

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY

HELMS SCHOOL
of GOVERNMENT

GRADUATE THESIS GUIDE

M.A. in Public Policy (M.A.P.P.)
Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.)
M.S. in Criminal Justice
M.S. in International Relations
M.S. in National Security
M.S. in Political Science

DISCLAIMER

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This version of the thesis guide supersedes all previous versions.

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I. Purpose

This guide describes the general guidelines for completion of the proposal and thesis for Master's degrees in the Helms School of Government, along with the required format for the thesis proposal, the thesis itself, and associated procedures for submission. Also provided are helpful books, websites, and tips for writing, research, and guidance.

All students in the thesis track are encouraged to start thinking about their thesis at an early stage in their master's program studies. It is important to consider your thesis topic early!

II. Eligibility

The Master's thesis is not like an end-of-term paper, but more like a rigorous, degree-encapsulating research project. Students who plan to pursue a Ph.D. or doctoral degree, who may go into a career field where research/writing skills are in demand, or a student who wishes to publish their work should consider the thesis track. In order to be considered for enrollment in thesis courses, students must:

- Have completed 21 hours of course work prior to requesting permission to enroll in the thesis sequence.
- Hold a 3.0 GPA or higher.
- Complete the "[Preliminary Master's Thesis Proposal](#)" form, a Registration Override Request (ROVER) form through Beacon, and gain approval for this preliminary proposal from a Thesis Chair and Reader.
- Submit the "[Application for Enrollment in Thesis Course](#)" with all relevant approvals, and submit it to appropriate departmental staff.

Registration forms should be submitted *one week prior* to the registration deadline for the term in which you wish to take the first course of your thesis sequence.

III. Thesis Committee

Thesis Committees consist of at least two members, a Chair and a Reader. These roles are filled by two different faculty members. Below are the criteria for Chair and Reader participation.

Criteria for Chairs:

- Must possess a terminal degree in the applicable field from a regionally accredited institution,
- Must be approved by Liberty University's Helms School of Government.

Criteria for Readers:

- Must possess a terminal degree in the applicable field from a regionally accredited institution, or have a degree equal to the one being conferred, with appropriate expertise and approval from the Program Director and/or Department Chair,
- Must be approved by Liberty University's Helms School of Government

Qualified Chairs may be from outside the conferring school, department, or university with approval from the Department Chair.

Students considering the thesis option are strongly encouraged to think about candidates for Chair and Reader early in their studies. Students will rely heavily on their Chair for candid feedback on their proposals, research, and analysis. Students will also rely on their Chair for advice about the writing and thesis defense process. Select a Chair whose research interests and personal traits seem to mesh well with your own. Select a Reader whose research interests and/or professional profile seem well suited to help you achieve your own research and professional goals.

It is the responsibility of the student to obtain a Chair and Reader prior to registration for the thesis sequence. The [Faculty Reader/Chair Roster](#) acts as a resource for students review a current list of approved faculty and their backgrounds and expertise. Students who need assistance in identifying a Chair or Reader for their Thesis Committee should contact HSOGDoctoralPrograms@liberty.edu for assistance.

IV. Thesis Topics

A thesis is intended to demonstrate the student's ability to successfully conduct original research. Theses are often designed to solve practical problems and to answer professionally relevant research questions; they also generally deal with underlying theoretical, philosophical, or ethical issues of interest to scholars and professionals in the discipline. The thesis is expected to be of sufficient depth that (in edited form) it could be presented for publication in a professional academic outlet. The master's thesis should offer evidence of sound research and a robust treatment of a well-defined subject. A mere essay or compilation of facts will not be accepted. The thesis must be written on a subject under the cognate area in which the student is seeking a degree.

In choosing a thesis topic, the student should first prepare a Preliminary Master's Thesis Research Proposal, and seek approval for that preliminary proposal from their Thesis Committee. After the Preliminary Master's Thesis Research Proposal is approved, the student can collaborate with their Chair and move into the process of writing and submitting the formal Thesis Proposal. The Thesis Committee reserves the right to refuse a thesis topic and request the student to reevaluate their topic.

It is the responsibility of the student to conduct original research and present well-organized analysis and findings. This is not the responsibility of the Thesis Chair, who merely serves in an advisory role. Students should seek assistance from the Graduate Writing Center and Library should they need instruction in writing and research of their thesis. The Graduate Writing Center will only review the written thesis once. Please review information about the Graduate Writing Center (posted online) with regard to the thesis process and take advantage of their resources.

