

Mémoire / MA thesis proposal (circa 2'000-3'000 words)

The mark of an innovative study lies in its changing our vision of significant texts/works, in combining them in new ways, or in discovering new ones. My decision to supervise your MA thesis/*mémoire* will be made on the basis of your *mémoire* proposal.

The MA thesis/*mémoire*

What is an MA thesis?: basically, it is an extended essay that displays all the skills that you have learned throughout your studies. Because the MA thesis is longer (approx. 15'000 words) and more complex than an advanced essay, you need to carefully plan your research.

The aim of the proposal is to demonstrate that you have a manageable (in terms of scope and time frame), well thought-out, coherent, interesting, original and informed topic, argument and approach. You are also expected to have done some research on your subject and have a good grasp of the critical background and methodological requirements of your project.

Your *mémoire* proposal should provide information including:

- Name, home address, email address
- **Interest** in the subject matter (1-2 paragraphs):
Pick a theme and set of texts that **matter (or speak)** to you. No valuable research is ever undertaken without a motive (aside from getting a degree): at the back of those motives is curiosity, and a strong response to a particular text, author, idea, and/or theory/critical approach:
- **Title** (provisional)
- **Topic and argument** / working hypothesis / thesis / abstract (1-2 paragraphs, 250-300 words)

How to get started: the *mémoire* proposal describes what the project is about, providing its focus and rationale, and introduce the main texts and approach. Some background information about the topic or area will give insights into the reasons for the writing and the 'gaps' in existing criticism that are to be filled in by the project, and this will help you define your aims and objectives.

The first draft of an argument is usually only a rough approximation of what you'll ultimately discover as you proceed with your analysis of the text(s), writing, thinking and researching deeper into your subject. The most important elements of your thought will be obscure to your reader if your argument doesn't ultimately transmit the full content or potential of that thought/argument. To express a complex, original thought in a way that appears simple and obvious requires work, time and patience. Avoid vagueness and imprecision.

- **Corpus** of primary texts and brief explanation of the reasons for the selection:

- Coherence and relevance of the corpus in terms of period, genre, author, approach, etc.?
The corpus must be manageable (scope): neither too limited (based on only one novel a couple of short stories or poems) not too broad (4 novels), 8 short stories, or an entire collection of poems, all of Shakespeare's comedies etc. Students generally tend to be overambitious and encompass too much material: better to go into depth and detail than lapse into plot summary.
- Outline of the **approach**, the **methodology** of the mémoire. This may include discussion of critical contexts, theoretical framework (key sources and references), and the identification of any terms that are particularly important in your methodology. **Key terms** should be defined with reference to the critical context you are working in.
- **Aim / significance**: Does the project reflect a personal view on the subject? In what sense will your work contribute something new to our understanding of the texts/topic/approach? Present state of research on the topic (existing studies on the topic if any) and originality/interest of your project
- **Outline**, plan, basic structure and underlying logic.
- **Select bibliography (annotated)**, including primary texts and relevant secondary literature; a critical bibliography exercise will be part of the course.
- **Planned schedule** ('road map') and expected date of submission. Remember that writing is an integral part of the process of discovery and thinking through your project. Writing takes time, effort, patience, attention to detail, style... so save enough time for editorial revisions. Your memoir should be written in good English, adequately formatted, and relatively typo-free.

Further resources

Fabb, Nigel and Alan Durant. *How to Write Essays, Dissertations and Theses in Literary Studies*. London: Longman, 2005 (1993).
[Research proposals \(English Faculty, University of Cambridge\)](#)
[The English Department Guide to Essay Writing](#)