

II . Guidelines on Thesis Writing

1. Introduction

Writing a thesis is an opportunity to use your knowledge and your learning from your two years at GSIS on a topic that is of special interest to you. Thesis writing is challenging, deserving high intellectual commitment and intellectual stamina. Thesis writing goes through different stages, evolving from your initial choice of subject, finding your resources, your creative and thinking stage, the organizational stage and then the hard graft 'writing up' through to your thesis defense. At the end you will have written a solid academic document and you will have earned a personal and professional achievement. Writing a thesis in GSIS is your way of combining all the academic skills you have learned at GSIS, and out of this you are writing a piece of very substantial work to be read by fellow students, academics, researchers, and policy makers. Writing a thesis requires specific academic skills and these are skills and points of advice to be outlined over the next few pages.

2. Preparation for Thesis Writing

During your first two semesters at GSIS you will already have an idea of the kind of topic you would like to focus on. A thesis allows you to look at a topic in greater depth and you have a degree of flexibility with this choice. The choice is yours, but it is always a good idea to choose a topic that includes the following questions to consider:

- 1) Ask other students who have completed a thesis about their experience, what were the positive benefits of writing a thesis, not simply in terms of your degree but also as intellectual satisfaction and the sense of achievement. Read previous theses in a related area.
- 2) Ask yourself if the topic you are thinking of choosing is a topic you have already been taught or a topic you have presented in class. What marks or grades did you get? Can you imagine yourself writing on this topic for two semesters? What are your interests in this topic? Keep asking yourself if will I be interested in this topic this time next year? How can I judge that?
- 3) Have a look at some basic resources in the library and on the internet. Do some initial research, read articles, and books, get to know some key books and authors in the field. Familiarity with key texts and writers even at this stage will give you confidence and save time later on. Assess what resources are available, and ask yourself if you can see problems accessing information later on.

When you have decided you want to do a thesis then:

- 1) Meet and make contact with your supervisor, have a look at your supervisor's research interests, check what courses the professor's teach
- 2) Begin to make a preliminary list of books and references that you have read during your courses, books you are reading and references you think you might want to

consider. Remember whenever you find a reference make a note of the author, title of book or article, page numbers and publishers. This will save a lot of time and anxiety later on and it is good practice for students wishing to go on and do a Ph. D.

3. Thesis Proposal Stage

- 1) A thesis requires a hypothesis and research question(s)
- 2) A thesis requires a title. Make the title clear, no more than 15 words. The title should be catchy and stand out, but within academic protocol. A general statement then a specific statement is often good. For example, 'Critically assessing global politics: a Case Study of ...'.
- 3) A thesis has to be framed and written around a central argument or proposition. This is your hypothesis or question that your thesis will show and make an argument for or against. This hypothesis is the central 'hook' of your thesis and around which your entire work will be organized. So spend a lot of time on the hypothesis. As your work progresses you should be able to summarise the key argument/hypothesis of your thesis in three sentences. You should be able to explain to someone who doesn't know the thesis topic what your thesis is in a concise and understandable way.
- 4) At this stage, before the proposal is finalized, do not worry if your hypothesis changes and you change your mind. In fact this is a sign that your thought processes are working well. But at some time you will have to come down on one side of the argument. Going through the thought process and being aware of different arguments this will make your thesis defence much stronger. Remember that thesis writing is often akin to a legal case; you are stating a problem, identifying ways to approach the problem or issue and defending your case.
- 5) You will then need to write some research questions such as how, why, what, where and when questions in order to break down your thesis into manageable parts and basics for your chapter outlines. Have a look at previous MA theses in GIS to get an idea what kind of questions are asked.
- 6) Your thesis proposal will also require an abstract and a literature review. An abstract is a summary of your main argument, usually about 200 words. Your thesis proposal needs a short introduction of the topic, why you want to study the topic and why you need to place your thesis within the literature. The purpose of a literature review, is to help you find a gap in the literature and it is a dynamic process of reflection and rethinking. This gap depends on the kind of thesis you are writing. There are several types of thesis which are not mutually exclusive:
 - ① Primary research thesis which is filling a quantitative data gap.
 - ② Assessing a particular academic debate, placing your thesis within this debate and taking the debate further or critiquing the terms of the debate.
 - ③ Identifying a theoretical or conceptual gap in the literature.
 - ④ Applying empirical examples of theories.
 - ⑤ Focusing on critiques of existing policies.

