

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Linguistics Program

Senior Honors Thesis Guide

by

The Linguistics Faculty

Guidelines

for writing senior theses in

partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

of Bachelor of Arts

with Honors

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Abstract

A set of guidelines are presented for formatting senior honors theses for majors in the Linguistics Program in Washington University in St. Louis. The guidelines are compatible with those followed by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences for masters theses, but also take into account the special requirements of undergraduates. Some guidelines address formatting issues peculiar to linguistics, but most such issues are handled by referring the student to other style guidelines and handbooks, in particular the style guide of *Linguistic Inquiry* and the handbook of the International Phonetic Association. Even though these guidelines do not themselves constitute a thesis, they follow the formatting guidelines in order to illustrate the main points of the thesis format.

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1 The Thesis Process

Students who maintain a grade point average of at least 3.5 will graduate with College Honors. A subset of those students may also work toward an additional level of honor called Latin Honors, so-called because they add the designation *cum laude* to your diploma. Latin Honors are granted jointly by the College and by the Linguistics Program. To receive Latin Honors, you must fulfill both the requirements set by the College of Arts & Sciences and the requirements of the Linguistics Program. The College requires an overall grade point average of 3.65; see <http://bulletin.wustl.edu/artsci/honors/> for the fine details. The requirements of the Linguistics Program are spelled out in this document.

In a nutshell, the Linguistics requirements for Latin Honors are that you maintain a GPA of at least 3.65 across the Linguistics classes you take, through to the end of the final semester, and that you complete a Senior Honors thesis.

The thesis is a substantial project that shows that you have a strong understanding of linguistics and can use it in a meaningful, sustained application. While working closely with faculty advisors, you will have primary responsibility for an entire project: developing a question or idea; figuring out how to address the issue; collecting and analyzing the data; writing up your analysis; and defending your work in oral questioning.

The thesis project may take several forms. You might, for example, think of a new way language data could be analysed; take an existing methodology and apply it to new data; systematize our understanding of a given language; collect and organize information about a language or dialect; run an experiment to see how people understand, process, or produce language; analyze an existing

corpus; or write a computer program to analyze or model human language. It may be devoted to theoretical linguistics or to any of various areas of descriptive or applied linguistics.

It is difficult to give general advice as to the size of the project. As a general rule of thumb, a thesis should entail about 250 hours of work. It should be substantially larger in scope than a class project, although a good class project is often an excellent point of departure for a thesis. The written thesis is typically around 50 pages of text, double-spaced, but that length can vary substantially depending on the type of project.

In addition to qualifying you for Latin Honors, a thesis fulfills the requirement for a senior capstone experience.

1.1 Applying to Enter the Program

You may apply to the senior honors program after you get your grade reports at the end of your junior year. The application consists of a statement, approximately 250 to 500 words in length, of what you propose to do for your thesis. You also need the agreement of one faculty member to serve as your primary advisor for the thesis project.

Your statement should clearly describe the purpose of your thesis; the process by which you propose to study the topic; the type of product that will be produced; and your preparation to pursue the topic. The purpose is typically a research question: what do you hope to find out or produce that is not already readily available? The process covers such issues as whether you are basing your work on published materials or will be gathering your own information by interviewing native-language consultants, running experiments, searching

corpora, or the like. It also covers your methodological theory and analytical processes: Will you, for example, be working within Optimality Theory, will you be doing statistical regression analyses? The type of product could be a dictionary, a grammar, a theoretical research paper, an experiment report, an instructional video, and so forth. Preparation should be an honest look at what sort of knowledge, training, or other resources are necessary for the project, and whether you have them or can reasonably expect to obtain them. For example, if you are planning to study a little-attested language, will you have access to sufficient materials? If you need to work with native consultants, have you already secured their permission? If you will be consulting interviews in a foreign language, do you speak that language adequately? If you need funding to travel to Australia, where will that money come from? If you will be working with human subjects, can you reasonably expect to gather all the requisite permissions in the available timeframe?

