

English MA
Guide to ENGL 791 / Thesis Essay

Fall 2022

The culminating thesis essay should represent your strongest scholarly work in the English MA program. It should be about 6,000–8,000 words (roughly 25–30 pages) in length, including an up-to-date and extensive Works Cited list of secondary sources. In most cases, your thesis essay should be a revision and expansion of a paper (or papers) you've already written.

Signing Up for ENGL 791

Your culminating thesis essay is written and revised under the supervision of a full-time faculty member, within the context of a required 3-credit course: ENGL 791. Most students register for ENGL 791 during their final semester as a matriculated student. (In some cases, with the permission of the Director of Graduate Studies [DGS], it is possible to register for ENGL 791 before your final semester, as long as you have already taken ENGL 636 and ENGL 701, the two required foundational courses.) Please note that ENGL 791 is only offered during the fall and spring semesters, not in the summer.

The Fall 2022 deadline to sign up for ENGL 791 is Friday, August 5, 2022.

In order to be registered for ENGL 791, you must do the following:

1. Find a full-time faculty member who agrees to serve as your thesis advisor

Your thesis advisor should be a full-time faculty member of the English Department and a scholar in the field(s) most relevant to your essay's topic and/or text(s). Profiles of all full-time English faculty can be found on our department website at <https://qcenglish.commons.gc.cuny.edu/people/faculty/>.

You should ask your potential advisor *the semester before* you plan to take ENGL 791. Because you're likely revising a paper you wrote for a class, it's a good idea to ask the same professor whether they might be available to work with you again on your thesis essay. If you're having difficulty finding an advisor, please contact the Directors of Graduate Studies.

2. Email your ENGL 791 sign-up form with proposal to MAEnglish@qc.cuny.edu (see copy at the end of this guide; [click here to download the form as a Word doc](#))

The ENGL 791 sign-up form asks for your contact info, the names of your advisor and second reader, a working title, and a brief proposal for the thesis essay (about 250 words). All info should be typed and proofread carefully.

The DGS will share sample proposals. When drafting your proposal, ask yourself how and why this topic and text(s) engage you, and what you imagine

the stakes of your project to be. Think about the broader scholarly conversations you want to contribute to. There should be some sense of the field(s) you're working in and the theoretical/critical framework you'll be using in the essay. You will be asked to revise and resubmit your proposal if it contains ideas that are too broad or vague to be workable in 25–30 pages. And we recommend first sending your proposal to your advisor for feedback, before submitting it to the DGS at MAEnglish@qc.cuny.edu by the deadline above.

A copy of your approved ENGL 791 sign-up form is retained by the department. You should also keep a copy of this form for your own records.

Recent Culminating Thesis Essays

Sample thesis essays recently submitted and approved for the English MA include

- Affective Laboring in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*
- A Black Narrative Voice: Genre, Authorship, and Authenticity in *The History of Mary Prince*
- Bringing Monsters to Light: *Shigeru Mizuki's Hitler's* Defamiliarizing of Western History through Manga
- Curious Creatures: The Animal Other in the Menagerie of Elizabeth Bishop
- Forged Letters in Shakespeare's Tragedies
- Ghosts of the Medieval: Race in Contemporary Fantasy Novels
- "A man of two minds": Deconstructing Dualities in Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*
- A Path Denied: Spenser's Treatment of Lesbianism in *The Faerie Queene*
- Playing with Your Food: Constructing and Performing Identities in Food Memoirs
- Posthuman Possibilities in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy
- Propaganda, Poverty, and Patriotism: Wonder Woman's Immigration Stories
- (Un)Happy Mediums: Spiegelman's *Maus I & II* and the Holocaust Photograph
- The Victorian Poetess Unveiled in Rossetti's *Goblin Market*
- "When You Finally See Them": The Narrative Deployment of Disabilities in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The DGSs have some recent thesis essays on file, if you would like to take a look. QC's Rosenthal Library also has some copies of MA theses available for in-library use—please contact the Borrowing desk ahead of time at QC_ask_circ@qc.cuny.edu to schedule an appointment for viewing theses.

