# Th.M. Thesis Guidelines

(Including thesis defense)

## Timeline for Th.M. Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Deadline if Spring Graduate</th>
<th>Deadline if Summer Graduate</th>
<th>Deadline if Fall Graduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission from advisor (ThM director) to complete a thesis</td>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>July 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration of directed study</td>
<td>Spring registration in the Fall preceding graduation</td>
<td>Summer registration in the Spring preceding graduation</td>
<td>Fall registration in the Spring preceding graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Thesis Proposal to 108 Gray (via Thesis Proposal Form); requires secured supervisor and reader</td>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>October 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full draft due to advisor for review</td>
<td>No later than 2 weeks prior to the first day of Reading Week</td>
<td>July 10</td>
<td>No later than 2 weeks prior to the first day of Reading Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final thesis due to reader and ThM director for signatures (includes cover page – use cover page template)</td>
<td>No later than Noon on the first day of Reading Week</td>
<td>July 20</td>
<td>No later than Noon on first day of Reading Week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students should submit the thesis by emailing the final version to the thesis supervisor and second reader and copying the Th.M. director and academics@div.duke.edu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ThM Defense date</th>
<th>After submission of thesis and no later than the end of Final Exam Week</th>
<th>Prior to August 1</th>
<th>After submission of thesis and before the end of Final Exam Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed cover sheets to 108 Gray (student responsibility)/Notification of approval by supervisor and reader (cc ThM director) to Office of Academic Programs (one paragraph narrative summary) <em>(No exceptions given past this date that keep the student a graduate of that term)</em></td>
<td>No later than last day of Final Exam Week so student can be cleared to graduate</td>
<td>August 3 so student can be cleared to graduate</td>
<td>No later than last day of Final Exam Week so student can be cleared to graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor feedback to student</td>
<td>Within a week of defense</td>
<td>Within a week of defense</td>
<td>Within a week of defense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Materials due to 108 Gray, Office of Academic Programs, can be dropped off or emailed to academics@div.duke.edu.*

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Permissions and Advisors

Students can elect the thesis option only with the permission of the Th.M. director, who can, alternatively, recommend that a student who is not prepared to write a thesis take a comprehensive exam in order to complete the program in a timely manner. See deadline on timeline chart.

In addition to receiving permission from the Th.M. director to proceed with the thesis option, students must secure written permission from a faculty member to supervise the thesis. The thesis supervisor must be regular rank or adjunct Divinity School faculty, or, where warranted and approved by the ThM Director and by the Vice Dean of Academic Affairs, a member of Duke University’s Department of Religious Studies. Students are also required to seek out a second reader for the thesis. It is expected that the student will work closely with the faculty thesis supervisor in order to shape the paper’s precise topic, coordinate the necessary research, and reach agreement about the paper’s exact length, format, and style (e.g., Turabian, Chicago, Society of Biblical Literature, etc.). The supervisor and reader must be selected in order to complete required proposal; see deadline on timeline chart.

The Nature of the Project

The goal of the Th.M. thesis is to provide students with an opportunity to conclude their course of study with by synthesizing and focusing their intellectual interest under the discipline of a substantial written paper/thesis. The thesis may build upon and elaborate work done in a previous paper in the program or may probe in the direction of future academic study (e.g., a possible dissertation topic).

The thesis can therefore do any of the following:

- focus on a specific text, figure, or question within a field
- integrate two or more disciplines with respect to a particular topic
- apply a certain theoretical perspective to an issue or problem in the church or society

The thesis should be well researched, clearly written, and represent a significant act of intellectual engagement. It would normally be **12,000 to 20,000 words (50-75 pages)**, although some projects will necessitate greater length. Artistic projects may be proposed in place of a traditional research paper. However, an artistic project must still include a written description of the theoretical basis for the creative work the student does in another medium. This written description will normally take the same form as the traditional Th.M. thesis and be at least 10,000 words (40 pages) in length.

Procedures for Writing the Thesis

The Th.M. thesis must be written within the context of a directed study. Normally, the thesis is written in the student’s final semester of enrollment. If the thesis is written using work from another course, the expectation is that the thesis will exceed the requirements for the course paper, both in terms of its quality of engagement and its length.

While the thesis itself does not need to have a letter grade, a grade will need to be assigned by the thesis supervisor for the directed study. In this context, the responsibility for determining a letter grade lies solely with the instructor of the directed study, and the grade does not, on its own, signal approval of the paper as a thesis. See timeline for directed study deadline.

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Submitting a Final Reviews of the Thesis

Students must submit a full draft to supervisor to check for fatal errors before final submission. See timeline chart for deadlines on both.

After receiving the thesis, the thesis supervisor and the second reader should communicate approval or rejection of the thesis to the Th.M. director, who will then communicate the results to the Office of Academic Programs. If the thesis is approved, the Th.M. director will submit a copy of the signed cover page to the Office of Academic Programs.

The faculty thesis supervisor is responsible for providing a written evaluation of the thesis to the student. Especially in light of the fact that many Th.M. students hope to pursue further academic work, thesis supervisors are encouraged to supply ample comments when they review a thesis. Second readers should also seek to provide student thesis writers with analytical comments on their work.

Oral Defense

Each student will schedule an oral defense with her or his thesis supervisor and second reader. The defense will normally last one hour and provides an opportunity for discussion and feedback regarding the thesis as well as guidance for developing the student’s research in the future.

Defense Process

The defense will typically last about one hour. Those present should include the ThM student, the thesis supervisor, and the second reader. Individuals may participate remotely using video conference or conference calling if needed. The defense may take place on campus or, if agreeable to the student and faculty, may take place at a coffee shop or similar near campus. Students may invite others to attend the defense if desired. To avoid scheduling difficulties, setting a defense date with the advisor and reader as soon as possible prior to the submission of the thesis is recommended.

Prior to the defense, the supervisor and second reader should provide students with written feedback on the thesis.

During the defense, students have an opportunity to respond to written feedback they have received regarding the thesis. Faculty may pose further critical questions regarding the thesis. In addition, faculty and students should discuss the implications of the thesis for the wider field of study and for the student’s vocation. For example, if a student plans to pursue doctoral work, what are further, related questions the students might explore? How might they build on this research in their doctoral program? If a student is entering or returning to the practice of ministry, how will the work they have done in their thesis shape that ministry? How might they translate this research for a lay audience? What questions remain to be answered/addressed? The tone of the defense should be constructive and not harrowing.

Finally, the defense is an occasion to acknowledge the student’s accomplishment. For many ThM students, the thesis is the most significant piece of research they have completed to date. The defense allows an opportunity to celebrate student achievement.

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Submission to the Library

After the final draft of the thesis has been approved, the candidate will have a final opportunity to make corrections. Students wishing to submit their theses to Duke University’s digital archive, Duke Space, should read about it here and submit a form. Th.M. thesis does not go to ProQuest.