The faculty member you get to serve as your primary advisor should be a member of the core Linguistics faculty. He or she does not have to be the same person who serves as your Major advisor. Advisors do not need to be experts in your specific thesis topic. They do need to be able to take on a non-negligible amount of mentoring responsibility, as described below. One of their first tasks is to make sure that your topic is well described at the outset and has a good chance of success. You should expect your potential advisor to critique and help you refine your thesis project statement even before you submit it with your application. You should not expect your advisor to assign you a topic. It is up to you to find a primary advisor; impressing teachers with your scholarly skills and getting them intrigued with your thesis idea is part of the job of writing a thesis.

The Linguistics Program will evaluate your application, adding its own evaluation of whether the thesis topic is of proper scope, topic, and ambition for a senior honors thesis. They will also conduct a frank appraisal of whether you are likely to do well on such a project. A minimum guideline is that at the end of your junior year both your overall GPA and your Linguistics GPA are at least 3.65. You should also be making good progress toward fulfilling your course requirements, and have done especially well on coursework that is most relevant to your proposed thesis.

As soon as your thesis proposal is approved, you should register for 3 units of Ling 499 for the coming Fall.

If your background and proposal do not qualify for a thesis, they may be sufficient for an Independent Study. Such courses are typically half as big in scope and expectation as a thesis, and there is no GPA prerequisite. A 3-unit Independent Study will typically qualify as a senior capstone experience.

1.2 Fall of Senior Year

After your thesis is approved, at least one other person will be selected to serve as your second advisor. The second advisor is usually another linguist who is available for consultation and can verify that you are writing a good thesis. Typically a second advisor will be assigned to you, in order to average out workload across the faculty, but you may also enlist one yourself. Occasionally it may be appropriate for you to recruit a member of some faculty other than Linguistics, especially if she or he brings expertise in a specific foreign language, culture, or a subject matter that is particularly relevant to your thesis. Interdisciplinary and applied work is welcome and encouraged. At the same

time, bear in mind that the primary focus of a Linguistics thesis must be on the linguistics.

During the Fall, you should expect to meet with your primary advisor on a regular basis. A typical pattern is a meeting of 30 minutes to an hour once a week, but this can vary considerably. Your advisor will be available to offer advice, and you should not hesitate to ask questions; on the other hand, a good advisor will also ensure that you do your own work and show initiative. Most importantly, your advisor will make sure that you stay on track and show sufficient progress toward getting your thesis done on time.

The role of your second advisor during the Fall is generally more constrained. A typical pattern is for students to meet with their secondary advisors only a couple of times, and perhaps send them two or three emails a month to keep them in the loop about any developments. However, if your second advisor wishes to take a more active role, you should definitely take advantage of that opportunity. A bare minimum is to provide your second advisor with a snapshot of your work by the start of finals week of the Fall semester.

Although schedules vary depending on what form your thesis project takes, you should normally have by finals week a rough draft of the whole thesis, or a solid draft of half of your thesis, along with a written plan detailing your schedule for completing the thesis. Your advisors will make a frank assessment of whether you have a reasonable chance of producing a satisfactory thesis by the coming deadline (see below). It is crucial that you will have availed yourself of every opportunity of making satisfactory progress in the months leading up to that assessment. The most common mistake thesis writers make is to give priority to their other classes during the Fall, wasting four months of opportunity, then

think they will make up the time during the interlude between semesters. This rarely works. In order to give yourself sufficient time, it is best if you can minimize the number of other classes during your senior year, especially in the Fall.

If your main advisor gives you a grade lower than B- in Ling 499 in the Fall, or if your GPAs drop below the minimum standards (3.65 overall and in Linguistics), you will not be permitted to continue your thesis work in the Spring. The Program Office will cancel any attempt to register for thesis credit in the Spring. More commonly, however, the agreement to discontinue thesis work is arrived at mutually, and you may be able to negotiate changing your Ling 499 registration to Ling 500, Independent Work.