Managing Your Time Effectively

Since ENGL 791 largely takes the form of an independent study, there is no prescribed schedule, and each student makes individual arrangements to meet in-person or virtually with their faculty advisor. Regardless, you are advised to keep the following guidelines and procedures in mind as you plan out your semester.

Working with Your Advisor

It's important that you meet regularly with your advisor throughout the semester, especially at the beginning when your project is just starting to take shape. This may well be the first time you've worked on an essay of this magnitude or had the benefit of working closely and independently with a faculty advisor. Establishing regular meeting times and agreeing in advance on the work to be completed for each meeting will ensure that you do not leave your reading, writing, and revising until the last minute.

Creating Structure and Writing in Stages

Writing the thesis essay involves many stages (that sometimes overlap)—research, outlining, drafting, revising, revising again, and editing. It's very important that you set up a series of manageable deadlines with your advisor. These deadlines will enable you to finish your essay in stages, prevent procrastination, and give you a sense of accomplishment as you're working.

Below you'll find a couple sample templates for planning your writing process and thesis essay timeline. You should expect to receive some form of written feedback after each of these steps, so please be considerate of your advisor's schedule when planning out your semester.

Sample Tentative Thesis Essay Timeline (from Prof. Caroline K. Hong)

We'll meet every 2–3 weeks. Drafts should be shared at least 3 days before our meetings.

Initial meeting: Week 1 of the semester

Meeting to discuss outline/notes and research: Week 4

Meeting to discuss draft 1: Week 7

Meeting to discuss draft 2: Week 10

Meeting to discuss draft 3: Week 12

Final draft due: Week 14

Thesis essay conference: Week 15

Sample Thesis Essay Timeline (from Prof. Kevin Ferguson)

While every writer's process is different, every writer has to have a process and should be able to describe its stages. Here's a standard process for academic writing I'd like you to follow.

<i>Steps</i>	<i>How long will it take you?</i>	<i>Your dates</i>
Coming up with an idea	a long time	
Formal Proposal	2 weeks	
Annotated Bibliography	2–3 weeks	
Messy Draft	2 weeks	
Sentence Outline	1 week	
Second Draft	3–4 weeks	
Final Draft	3–4 weeks	

The more time you spend on the earlier parts of the process, the easier the later parts will be!

791 Workshops

The Directors of Graduate Studies will schedule optional monthly meetings to discuss the process of working on the thesis essay and to work on and/or workshop your writing-in-progress. These 791 workshops over the course of the semester are designed to help you feel part of a community of writers, offer you peer feedback and support, and enable you to share your work with readers outside of the relationship you've established with your advisor. The first workshop will be announced at the beginning of the semester. (*Note: Until further notice, these workshops will be held virtually via Zoom.*)

The Reader's Role

Your reader (often referred to as the "second reader," since your advisor is technically your "first reader") receives the final version of your thesis essay once it has been approved by your advisor. Your reader should ideally be a full-time member of the English faculty and a scholar in a field relevant to the topic or text(s) of your essay. You should contact your potential second reader as soon as possible, listing them on your ENGL 791 sign-up form if you can. You can ask your advisor or DGSs for suggestions.

Sometimes a reader is willing to be more involved in the advising process—for example, agreeing to read and give feedback on an earlier draft of your essay, or offering to help with your research in a particular area. Although you shouldn't assume this level of involvement on the part of your reader, it doesn't hurt to ask and draw from your reader's expertise and suggestions if/whenever you can.

Formatting and Proofreading

It's important that the final version of your thesis essay be as polished as possible—that is, free of typos and mechanical errors, and formatted according to up-to-date MLA style guidelines. Essays that don't meet these standards may be rejected by your advisor and reader, who can ask you to revise and resubmit your essay.

Editing and proofreading are important, so be sure to leave yourself enough time to do a thorough job. For formatting, you should consult the [9th edition of the *MLA Handbook*](#). The [MLA Formatting and Style Guide at the Purdue OWL](#) is a great resource.

