Alessandra Petrina

## A short guide to your Master's thesis

### What is a Master's thesis

It is a long piece of work, of roughly 30,000 words (footnotes and bibliography included), which presents the results of your research. The research can concern any aspect of the language, literature and culture within the linguistic domain which you have chosen during your Master's degree. Your final work need not be original, or run counter to all established criticism, or establish a new path in the reading of a text. It must, however, show that you can
- organize your research professionally;
- study all critical and scholarly sources at your disposal, and assess them correctly, discussing them in your thesis;
- write out your conclusions in clear, fluent, comprehensible language, writing autonomously and not incurring in plagiarism (i.e., the silent copying of other people's work).

### Choose your topic and your supervisor

When choosing your topic, first of all you must consider the area in which you want to do research: for instance, English pragmatics, French Renaissance literature, German syntax, Anglo-Spanish contemporary translation, etc. When making your choice, consider your inclination, but also your expertise. Choose your supervisor on the basis of this: all lecturers in UniPD have a personal page in which they indicate the areas in which they supervise theses (and sometimes, they even offer a list of sample thesis titles).
Avoid topics that are too generic (e.g., the status of women in Shakespeare's plays), too vast (e.g., the role of the devil in English literature), or too obvious (e.g., any text you have already studied in the courses you have attended). Once you have chosen your topic, it is a good idea to think of a working title for your thesis: this might not be the final title of your work, but it should help you as a reference. For instance, your working title should not be "Geoffrey Chaucer" (too vast) or "The Dream Vision" (too generic): it should contain your topic and give an indication of your approach. Thus, "The Significance of Bird Imagery in Geoffrey Chaucer's Dream Visions" could be a good working title, as long as you are aware of the fact that you will be expected to study ALL Chaucer's dream visions at this point.
The role of the supervisor is to discuss your choice with you, to address the potentialities and limits of your choice, and correct your aim if need be, to the point of proposing a new or different topic. S/he will also give you advice on the organization of your work, on the search for critical and scholarly material, and on the redaction of your thesis. The supervisor will read and correct what you write (in instalments! please do not give your supervisor the whole of your thesis to correct in one go; it is a good rule to hand in each chapter as it is finished, taking care that the amount to be read and corrected shall not exceed 6,000 words). Remember that it is not a good rule to keep your doubts for yourself: your supervisor is there to answer your questions.
Please note that you are also required to attach at the end of the thesis a summary (approximately 3,000 words) in Italian.

### Building your bibliography

To begin with, use the bibliography databases and search engines available in your University to build your bibliography, which shall increase and change throughout your work. Begin with Galileo Discovery (https://galileodiscovery.unipd.it): this is the main search engine for the University library, and for all the Padua libraries; it also gives you access to our electronic resources. Use it to

find a specific book or document you are looking for, but also to find whether the library has anything on a specific topic (in this case you will have to insert one or more keywords, in English and/or in Italian).

There are other databases you may use – for English literature, you might want to use one or more of the following tools:

MLA (https://search.proquest.com/advanced) to enlarge your bibliography;

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (https://www.oxforddnb.com/) to get updated, scholarly biographies of the people you are researching;

Oxford English Dictionary (https://oed.com) to analyse individual words that you find in the texts you are studying.

Other public/open-access databases/repositories you can use:

Google Scholar, to search all kinds of publications across any fields (it returns results from Google Books too). Like Galileo Discovery, but even more powerful, as it searches basically any existing scholarly publication in the world.

Google Books, to search books and ebooks only. You can freely read and search the previews of books (which might sometimes happen to be useful for your specific need) or you can access full-view versions of books that are in the public domain.

The Internet Archive, a massive online library where you will find digitisations of millions of books. Particularly useful to find not very recent scholarly books or editions. By signing up for a free account, you can also digitally borrow books with restricted access.

Hathitrust, somewhat like the Internet Archive, but smaller. It is sometimes worth checking it if the Internet Archive does not have what you need.

Academia.edu: this is a social network for academics, where they occasionally share their published or unpublished papers. With a free account you can search for papers by keywords, or you can directly connect with the authors – perhaps to kindly ask them if they might be willing to send you their paper?

If you are working on Middle English texts, use the Middle English Dictionary (https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/).

If you are working on early modern English literature, a useful website is http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search, Early English Books Online, a database with pdfs of all books printed in England, from the invention of printing to 1700.

For Anglo-American literature, you may find useful:

https://ahdictionary.com/ American Heritage Dictionary

http://worldwidewords.org/ World Wide Words

http://www.urbandictionary.com/ Urban Dictionary (not an academic resource, but useful for contemporary slang that is not listed in dictionaries yet).

