

The Senior Thesis Project in English

The Senior Thesis Project in English is developed in consultation with the faculty in English, who can guide you in developing the best project for your skills and interests. There are three common pathways: **literary analysis**, **portfolio format**, and the **plus creative** thesis track. Requirements for a range of historical and generic core course are common to all of these pathways or “tracks,” but the Creative track has some additional expectations. Students completing the Literary Analysis track are most welcome to include coursework that is creative or performative; they are in no way limited by their choice of the Literary Analysis track.

Written senior theses in English range significantly in length. While there are no fixed rules about how long or how short a good senior project may be, it seems likely that in a purely written thesis comprising two semesters of work a thesis under 30 pages and those over 75 pages are likely to be less strong.

1) Literary Analysis

This is the most common track and is recommended for most students who want to showcase their skills as literary critics and highlight analysis. Students are expected to complete a range of coursework in English or in literature from other language traditions that includes at least two courses that address literature historically, and at least two that approach literature in terms of generic difference. Some work in critical theory or with literary criticism and methods is also required. (See the “Expectations and Guidelines for Planning and Applying for an AOC in English”)

The thesis for the literary analysis track will focus on producing first *good analysis* of some object of study that falls within the larger category of “literature” (including printed textual work, digital or electronic work, performed or dramatic work, and film or other linguistically complex work).

A strong literary analysis thesis will also show engagement with secondary criticism and/or theoretical approaches that are appropriate to the topic. Students should be able to *identify* their critical approach and explain *why* this approach was particularly apt for their project.

2) Portfolio Format

Really a subset of the Literary Analysis or (with permission) the Plus Creative thesis project, the portfolio is particularly valuable for students who want to emphasize their ability to revise and build on earlier work and showcase their development as students of literature. The portfolio is a particularly good option for students who want more flexibility in the relation among the various parts of their thesis project, rather than forcing their project into a proto-book chapter structure. The portfolio is in some ways a particularly challenging project, requiring careful selection by the student of past strong work, deeper research that will allow for significant revision not only in mechanics, but in the thought and contexts of that work. It is a good choice for students who would

rather go deeply into several areas and hone their research and revision skills, producing a particularly well-crafted series of examples of their best work.

3) +Plus Creative

The **plus creative** pathway allows for the inclusion of original creative work as part of the thesis project—whether written, directed, performed, filmed, or in another related mode. To qualify for this pathway, students should demonstrate through their coursework some minimal training in creative work. For example, students seeking to incorporate creative writing or original poetry into their thesis project should have completed *at least one semester of directed creative writing work at an advanced level (i.e. not beginning Creative Writing)*, ideally with a visiting writer-in-residence. Students who intend to include film or performance should likewise be able to demonstrate some prior preparation for working in these media, whether at New College or elsewhere.

The AOC application should announce the intention to choose the ‘creative’ track and document this preparation; faculty acceptance of the student into the AOC should indicate whether the student is authorized to proceed. No reapplication is necessary should the student in consultation with the thesis advisor decide to produce a project that does *not* include a creative portion.

In most cases, the creative portion of the senior thesis project should make up not more than 1/3 of the project submitted for examination.

Some examples of thesis projects:

- Multiple chapters (often three) of analysis demonstrating good engagement with secondary criticism on different works that share similar thematic concerns from a tight time period or literary and linguistic tradition, or that range significantly but that the student can provide an interesting rationale for examining together;
- Adaptation that discusses the original source material, includes the student’s own adaptation of that source, and some rationale for choices made in the adaptation;
- Two analytical chapters on literary material and topics followed by an original creative selection that responds to and grows out of the other material;
- Annotated edition in print or electronic format, with introduction explaining why an annotated edition is important for accessing and understanding this work;
- Portfolio consisting of one earlier term-paper, revised and expanded on a topic in southern U.S. literature of the twentieth century and a second paper much expanded from a short and somewhat underdeveloped essay on a topic from early modern literature and historical studies. A short reflection essay explaining why these two quite different papers were chosen, the additional research and rethinking the student undertook to shape them into exemplary senior-level work and why they represent his/her current skills and interests. (This may be an ideal format for graduate school applications.)