Your final thesis essay must include a cover page that follows an official template determined by the College (see sample cover page at the end of this guide or [here](#)).

Thesis Essay Conference/Oral Exam

The thesis essay conference, sometimes referred to as the oral exam, typically lasts between 30–45 minutes. It takes the form of a conversation among your advisor, your reader, and yourself.

Your advisor and your reader may ask why you chose to work on your essay's topic and/or text(s); push you to expand or clarify your essay's arguments; ask you to summarize the whole project or its parts; invite you to situate your arguments within larger theoretical or critical conversations; propose new ways of approaching your topic; and suggest ways of strengthening or extending the scope of your claims. The conference is intended to be a constructive and enjoyable experience. It is less about demonstrating your knowledge and more about being willing—as a scholar talking with other scholars—to explain, modify, and expand your ideas.

To complete ENGL 791 in Fall 2022, you must schedule your conference on or before Wednesday, December 21, 2022.

Sample Questions for the Conference/Oral Exam

General questions

- Tell us how you came to this project. Why did you choose this topic and text(s)?
- Can you summarize your overall argument and its trajectory? How did it develop and change over the course of the semester?
- Can you talk about the kinds of research you did? How do you situate your project within a broader critical or scholarly conversation (about your text[s] and/or within a field)? How are you contributing to that conversation?

- What have you learned from this project that you want to take with you or pursue beyond the MA?

Questions re: a thesis essay on Alison Bechdel's Fun Home and Art Spiegelman's Maus (from Prof. Caroline K. Hong)

- What is the difference between what you describe as Bechdel's "legibility" (4) and Spiegelman's "calibration" (34)? Can you unpack those terms a bit?
- What's the difference in Bechdel's and Spiegelman's relationships to the notion of being "witness" (32)?
- Can you say more about the different ways that photos function in the two texts?
- You cite Hillary Chute's work on several occasions. How are you using and expanding on her work to make your own argument?

You should schedule the date and time of your conference well in advance, respecting the availabilities of your advisor and your reader. (*Note: In Fall 2022, conferences/oral exams may be virtual.*) You should plan to submit the final version of your thesis essay to your advisor and your reader at least **1 week before** your scheduled conference. This is so your reader has time to carefully read and reflect on your ideas before discussing them with you. Your reader may ask that the conference be rescheduled if they are not given adequate time to prepare.

Thesis Approval Form

Once the conference has ended, your advisor and your reader will ask that you briefly leave the room (or virtual meeting) so that they can confer about your essay and assign a letter grade. Your grade for ENGL 791 is based on your essay alone and not on your performance during the essay conference, which is pass/fail. (Not to worry: everyone passes the conference!) Your letter grade is recorded on the Thesis Approval Form (see copy at the end of this guide), which your advisor and your reader will both sign. Your Thesis Approval Form will then be submitted to the Dean of Faculty in the School of Arts & Humanities and the Registrar's Office, as proof of your completion of the thesis requirement for your MA. You may also request a copy of the form for your records.

In rare cases, your advisor and your reader may wish to discuss revisions that you need to make in order for your essay to be of at least B quality and acceptable for the MA degree. Make sure you understand the nature and extent of any revisions you are being asked to make and establish a specific time frame for completing them with your advisor. Your essay will not be approved and your Thesis Approval Form will not be submitted to the Dean and Registrar until any stipulated revisions have been made.

CUNY Academic Works

Unfortunately, the College is no longer offering thesis binding services. However, you do have the option of uploading your thesis essay to the CUNY Academic Works platform (<https://academicworks.cuny.edu/>). By doing so, you make your thesis essay accessible online to the public. [Click here to learn more about this option](#), and email our Humanities Librarian, Prof. Nancy Foasberg (Nancy.Foasberg@qc.cuny.edu) with any questions. You can check out [sample theses on CUNY Academic Works here](#).