V. Thesis Courses

Beginning in Fall 2021, the thesis course sequence will include 3 courses: 688 (Thesis Proposal), 689 (Thesis Research), and 690 (Thesis Defense). 690 is 0 credit hours. Students on prior academic year DCPs will follow the former 689/690 thesis sequence. Details on each thesis sequence can be found below.

2017-2020 DCP Sequence

For students who began their Master's degree in Spring 2021 or earlier, there are two courses in the thesis sequence: 689 (Thesis Proposal and Research), and 690 (Thesis Defense). Before admission to the 689 course, the student will secure a Thesis Chair and a Reader, who will serve as their Thesis Committee. During the 689 course the student is expected to complete their proposal and secure the approval of their Thesis Committee (see [Section VIII](#)).

The student will then conduct research and analysis during the 689 course, keeping the Thesis Chair aware of the progress of research. If research and analysis is not completed during the 689 course, students will be expected to re-enroll in 689 (see [Section VI](#)).

Before enrolling in the 690 course, the student will need to complete the "Application to Defend Master's Thesis" form. The student's thesis does not need to be complete at the time this form is completed and submitted, but the Thesis Chair, Reader, and student should be agreed that any remaining analysis, and the final production of the thesis document, can be completed with enough time for Chair and Reader to prepare for the day of the Thesis Defense. (In no case will the "Application to Defend Master's Thesis" be approved if data collection is not complete.) If the student cannot complete the final thesis document with sufficient time for Chair and Reader to prepare for the day of the Thesis Defense, the student may need to re-enroll in the 690 course.

2021-2022 DCP Sequence

For students who either began their Master's degree in Fall 2021 or completed a degree/cognate change after Summer 2021 will follow the updated thesis sequence. There are three courses in this sequence: 688 (Thesis Proposal), 689 (Thesis Research), and 690 (Thesis Defense). Before admission to the 688 course, the student will secure a Thesis Chair and a Reader, who will serve as their Thesis Committee. During the 689 course the student is expected to complete their proposal and secure the approval of their Thesis Committee (see [Section VIII](#)).

Students enrolled in 688 will complete their thesis proposal and obtain IRB approval. A thesis proposal should include the following elements:

- Cover Page
- Purpose Statement & Significance
- Preliminary Literature Review
- Statement of Research Problem
- Research Question
- Methodology

- Reference List

Once the student successfully completes their proposal they will progress in 689, where they will complete their data collection and analysis. Students are expected to keep the Thesis Chair aware of the progress of research. If research and analysis is not completed during the 689 course, students will be expected to re-enroll in 689 (see [Section VI](#)).

Before enrolling in the 690 course, the student will need to complete the “Application to Defend Master's Thesis” form. The student's thesis does not need be complete at the time this form is completed and submitted, but the Thesis Chair, Reader, and student should be agreed that any remaining analysis, and the final production of the thesis document, can be completed with enough time for Chair and Reader to prepare for the day of the Thesis Defense. (In no case will the “Application to Defend Master's Thesis” be approved if data collection is not complete.) If the student cannot complete the final thesis document with sufficient time for Chair and Reader to prepare for the day of the Thesis Defense, the student may need to re-enroll in the 690 course.

VI. Reenrollment

When working on the thesis, maintaining continuous enrollment is vital. Any student who is enrolled in a thesis course and does not complete their proposal or defend their thesis to a point deemed acceptable by the student's Committee will be required to enroll in that course again in the next term, paying relevant tuition and course fees.

The student can repeat the 689 course twice after taking it the first time. If the student needs to repeat 689 more than twice, this will require special permission from the Program Director or Department Chair. The student can repeat the 690 course once after taking it the first time. If the student needs to repeat 690 more than once, this will require special permission from the Program Director or Department Chair.

VII. Conflicts and Appeals

Conflicts with Chairs and Readers and grade appeals will be handled in accordance with the academic policy for Liberty University. There is no appeal of decisions rendered by the Thesis Committee on the Thesis Proposal, nor is there any provision for removal or termination of Thesis Chairs or Readers due to disagreements regarding their academic judgments.

