

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE CREATIVE WRITING THESIS

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

The Graduate Program Director will give you the name of a thesis supervisor who has already agreed in principle to supervise your thesis. Once you have met and agreed on the objectives of the thesis, and the terms of working together, the formal process of preparing your thesis begins.

### **WORKING WITH A SUPERVISOR**

As soon as possible, you and your supervisor should set up a schedule whereby work is submitted, evaluated, and discussed at regular intervals. How often you submit, and in what quantity, will depend in part on your method of working as a writer; on your, and your supervisor's, work schedules; and, of course, deadlines. Work over the summer may be subject to more infrequent meetings due to your travel plans, as well as faculty research and teaching commitments. However, in general, you may expect to meet with your supervisor a minimum of three times per semester during the regular school year.

The supervisor's main task is to help you prepare a thesis that represents the best writing of which you are capable at this stage of your career. However, Supervisors are not copy editors. You must correct typos, spelling, and grammatical errors before submitting a draft, however rough it may be. Sloppy errors take your Supervisor's time and attention away from addressing more fundamental aspects of your work. You should refer either to the *Canadian Style Guide* or *The Chicago Manual* for guidance on usage, spelling and format, unless there is a carefully considered aesthetic reason for disregarding these accepted guidelines.

Supervisors require a minimum of two weeks in which to read submitted work. They may require up to a month during busy times of the semester. If this is the case, they will give you notice.

It is also important to note that if you are delinquent in meeting agreed upon deadlines, or if your work is not of an acceptable standard, your supervisor is under no obligation to allow for submission of the thesis in time for your chosen submission date. If this occurs, you will be liable for any additional fees or penalties that may be incurred by taking a later submission date. Please ensure that your supervisor has adequate time to read and comment on your work, and, if necessary, for you to make corrections and then re-submit to the supervisor. For a February deadline, you should plan on submitting a full draft to your supervisor in early December.

Your supervisor must have a minimum of two weeks to read and approve the final (pre-defense) draft of your thesis. If you then revise this final draft (excepting minor grammatical changes) either before or after the defense, the thesis must again be submitted to your supervisor for approval. Failure to do so may jeopardize your ability to graduate at the time of your choice.

Finally, if you have a conflict with your supervisor, and speaking with him or her (always your first course of action) has not adequately resolved this conflict, contact the Co-ordinator of Creative Writing. If necessary, another supervisor will be suggested to you.

### **THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT**

**Short:** You are responsible for writing a 250 to 350 word Short Form Proposal that outlines your intended project (subject, genre). After it has been approved by your supervisor, it is to be handed in to Bonnie-Jean Campbell in the Graduate Office by April 15 of your first year.

**Long:** This is an elaboration of your Short Form Proposal and will be between 500 and 1,000 words. This proposal should (depending on the genre) touch on the following elements: story/plot; themes/ideas/arguments; structure; style; genre; influences. Bonnie-Jean keeps copies of former proposals which you may examine. Be mindful, though, that these are not templates, and may not suit the needs of describing your project. The long form proposal is due in Bonnie-Jean Campbell's office no later than September 15 of your second year.

The proposal is an official declaration of your intent to write a thesis and is an important element in the overall expectations of writing your thesis. It must be approved by the creative writing committee and the graduate committee. You may be asked to re-write and re-submit a proposal if either committee deems it insufficient.

Further, should your project change substantially between submission of the proposal and completion of the thesis, you will be required to re-write and re-submit the Long Form Proposal.

### **THESIS LENGTH REQUIREMENTS**

**Fiction:** 22,000 (minimum) to 70,000 (maximum) words. The work must be self-contained, not a fragment.

**Poetry:** 50 pages

**Drama:** A full-length play.

### **THESIS SUBMISSION DATES**

**February 1:** This is the first submission date and will ensure a spring graduation.

**May 15:** This is the second submission date and is for a fall graduation. Please remember that faculty are often unavailable during parts of the summer. If you have travel or work plans for the summer, please confirm your supervisor's and your readers' availability before making those plans. This should be done in coordination with the Graduate Program Director.

### **THESIS DEFENSE COMMITTEE**

Your defense committee will consist of your supervisor and two readers. These readers will normally be determined by your thesis supervisor, often in consultation with the Co-ordinator of Creative Writing and possibly the Graduate Program Director. Readers may be drawn from both the creating writing and the literature faculty. If you wish to have a specific reader assigned to your committee, please let your supervisor know. Every effort will be made to accommodate your request.

### **THESIS DEFENSE**

This will normally take place within 6-8 weeks of submitting your thesis. (Please see note about the May 15 deadline.) After submitting your thesis, the defense committee will have four weeks to read and comment on the work. Their comments will be submitted to the supervisor. If the readers are in agreement that the thesis may move forward to oral defense, these comments will be forwarded to you. You should have a conversation with your supervisor as to how to respond to the readers' observations about your work. You are invited, if you so wish, to prepare a short statement (10 minutes maximum) to be read at the beginning of your defense. This may touch on the genesis of the project and/or offer a general response to the readers' comments on your work. Please do not use this statement to address specific comments by the readers. These ought to be discussed in the body of your defense.

If for some reason the thesis is deemed not ready for a defense, your supervisor will resume work with you on a further draft.

Please remember that "defense" is a poor name for what in fact takes place. The committee is interested in seeing what you have learned while in the program, and how you have applied that to your work. You are not, therefore, being asked to defend your choices as much as you are to understand them, and to articulate your writing process. A defense generally lasts from 60 to 90 minutes.

**More details on thesis format, defense, submission process, and final post-defense submission appear on the department website.**

### **DUE DATES REVISITED**

April 15 (first year): Short form proposal due to Bonnie-Jean Campbell.

September 15 (second year): Long form proposal due to Bonnie-Jean Campbell.

February 1: First thesis submission date (for spring graduation)

May 15: Second thesis submission date (for fall graduation)

### **FINALLY**

The creative writing thesis should not be regarded as an immediate precursor to publication. Ideally, in time, this may happen and we, as a department, certainly wish that for you. But the thesis is designed to represent, to the best of your present ability, how you have applied yourself in the two years of this degree.