

Script Defense | Comprehensive Exams | Thesis Project | Guidelines

Introduction

For their thesis project, students will write and direct an original film, based on an original or adapted screenplay written by the student. Students must own full rights to any adaptation. Thesis films will have a recommended running time of 17-20 minutes and a maximum running time of 25 minutes.

Timeline

Details on these items can be found in the sections below.

Second Year:

November 1st: Thesis Committee Form Due

by February 1st: Draft of the script and proposal due to all members of the committee

Second week of March: Script Defense Meeting. The Notice of Intent to Complete a Master's Thesis and the Petition for Candidacy are due upon successful defense of the script and proposal

Friday of Final Exam Week: Comprehensive Examination

Third Year:

by September 15th: Submit production book to chair for approval

by December 15th: Screen string out for the committee chair

by February 1st: Screen completed picture cut for full committee

by March 15th: Screen completed picture and sound cut for full committee

by Monday after Spring Break: Completed thesis film, production proposal with script, and production book due

Weekend after Spring Break: Public screening of thesis film

Following week: Thesis defense meeting

Two weeks before graduation: Signed routing form, two unbound copies of production proposal with script on bond paper and signed thesis approval pages, and two playable standard definition DVDs due to Graduate Office (Torreyson 328)

Choosing a Committee

-By November 1st of the third semester of study a student will have chosen a thesis advisor (committee chair) and a committee. The committee will be comprised of a minimum of three members: the thesis chair (who must be a Digital Filmmaking faculty member), a second member of the Digital Filmmaking faculty, and a third member who may either be from the Digital Filmmaking faculty or another department's graduate faculty (this also includes graduate faculty from the Theatre Program). It is the student's responsibility to ask specific faculty members if they are willing to serve on their

committee. Once the committee is chosen, the Graduate Thesis Committee Form should be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies.

Should students wish to change the members of their graduate committee, they must submit a Change in Graduate Thesis Committee Form to the Director of Graduate Studies. The form must be signed by the committee chair, the outgoing committee member, and the incoming committee member.

Once a student chooses a thesis committee chair, that faculty member becomes the student's new advisor. A student must have the advisor's consent to enroll in courses each semester.

Script Defense

-During the fourth semester of study, the student will submit a script and a production proposal that must be approved by the thesis committee. The script will detail the student's proposed film and provide the opportunity for review and feedback from the committee. The production proposal will provide the student's vision for the film in terms of style, casting, and locations. The committee may require revisions prior to approval. There are three possible outcomes at the script defense: the script passes as is, the script passes but with revisions to be approved by the committee chair, or the script does not pass and must be revised and presented to the committee at a later meeting. Once the script has passed, any significant modifications to the script require the approval of the student's committee. Script passage does not guarantee successful passage of the final thesis project.

The script and production plan will be submitted to the committee in a formal meeting. Professional attire is expected. Graduate students are required to make an oral defense of their script, providing committee members the opportunity to evaluate the student's knowledge and understanding of the proposal as well as the student's ability to reason and present logical explanations to questions related to the completion of the proposed

-Students must show a draft of the script and proposal to all members of the committee by February 1st.

-Normally, the script proposal defense takes place in early March. The meeting is scheduled well in advance. All students are expected to defend their script during the same week. The final version of the script and proposal must be turned in by the deadline established by the graduate director, usually about ten days before the defense week.

-Students must pass the script defense in order to take the comprehensive examination. A student who has not passed the script defense by the time of the comprehensive examination will have to wait to take the exam until the next semester in which it is given (Fall and Spring only).

-The script should be approximately 20 pages with a maximum of 30 pages and conform to all formatting guidelines and stylistic features of the standardized spec script.

-The purpose of the production proposal is to ensure that students are taking all aspects of the thesis film into consideration as they develop their project. The proposal will also be used as a benchmark to discuss during the filmmaking process and ultimate defense of the final film.

The proposal should be approximately 10-15 pages (1.5 inch left margin, 1 inch all other margins, double spacing, upper right hand corner pagination).