VIII. Thesis Requirements

Outlined below are the general requirements for thesis papers regarding length, content, formatting, and style.

Length & Content

There are no maximum page requirements for a Master's thesis; although, the length of the paper should reflect the scope of the topic, the amount of literature to be reviewed, and relevant methodological issues.

The Chair will have the final say as to what content is appropriate in the Master's thesis, but in general any thesis will include the following:

- Title Page
- Signature Page
- Abstract
- Dedication/Acknowledgement
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables
- List of Figures
- List of Abbreviations, Manuscript Chapters, References, Appendices

The thesis will be divided into chapters. **Note that not all theses will have the same chapter titles or the same number of chapters – this depends on the nature of the study.**

Format & Style

The body of the paper should be written in APA style.

- Margins: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1.5 inch on the left side (for binding purposes). 1.5 inch top margins for the prefatory pages, for the first page of each chapter, and for the first page of the references.
- Font and Justifications: Times New Roman, 12 point font. Text within the body of the manuscript should be left-justified.
- Page Numbering and Count: Page numbers are centered, 1 inch from the bottom of the page. The prefatory pages are numbered using Roman Numerals; the body of the dissertation is numbered using Arabic numerals. The counting of pages begins with the title page; however, the page number is not put on the title page. The copy right page, the signature page, and the abstract page are not counted nor numbered. The dedication page is the first page after the title page that is counted and numbered (i.e. ii).

For more information regarding formatting, please see the [Appendix A – Editing Checklist](#).

IX. Thesis Components

The components necessary to successfully complete a Master's thesis includes the research, IRB approval (if needed), and drafting of the thesis proposal.

Research

All research will be overseen by the student's Chair, but the student is ultimately responsible for the design, execution, and analysis of that research. The Chair will ensure that research follows the policies of Liberty University and as outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB guidelines for student research are as follows (IRB website <http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=12606>)

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Student Research

When students begin their research project, they should follow the outline below. Other questions may be answered by the [IRB Frequently Asked Questions page](#).

1. *Determine if an IRB review is needed.*

Masters Theses and dissertations that involve human subjects or secondary/archival data require an IRB review. If you are unsure if your project fits this description, consult with your thesis Chair.

2. *Secure a faculty sponsor.*

For your thesis, your faculty sponsor will be your Chair.

3. *View the "Avoiding Pitfall" link under Resources on our home page.*

Many times, simple modifications to a design can prevent delay (or the need for resubmission) in the IRB application process. You are encouraged to read each of the tips in the [Avoiding Pitfalls](#) section.

4. *Complete and submit your IRB Application.*

The IRB now utilizes an electronic submission platform called Cayuse, which is accessible through Liberty's [IRB website](#). The candidates' and chairs' LU credentials are pre-loaded to provide access to Cayuse. In order to ensure that your IRB submission includes all necessary information, please download and utilize the IRB Checklist throughout this process.

Once the candidate completes their IRB submission through Cayuse, the candidate should notify their Chair to review it. Once the chair logs into Cayuse, the candidate's study will be listed on the dashboard there. The Chair will review the IRB application to check for accuracy and completion. If revisions are needed, your Chair will route the form back to you through Cayuse; if no revisions are needed, the Chair will approve the IRB application and provide a signature through Cayuse. IRB will notify you through Cayuse to let you know if there are any revisions that need to be addressed or if the application is approved.

Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal is the background and planning document for the thesis. It must be professional and thorough, and it must be a product of the student's own original thought and effort. Use of others' work must be properly referenced in accordance with the APA guidelines.

The thesis proposal should be between 15 - 20 pages, not including the cover page or references. However, the length will vary according to the demands of each thesis and will ultimately be at the discretion of the thesis Chair. At a minimum, it will include the following, in APA format:

- Cover Page (with working title);
- Introduction to the proposed topic;
- Purpose and Significance (why the paper will add to the body of knowledge in the discipline);
- Statement of the research problem (including relevant research questions);
- Literature Review (assessing relevant scholarship which informs the thesis);
- Methodology (overview of whether the study will be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed, its justification, and what exact methods are to be used);
- Working Reference List

The proposal should be written in accordance with the APA manual (students should contact the writing center, or visit the graduate writing center website, with questions regarding the APA formatting and guidelines). Electronic references (including Tweets, Facebook, Blog, and other online sources) should be formatted as described in the APA guidelines. The proposal also should be preceded by a title page.

