reading and theoretical research.

Who to Approach for Supervision and Why

It is up to you to approach a potential supervisor. (For timings see module guidelines, link above.) You should primarily choose somebody whose own research focus reflects your topic. Of course, it may be that you approach a supervisor because you have had contact with them before, and feel that you can work successfully with them. If this is the case, but they decide that they are not the best person to supervise your particular topic, then they will suggest someone else in the department. BA literature theses are primarily supervised by one of the professors or a senior lecturer. A research assistant may supervise your thesis if their research focus is particularly well placed for your topic.



The following list outlines some of the main research interests of the literature Professors and senior lecturers. However, the list is not exhaustive. If your topic doesn't exactly fit into one of these research fields, but you nonetheless think that a particular professor or lecturer would be an appropriate supervisor, get in touch with them and they will be able to advise you.

Professor Dr Michael Frank

- Victorian culture and imperial history
- The origins and development of popular genres such as Gothic romance, the detective story and science fiction
- Cross-cultural encounters in colonial and postcolonial literature - Re-writings and other forms of intertextuality
- Representations of the city
- Migrant and multicultural literature
- 9/11, terrorism, and the 'War on Terror' in contemporary global literature

Professor Dr Isabel Karreman

- Early modern literature and culture
- Theatre history and early modern drama
- Afterlife and adaptations of Shakespeare plays
- Literature and culture of the long eighteenth-century
- History of feminism before 1800
- Literature and globalization before 1800
- Memory studies

Professor Dr Barbara Straumann

- British and American literature since 1800, especially the long nineteenth century (from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century)
- Victorian literature and culture including their afterlife in Neo-Victorian fiction
- Film, visuality
- Intermediality, transmediality, adaptation studies - Audio-visual essays and storytelling
- Psychoanalytic approaches
- Gender theory and issues
- History of feminism
- Voice and gender, voice in literature
- Economic issues in literature
- Class issues
- Transatlantic cultural exchanges



- Exile studies
- Celebrity culture, stardom

Dr Sophie E. Battell

- Early modern literature and culture, with a special focus on Shakespearean drama
- French philosophy
- Borders and migration in literature
- Global literary history and cross-cultural encounters
- History of science
- Economic criticism
- Environmental literary criticism, including energy humanities
- Indigenous studies and decolonization
- Cultural anthropology
- Shakespeare and social justice, including race in early modernity

Dr Cedric Essi

- American Studies
- Black Studies, Critical Mixed Race Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies
- Critical Kinship Studies
- Queer Studies
- Autobiography
- Cultural Legal Studies: Law & Literature, Critical Race Theory

Contact Points with Your Supervisor

Each thesis and supervision is individual, and your supervisor will be able to suggest the best schedule for contact for your particular needs. However, here a few pivotal moments in the thesis process at which it might be useful to meet with your supervisor:

- to discuss your initial idea;
- to present an outline for the structure;
- to present an excerpt from your writing. (Do not expect your supervisor to read and correct a complete first draft);
- if and when you find yourself struggling. For instance, you might need help to find relevant secondary material, or you might be struggling with the structure of your thesis.



For each of these, your supervisor will help you to identify any problems and will suggest solutions. These points of contact are not part of the assessment.

Peers and Co-Readers

If you can, get other people to read your work-in-progress. Fellow literature students can make excellent peer reviewers, but friends and family can also give useful feedback. Co-readers are useful not only for spotting mistakes, but for you to make sure that your arguments are understood (and understandable!) in the way in which you intend. Just remember that your co-readers are neither supervisors nor examiners. (For instance, if your supervisor points out a weakness in your writing, take their criticism seriously, even if your peers have told you it is brilliant.)

Plagiarism

Finally, a brief reminder about plagiarism. By this stage in your studies, you will be familiar with the rules about plagiarism, and they become particularly important here. Be sure to refamiliarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism. Remember, plagiarism is not restricted to 'copy and paste' text. Repeating a specific argument or set of ideas without crediting a source is also plagiarism. (For example, structuring your thesis chapters to directly follow the structure of an article on the same topic.) If you are not sure whether you are correctly engaging with your material, discuss it with your supervisor.

Good luck with your thesis module, and don't forget to enjoy it! This is your chance to work on something that really interests you, and to show what you can do!

Sophie E. Battell – Zurich, May 2024