



# Guidelines for the Preparation of Your Master's Thesis

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## ***Foreword***

This guidebook summarizes the procedures followed by the Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation for students who are planning to write theses for their master's degree. This manual is intended to guide students in the elements and structure generally contained in a thesis. Departments with graduate programs also may have guidelines for thesis writers. This document is not meant to supplant, but rather to supplement department procedures.

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## II. Introduction to Graduate Research and Thesis Writing

### A. Purpose & Expectations of a Thesis

The purpose of a thesis is the documentation of a student's scholarly activity in a formal structure that lends a relatively uniform appearance to work completed at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The thesis structure is intended to facilitate the understanding of students' scholarly work by people unfamiliar with the specific work presented, but who are familiar with professional writing in general. Also, the thesis structure is intended to aid students in the preparation of manuscripts from their scholarly work.

Research is an essential component of graduate education. The thesis is often seen as the culmination of graduate work, and it is the formal product. However, the process requires the work of many people including the Graduate Thesis Committee Chair and the Thesis Committee who interact with a master's student to create a significant professional experience and shape the degree work and resulting thesis. One of the most important aspects of graduate work is communication between the Graduate Thesis Committee Chair and the student. Methods, circumstances, and personalities vary and can make sufficient communication challenging. **Ultimately it is the student's responsibility to make adequate progress toward completion of their thesis and for producing high quality work.**

A master's thesis provides opportunities for students to plan, complete, interpret, and report research. Thesis projects must not have been published previously and must be conducted and written under the supervision of a Graduate Thesis Committee. The completion of a master's thesis constitutes six semester hours of credit.

Master's projects should be the result of work that is independently conducted, and that represents original research and critical analysis. The work should demonstrate the following from the student concerning the field of study:

- Awareness and understanding of important current work in the field
- Ability to plan a research activity
- Knowledge and motivation to carry out the planned research activity
- Ability to analyze the results of the research
- Ability to draw reasonable conclusions from the research
- Ability to complete a written description of the work in the form of a well-written, properly organized thesis
- Ability to complete a thesis with potential for presentation at and/or participation in professional meetings and/or publication in scholarly journals

## B. Thesis Types

Theses generally can be categorized as two types: qualitative (which includes creative) and quantitative. While some graduate work may not clearly fit in one category, most will.

### *Qualitative or Creative Thesis*

This type of thesis is the result of work done by students in a descriptive, exploratory, analytical, or creative way. Departments that encompass the arts and humanities may have graduate students doing this type of thesis.

### *Quantitative Thesis*

A quantitative thesis is research that uses quantitative research methods to test a hypothesis and analyze data. Quantitative research is based on the scientific method and uses numbers, logic, and objective reasoning to provide precise explanations.

## C. Thesis Checklist

Listed below are the suggested steps for completing a thesis project. Note, however, the final point is time critical.

### ☐ Establish Thesis Chair and Thesis Committee

- Work with a faculty member as a Thesis Chair to determine a thesis project.
- File a “Thesis Committee Appointment Form” at the Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation at least one semester prior to your anticipated graduation date to establish the Thesis Committee.

### ☐ Research

- If appropriate, obtain approval from the IRB (Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research) or the IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) prior to initiating the study. To determine if approval is needed contact the chair of the appropriate committee.

### ☐ Writing & Formatting

- During writing, refer to “Formatting Requirements” and “Forms and Examples.”
- Follow the writing style format determined by your department. Recent previous thesis work is available on [OpenSPACES](#), the digital repository of the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Your department and your advisor can also provide examples of previous thesis work.
- Establish a timeline for completing the first draft of the thesis with your Thesis Chair.
- UNK’s Writing Center, located within the Loper Success Hub, is available for in-person and online assistance with theses.

### ☐ **Apply for Graduation**

- Pay attention to calendar date requirements for the Application for Graduation and other University, Graduate College, and Departmental deadlines.