Margins: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1.5 inch on the left side (for binding purposes). 1 inch top margins for the prefatory pages, for the first page of each chapter, and for the first page of the references.

Font and Justification: Times New Roman, 12 point font. Text within the body of the manuscript should be left-justified.

Thesis Proposal Acceptance

The thesis Chair (and/or readers) will review the proposal and respond to the student with either: (1) Accepted; (2) Conditionally Accepted; or (3) Rejected. Proposals that are Conditionally Accepted or Rejected must be revised or rewritten and submitted to the Chair by the due date given.

Submission Procedures & Deadlines

Before completing 689: Thesis Proposal and Research, the student must present the Thesis Chair with a final draft of the thesis, on or before the deadline assigned by the Chair. This deadline should give Committee members a reasonable amount of time to review, comment, and confer with one another regarding the proposal. If revisions are required, the revised thesis should be delivered to the Chair by the submission due date given.

Prior to requesting permission to enroll in 690: *Thesis Defense*, the student must complete and submit the “[Application to Defend Master’s Thesis](#),” obtaining approval from Chair and Reader that the thesis will be ready for final defense during the student’s requested term of enrollment in 690. The student may have minor revisions to make at the time of requesting enrollment in 690, and during the course, the student may finalize their analysis and prepare their thesis for final presentation. **In no case will students be permitted to enroll in 690 if data collection is incomplete.**

X. Thesis Defense

After the student is granted admission to 690: *Thesis Defense*, the student will prepare to present and defend the thesis orally before the Committee. Working with the Chair, the student will arrange the date, time and location to present a final defense. The thesis defense should last 1 to 3 hours. Once the date, time and location are confirmed the student will need to complete and email the Defense Announcement Form to the departmental contact listed on the Helms School of Government website. (Please see [Appendix D – Final Defense Announcement](#).) Defense of online student's thesis may be accomplished via Microsoft Teams.

Defense Day

Most defenses will be done online via webinar or some similar format. Basic questions that will be posed to the student regarding the thesis will include questions on the design of their study, outcomes of their research, choice of methods, other research in the field, and analysis. The student will need to be prepared to answer questions regarding all aspects of their methodologies, findings, and conclusions included in the thesis. The student is also required to bring a hard copy of the thesis manuscript to the defense for each committee member.

During the defense, students must dress in proper business attire in compliance with the [Helms School of Government dress code](#). The student will be given appropriate time (expect 20-30 minutes) to present an overview of their thesis. A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation is required and should be sent to the Chair at least one week prior to the defense. Again, the PowerPoint may be presented virtually. The presentation needs to include an overview of the study's purpose and significance (both practical and empirical), the methods, the analysis, the results, limitations, discussion of the findings, and suggestions for future research.

Following the presentation, the student will be presented questions by the Thesis Committee. Two rounds of questions will be posed by the committee after which any visitors may be allowed to ask questions at the discretion of the Chair. Any committee member who cannot attend the final defense must, in advance, submit questions in writing to the Chair. The Chair will read the questions and ensure that they are answered by the student to the satisfaction of the other committee members. If a committee member is absent without submitting questions in advance, the thesis defense must be rescheduled.

Following the student's presentation and the rounds of questions, the final defense will be adjourned and the student and any visitors will be asked to leave the room. The committee will make a decision based on the following categories:

- ***Accepted:*** The thesis may require typographical or minor editorial corrections to be made to the satisfaction of the Chair.
- ***Accepted with modifications:*** The thesis requires minor changes in substance or major editorial changes which are to be made to the satisfaction of members of the Thesis Committee designated by the Committee. The Thesis Committee's report must include a brief outline of the nature of the changes required, the date by which the changes are to be completed, and the consequences if the student fails to comply.

- **Accepted conditionally:** The thesis requires more substantive changes, but will be acceptable when these changes are made to the satisfaction of the members of the Thesis Committee designated by the Committee. The Thesis Committee's report must include a brief outline of the nature of the changes required, the date by which the changes are to be completed, and the consequences if the student fails to comply.
- **Decision deferred:** The thesis requires modifications of a substantial nature the need for which makes the acceptability of the thesis questionable. The Thesis Committee's report must contain a brief outline of modifications required, the date by which the changes are to be completed, and the consequences if the student fails to comply. The revised thesis must be re-submitted to the Committee for reexamination. The reexamination will follow the same procedures as for the initial submission. This decision is only open once for each candidate.
- **Rejected:** The thesis is rejected. The Chair of the examination will report the reasons for rejection and advise the student on the suitability of the candidate continuing in the Master's thesis track.