1.3 Spring of Senior Year

If you continue on with your thesis, register again for 3 units of Ling 499 for Spring semester. In the Spring, you will be up against some very firm deadlines.

By February, your thesis should have advanced to the point where you are finalizing it. Most of your interactions with your advisors should consist of submitting drafts, getting feedback from them, and making the needed corrections.

By March 1, your advisors should have a candidate final draft that they agree is ready to defend. That is, everything should be written in full, readable sentences, and be substantially complete. It is permissible for the candidate final draft to have some deficiencies in style and formatting – e.g., wrong-sized margins or ugly trees – as long as it is clear that such deficiencies can reasonably be cleaned up within a few weeks. There should not be substantive deficiencies

such as missing sections or bad argumentation.

If your advisors agree that the thesis is substantially ready to defend, they will ask you to schedule an oral defense: that is, find an hour when both you and your advisors can meet. Often it is helpful to reserve a meeting room for your defense, although some professors may prefer to meet in their offices. This defense should be held at least two full weeks before the end of March – or the first week after Spring Break.

At least a few days before the defense, you should give your advisor final drafts of your thesis, on paper, having corrected any remaining deficiencies. The thesis does not have to be bound yet, but otherwise it should be in the format called for in the thesis guidelines.

The oral defense lasts one hour. It begins with an oral presentation by you, lasting about ten minutes. The rest of the time, you answer questions posed by your committee. Some questions may narrowly focus on parts of your thesis, others may address its general topic more broadly.

Your committee then confers to assess your thesis, both its written form, the oral defense, and any ancillary material – for example, computer programs, poster presentations, spreadsheets, lexicons – that you may have produced. If there is sufficient time, committees will often ask you to wait outside the room while they confer.

The committee should give you quick feedback on your thesis. They may decide not to approve the thesis; approve it; or approve it contingent on correcting small deficiencies by March 27.

If your thesis is approved, you should immediately send its abstract to the Office of Undergraduate Research via their Web page. You should also consider

presenting a poster at the local Undergraduate Research fair held in the spring (usually very early in April; see <http://ur.wustl.edu>), or at other venues, but this is not mandatory.

After a successful thesis, the Linguistics Program will normally recommend to the College that you receive Latin honors. The level you receive -- cum laude, magna cum laude, or summa cum laude -- is made by the College based on your overall grade point average through the end of your senior year. If your thesis is not approved, you will not receive Latin honors, but you may receive College honors.

2 Format of the Thesis

2.1 General Principles

This sheet prescribes the broad outlines of how to format your thesis. It is based mostly on the Washington University in St. Louis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences “Master’s Thesis Guide” 2011:3–7, with a few modifications required for our specific program.

To make this guide less redundant, it does not repeat information that can easily be found in other guides. On all points that do not conflict with this guide, the following sources should also be consulted, in descending order of priority:

1. *Linguistic Inquiry* “Style Guide” 2010:sec. 5–70. This will be cited as *LI* below.
2. International Phonetic Association *Handbook* 1999.

3. *Leipzig Glossing Rules*, 2008.
4. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition, 2010.
5. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* 2003.

In technical matters such as the formatting of trees, you should follow the conventions and styles used in the papers you have drawn from. Avoid inventing new notations unless you have a clear reason; otherwise your readers will find it more difficult to read your paper and may conclude that you are insufficiently familiar with the literature.

Media. The thesis should be submitted both on paper and as a computer file.

The paper version should be on single-sided, 8.5" by 11" (i.e. letter-size) sheets of acid-free white paper, 20 pound or heavier. Submit two copies spiral bound and one copy unbound, in a manila envelope.

The computer version should be a PDF file capable of producing the paper version when printed.

It is acceptable to fit an exceptionally wide illustration to an 8.5" by 11" page by printing it landscape (rotated 90 degrees to the left).