PAL (Perspectives in American Literature): https://www.paulreuben.website

 "Making of America" (19th-century books and journal articles):

http://digital.library.cornell.edu/m/moa/; http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/

The Online Books Page: http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/search.html

Primary and Secondary sources: http://www.hathitrust.org/

Much of your research, especially in its early stages, will be done online. All the resources listed above are available to UniPD users, so you will be required to enter them via Galileo Discovery. The only exception is the Middle English Dictionary, freely available to everyone.

You will find that many of the books and journals that you need are also available online, but quite a few exist only in hard, paper form. Use first of all the library in Polo Beato Pellegrino, but

remember that the catalogue you find in Galileo Discovery includes all the university, civic and religious libraries in Padua (and a few outside). As a UniPD student, you have a right to access and use all these libraries – and some of them can be a wonderful discovery. Note also that you can access and use university libraries in nearby Venice, Verona, Bologna, etc.: in these cases, you will not be allowed to borrow books, but you can study them in the library itself. We also have an interlibrary loan system – please ask our librarians.

**Organizing your material**

Write out a plan at the very beginning of your work: you have identified a topic with your supervisor, now you need to know how to develop that topic. Draft a division into chapters, and divide those chapters unto subchapters, as if you were already writing your table of contents. You will then be free to change your roadmap throughout your work, but it is important not to start your journey blindly and without a compass. Run your roadmap by your supervisor, every time you change it.
At this point you are also finding relevant material, studies, monographs and critical essays that are useful to you. Begin to prepare a **Bibliography** (about this, more below, in the dedicated section). Note in your computer all points that are useful; copy also useful quotations, and in this case be sure to mark them as quotations (normally by using inverted commas) and note accurately the source, including the page number. This will be useful to build your system of footnotes. The more accurate you are with this, the more time you will save.
As you study and think, write down anything that comes in your mind: ideas, quotations, queries. There is nothing worse than starting to write your thesis by facing a blank screen!

**Preparing your bibliography**

Your bibliography is the list of books you have studied, consulted, analysed, quoted from and discussed in your thesis. It will give your readers a sense of the research you have undertaken and of the work that has built your thesis; it will also give readers indication on how to pursue further research on the topic. It must be clear and consistent. It should be inserted at the end of your thesis and ordered alphabetically by author; in the case of more than one work by the same author, please use a chronological order. If you are inserting a book in your bibliography, please follow the indications given in the frontispiece, not on the cover; conclude every entry with a full stop. Below you will find my preferred style for the bibliography: please note that there are many styles, some of them more suitable, for instance, if you are writing a thesis in linguistics. The important thing is, once you have chosen a citation style, not to deviate from it.

Generally, your bibliography shall be divided in two sections: *primary sources*, that is to say, the (literary) texts you are studying and analysing, and which form the object of your thesis; and *critical literature*, that is to say, the essays, monographs, websites and journal articles that discuss the same texts you are discussing, and that help you understand those texts.
Do NOT insert works you have not actually read, but only heard of, or seen second-hand.

**Citation style – your bibliography**:
Books/monographs:    Author, *Title*, Place of publication: Publisher, year.
Journal articles:        Author, "Title", *Journal title* journal number (year), pages.
Chapters in books:    Author, "Chapter title", in *Book Title*, ed. by Editor, Place of publication:
                            Publisher, year, pages.
Theses:                Author, "Title", Thesis type, University, year.
Websites:              Author, "Title", URL, access date.

**Examples:**

<u>Books/monographs</u>:

Allan, David, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment. Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.

Benson, Larry D., ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Cassirer, Ernst, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, translated by James P. Pettergrove, New York: Gordian Press, 1953.

Jusserand, J.J., *The Romance of a King's Life*, revised ed., London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1896.

Marlowe, Christopher, *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

<u>Journal articles</u>:

Aswell, E. Duncan, "The Role of Fortune in *The Testament of Cresseid*", *Philological Quarterly* 46 (1967), pp. 471-87.

Battista, Annamaria, "Sull'antimachiavellismo francese del sec. XVI", *Storia e Politica* (1962): pp. 413–47.

Dasenbrock, Reed Way, "Wyatt's Transformation of Petrarch", *Comparative Literature* 40 (1988): pp. 122–33.

<u>Chapters in books</u>:

Corti, Maria, "Introduzione", in *Guido Cavalcanti. Rime*, ed. by Marcello Ciccuto, Milano: Rizzoli, 1978, pp. 5-27.