Subsequently, the student will be invited to reenter the room (or call back in, if it is a webinar) and the final decision of the committee will be conveyed to the student. After the final defense is finished, the Chair will complete the Final Thesis Defense Decision Form (Please see [Appendix E](#)) and will deliver it to the student with the necessary signatures. Changes may be required to the thesis after the final defense. Once these changes have been completed, the student must submit the final thesis to the Chair. Once the final thesis is approved, the chair determines a final grade for 690: Thesis Defense. The grade should not be provided until all edits are complete and the final document is submitted to the library through the digital commons system, detailed in Section XI.

XI. Final Submission

Upon approval from the Chair, the student will follow the Scholars Crossing guidelines for publication. These guidelines must be strictly followed and can be accessed at Theses and Dissertation Publishing [Guidelines](#).

The candidate is required to furnish bound copies of his/her thesis to the chair, the committee members, and the Helms School of Government (completed through [this link](#)). The student must select cover color 490, gold lettering for the cover, title printed on the spine and the cover, and single-sided printing option.

XII. Dates & Deadlines

The student should follow submission deadlines set by their Chair. It is strongly encouraged that the student set a timeline in order to reach completion of their thesis within their desired graduation time. Here is a template for a thesis student timeline:

Personal Time Schedule		
Date	Item to be submitted	Date Submitted

It is strongly suggested that students remain in contact with their Chair during the proposal process as not to miss deadlines. Students who are not in contact with their Chair and showing satisfactory progress may not be permitted to register for an additional research and proposal term should they miss a deadline. This situation might affect graduate assistantships, financial aid status, and potentially delay completion of the program should it occur.

XIII. Bibliography

Eggenchwiler, Jean. (1997). Cliffs Quick Review; *Writing: Grammar, Usage, and Style*.

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project Handbook. University Writing Program, Writing Aids.

Liberty University Helms School of Government Dissertation Guide.

Liberty University School of Education Dissertation Guide.

https://community.liberty.edu/Academics/School_Education/Dissertations/default.aspx.

Liberty University Writing Program Thesis/Dissertation Guidelines.

<http://www.liberty.edu/academics/graduate/writing/index.cfm?PID=12268>.

Liberty University Jerry Falwell Library (JFL).

<https://libguides.liberty.edu/c.php?g=749313&p=5480729>.

Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliffs Notes. USBN: 0-49086-05367-8. Liberty University Faculty Handbook (July, 2011).

XIV. Appendices

Appendix A: Editing Checklist

Formatting	Y	N	Comments
Page order: The order of the pages is as follows: Title page, Signature page, Abstract, Dedication/ Acknowledgement (optional), Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, List of Abbreviations, Manuscript Chapters, References, Appendices.			
Margins: The margins for all chapters of the Thesis are as follows: 1 inch at the top and bottom, 1 inch on the right side, and 1.5 inch on the left side (for binding purposes). 1 inch top margins for the prefatory pages, for the first page of each chapter, and for the first page of the references.			
Text and Justification: All text is Times New Roman, 12 point font. Text within the body of the manuscript should be left justified.			
Page Counts and Numbers: Page numbers are centered, 1 inch from the bottom of the page. The prefatory pages are numbered using Roman Numerals; the body of the dissertation is numbered using Arabic numerals. The counting of pages begins with the title page; however, the page number is not put on the title page. The copy right page, the signature page, and the abstract page are not counted nor numbered. The dedication page is the first page after the title page that is counted and numbered (i.e. ii).			
Title Page: The title page includes the title of the manuscript, the author, the university supervising the research, and the date completed. The title should reflect the research completed and should be 10 words or less. 1 inch top margins are used; a running head is NOT included.			
Abstract: The abstract clearly and succinctly summarizes the contents of the manuscript and is 120 words or less. It is contained on a separate page following the title and signature page. The word "ABSTRACT" should be in all-caps and a Level 1 heading, centered, 1.5 inches from the top of the page.			
Table of Contents: The Table of Contents lists the various chapters and subsections of the manuscript along with their page numbers. The table of contents includes the acknowledgement, list of tables, list of figures, CHAPTER TITLES (all caps), REFERENCES (all caps), and APPENDICES (all caps). It is justified left. The subsections included are to be level 1 and level 2 headings within the manuscript. Level 1 headings are indented one-half inch. Entries should be double spaced. Page numbers are inserted in the footer, centered, lowercase roman numerals.			