You may also submit supplementary materials along with your thesis. Such material may include very large data sets, spreadsheets, computer source code, and the like, which may be of interest to some readers but which are not essential for an appreciation of the argument of the thesis. Ideally, we encourage supplementary material to be printed out and submitted along with the thesis, but not bound with it. However, if the supplementary material is very large indeed or unlikely to be useful in printed form, it may be submitted only as computer files.

When submitting computer files, carefully consider how easily they can be read across a variety of computers. Whenever feasible, it is best to submit files that can be read or played without costly proprietary software, although Microsoft Office 2010 is also acceptable. Text files should be in Unicode.

Margins. Margins should be at least 1 inch on all sides, except that the left margin should be 1.5 inches, to facilitate binding.

Pagination. Page numbers should appear centered at the bottom of the page. The 1-inch bottom margin is below the page number; an additional half inch of space should appear above the page number. Every sheet of paper in the manuscript should be numbered except for the first, the title page. Lowercase Roman numerals are used for the preliminary pages (front matter). Since the title page is counted though not numbered, “ii” is the first page number used. Arabic numerals are used for the text and any back matter such as the References. The first page of text is page 1, and pagination continues in a single sequence through the rest of the thesis.

Font. The main font of the text should be 12-point Charis SIL¹ or Times New Roman.² Another font may be substituted, as long as it is no smaller and is a formal book-style font; e.g. it should have serifs.

Ideally your main font will contain any IPA symbols you use, so that there is no obvious clash in style between the main text and your phonetic

¹Available free from <http://sil.org>. Curiously, this is not the same font as SIL Charis, which should not be used.

²Version 5.01 or later. This version, which is supplied with Vista and Windows 7, is much more complete than the version that comes with Windows XP; it includes the IPA characters.

transcriptions. If your main font lacks symbols that you need, it is permissible to use additional fonts. Use Unicode fonts unless no alternative is available.

In charts and other figures, it is permissible to use other styles of fonts, even sans serif ones.

Running heads. Headings at the top of pages, above the text area, are not necessary. They must not be used on the title page or copyright page, and it is best not to include them on the first page of a section that has to begin on a new page (e.g. Contents, Appendix).

If you do use them, we recommend that they contain some useful information, such as the number or the name, or both, of the current section. Running heads need to go below the 1" top margin.

Language. The thesis must be in English. United States spelling is preferred, but you may follow international spelling standards if U.S. spelling is difficult for you.

Text sections. Your text (the part of the thesis that begins on page 1) should be divided into sections with headings. Follow the *LI* guidelines, 5–6. Contrary to *LI* guideline 7, section headings may be formatted for extra prominence, for example by use of boldface, small caps, italics, slightly larger font, skipping a line before the heading, or a combination of these methods. We do not recommend centering the heading, or using a different font family for it.

For very small sections of only a paragraph or two, it is also permissible to use paragraph section headings. The paragraph is formatted and indented as a normal paragraph would be, but a title is put at the beginning of a paragraph, followed by a period and two spaces. Then the text of the paragraph begins on the same line. The title is cased like a sentence rather than like a title, but does

not have to be a full sentence. Use boldface, small caps, or italics to make the heading stand out, but use the same font family and size as the rest of the paragraph.

Paragraphing. Do not leave blank lines between paragraphs. The first line of a paragraph that immediately follows another paragraph should be indented by about 1/2".

Do not right-justify your paragraphs. That is, the left edge of the text should be lined up, but the right edge should be left ragged. Do not break words at the end of a line.

Line spacing. In general, text should be double spaced. But you should single-space footnotes and blocks of text that are set off from the main text with extra indentation, such as linguistic examples and long quotations. We recommend single spacing for illustrations, such as tables and their captions and notes, but double spacing is also acceptable.

Footnotes. In the text, footnotes appear at the bottom of the same page as the text that references the footnote. Each note should begin on its own line, indented as for a new paragraph. Each footnote should be single-spaced, but leave a blank line between each footnote.

The rules for footnotes in illustrations are a little different; see the section on illustrations below.