### ☐ **Oral Defense**

- Arrange for the oral/written defense of the thesis with your Supervisory Committee no later than one month before graduation day.
- Be sure that your thesis chair files a signed “Report of Committee on Thesis Examination” form with the Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation after defense.

### ☐ **Acceptance Page**

- An acceptance page must be included following the title page. The thesis committee chair and committee members will sign it, indicating acceptance of the thesis by the committee, following the oral examination.

### ☐ **Format Check**

- You should submit the entire thesis including preliminary pages to the director of Graduate Admissions three weeks prior to graduation for a format check.

### ☐ **Electronic Submission**

- After completing the writing of your thesis, review “Copyright” and “Library/Electronic Submission” sections. Note that some copyright issues may arise during the writing stage; for example, the researcher may need permission to use another work or to include charts or photographs not their own.
- **The student must submit an electronic version of the completed thesis NO LATER than two weeks before graduation day. This is a FIRM deadline and ignoring the deadline may mean you will not graduate in a given term.** The Graduate Studies website will provide you with step-by-step instructions.

## **D. Protection of Human Subjects in Research**

If the research you are conducting for your thesis involves human subjects, federal law requires that your project be reviewed and approved—in advance—by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This means that you must complete an online research training program titled the Course in the Protection of Human Subjects (CITI). You also will need to complete the appropriate IRB forms, and submit them to the university’s IRB for review before your research can proceed. Detailed information about the training program, the federal legislation, the instructions for completing the application and IRB materials, and the downloadable forms can be found at the university’s IRB website.

Because training and IRB review requires planning, you should complete the steps in this procedure well in advance of your anticipated beginning date of the research.

## E. Protection of Animal Subjects in Research

If the research you are conducting involves the use of animals, federal law requires that your project be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) prior to your research. To accomplish this, complete the appropriate form found at the IACUC website.

## F. Academic Integrity

As a graduate student about to embark upon the role of active scholar, your attention to academic honesty is imperative. This requires that your work:

- Provides a full and complete representation of any scholarly findings,
- Credits the contributions of colleagues and co-workers,
- Respects diversity of opinion,
- Defends you and your colleagues' academic freedom.

Misconduct in research and writing is defined in the university's Policy Statement on Integrity in Faculty/Student Authorship & Research as:

The fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those commonly accepted within the scientific, artistic, and academic professional communities. Plagiarism involves the intentional appropriation of another's work, including ideas or phrasing of words, without crediting the source.

A student found guilty of dishonesty in academic work is subject to the disciplinary action and procedures as outlined in the Academic Integrity Policy in the Graduate Catalog.

## G. Copyright

Small amounts of most material (for example, findings from previous research, quotations and information from literary works, excerpts from surveys and other test instruments) may generally be used in a thesis with the appropriate citation.

1. If you include third-party materials (those not created by you) in your thesis:
  - a. Use open access works and/or works covered by Creative Commons Licenses
  - b. Ensure your use of copyrighted materials counts as "fair use" (repurpose, reinterpret, or otherwise "transform" the copyrighted work in question)
  - c. Request permission for copyrighted works
  - d. Remove potentially problematic materials entirely from your thesis.

We recommend you follow the above guidelines in **the order that they're listed**; that is, seek out open access works first to avoid any potential copyright infringements. If you are unable to do so, seek fair use for copyrighted materials. If each of these strategies is

unsuccessful, your last resort may be to request permission for copyrighted work[s], or to remove problematic third-party content from your thesis entirely if this option fails.<sup>1</sup>

2. Your thesis is automatically copyrighted, and you own the copyright. It is good practice to include a copyright notice in your thesis. The unnumbered copyright page should follow the Title Page or Abstract in the manuscript. The copyright statement should include the copyright symbol, your legal name, and the date of the acceptance of the thesis. For example:

Copyright © 2007 by Susan B. Jones

If you choose, you may register your copyright when submitting your thesis to ProQuest, for an additional fee.

