



NAVIGATING THE THESIS

a support guide for students

Provided by the NCF Writing Program



New College of Florida's Writing Program works to maximize available resources to meet the needs of all thesis students. New initiatives include an advanced research writing course, expanded thesis camp, an emphasis on setting up recurring appointments with SWAs, and more! In **Part One** of this booklet, we answer the most Frequently Asked Questions from students about how to utilize the Writing Resource Center during the thesis writing process; and in **Part Two**, we provide students with tips for making healthy, productive, and proactive choices throughout the thesis process.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Can I go to see the Director or Assistant Director of Writing about my thesis?

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The Director and Assistant Director of Writing are happy to meet with any thesis student and help them create a plan to best utilize the resources available to them – including the WRC. Though it can be tempting, thesis students should not use these conversations in place of talking to their sponsor or as a way to avoid their sponsor. The first question we always ask is “**have you spoken with your sponsor about...?**”

Unfortunately, the Director and Assistant Director will not be able to read through entire chapters or drafts of theses. If a student needs focused guidance on their writing, they are encouraged to set up an appointment, or recurring appointments, with a SWA.

Can the SWAs help me with my thesis?

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Yes! Meeting with SWAs gives thesising students the opportunity to hear how their writing sounds to a **practice audience** before they share their writing with the actual audience – their thesis sponsor and committee. We encourage thesis students to include as-needed or **recurring appointments with SWAs** in their thesis writing plans. Recurring appointments help break the large task into smaller pieces. Thesis-related isolation, issues of writing anxiety/perfectionism/avoidance, proofreading strategies, and identifying and revising specific grammatical patterns of error are some of our specialties.

To include recurring appointments with a SWA as a part of your agreement with your sponsor, email the Director or Assistant Director of Writing and Cc. your sponsor on the email; you will then work with us to choose a SWA and a day/time that fits your needs and schedule best. If your sponsor requires a post-appointment summary report that will keep them up to date on your weekly progress – we strongly recommend this – then you will need to include that request on the appointment booking form.

Is there a thesis writing class?

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The Director or Assistant Director of Writing teaches a full-semester course titled “**Advanced Research Writing**” for thesis students. The focus of the class will be on building healthy writing habits and maintaining a regular writing schedule. Each student will have a recurring weekly meeting with a SWA, participate in writing exercises designed to break research writing down into manageable pieces, and read texts written specifically about writing theses. The content of the thesis will not be evaluated; instead, students will be evaluated on their participation with in-class writing workshops, their engagement with course readings and discussion, completion of assigned

activities in and out of classroom, attendance at SWA meetings, and application of course concepts, strategies, and knowledge to the thesis itself.

Do you have thesis writing tutorials?

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In lieu of asking students to sign up for a thesis writing tutorial, which may cause them to have excess credit hours and/or further avoid talking directly to their thesis sponsor, we strongly encourage thesis students to consider **including recurring appointments in the WRC as a part of their agreement to work with their thesis sponsor**. Thesis sponsors can receive weekly reports indicating their student's attendance and progress, describing topics covered during the appointment. The Director and Assistant Director will still be more than happy to have consultations with thesising students about their writing as needed.

What other types of thesis writing support does the Writing Program offer?

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During ISP in January, we offer Thesis Camp, and due to popular demand, we will now offer three sessions, beginning the first week of ISP and running through the third. Each session is four days long, and each day is four hours. Students benefit from structured writing time, activities, point-of-need feedback, and camaraderie. Students who attended Thesis Camp reported establishing momentum which helped them complete their thesis on time.



We will also offer Thesis Crunch every Wednesday from 10 p.m. – 1 a.m. in the spring semester. This is a once-a-week thesis writing group led by SWAs who are available to help answer writing-related questions.

Will you proofread my thesis before submission? Will SWAs?

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Proofreading is an essential step of the writing process and, as such, is **the student's responsibility**. If they are not confident in their own proofreading abilities, students can meet with a SWA who can help the student utilize **proofreading strategies**.

However, SWAs cannot proofread students' theses for them. SWAs can work with thesising students by discussing strategies for proofreading or by looking at specific sections, but they cannot proofread or edit an entire thesis.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR THESISING STUDENTS



Breaking down the project.

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One of the best ways students can improve their writing is to **break down the large project into small pieces** (and small pieces into micro-pieces), and then set **meaningful deadlines** with **actual consequences** if these deadlines aren't met. When we have consultations with thesising students, many state they wish they were given deadlines with consequences.

Many do not trust their own motivation to get writing done without the pressure of a deadline and when it seems like nothing is at stake if they don't meet one.

Creating a substantial **draft of a rationale for their topic, a preliminary review of literature/theory, and a description of research methods/theoretical application** before the end of the first semester of their thesis helps ensure that students are making progress early on. Aim to have at least 30% of the writing done by the second semester.

Considering the style, form, and genre.

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Thesis students should consider the **types of writing** they have already done at New College (genres, page lengths, documentation style), as well as their **writing processes**.

Students who have written in a genre similar to the one in which they will write their thesis, students who have experience breaking a large project into smaller pieces, students who have written multiple drafts of writing assignments, and students who have consistently completed writing assignments without asking for extensions will have had the kinds of experience that could make the thesis writing process more familiar. **Being metacognitive and reflecting on strategies used in the past** may help thesising students choose which strategies or approaches will best help (or hinder) their writing progress.

Whether or not thesising students have experience writing in a genre similar to the one in which they will write their thesis, the best way to ensure good writing is through clear and consistent communication with the thesis sponsor. Many of the students we speak with are unsure of their sponsor's expectations. Consider asking for these expectations **in writing** if they are communicated only through conversation. This practice will help to avoid unnecessary confusion later in the process.

Another way students can understand what is expected of them is by **looking at models, e.g. past theses**, if they display an organizational structure that thesis student wishes to emulate. Students are encouraged to ask for the titles of theses their sponsor has sponsored in the past, which may also be found on the **online thesis database**.

Receiving feedback.

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When it comes to receiving feedback or feedforward on their drafts, students should consider larger structural and organizational issues before lower-order revision such as typos or sentence-level structure. Faculty can help students meet expectations by **writing out what they expect to see in that draft**. Talk to your sponsor about making a timeline with achievable deadlines and transparent expectations.

In later drafts, if there are a number of egregious mechanical problems in the first couple of pages, we strongly encourage students to resolve these before sharing the draft again. If there are **consistent patterns of error** addressed by the sponsor, list them out to keep these issues at bay in further writing and revision. The **WRC can help teach proofreading strategies**. Neither faculty nor SWAs should be serving as copyeditors for students.



THESIS SUPPORT RESOURCES AND EVENTS

Thesis Camp: ISP 4-Day Writing Workshop

- Participating thesis students meet as a group, write, discuss and develop healthy writing habits and strategies.

Advanced Research Writing: Full-term spring course

- Focuses on building healthy writing habits and maintaining a regular writing schedule. Students set personalized writing goals, participate in reflective writing, and read texts specifically about writing theses.

Spring Thesis Crunch: Weekly writing group hosted by SWAs

- A once-a-week thesis writing group in the WRC, led by SWAs who are available to help answer writing-related questions.

Recurring SWA Appointment: Weekly meeting with a SWA

- Ongoing weekly meeting with a SWA. Encourages continuous writing, conversation, and revision. To set up, email writing@ncf.edu