List of Tables: The List of Tables cite the tables and the corresponding pages of each table. The title of this page is a Level 1 heading, centered, 1.5 inches from the top of the page. Entries are double spaced. Page number is inserted in the footer, centered, lowercase roman numerals.			
List of Figures: The List of Figures cites the figures and the corresponding pages of each figure. The title of this page is a Level 1 heading, centered, 1.5 inches from the top of the page. Entries are double spaced. Page number is inserted in the footer, centered, lowercase roman numerals.			
List of Abbreviations: The List of Abbreviations identifies the phrase and corresponding abbreviation or acronym used. The list should be in alphabetical order. Each phrase should be listed and the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses [e.g. Higher Education (HE)]. The title of this page is a Level 1 heading, centered, 1.5 inches from the top of the page. Entries are double spaced. Page number is inserted in the footer, centered, lowercase roman numerals.			
Chapters: The chapter numbers are written rather than in numerical form. The entire chapter titles are capitalized, centered, 1.5 inches from the top of the page. Titles longer than one line are single spaced.			
APA, Grammar & Spelling	Y	N	Comments
Style: The entire manuscript, including references, follows APA standards.			
Grammar: Proper grammar is used (e.g. verb tense consistent throughout, minimal usage of “to be” verbs, pronoun-antecedent agreement and subject-verb agreement, parallel construction, varied in structure, rhythm, and length, full sentences).			
Punctuation: Punctuation is used correctly and follows the rules outlined in the APA manual.			
Spelling: The manuscript is free from misspelled words.			
Word Choice: Word choice is clear, concise, and precise. Jargon, figures of speech, anthropomorphism, editorial “we” and colloquialism avoided. Non-biased language is used.			
Voice: Active voice is primarily used throughout the manuscript.			
Quotes: Quotes are cited correctly (over 50 words are formatted as a block quote).			
Numbers: APA rules for numbers are used.			
Tables and Figures: If tables and figures are used, they are formatted in APA style.			
Flow of Thought: Paragraph & Sentence Structure	Y	N	Comments
The writing is logical, organized, and coherent fashion. The paragraphs flow smoothly from one to another and transitional sentences used between paragraphs.			

Paragraphs have a thesis sentences. All sentences within the paragraph support the thesis sentence.			
Sentences are clear and concise (e.g. look at one or two of the sentences and consider if they could be written using less words without losing meaning). Redundancy is avoided.			

Appendix B: Writing Tips

(An outline with references from *Writing: Grammar, Usage, and Style* by Jean Eggenschwiler.)

Collegiate writing involves mainly the following elements: reporting information, providing instruction, explaining a process, arguing a position, proving a point, or analyzing a text, theory, attitude, or event. Most of the collegian's writing will focus on argument and analysis.

Understand

When approaching your writing, it is best to keep your point or purpose in mind as you develop your paper. You will want to 'start with the end in mind' and understand the direction/ point your research material needs to support and develop your topics to meet that end goal.

Balance

Remember that you will want to balance your topic.

For instance, if you are arguing the need for a reform, then you will want to understand and state the current policies, give supporting argument for change in those policies, and point toward your end goal of reformation.

You will want to balance the amount of explanation of current policies and the research detailing the need for a change in those policies. Picture a pie, everyone likes their equal share of a pie and does not want to receive less than anyone else. It is the same with writing, equal portions assist in supporting and moving your writing along while keeping your audience's attention.

Audience

It is highly important to write with your audience in mind. Many writers forget who they are writing for.

In the collegiate atmosphere, you are writing to individuals who have spent years studying and writing on the same topics that you are developing your paper to address. If you were writing for someone who knew nothing of your topic, you might give definitions for area specific terms, with the realization that someone outside of that field of study might not understand what that term is; but, with collegiate writing, you can safely work with the assumption that you will be addressing like-minded individuals with vast experience and knowledge in that field.