Non-Latin Scripts. Normally linguistic forms are cited in their native orthography. But if the orthography does not use the Latin script, it is normally transliterated into the Latin script, using a well-established system such as the ALA-LC tables or an ISO standard. It is also possible to cite words in phonemic transcription, using the IPA; this is particularly common if the native

orthography is not well known. Be sure to state at the outset which system you use for each language. Whether transliteration or transcription is used, words are cited in italics, without slashes or square brackets: Greek *zugón* ‘yoke’.

If you feel it is important to cite a form in its native non-Latin orthography, that form is not italicized. However, to accommodate readers unfamiliar with the script, such a citation should be immediately followed by its transliteration, in italics, or its pronunciation, in slashes (phonemic) or square brackets (phonetic): Russian *-oro -ogo*. It is not necessary to repeat those elaborations if the same form is repeated in the same paragraph, or is the focus of an extended discussion.

Glossing. If you cite a word in a foreign language, you should supply an English translation. If you cite a word in a non-Latin script, you should add a pronunciation or Latin transliteration. Do this even if you think such information is linguistically irrelevant: it helps readers remember the form and gives them a handle for talking about it out loud.

Indented blocks. In order to set off some information to make it more visually salient, and to show that it is not part of the text proper, it can be set as an indented block. The two main types of indented blocks are block quotations and linguistic examples. All lines of indented blocks are indented one inch, in addition to the left margin. The first line of an indented block is not indented further, even if it is the beginning of a paragraph. The lines in such a block are single-spaced.

Illustrations. Tables and figures (pictures, diagrams, etc.) are collectively called “illustrations”. (Note that linguistic representations of words or phrases are considered examples, not illustrations, even though they may be quite big, such as trees, f-structures, and OT tableaux.) Illustrations should normally be

placed in the main body of the text. Place an illustration on the same page on which it is first referred to in text, or as soon as possible thereafter. Make sure all illustrations are placed in the same order in which they are mentioned. Ideally, illustrations should be placed at the top or bottom of a page, and the text floated around it. If that cannot be done elegantly, it is also acceptable to place each illustration on its own page. The lines in an illustration should be single spaced.

Notes to illustrations should be placed immediately below the illustration, not at the bottom of the page. They should be marked with lowercase letters instead of with numbers. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* 2010:chapter 5 has useful advice on making good illustrations and notes for them.

Citing sources. A good thesis gives a solid review of the relevant linguistic literature. It also gives credit for all ideas. Both of these functions require citation and references. Citation is done by mentioning the author(s) and date of publication in the text at the place where you refer to the other person's ideas (LI 51–58); the References list at the end of your thesis gives fuller details about the works that were cited (LI 59–64).

It is appropriate to cite even unpublished material, such as a class paper or something a professor or fellow student suggested to you personally. Failure to cite the source of an idea that is not common knowledge is known as plagiarism, and can be a career ender.

Copyright is a related concept: using too much of other people's work without their permission, regardless of whether you cite it properly, may be illegal and result in a substantial fine. In practice, this mostly enters into consideration when students use somebody else's illustrations in their thesis. If

you got an illustration from somewhere else, you need to either prove that it is not protected by copyright, or that you got permission from the copyright holder. If the latter, add a permissions note to the figure.

2.2 Parts of the Manuscript

2.2.1 Mandatory Parts

The following sections should be present in all theses, in the order given:

Title page. Mimic slavishly the format illustrated below. All lines are centered. Give some thought as to the form of your name, because you will want to maintain some consistency throughout your scholarly career. We strongly recommend you spell at least one forename in full, and give at least initials for other forenames—“Avram Noam Chomsky” or “Avram N. Chomsky”; this will minimize the possibility of your being confused some day with somebody else who uses the same name. The month should be the month your degree is to be formally conferred; usually May but occasionally December or August. There is no page number on the title page.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Linguistics Program

This Is the Title of the Thesis, Bolded, and

Title-Cased

by

Your Full Name

A thesis presented to the

Linguistics Program

of Washington University in

partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the

degree of Bachelor of Arts

with honors

May 2011

Saint Louis, Missouri

All other sections listed here begin on a new page, which has the name of the section (e.g. **Abstract**) centered at the top of the page. All pages after the title page should bear a sequential page number, starting with ii.