7) You then need to write a chapter outline and briefly write a couple of sentences as to what each chapter is to include and discuss. Most theses have the following chapter structure:

- ① Introduction,
- ② History of topic,
- ③ Theoretical approaches/models you are going to use,
- ④ Analysis,
- ⑤ Conclusions and recommendations

4. Thesis Writing

Write in precise and straightforward language.

- 1) Write chapters separately one at a time.
- 2) In each chapter, keep referencing to your hypothesis and explaining in a couple of paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter why you are writing this chapter, what you are going to write in the chapter and how this links to the other chapters and your overall argument of the thesis. This self referencing is essential to keep the thesis argument consistent and logical. This is why reading is so important, so you can get an idea of good writing organization so it becomes second nature to you.
- 3) Thesis paragraphs should be clearly marked, either an indentation of the first line or a double space between paragraphs. Paragraphs should be no less than 6 sentences and no more than twenty. This is not a strict rule but a guide.
- 4) A thesis has to be seen as a holistic piece of work so the reader in theory opens a random page and can immediately follow the argument and see how the argument is progressing
- 5) Your introduction to your thesis and the conclusion to your thesis should be written at the end so you can make the thesis consistent.
- 6) Don't forget to write a contents page with the information of page numbers for each chapter.
- 7) Remember to check that you have given each chapter a chapter title. Divide chapters into sub headings to make it easier for the reader, and it will help you organize your thinking.

The classic thesis shape is as follows:

general-specific-general

5. References

- 1) Referencing: each item must be acknowledged to avoid plagiarism. You can use the Harvard author date system in the text (Smith, 2010: 20) and then you collect all the references at the end of the thesis in an alphabetically based bibliography; OR, you can use the footnote method where you put numbers in the text and then list your sources in footnotes and sequenced in order they are referenced in your text. Once you make your choice, be consistent.

2) Put the page numbers at the end of references.

3) Quoting:

- ① direct quotes are word for word quotes. Up to three sentences in direct quotes “....” in the normal text margins. Any more than 3 sentences then direct quotes must be indented and the indented sentences DO NOT have inverted commas. Remember direct quotes need author-date AND page number(s). for the Harvard system this comes in the text. For footnote system this information is in the footnotes
- ② with indirect referencing use of sources, you summarise an authors argument or statement IN YOUR OWN WORDS. You do not need quote marks. Indirect quotes only need author-date
- ③ If you are quoting a writer but the work is in another book that you are reading then you must reference the book you are reading with page number information.
- ④ When you list your references either as footnotes or as a bibliography, your references will also need publisher information. PLEASE NOTE the Harvard system does not need page numbers in the bibliography

6. Examples of referencing

1) Sample References (Harvard)

[Book]

Giddens, Anthony. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press)

[Edited Book]

Krasner, Stephen. (1983) (ed) *International Regimes* (Cornell University Press)

[Chapter in an Edited Book]

Watson, Iain (2002) 'Rethinking Resistance: Contesting Neoliberal Globalization and the Zapatistas as a Critical Social Movement' in Abbott, Jason and Worth, Owen (eds) *Critical*

Perspectives on International Political Economy (Palgrave: Macmillan), pp.108-139

[Article]

Lee, Shin Wha (2003) 'Human Security Aspects of International Migration' *Global Economic Review* Vol.32no.3, pp.41-66

[Sample References (footnote)]

Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge,1990), p.25

7. General Advice

- 1) Keep reading your writing as your thesis progresses. Sometimes it's a good idea to have a break for a couple of days then go back to the writing and reread. Mix up your rereading of your work, so for example when you have finished chapter three, then go back and read the introduction, and so on. You might be surprised at your reaction, and you might find issues in the writing that you would like to change.
- 2) Check all the technical words and definitions to make sure you are using the words in the right context and in the right way.
- 3) Time management is important.

- ① End of Semester 3: thesis proposal/introduction and draft of chapter one and start of two
- ② Summer break/winter break: reading documents/research, draft chapter two/three
- ③ Semester 4: completing thesis write-up

There are no rules on how long each chapter should take to write. After all this will depend on the nature and topic of the chapter and your own experience and knowledge. Remember that we all have different work and study practices. Talking to your colleagues is useful but you must also work at your pace in order to get the job done in the most efficient way. Your supervisor will also guide you and make comments on your progress and the substance of your work. Most of all enjoy your thesis writing. This is your chance to put all your knowledge together in a substantial piece of internationally recognised academic work.