Helpful questions to ask yourself, before writing, to identify your audience are:

- Am I writing for a person in particular field of study (Psychology, English literature, Genetics, Sport, etc.)? [Tip: This can be helpful in examining whether or not you will need to relate your topic across more than one field of study for understanding.]
- Will they have prior knowledge of the terminology and concepts I will be discussing? (Yes: Keep your definitions to a minimum. No: Define as if they have never heard of your work before.)
- Will I need to provide extensive background information on my topic or will a detailed summary be enough? (Expert in the field: Give a detailed summary. Novice: Give an extensive background.)

- What is the reading level of my audience, will they need a more simplified vocabulary or will they understand more technical and precise language? (If your audience is in middle school, then they might not understand words like ‘Eschatology’, but would understand ‘The Study of the End Times’. If your audience is a bible professor in seminary, then use the word Eschatology, they will know the meaning without explanation.)
- Will my audience agree or disagree to my point of view? (If you are writing your paper as an argument you will want to keep your language to sway others in support of your view, and not argue against yourself.)

Keep in mind that you will not want to address an expert in a field of study as though they are a fifth grader who has never heard of your topic!

Organizing Your Writing

Getting started can be difficult, but you can do simple things to help organize your materials, which will in return help your writing to be more organized. Below is helpful information in starting, moving through, and completing the writing process.

Develop an Outline

Developing a true outline of your paper will help you to not only organize your thoughts, but your research and topics/talking points, as well.

Example:

A Need for Reformation in the 20th Century Evangelical Church

- I. The first reformation in the church came in XXXX...
 - a. What brought about the first church reformation?
 - b. How has that affected the Evangelical Church?
 - c. What is the impact on evangelism and the church at this time due to the reformation?
 - d. When does this reformation turn and spur another need for reformation in the church?
- II. The next noted reformation of the church occurred in XXXX---
 - a. What brought about this reformation?
 - b. How did that affect the Evangelical Church?
 - c. How did that affect evangelism in that time and the church?
 - d. Where are we now that would support a new reformation of the evangelical church?
- III. A call for reformation in the 20th Century Evangelical Church
 - a. Where the church or society is spiritually, compared to the past, to support a need for reformation?
 - b. How would we support reformation in the current evangelical church?
 - c. What would the lessons we need to take from previous reformations and decline of the evangelical church in today’s society?

Outlines can be adapted to support chapters of a Master’s Thesis. Each question posed can be a chapter or point needing support in the paper. [Tip: By using an outline you allow yourself to be

directed in your research and writing, and allow for flexibility should you not find research to support a point. You can easily substitute or eliminate that point without losing focus on your topic, and maintain balance in your writing.

Writing

Decide on your topic. Choose a topic appropriate to the length of your paper and that interests you. You want a topic that is sufficiently broad to be robust but not too broad so to hinder your matriculation through the thesis process. Hence, a master's thesis could involve a broad topic such as "A Need for Reformation in the 20th Century Evangelical Church" versus a narrow topic such as "The Reformed 20th Century Evangelical Church Model".

The first can be a good document with well-developed topics and discussions on Reformation of the 20th Century Evangelical Church, the latter would be a narrow discussion paper not nearly suitable for a Master's Thesis. [Tip: When choosing your topic you may need to do some brief, early research to ensure that there is sufficient material to cover your topic and present a well-formed Master's Thesis. If you start developing your paper and find that your research is not of sufficient breadth then do not fear changing your topic.]

Explore the research and written material available on your topic. A frequent mistake in writing is failing to provide sufficient examples and evidence that give detailed support of your talking point, topic, and thesis. General, unsupported statements and points are unconvincing and uninteresting.

Take notes while you are reading your research (be sure to write down the citation for your notes, this will assist you in avoiding plagiarism should you incorporate any part of that note in your writing).

The notes, and research associated with them, may never appear in your writing, but may further help you direct the topic you are discussing. [Tip: Keep an on-going citation list (already in APA format) of all of your reference materials that you have reviewed.

This will allow you to easily reference the materials you have used for research and keep you from having to locate a citation when you are finished. This also assists you in avoiding plagiarism.

Formulate your Thesis (main idea) and decide on the points you want to make to support that idea. Your thesis should require you to express a position on your topic and defend that position with research and written materials. [Tip: Write your thesis (or your end goal) at the top of a paper and put each point you wish to make as an outline for organizing your research for later writing.]