Elements of the Proposal and Script Submission

1. Title Page
2. Approval Sheet (not required until thesis defense)
3. Statement of Permission to Use (not required until thesis defense)
4. Abstract - Executive Summary about the elements of the proposal (no longer than one page; printed on its own page)
5. Table of Contents
 - a. Starting with the abstract, all pages before and including the table of contents should be numbered with roman numerals. Starting with the artist's statement, pages should be numbered in Arabic numerals. Numbering should restart with the script, preserving the script's normal page numbering.
6. Artist's Statement
 - a. This is about the filmmaker rather than the film. Discuss your goals as a filmmaker in general. Why have you chosen to be a filmmaker? How do you expect to use your skills as a filmmaker for your career?
 - b. Discuss your personal objective of the film being produced for the Thesis (besides fulfilling the requirements for the degree of course). Why are you doing this film? Is there a personal and/or intellectual goal driving the development of your film?
7. Production Treatment
 - a. Story Summary—one or two paragraphs summarizing the plot of the film
 - b. Concept Statement – this is your one to two sentence pitch that encapsulates the story and style of your film (basically the film's logline)
 - c. Intended Audience and Genre
 - d. Scenery and/or Location Needs
 - e. Required Resources - Camera(s), Lighting, Audio, Studio, etc.

- f. Limitations/Challenges
 - i. Describe known limitations and challenges for the project. This may include budget constraints, talent availability, equipment restrictions, etc.
 - ii. Other limitations could exist in facility or infrastructure use and availability.
 - g. Style
 - i. Mise en scene – production design, costumes, props, locations, etc.
 - ii. Cinematography – composition, camera movement, tonal qualities, etc.
 - iii. Editing – pace, rhythm, etc.
 - iv. Sound – music, sound effects, etc.
8. A Business and Marketing Plan – This section should detail basic aspects of how you plan to finance, promote, and market your film. At minimum it should include discussion of the following:
- a. A budget. This should be a rough estimate of the budget using standard motion picture industry formatting and categories (the proposal turned in at the thesis defense should also include a detailed pre-production budget and a final budget comparing the projected costs with the actual costs)
 - b. A fundraising plan. How will you secure the funds called for in your budget?
 - c. A trailer
 - d. A website
 - e. Graphic design for posters and other potential merchandise
9. Literature Review – This section is required for films that rely on research, such as historical, scientific, technological, and/or location references.
- a. Briefly discuss your sources for information, such as the Internet, library resources, and/or personal interviews.
 - b. Include information regarding which sources were the most useful and provide some insights on how this information informs your script, such as which aspects of the references are most useful and which parts will you omit.
 - c. Bibliography
10. Script Analysis--A breakdown of the film with protagonist's goal for the film, the protagonist's goal for each scene, and a breakdown of action/conflict beats for each scene. This should be formatted as a table, which will allow you to single space and save pages.
11. Final Report - This section is added to the proposal after post-production has completed. This section details how well the finished film accomplished the original vision the student set out to achieve. It should revisit the proposal and discuss how well the completed project matches the original plan. In addition, it

should discuss positives and negatives of the pre-production, production, and post-production process. Finally, it should analyze the completed film discussing its strengths and weaknesses.

12. Script

Petition for Admission to Candidacy and Notice of Intent to Complete a Master's Thesis

-The student must also file a Petition for Admission to Candidacy with the Graduate School. This includes a formal declaration of the student's Program of Study and will be used later by the Graduate School as a check-sheet for graduation. The Petition for Admission to Candidacy and Notice of Intent to Complete a Master's Thesis should be filed at the script defense, to indicate the student's intention to complete a thesis. Students must complete and receive approval for all coursework before beginning thesis hours.