3. Creative Commons: Creative Commons licenses are a standardized way to grant the public permission to use your work. They make clear what others can and can't do with your thesis. There are a [variety of licenses](#). If you'd like to apply a Creative Commons license to your thesis, you can do so when submitting your thesis.

For additional information, consult the UNK Library [copyright guide](#) or [theses guide](#).

### III. Library/Electronic Submission

All theses are managed and published in OpenSPACES (UNK's digital repository). Mechanics are discussed below but the process is:

1. Submit your draft thesis to the repository.
2. Thesis Chair and committee members will review work and may provide comments via the repository.
3. You defend your thesis.
4. Submit the final version, with any changes requested by the committee and any formatting changes requested by the Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation.
5. Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation approves the thesis. The thesis is posted to the repository, visible to the public (if no embargo is selected).

The Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Innovation requires electronic submission of the final version of your thesis at least two weeks prior to commencement.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://libguides.pratt.edu/thesisguide/copyright\\_and\\_your\\_thesis](https://libguides.pratt.edu/thesisguide/copyright_and_your_thesis)

All theses are submitted to OpenSPACES (UNK's Digital Repository) and may be embargoed for up to 5 years. Theses may also be submitted electronically to ProQuest (Global Digital Repository) although be aware that, if an embargo is needed, it is limited to two years.

## **A. What is an Embargo?**

In academia, an "embargo" is a restriction placed on a thesis that allows only the title, abstract, and citation information to be released to the public, while the full text of the work is kept hidden for a limited period of time. Embargoes typically last from one to five years following publication of a thesis.

## **B. Reasons to Make Your Work Available**

- Making your thesis accessible allows it to be scrutinized by others in the field, prompting collegiality.
- Scholarly work will be readily available to prospective employers as you embark on your job search.
- You don't want to be plagiarized.
- Having theses available helps future scholars learn about the process of scholarship.
- The more accessible your thesis is, the more likely it is to be cited because your work enters the scholarly community more quickly and other scholars and researchers have access.

## **C. Why Embargo a Thesis?**

Most theses are not embargoed but are made publicly available following their formal defense as part of completing a master's degree. Some reasons to embargo a thesis include:

- The author wants to publish the work in whole or in part in the future and is concerned that making the work public will interfere with this.
- The author has previously published the work in whole or in part, and the publisher is restricting the public release of the work in some way.
- There is an ethical need to prevent disclosure of sensitive or classified information about persons, institutions, and so forth.
- The thesis includes data covered by a nondisclosure agreement for a specified period of time, including personal information, company secrets, or intellectual property.
- There is a patent pending on the work or there are related issues that might make disclosure detrimental to the rights of the author.

## **D. How to Embargo a Thesis**

Thesis embargo periods can be selected when submitting your thesis. OpenSPACES allows embargoes up to 5 years, with one renewal. ProQuest allows a 2 year embargo.

After the ending date of the initial embargo period, the work will be made publicly available unless the student contacts the library to extend the embargo. The maximum extension period is 5



years, for a total of a 10-year embargo if an initial embargo period of 5 years was selected. This request must be received prior to the end date of the initial embargo period.

## **E. OpenSPACES & ProQuest**

- OpenSPACES is managed by UNK. You are required to submit your thesis to OpenSPACES. The system is flexible, so you can include additional materials as supplemental files. You might choose to include data collected during your research or anything else relevant to the thesis.
- OpenSPACES allows a 5 year embargo, with one renewal.
- Materials added to OpenSPACES will be freely available, maximizing the reach of your scholarship.
- ProQuest is an additional platform. Because it is not managed by the university, customization options are limited.
- ProQuest embargo is limited to 2 years.
- For additional fees, ProQuest offers copyright registration and thesis printing.
- Including work in ProQuest provides access to the scholarly community as your thesis will be searchable within ProQuest products.
- Work may be submitted to both OpenSPACES and ProQuest if desired.