Abstract. The abstract should be between 250 and 300 words long, and formatted as a single unindented paragraph. It should comprise a précis of your entire thesis, including the conclusions: do not be afraid of revealing the ending.

Acknowledgments. You may wish to thank here people who helped you with your thesis. Be especially careful to thank people and agencies who provided financial support for your thesis work. If you wish to include a dedication, it may constitute the last paragraph of the acknowledgments page. But you may omit this section if you have no one to acknowledge.

Table of Contents. The table of contents should give the beginning page number of every section of your thesis from the Abstract on, including itself. It is rarely necessary to have a contents section that is more than a page long; use that consideration when deciding how much detail to go into. The locations of your main sections will probably suffice; the location of each subsection is almost certainly too much information.

List of Illustrations. Tables and figures are collectively known as illustrations. This section gives the location of all illustrations, usually as two lists, figures first. If you have a lot of illustrations, you might want to split this into two sections each starting on their own page: List of Figures and List of Tables. If you have no illustrations at all, this page is omitted.

Abbreviations. In this section, expand any abbreviations used in the thesis. You do not have to define universally known abbreviations such as *U.S.* or *e.g.* But err on the side of inclusion: Even abbreviations that you think are

bleedingly obvious, such as *nom.* for ‘nominative’, may not be obvious to everybody. You should also expand abbreviations you use for language names. Arrange this section in alphabetical order, by the abbreviation.

You should also define any special symbols you use. However, you do not have to define symbols of the International Phonetic Association that are used as the IPA defines them. It is often useful to make the list of symbols separate from the list of abbreviations. If there are many abbreviations and symbols, you might even want to make **Symbols** a separate section following the **Abbreviations** section.

Text. The text proper then begins. Its first page is numbered 1, and that numbering continues through the rest of the thesis. Do not put the heading **Text** at the top of the page. If you have an epigraph page, that counts as part of the text, so it will be page 1.

The text will itself contain several sections, but they cannot be prescribed here: it is up to you to decide what sections are needed. However, virtually all theses will start with an introduction and end with a conclusions section. See below for style guidelines for section headings.

References. Center this word at the top of the page. List here all (and only) the articles, books, etc. that you cite in the thesis.

2.2.2 Optional Parts

The following sections may be used if you find them appropriate:

Copyright page. A copyright page is pointless according to universal copyright law, but if you want one, it goes right after the title page and has this format, centered and double-spaced:

copyright by

Your Full Name

2011

Do not put a page number or running head on the copyright page. A copyright page is totally ignored for the purposes of pagination: the Abstract still begins on p. ii.

You may optionally add any of the following sections between the Text and the References:

Appendix. Appendices are for material that would be distracting in the midst of your text but is still important to an understanding of your thesis. Each appendix should begin on a new page.

Notes. Use this for lengthy notes that cannot easily be accommodated in footnotes. A Notes section is fairly unusual in senior theses.

Glossary. A glossary is an alphabetical listing of all technical terms used in the thesis. A glossary is rarely required in a senior thesis, and even if you have one, it does not relieve you of the obligation of explaining unusual terms as you introduce them. On the other hand, a glossary can sometimes relieve the text of the obligation of repeatedly reminding the user of the meaning of an unusual term.

Index. If you wish to include one or more indexes, they may be added at the very end, after the References list. But, frankly, any time you spend on an index is better spent doing something else.

References

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Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. 2003. 11th edn. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster. Also available at <http://m-w.com>

Washington University in St. Louis. Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. 2011. Master's thesis guide. Available from http://graduateschool.wustl.edu/files/graduate/Masters_Thesis_Guide.pdf