Comprehensive Examination

-By the end of the fourth semester students must complete a comprehensive examination administered by the thesis committee. This must be completed before beginning the thesis project. The comprehensive examination will cover history, theory, and production practices. The comprehensive exam takes place on the Friday of final exam week during the spring semester of the second year. Students are given a list of questions during the third semester, from which the exam questions will be drawn. The exam itself is a one-day, on-site, written exam. The graduate faculty will evaluate the comprehensive exam and give it either a Pass or a Fail.

Students who pass the examination will be able enroll in thesis hours and continue the program. Students who fail will not be allowed to enroll in thesis hours. Failing students must re-take and pass the exam before they will be allowed to enroll in thesis hours and complete the program. A student who fails the comprehensive examination the first time will be allowed to take it twice more. The exam is offered each spring; students who fail the spring exam may retake the exam in August.

Thesis Hours

-Once all of these steps are completed, students are allowed to enroll in thesis hours for their third year (fifth and sixth semesters).

-Students typically enroll in nine hours of thesis production per semester in their third year. Students must complete 18 hours of thesis work to graduate.

-If students complete the 18 hours of required thesis credit, but still have not graduated, they are required to enroll in a minimum of one thesis hour each semester, including

summer, until they graduate. If students do not enroll in the required thesis hours, after the first 18, by the first day of classes of the new semester, they will be enrolled automatically in the one hour option. If students do not wish for this to happen they must appeal for an exemption with the graduate director or withdraw from the university.

-All students enrolled in thesis hours are required to attend a twice monthly meeting (both fall and spring) to update the Graduate Director and fellow students on their progress, as well as to seek advice, ask questions, and assist each other when needed. Students wishing to complete thesis requirements while not in residence may seek an exemption from the Graduate Director.

-After the script has been approved by the student's thesis committee, the student must have a production book approved by the thesis advisor before the student will be allowed access to any university equipment for shooting purposes. The production book should contain the following: script, script analysis, shot lists, completed release forms, script breakdowns, shooting schedules, prop list, costume list, cast and crew list. The production book must be submitted to the thesis chair by September 15th to guarantee access to equipment, and must be approved in order to move forward with production.

-Students are required to have the following crew positions filled by persons other than themselves: Producer/Production Manager (provided by the graduate producing class), First Assistant Director, Script Supervisor, Cinematographer, Camera Operator, Production Designer, Sound Recorder, and Gaffer. Positions may not be doubled. Students must submit a signed crew list of all crew members as part of their production book. Graduate faculty are not allowed to work on thesis films as crew or actors.

-Once the thesis advisor approves the production book, the student will have access to departmental equipment for their thesis shoot. Students are only guaranteed two weeks of access to equipment. In addition, equipment access for production is only guaranteed during the fall semester of the thesis year. Major changes to the schedule must be approved by the thesis chair.

-There is no set or required cost for a thesis film. Because thesis films can be shot in digital video with department equipment, overall budgets should be kept to reasonable levels. The most expensive items on the budget will probably include: craft service; catering; transportation; costumes; props; settings; location rentals; music composition, recording and rights; and publicity materials and festival entry fees. If students choose to use SAG actors they may have salary deferrals to pay.

Thesis projects budgets can vary widely depending upon the film and the student. The university does not provide any funding for thesis projects.

-After shooting is completed, students are required to show their footage to their committee chair by December 15th in order to be eligible to show and defend their thesis in April. The thesis chair must approve the footage before the student can enroll in spring

thesis hours. If the chair feels the footage is not satisfactory, the student must show the footage to the entire committee who will decide whether the student can proceed to post-production or must re-shoot some or all of their footage.

-Students are required to show a completed picture cut to all members of their committee by February 1st, in order to be eligible to show and defend their thesis in April.

--Students are required to show a completed picture and sound cut to all members of their committee by March 15th, in order to be eligible to show and defend their thesis in April.

--Students are required to register their film on Withoutabox and submit their film to a film festival by the Monday prior to the public thesis screening.

--Students are required to submit their film to the Student Academy Awards by the Monday prior to the public thesis screening. The normal deadline for the Student Academy Awards is April 1st.

--Students must have releases for all music, locations, and actors.