## **F. Submission via OpenSPACES (UNK's Repository)**

- Go to <https://openspaces.unk.edu/> and select "My Account."
- Create a BePress account. Use an email address that you'll have access to after you leave UNK. This account is NOT tied to any UNK credentials, so you can use whatever you'd like for your credentials.
- Go to the thesis series for your department. Direct links are available at <https://guides.library.unk.edu/DR/theses>. You can also navigate there: Browse, Collection, College, Department, then select Theses, Dissertations, and Student Creative Activity.
- Under Author Corner, click Submit Research. This will take you to a submission form with instructions.
- You will need the following: your thesis (initial submissions for review by advisor and thesis committee may be in Word but the final version should be a PDF), abstract, keywords.
- Read and agree to the Submission Agreement. If desired, save a copy of the Submission Agreement for your records.
- Fill in all required fields (those in red) and any relevant other fields. Keywords and Subject Categories enhance the discoverability of your thesis.
- If you are requesting an embargo, make sure to indicate the length of your embargo, up to 5 years.
- Under Upload Full Text, select Upload file from your computer. If you have been working in the cloud such as on OneDrive or Google docs, you may need to download a copy of your thesis to your computer before completing this step.
- If you have Additional Files, such as datasets, large images that weren't included in the thesis itself, etc., check the box under Additional Files.

- Additional files are uploaded one at a time. From the Upload Supplemental Content page, under Upload a new file, click Choose File and select the desired file. Do NOT click continue. Once file is uploaded, you will see a table with filename and description. Fill in the description and click Save. Repeat as needed for all additional files.
- When you have added any additional files, click Continue. This will submit your thesis.
- You will receive a submission confirmation, with a link to revise your submission. You will also be able to access your thesis via My Account.
- To revise your thesis, such as to add the final version, access it via My Account or the direct link. Click Revise thesis/dissertation. Leave any information that is correct alone. Upload final full text file (in PDF) using the process detailed above. It is helpful if you complete the Reason for Update. Examples: Upload final version. Correct keywords.
- If you would also like to submit to ProQuest, follow the directions in Section G.

## G. Submission via ProQuest

The website will provide you with detailed instructions. Once you access ProQuest via the UNK Graduate Studies webpage by clicking the 'Student Resources' box, you should:

- Create a [ProQuest account](#). Use an email address that you'll have access to after you leave UNK. This account is NOT tied to any UNK credentials, so you can use whatever you'd like for your credentials.
- Read the section on the first screen titled "Before you begin" for helpful information. Note: the full text of your thesis must be converted to a PDF format prior to submitting it to ProQuest. If you need help in the conversion process, links are available at the first ProQuest screen.
- Once the PDF format conversion is complete, you are ready to begin the process by clicking on "Start your submission."
- At "Publishing Agreement" select TR-1, Traditional Publishing Agreement" and continue.
- Look through the IR agreement; we recommend accepting so that UNK can fully preserve and make available your work – increasing the reach of your scholarship or creative activity - but it is not mandatory.
- Enter your personal information at "About You."
- Provide information about your thesis at "Submission Details."
- Upload your PDF formatted thesis.
- Next you will have the option of submitting "Supplemental Files," such as figures, tables, or graphics.
- At "Copyright Fees," you have the option of having ProQuest/UMI submit an application to the U.S. Copyright Office for you. There is a charge. Be sure to click "I am not requesting that UMI register my copyright" if you do not want this service.
- ProQuest/UMI offers physical copies of your thesis for a charge at "Bound Copies." This is an optional service. Click "Continue with submission" to proceed.
- Confirm submission.

## **IV. Order and Components**

### **A. Formatting Guidelines**

- **Margins**

All margins should be 1 inch unless special permission is obtained.

Illustrations and appendices should also conform to this requirement.

- **Style**

Departments require the use of a particular style that has been approved in the profession.

Consult with your department on the proper style manual to use.

- **Font**

The thesis should be formatted in Aptos 12-point font.