Develop your written thesis statement to summarize the argument you will pose and support with your research in order to support your main topic.

Start selecting detailed research and written material that supports the points you want to make in your writing (this will involve a lot of reading and research). [Tip: When you gather your print materials, organize them under each topic that you want to use to support your main thesis. This will later assist you in writing your paper and organizing your thoughts.]

Once you have collected your data, decide on the order you want to present your data. [Tip: Keep the balance of your paper in mind, if you have bulky amounts of data for one point, try breaking that

point into smaller discussion areas to assist your reader along. Adjust your outline according to those discussion areas.]

Using your data arranged according to your outline, discussion points, and end goal, start writing your first draft, following your outline, and include references for your gathered materials.

Edit. You will not edit less than 3 times before moving into the final draft phase of your writing. When editing keep in mind:

- Content: Do I have sufficient information to support my topics and end goal? Should I gather more research to support any point?
- Style: Am I writing to my audience, is there anything that needs more detailed explanation in order to get my point across better? Are there any areas in which my audience may not understand the topic I am discussing?
- Mechanics: Grammar, word usage, sentence structure, punctuation, formatting for APA, and organization. You will need help here, we all do! This is where your editor comes in handy, use them, abuse them, take them baked goods. Hand your paper to buddies to read and point out things. All of these techniques are important to formatting a well written paper. You have looked at your writing for weeks and will become blind to your own mistakes, having extra eyes will allow you to present a more polished and well written paper. Remember, even the most accomplished writer uses editors to achieve their finished product. [Tip: Cite as you write. It is easy to forget where a quote or referenced material comes from, so cite it as you are writing it, it will make the editing process easier in the end.]

Helpful Websites

www.owl.english.purdue.edu (Great for APA tips and writing help also.)

www.grammar.quickanddirtytips.com (Grammar Girl) (*Also available as podcasts*)

Write the FINAL DRAFT: Yes, even after all those eyes have looked at and wrote all over your hard work, you will need to edit again. Take all of the feedback and give your paper a serious look. Change the mechanics where needed. Address anything that is not clear in your topics, adjust wording to ease the readers progress through your paper. All of this will benefit you in the end. Then, have your final finalized. This involves one more look by an outsider. Allow them to mark it up, and make those adjustments (this is your big visit to the writing center).

FINAL: You are ready, you are formatted, you have made your points, you have noted your research and documents properly, your grammar is fluid, your punctuation is right, you are understood, and you have made your point. It is time to hand in your work.

Appendix C: Plagiarism

Plagiarism is not just using someone else's words, but using someone's ideas also. When you are referencing, even briefly, someone's thoughts or ideas on a topic, even if it is not their direct words, you must cite them. If you are in doubt as to whether or not to cite a work, cite it. You are better safe than sorry.

All students should review the Power Point Presentation by Dr. Emily Heady of the Online Writing Center: https://www.liberty.edu/media/1171/Writing_With_Integrity.pdf, along with other available writing resources.

Resources

- Online Writing Center: <https://www.liberty.edu/online/casas/writing-center/>
- Fair Use and the Fair Use Checklist: <https://www.liberty.edu/library/fair-use/>
- JFL "Using Sources" Presentations: <https://libguides.liberty.edu/c.php?g=749313&p=5480729>.

Liberty University's Plagiarism Policy can be found in the [Online Honor Code](#) on pages 4-5.

Appendix D: Final Defense Announcement

Please Specify the Location of Defense: _____

Defense Date and Time: _____

Thesis Title: _____

Abstract:

Biographical Information:

Print Name (Candidate)	Signature (Candidate)	Date
Print Name (Chair)	Signature (Chair)	Date
Print Name (Reader)	Signature (Reader)	Date

Please submit this completed form to your Department Chair.

(This document is sourced from the Liberty University School of Education.)

Appendix E: Final Defense Decision Form

HELMS SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

(Circle degree program)

Master of Science

Master of Arts

Master of Public Administration

LUID Number: _____

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Student Signature: _____

DATE: _____

THESIS TITLE:

Committee Decision:

Explain Decision (as applicable):

List revisions needed:

Chair Signature: _____

Reader Signature: _____

Reader 2 Signature (*if applicable*): _____