Durkan, John, "Education in the Century of the Reformation", in *Essays on the Scottish Reformation 1513–1625*, ed. by D. MacRoberts, Glasgow: Burns, 1962, pp. 145-68.

McManus, Clare, "Marriage and the Performance of the Romance Quest: Anne of Denmark and the Stirling Baptismal Celebrations for Prince Henry", in *A Palace in the Wild: Essays on Vernacular Culture and Humanism in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. by L.A.J.R. Houwen, Alasdair A. MacDonald and Sally Mapstone, Louvain: Peeters, 2000, pp. 175-98.

<u>Theses</u>:

Mapstone, Sally, "The Advice to Princes Tradition in Scottish Literature", DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1986.

<u>Websites</u>:

Stromberg, Joseph R., "Shakespeare, War, and Peace", http://www.lewrockwell.com/stromberg/stromberg46.html (accessed 5 June 2012)

**If you have opted for in-text citations or "author-date" system**: you will indicate the source you consulted not in footnotes but in parentheses in the text, with only the author's name followed by the date of publication and the page number, in your bibliographic references the date of publication should appear immediately after the author's name.

Examples:

Smith, Zadie. 2016. *Swing Time*. New York: Penguin Press.

Thoreau, Henry David. 2016. "Walking." In *The Making of the American Essay*, edited by John D'Agata, 167–95. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. 2016. *In Other Words*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Youngquist, Paul. 2011. "The Mothership Connection." *Cultural Critique* 77 (Winter): 1-23.

Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer): 64-81.

Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Viktoria. 2010. "On and Beyond the Colour Line: Afterimages of Old and New Slavery in Contemporay Art since 1990." In *Slavery in Art and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality*, edited by Birgit Haehnel and Melanie Ulz, 59-92. Leipzig: Frank & Timme.

Please note that if you have consulted one or more chapters in an edited book (a collection of essays by different authors), you are not supposed to merely cite the editor's name and title of the book but need to give first the name of the chapter's author and title (see the last example above).

**You need a thesis or argument**

Your dissertation is basically a long essay. Here you do not simply illustrate a topic freely, but you try to demonstrate something, to prove one central point. What is that point? In other words, what is your *thesis* or *argument*? Can you summarise your argument in one sentence or two? Ideally you should be able to find your argument (at least a working/preliminary argument) as you read your material in the beginning, and you will get a more refined idea of what it is exactly at the end of your work. Either way, you should formulate your argument clearly in your introduction which, of course, you will write at the very end. Here below you may find a few points to keep in mind – but you can always ask your supervisor if you have any questions.

In an essay you need:
● A coherent and scholarly argument
● A clear use of close reading to contend for your thesis ('look here, look at how this text works').
● A sense of how your ideas fit into recent scholarship (ideally including a sense of the originality and importance of your argument).
● A clear pay-off to your argument (e.g. why is your research useful/interesting? Why should I read it?)
● A critical (and fair) use of secondary sources, to back up your points.
● A smooth, clear style, guiding your reader well through your essay's twists and turns.

What is an argument?
● a statement or claim about the text (or texts)
Why is it important?
● Illuminates discussion of a text (or texts)
● Shows off close-reading and interpretative skills
● In case you start from a research question, it answers/elaborates/recasts the question
● Gives your essay structure
How do you support it?
● Textual evidence (in combination with criticism, where needed)
o It proves/shows a point
o It develops/complicates or even contradicts earlier points
o The accumulation and exploration of differences will result in a greater depth of the argument
● By using select points from criticism

**Presenting parts of your thesis to your supervisor**

Please agree with your supervisor whether sending chapters as email attachment (in .doc or .docx format) is acceptable, otherwise give your supervisor the printed chapter. Indicate on the first page your full name and the title of your thesis (even if it is a temporary one). Number the pages.

**Thesis stylesheet**

The following rules do not teach you to write your thesis, but they help you present a clear, legible thesis. Apply them from the very first time you write.

**Font:** Times New Roman, size 12 for the main text, size 10 for footnotes and block quotations.

**Line spacing:** 1.5 for the main text, 1 for footnotes and block quotations.

**Page numbers**: number your pages from the frontispiece.

**Spelling**: British English, not American English, unless your thesis is in the field of American Literature (and, of course, do not use a "mixed" spelling). When in doubt, follow the Oxford English Dictionary. Of course, when you are quoting you should follow accurately the spelling of the text you are quoting from.

> **Spaces:** Insert a single space after all punctuation; insert a single space before you open brackets, and before opening inverted commas. Insert a single space before and after a dash. Do not insert spaces before and after a hyphen. Do not insert spaces between initials, as in the case of UK, NB, or J.S. Bach.