- **Illustrations**

Where possible, illustrations, diagrams, and other visual materials, should be placed in the text or included as an appendix. Photography, maps, diagrams, and drawings may be included as separate files if desired.

- **Table and Figures**

Tables and figures should be numbered and labeled in accordance with the style manual being used.

- **Pagination**

The pages of the text should be numbered with Arabic numerals according to the style manual being used. Begin page 1 following any preliminary pages.

### **B. Organization**

- **Title Page**

The title page should not be numbered. Follow the form illustrated in this guide with respect to order, spacing, and capitalization. No abbreviations or punctuation should be used.

- **Acceptance Page**

An acceptance page must be included following the title page. The thesis committee chair and committee members will sign it, indicating acceptance of the thesis by the committee, following the oral examination.

- **Abstract**

An abstract must be included following the acceptance page. It should follow the same guidelines for margins and spacing and be consistent with the style manual being used. The abstract should not exceed 300 words.

- **Table of Contents**

The thesis should include a table of contents following the title page, acceptance page, abstract, and any other preliminary pages. The Table of Contents should list all the principal topics, subdivisions, and enumerate the illustrations, tables, and figures in the order in which they are to be bound.

## V. Forms & Examples of Thesis Pages

### A. Thesis Committee Appointment Form



#### Thesis Committee Appointment Form

##### Student Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 UNK Email: \_\_\_\_\_@lopers.unk.edu NUID: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree: Select

##### Proposed Title of Thesis

##### Thesis Committee Members

The thesis committee will be composed of a minimum of three graduate faculty members from any of the University of Nebraska campuses, at least two from the major department/school (one being the candidate's thesis professor who will serve as chair) and a third member from another department/ school. An additional member of your committee may be from outside the University of Nebraska system but must be pre-approved by submitting the Appointment of Special Thesis Committee Member form.

	Printed Name	Signature	Department	Graduate Faculty
*Chair:	_____	_____	_____	Select
*Member:	_____	_____	_____	Select
*Member:	_____	_____	_____	Select
*Member:	_____	_____	_____	Select
**Special Member:	_____	_____	_____	Select

\*Required; \*\* Must be pre-approved.

I understand that:

- This thesis must be my original works, and any included material that has been produced by or in collaboration with others must be cited as such.
- If my thesis may involve human subjects research and/or vertebrate animal research, I must contact the UNK Institutional Review Board (IRB) and/or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and receive all necessary approvals before conducting these types of research.
- If my thesis may involve information protected from dissemination by applicable law or contract, or intellectual property which may potentially be patentable, I should discuss this with my committee chair as early as possible in the research process.
- I am responsible for reviewing the UNK Graduate Guidelines for the Preparation of your Master's Thesis Guide.

I hereby request that the UNK Graduate College approve my proposed thesis topic and committee membership.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate Dean Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email this form to [gradstudies@unk.edu](mailto:gradstudies@unk.edu) or mail to address below.

Office of Graduate Studies & Academic Outreach | 1910 University Drive-CMCT 210 | Kearney, NE 68849 | 308-865-8500

9/2022

Page numbers can be placed here



1

## B. Example 1: Margins & Page Numbers

1" Left Margin

1" Top Margin

1" Right Margin

All text and diagrams must be printed within  
these margins

1" Bottom Margin

Or page numbers can be placed here



1

Or here



1

*Last Updated 4/15/2025*

**C. Example 2: Title Page**

(TITLE OF THESIS)

(ALL CAPS) Title sits at top margin of 1”

White space between all text sections should be equal.

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the (your department) Department

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

(Name of Degree)

University of Nebraska at Kearney

By

(Name of Student)

(Month and Year)

Month (graduation month) and Year should sit at bottom margin 1” from bottom of page.

## Example 2: Signature Form

THESIS ACCEPTANCE  
(ALL CAPS)

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree (name of the degree), University of Nebraska at Kearney.

## Supervisory Committee

Name

Department

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Supervisory Committee Chair

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Date