

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THESIS WRITERS

These guidelines are for assistance only, they are not exam regulations. If your tutor or supervisor has given you alternative guidelines, then you should follow those instead.

Status of the thesis within the degree course

It is imperative to recognize that the writing of a thesis involves quite as much work as for a paper, and that the work differs from conventional study in shape and demand. The subject of your thesis may, but need not, overlap with a subject or period covered by one or more of your other papers, but you must not repeat material used in your thesis in any of your papers, and you will not be given credit for material extensively repeated.

Planning and Choice of Topic

You should discuss the topic of your thesis in the first instance with your course coordinator or supervisor. If your course co-ordinator or supervisor does not feel qualified to give detailed advice he or she will put you in touch with someone suitable to supervise a thesis in the chosen area. You should do so as early as possible:

- For undergraduates Trinity Term, Year 1 is probably the best time for preliminary discussions. In no case should you leave the choice of a subject for your thesis later than the beginning of Michaelmas Term, Year 3.
Print form from: https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/a55c44d3-9f21-4dec-b48c-2dc6fa4e4bee/Forms/FHS_Exam_Application_for_Approval_form.pdf
- MSt students should discuss the possible subject of your thesis in the first instance with your supervisor during the first four weeks of Michaelmas Term
Print form from: https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/a55c44d3-9f21-4dec-b48c-2dc6fa4e4bee/Forms/MSt_Exams_Application_for_Approval_form.pdf
- MPhil students should discuss the possible subject of your thesis with your supervisor before the end of Michaelmas Term, Year 1.
Print form from: https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/a55c44d3-9f21-4dec-b48c-2dc6fa4e4bee/Forms/MPhil_Exams_Application_for_Approval_form.pdf

The Thesis Supervisor's Role

The supervisor of your thesis will assist in the choice of a topic and give initial advice on relevant sources and methods. He or she will advise on sources and presentation and assist with bibliographical advice; he or she will certainly expect to read draft chapters or sections. He or she may, but will not necessarily, read and comment on a complete first draft. But a thesis must be your own work.

Theses - Good and Indifferent

The hallmark of a good thesis is that it contains a consecutive argument or set of arguments on its topic. Apart from showing a sound grasp of the secondary literature on the subject and/or period and an awareness of the problems of the topic, you should deploy the evidence of the sources to support the elements in your general argument. It should be made clear how you have approached the subject, what conclusions you have reached and, if appropriate, how your approach and conclusions are related to the views of other scholars.

The work should be well-written and properly presented, with footnote references in orderly, consistent and unfussy shape and a sensibly-selected bibliography. Good presentation, in the experience of many examiners, is usually combined with high quality of analysis.

Conversely, careless or unclear writing, uncorrected mis-spellings, typing errors and plain misquotations often go with an uncertain or myopic focus on the subject.

Authors sometimes become so interested in their topic that they overlook the need to provide at least a brief introduction to it and to set it in its broader historical context or contexts. (An introductory section to a thesis may often usefully include a survey of the existing literature on a topic and 'pointers' to its particular interest and problems.)

While reading and research are being carried out, you should also be planning how to shape materials into an argument. Research, while sometimes frustrating, is intensely stimulating; it can also become a beguiling end in itself. Laboriously collected materials are worthless unless they contribute to a coherent argument. For this reason, you should begin to plan the structure of your argument as early as possible; some plans may need to be discarded until the most feasible one has been found.

It is a reasonable assumption that writing the thesis will take longer than expected: a good thesis will certainly require more than one draft of parts if not of the whole. Plenty of time should be allowed for getting the final typed version into presentable form without disrupting work for other papers or revision.

Format of the Thesis

(a) Length

Your thesis should not exceed the word limit given in the Exam Regulations (Grey Book) or in your course handbooks, including text and notes but excluding appendices and bibliography (see below).

(b) Pagination

Pagination should run consecutively from beginning to end and include any appendices etc. Cross references should be to pages and not simply to any sectional divisions.

(c) Order of Contents

After the title-page (N.B. This must bear your candidate number but not your name) there should normally be:

(i) A table of contents, showing, in sequence, with page numbers, the subdivisions of the thesis. Titles of chapters and appendices should be given; titles of subsections of chapters may be given.

(ii) A list of illustrations (if appropriate)

(iii) A list of tables (if appropriate)

(iv) A list of abbreviations, cue-titles, symbols etc.

(v) A brief introduction in which the examiners' attention is drawn to the aims and broad argument(s) of the work, and in which any relevant points about sources and obligations to the work of other scholars are made.