Taking an Incomplete

Students who do not complete their thesis essay in the semester that they are registered for ENGL 791 will receive an incomplete (INC), which will be replaced by a letter grade as soon as they have submitted their final essay and had the conference/oral exam. Students have two semesters to finish and resolve the INC (so if you take an INC in Fall 2022, you have until the end of Fall 2023 to finish). Please note that QC is now enforcing the policy for graduate students that **any INCs not resolved within 1 year will be converted to failing grades (FIN)**.

If you intend to take an INC, please inform both your advisor and the DGS of your plans. Please also be aware that, in certain situations, it may not be possible for your advisor to continue working with you for an additional semester.

Filing for Maintenance of Matriculation

CUNY regulations require all graduate students to be registered in the semester in which their MA degree is awarded. If you have completed all your coursework except for ENGL 791 (as is often the case when a student has taken an INC in 791 and only has their thesis essay to finish from a previous semester) and you don't plan to register for additional classes, then you will need to file for what is known as Maintenance of Matriculation in order to graduate. [The form, along with instructions and current fees, can be found here](#).

Planning for Graduation

You must apply for graduation via your CUNYfirst Student Center by these deadlines:

- ⇒ For fall, the deadline is **November 1** for a January 1 degree conferral.
- ⇒ For spring, the deadline is **March 1** for a late May or early June degree conferral.
- ⇒ For summer, the deadline is **July 1** for a September 1 degree conferral.

Further info about [graduation can be found on the QC Hub/Registrar's website](#).

At the end of every spring semester, there is usually an English Department graduation ceremony that follows the campus-wide commencement ceremony. You will receive an announcement with more details via the MA listserv. Students who graduated the previous fall, as well as students graduating in the summer, are welcome to participate in the annual ceremony.

Nancy Comley Prize

Named for the late long-standing Chair of the English Department, the Nancy Comley Prize was established in 2012 to honor the best essay written by a QC graduate student in English or English Education. The annual prize is sponsored by the English Department Alumni Fund. The call for essays and submission guidelines are usually distributed in March via the MA listserv. We encourage you to consider submitting your thesis essay for consideration. All currently matriculated English MA, MAT, and MS Ed students, as well as those who had degrees conferred in the most recent summer and fall graduation cycles, are eligible for the prize.

Annual MA Conference

Our annual student-organized English Graduate Conference offers a great opportunity to learn about and participate in an important and vital aspect of academic professional life. The conference typically takes place in April, although planning often begins the previous fall. All members of the MA community are invited to take part, whether as organizers, presenters, or audience members. We especially encourage you to consider presenting from your thesis essays-in-progress. (*Note: Next spring's MA conference may be held in part virtually.*)

ENGLISH 791 – CULMINATING THESIS ESSAY SIGN-UP FORM

Submit this form via email to the Director of Graduate Studies at MAEnglish@qc.cuny.edu.
All information must be **typed**.

Student Information

Name:

CUNY ID # (8-digit):

Contact email:

Committee Information

Advisor:

Reader:

Culminating Thesis Essay Proposal

Working Title:

Please provide a brief proposal for your culminating thesis essay (approx. 250 words), either in the space below or as a separate page. Make this description as specific and focused as you can at this early stage.

Sample Cover Page for Thesis Essay

Main Title of Paper:

Snappy Subtitle with Key Terms

Student's Full Name

Student's 8-digit CUNY ID #

Advisor: Professor's Full Name

Reader: Professor's Full Name

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English
in the Graduate Division of Queens College of the City University of New York,

15 December 2022

ENGLISH MA THESIS APPROVAL FORM

*All information, except the grades and signatures, **MUST** be typed.*

Please make an electronic copy of this form and email it to the Director of Graduate Studies and Kim Smith. Any hard copies can also be left in the DGS's mailbox.

Name of candidate:

CUNY ID # of candidate:

Title of MA thesis essay:

Date of oral exam:

Grade on MA thesis essay:

Please indicate whether the student has passed or failed the oral exam:

_____ Pass

_____ Fail

If revisions are necessary, please specify in detail what revisions are required, along with a deadline for completion:

Signatures

Adviser's signature: _____

Adviser's name (typed):

Second reader's signature: _____

Second reader's name (typed):