Application for Graduation

-The *Application for Graduation* is a separate step from filing the *Petition for Admission to Candidacy* and must be completed by the deadline in the semester in which the student plans to graduate (usually in February for May graduation and includes payment of a graduation fee at the Business Office or the Graduate Office.) The *Application for Graduation* specifies the title of the student's thesis.

Thesis and Thesis Defense

-At the end of the sixth semester, usually in the first and second weeks of April, students must screen their work publicly and defend their thesis to their graduate committee. The screening and defense date will be scheduled well in advance. Students not ready to defend their thesis in April will be given an opportunity to do so in the Fall Semester.

-The thesis defense takes place in two parts. The first is a screening of the thesis project. All thesis projects for that semester will be screened on the same day, usually the first weekend after Spring Break. Students may also screen and defend their project in the Fall semester (the screening generally takes place on the second weekend of November). The screening is open to the public.

The second part is the oral defense, which will be scheduled for the week following the screening. The oral examination is principally a defense of the thesis. This is a formal meeting and professional attire is expected. The defense meeting provides an opportunity for students to present their work to the committee formally and for the committee to

indicate its acceptance or to require further work to make it acceptable. At the oral defense the candidate will present an artistic overview of the project. The artist's statement, final script, and production book must be made available at the oral examination. The committee will then ask questions of the candidate. When the questioning is completed, the committee will deliberate and vote.

There are four possible outcomes at the thesis defense: the thesis project passes with distinction (reserved for projects that meet a high level of achievement), the thesis project passes, the thesis project passes but with revisions to be approved by the committee chair before graduation, or the thesis project does not pass and must be revised and presented to the committee at a later meeting. The deliberation and vote will take place in private. **This defense must be successfully completed in time for the thesis to be in the office of the Graduate Dean at least two weeks prior to the date of graduation.**

Thesis Rubric

To pass with distinction, the thesis project must meet the following requirements:

1. All final semester deadlines must be met (picture lock and sound lock).
2. All thesis items must be turned in by the due date of the screening semester.
3. The student must receive a "Superior" score on a minimum of six categories (a minimum of 22 points) with no scores below satisfactory from the thesis committee.

If the student also has a minimum 3.7 GPA they can graduate with honors.

To pass without revisions, the thesis project must meet the following requirements:

1. All thesis items must be turned in by the due date of the screening semester.
2. The student must receive no scores below satisfactory (a minimum of 16 points) from the thesis committee.

To pass with revision, the thesis project must meet the following requirements:

1. All thesis items must be turned in by the due date of the screening semester.
2. The student must receive no scores below needs revision and score a minimum of 12 points from the thesis committee.

A student who receives any unsatisfactory score or a total score below 12 points from the thesis committee will not pass and cannot graduate that semester.

Story

Superior (3): Film shows clear ability to tell a structured story with interesting, detailed characters in original situations.

Satisfactory (2): Film is understandable, with believable characters in relatable situations.

Needs Revision (1): In general, story is satisfactory, but certain aspects of structure or character need revision to be fully satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory (0): Film shows a muddled, confused structure and unbelievable or clichéd characters.

Directing

Superior (3): Film shows acting with subtlety and sub-text, and scenes and shots are staged in ways that enhance the story.

Satisfactory (2): Most of the acting is believable and uncomplicated, and scenes and shots are staged simply and unremarkably.

Need Revision (1): In general directing is satisfactory, but certain aspects of performance or shot composition and staging need revision to be fully satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory (0): Most of the acting is unbelievable, and/or the staging is non-existent or does not support the scene or story.

Cinematography

Superior (3): The shots and lighting enhance the dramatic intention of the scene and the film.

Satisfactory (2): The shots and lighting are clear, occasionally enhancing the scene or the film.

Needs Revision (1): In general, cinematography is satisfactory, but certain aspects of lighting and/or cinematography need revision to be fully satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory (0): The shots and/or lighting impede or are not supportive of the scene or the film.