(vi) The thesis itself, divided into chapters. The chapters should have clear descriptive titles.

(vii) A conclusion, consisting of a few hundred words which summarize the findings and briefly explore their implications.

- (viii) Any appendices (which are likely not to count towards the word limit, see below)
- (ix) A bibliography. This is essential, and should be sensibly selective, omitting nothing which has been important in the production of the thesis. Works which are not specifically mentioned in the text may be included, but it is not necessary to include everything that may have been read or consulted. Works should be listed alphabetically by surname of author.

(d) *Footnotes, references, and bibliography*

Footnotes (except for references) should be as few and as brief as possible: they count towards the overall word-limit. The practice of putting into footnotes information which cannot be digested in the text should be avoided. Notes should be printed, single-spaced, at the foot of the page. Footnote numbers should be superscript (not bracketed) and run in a continuous sequence through each chapter. In subject areas where standard abbreviations for much quoted books and periodicals are in common use, these abbreviations may be employed in text, footnotes, or bibliography; they should be listed separately after the table of contents.

When reference is given for a quotation or for a viewpoint or item of information, it must be precise. But judgment needs to be exercised as to when reference is required: statements of fact which no reader would question do not need to be supported by references.

It is recommended that references be given in footnotes by means of author's name and/or full or abbreviated title. For example: 'Beeston, *Arabic Language*, 72' or 'Beeston (1970), 72'. All works referred to in this way must be listed in full at the end of the text in alphabetical order by author's name. Your bibliography might take the following form; you do not have to follow exactly this format, but whichever you do adopt must be equally clear, precise and consistent.

(i) Books

Beeston, A.F.L., *The Arabic Language Today*, London, 1970.

or

Beeston, A.F.L (1970), *The Arabic Language Today*, London.

(ii) Contributions to Books

Beeston, A.F.L., 'Background topics', in A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G.R. Smith (eds), *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 1-26.

or

Beeston, A.F.L. (1983), 'Background topics', in A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G.R. Smith (eds), *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge, pp. 1-26.

(iii) Journal Articles

Beeston, A.F.L., 'A Sabean penal law', *Le Muséon* 64 (1951) : 7-15.

or

Beeston, A.F.L. (1951), 'A Sabean penal law', *Le Muséon* 64:7-15.

(e) *Tables, Photographs, Maps, Graphs and Drawings*

You are encouraged to employ tables, illustrations and graphs on any occasion when an argument can be more clearly and elegantly expressed by their employment. If they are not your own work, their original source must be acknowledged.

(f) *Appendices*

These should be used only to convey essential data that cannot be elegantly subsumed within the body of the text. They are particularly appropriate for material which does not count within the word limit of the thesis, such as transcriptions of texts, or catalogues of data.

(g) *Italics*

These should be used for: titles of books and periodicals; technical terms or phrases in languages other than English (but not for quotations in foreign languages); for abbreviations which are abbreviations of foreign words (*e.g.*, *loc. cit.*). Most such abbreviations are best avoided altogether.

(h) *Capitals*

These should be used as sparingly as possible. They should be used for institutions and corporate bodies when the name used is the official title or part of the official title.

(i) *Emphasis.*

Avoid the use of bold, italics, underline, exclamation marks, etc. for emphasis. It's ***rude*** to shout!!!

(j) *Spelling*

English not American spelling should be used, *e.g.* 'colour' not 'color'. When in doubt, consult the *OED*, not your spell-checker.

(k) *Transliteration*

Transliteration must be systematic, and follow a standard scholarly method. You should consult your supervisor as to which system is most appropriate to your subject. One system is that adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*.

(l) *Printing and Binding*

The thesis must be typed or printed double-spaced on one side only of A4 paper, with margins not less than 2.5cm (1"). The gutter margin must be at least 3.5cm. The thesis must be securely bound in either hard or soft covers. Loose-leaf binding is not acceptable. It is recommended that you use 12-point type. Do not justify the text. Normally two copies of the thesis should be submitted, please check the exam regulations or with your course tutor.

(m) *Submitting the Thesis.* Once the final draft of the whole thesis is complete, make sure that you allow adequate time for printing, checking, copying, collating, binding, checking again, packing, and submitting: all this is likely to take much longer than expected.

(n) Candidates must certify on submitting the thesis that it is indeed their own work. See weblink to print declaration form:

https://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/access/content/group/a55c44d3-9f21-4dec-b48c-2dc6fa4e4bee/Forms/work_declaration.pdf