**Punctuation:** Use punctuation to make your sentences clear; avoid question marks and exclamations marks (unless they are in a quotation). Prefer the full stop to the semi-colon. The three dots, between square brackets [...] are used only inside a quotation, if you are omitting part of the text. Do not use them otherwise.

**Paragraphs**: begin a new paragraph only when it is necessary, not whenever you have a full stop. A new paragraph indicates a new topic, or a change of subject. Begin each new paragraph with an *indent*, using the tab key in your computer keyboard.

**Capital letters**: use capital letters when you begin a chapter or a paragraph, after a full stop. Use capital letters also for proper nouns. English requires capital letters in the titles of books, poems, articles or book chapters: in this case all semantically full words, as well as the initial word of the title, require a capital letter. For instance: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, *The Englishman Who Went up a Hill and Came down a Mountain*. Capitalize also the initial word of every line in poetry.

**Footnotes**: The number which functions as a note exponent is inserted <u>after punctuation</u>.[1] After the note exponent, please leave a space.

**Quotations**: quoting from a scholar or critic is good practice; if you use a scholar's or critic's words without acknowledging your debt, it is plagiarism, or intellectual stealing. Quotations should be enclosed in double quotation marks ("like this"). All quotations of poetry, and quotations of prose longer than thirty words, are inserted as block quotations, separated from the main text, in smaller size (10) and with reduced line spacing, as in this example:

> Once upon a time, in a gloomy castle on a lonely hill, where there were thirteen clocks that wouldn't go, there lived a cold, aggressive Duke, and his niece, the Princess Saralinda. She was warm in every wind and weather, but he was always cold. His hands were as cold as his smile, and almost as cold as his heart.[2]

After the quotation, insert a footnote with the bibliographical reference and the page number. If you quote in a language other than English, insert a translation in the footnote.

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[1] As in this case.
[2] James Thurber, *The Thirteen Clocks*, New York: Donald I. Fine, 1957, p.17.

**Quoting titles**: if you mention the title of a book, play, film, journal, epic poem, please use *italics*. If you mention the title of a chapter, article, short poem, novellas, please insert it "between inverted commas".

**Footnotes**:
- Prefer footnotes to endnotes.
- Note numbers begin again at each new chapter.
- Use footnotes to give the bibliographical reference for something that you are quoting from, freely adapting, or discussing. You can also use footnotes to clear up minor points that are tangential to the main thrust of your argument.
- In the footnotes, the first time you refer to a bibliographical item, please give full bibliographical reference (as you would in the bibliography), followed by the relevant page(s).[3]
- If you refer to a bibliographical item to which you have dedicated a previous footnote, it will be enough to insert the last name of the author and the page number(s).[4] If you have more than one work by the same author, insert last name and short title, followed by page number(s): Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, p. 15.[5]

**A few final points**

**Table of Contents**: it should appear at the beginning of your thesis, right after the frontispiece. Check that the page numbers correspond!

**Foreword**: it is a short text which introduces your thesis. It offers a brief outline of the main research question; topic, central problems and sub-questions you are going to deal with, outline of the overall structure of your thesis, methodology. Try to imagine what exactly the reader might expect from your thesis when they read the title: if your thesis covers less or more than might be inferred from the title, say so in the foreword; tell the reader not only what you do but also what you do not do (and why). Introduce the abbreviations / symbols etc. you want to use.

**Acknowledgements**: you might want to thank (briefly!) libraries, institutions, or people who have helped you in your research. Do not thank your supervisor: they are doing their job.

**Summary**: at the end of your thesis, insert a summary in Italian (approximately one tenth of the entire work, or 3,000 words). No footnotes or quotations are necessary.

**Illustrations**: use them only if necessary. Each illustration needs a caption: name of the author, title of the picture, or brief explanation of the content, source. If you have more than one illustration, number them; you will insert a List of Illustrations after your Table of Contents.

**Language**: The choice of the research topic will also determine the choice of your language: if you work on English language, literature, or culture, for instance, your thesis will be in English; part of your work is using a clear, correct, idiomatic English. The language of the thesis should be up to university standards. Avoid gender discriminatory language (i.e., "the reader ... he", etc.). You can – and should – run a computer spelling check of your paper before handing it in, but do not rely on that: thorough proofreading of the final version of your thesis is indispensable.

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[3] As in this case: J.J. Jusserand, *The Romance of a King's Life*, revised ed., London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1896, p. 12.

[4] As in this case: Jusserand, p. 15.

[5] As in this case: Jusserand, *Romance*, p. 17.