Sound

Superior (3): The sound recording is clear and the design brings emotional depth to the scenes.

Satisfactory (2): The sound recording is mostly clear, and the design sounds natural to the scene.

Needs Revision (1): In general, sound is satisfactory, but certain aspects of the sound track, mix, and/or design needs revision to be fully satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory (0): The sound recording is often muddled and unclear, and/or the design sounds foreign to the scene it accompanies.

Editing

Superior (3): Film shows clear ability to tell a structured, well-paced story. Editing enhances the dramatic intention of the scene.

Satisfactory (2): Film is understandable, with generally good pacing. Editing does not impede the dramatic intention of the scene.

Needs Revision (1): In general, editing is satisfactory, but certain aspects of the pacing, structure, and/or dramatic intention of scenes needs revision to be fully satisfactory. Film may also need to be cut to meet time requirements.

Unsatisfactory (0): Film is poorly paced, and/or not clearly structured. Editing impedes the dramatic intention of the scene.

Art Direction

Superior (3): Clear unified choices and design of scenery/locations, set decoration, properties, and costume design that support the story and the overall production value. A clear visual style is evident.

Satisfactory (2): Art direction is consistent throughout the film and supports the story well.

Needs Revision (1): In general art direction is satisfactory, but certain aspects of the scenery/locations, set decoration, and/or costumes are distracting and should be edited out or adjusted via visual effects if possible.

Unsatisfactory (0): The art direction is uninspired and shows poor choices for scenery design/locations, set decoration, properties, and/or costume design. The art direction is distracting and generally lowers the film's overall production value.

Finishing

Superior (3): Visual effects are seamless and/or invisible, there is strong title design that supports the film's style, color correction is consistent, and color grading contributes to the film's style and overall production value.

Satisfactory (2): Visual effects are seamless and/or invisible, title design is appropriate to the film, color correction is consistent, and color grading is

unobtrusive.

Needs Revision (1): In general finishing is satisfactory, but may have issues with one or more of the following: some visual effects need more work or completion. title design does not reflect the film's style, there are serious misspellings in titles and/or credits, color correction is inconsistent in certain scenes, and/or color grading is distracting and/or does not fit the film's style.

Unsatisfactory (0): Visual effects are incomplete or missing to the point that they significantly lower the quality of the film, title design is poor, distracting and/or inappropriate, there are misspellings throughout the titles and/or credits, color correction is inconsistent throughout, and/or color grading is poor, distracting and/or inappropriate.

Proposal and Script

Superior (3): Proposal and script are complete and well written with no or only minor grammatical, typographical, or formatting errors. The proposal is insightful, in depth, and provides a strong analysis of the filmmaking process.

Satisfactory (2): Proposal and script are complete and understandable with only minor grammatical, typographical, or formatting errors. The proposal covers all topics thoroughly.

Needs Revision (1): In general, the proposal and script are satisfactory, but certain aspects of the proposal, including grammar, typography, and/or formatting, as well as thoroughness of assigned topics, needs revision to be fully satisfactory.

Unsatisfactory (0): Proposal and/or script are incomplete, grammar, typography, and/or formatting are full of errors, and assigned topics are not discussed with any thoroughness whatsoever.

-The completed thesis project will include the following elements, which must be submitted by the Monday prior to the public defense screening:

1. A digital version of the film exported as an Apple Pro Res 422LT file on the department server.
2. One pdf copy of the production proposal with all required pages (listed above), a revised business and marketing plan including links to the trailer and website, and a new, added Final Report section. This includes the final script in proper format. This should be e-mailed to all members of the committee.
3. A jpg of the final poster design. This should be e-mailed to all members of the committee.

4. A production book containing all relevant pre-production and production paperwork, including, but not limited to: the budget breakdown (including a comparison between money budgeted and money spent) script breakdown sheets, storyboards, shooting schedule, element lists (props, costumes, etc.), and all necessary release forms (actor, location, music, etc.), as well as creative documents, including shot lists, set plans, and script analysis. The production book must also include printouts of the film's registration on Withoutabox and submission to a film festival.

-Students should bring the routing form and two copies of the thesis approval page on bond paper to the thesis defense. These forms will be signed upon successfully passing the thesis defense. If changes are required they must be made and turned into the committee chair before the signature pages are signed.

Items one, two, and three will be archived and kept for department record keeping. Item four will be returned to the student after the meeting.

-After all corrections requested by the thesis or dissertation committee have been made, the student must submit the following to the Graduate School Office:

- 1) Two copies of the movie on a playable DVD-R.
- 2) Two unbound copies on bond paper of the production proposal and script with original signatures of the thesis committee on the approval page.
- 3) The signed routing form (Appendix A).

These three items must be submitted to the Graduate Dean at least two weeks prior to the date of graduation.

Formatting guidelines for written materials, samples of the approval page and other documents, and relevant forms such as the routing form can be found in the Thesis and Dissertation Handbook.

Final verification that all requirements have been met will be given by the Graduate Dean, who will notify the student and committee chair. The original paperwork on bond paper will be placed in Torreyson Library.

Graduating with Honors

Students have the opportunity to graduate with honors. To do so they must graduate with a 3.7 GPA and pass their thesis project with distinction. Passing with distinction and/or graduating with honors will not show up on a student's transcript, but can be listed on a student's resume.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DISSERTATION/THESIS APPROVAL ROUTING FORM

Dissertation/Thesis Approval
Routing Form

The thesis of **[insert student's name here]** entitled **[insert title of dissertation/thesis here]** has been reviewed and approved by the Thesis committee and all departmental, college, and university policies and procedures have been followed.

Dissertation/Thesis Committee Chair (Date)

Department Chair (Date)

College Dean (Date)

Graduate Dean (Date)

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE NOTICE OF INTENT TO COMPLETE A MASTERS THESIS

NOTICE OF INTENT TO COMPLETE A MASTERS THESIS

Name _____ UCA ID _____ Date

I intend to complete a thesis as partial completion of a Masters degree in

Program

Thesis Committee Chair:

Name

Signature

The following graduate faculty members have agreed to serve on the thesis committee:

Faculty Committee Member:

Name

Faculty Committee Member:

Name

Faculty Committee Member:

Name

Faculty Committee Member:

Name

Student's signature

Date

APPROVED:

Department Chair's Signature

Date

Submit to the Graduate School, Torreyson West 328, UCA, 201 Donaghey, Conway AR 72035

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

1 ½ inch
left margin
(for binding)

THESIS FILM TITLE

Title in all
CAPITALS,
double spaced,
same font size
as main body

by

Your Name

A thesis presented to the Department of Mass Communication and Theatre
and the Graduate School of the University of Central Arkansas in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Digital Filmmaking

Conway, Arkansas
May 2009

← Month & Year of
commencement,
not defense

APPENDIX E
SAMPLE APPROVAL PAGE

2 inch top margin

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of

[insert name of student here] presented on [insert date of thesis defense here].

2 inch bottom margin

1 ½ inch
left margin
(for binding)

[insert name], Committee Chairperson

[insert committee member name here]

[insert committee member name here]

APPENDIX F
SAMPLE PERMISSION PAGE

2 inch top margin

PERMISSION

Title Thesis Film Title
Department Mass Communication and Theatre
Degree Master of Fine Arts

1 ½ inch
left margin
(for binding)

In presenting this thesis/dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduate degree from the University of Central Arkansas, I agree that the Library of this University shall make it freely available for inspections. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis/dissertation work, or, in the professor's absence, by the Chair of the Department or the Dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Central Arkansas in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis/dissertation.

[your signature goes here]
[type your name here]

April 15, 2009 [today's date]

APPENDIX G
SAMPLE COPYRIGHT

1 ½ inch
left margin
(for binding)

© 2009 Jane L. Doe

center on the
page vertically

APPENDIX H
SAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS

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left margin
(for binding)

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