

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras

Guidelines for the MA thesis

General

The MA thesis in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences needs to demonstrate original work, independent thinking and should ideally result in a product that is worthy of being published in a reputable peer-reviewed journal/book/conference with a little additional work if necessary. At present, the thesis is worth 17 credits, which should be reflected in the preparation and work associated with it.

Topic Selection

Topic selection would be based on one of two modes:

(A) From a list of broad topics/ interest areas identified by faculty members: The list should be provided by the end of the previous semester (mid-April). Students should indicate by way of a brief written abstract their choice of topics from this list. **The abstract needs to be submitted to the HoD by the last week of April.**

OR

(B) Specific research projects identified by the students for which they also identify supervisors: When students have a compelling case to make about a topic that they propose, the onus is on them to identify an appropriate faculty partner willing to endorse the topic. Topics ought to be relatively narrow in scope and also be manageable.

In the first week of May, the HoD will designate MAP co-ordinators to match supervisors with students. Each faculty is required to take on a minimum of 1.5 and a maximum of two students Master's theses to supervise.

Students need to begin the project semester in August with an awareness of the literature and broad research goals, so that they can focus more meaningfully on their methodology, data/evidence gathering and writing during the next 3 months or so. To this extent, a regular and ongoing communicative process with their advisors is necessary.

Thesis evaluation

The general rule for evaluating the thesis is that the *process of doing research is at least as important as the final product*. This is in line with the institute's overall principle of promoting continuous evaluation. To abide by this principle, the HoD will identify two coordinators in each stream who will sit through a minimum of

three reviews along with the supervisor before final submission of the thesis. All faculty and students are welcome to attend all the reviews.

There will be at least three review meetings and a final submission of the report. The stream coordinators will evaluate the reviews, with inputs from the thesis supervisor.

Review meeting 1 (within 2-3 weeks of the start of the thesis semester):

Student presents research question, demonstrates conceptual clarity and a roadmap for rest of the semester, including draft methodology and sources of evidence – 15%

The proposal document supporting this review meeting should include the following:

a. Research Question/s: Describe in detail the area of interest, primary research questions or areas of exploratory interest, and their significance to your chosen field.

b. Methodology/ Theoretical Framework: Identify the methodology/ framework you will follow and offer justification. Please cite proper sources.

c. Literature Review: Offer a list of sources/ archives/ texts that you have identified with a limited annotated bibliography of the same.

d. Timeline: Please provide a timeline for the progress of the thesis including fieldwork, if any, and the writing of the thesis in consultation with your advisor. Incorporate the dates of reviews within this table.

Review meeting 2: (about 5-6 weeks after review meeting 1):

Student has an elaborate literature review in order to commence fieldwork/ archival work/ textual analysis – 15%

The document supporting this review meeting should include the following:

a. Introduction: Locate your area of research within the relevant literature and thematically organize the rest of your review. Give a listing of themes/ areas that you have identified within which you locate your research question. Offer justification for your choice of themes either from the relevant literature or through preliminary fieldwork

b. Arguments within each theme: Provide a review of arguments within each theme that you have identified. Each theme should provide a review of the conversations within the field.

c. Analysis: After elucidating the themes, offer a general analysis of the ways in which these themes locate, explain, or problematize your area of research

d. Bibliography: APA/ Chicago/ MLA citation formats only

Review meeting 3: (about 5-6 weeks after review meeting 2)

Student has completed the research and has a draft thesis that has been reviewed by the research supervisor. S/he presents the draft thesis (a complete argument), which is tested on methodological rigour, quality of evidence presented, presentational clarity, etc – 20%

The **final project report** must be submitted at or before the third review meeting, so that there is sufficient time for stream coordinators to assess them. Stream coordinators may request support from other colleagues, in the department and outside, but should nevertheless provide their final evaluation. They may request the student to make certain corrections before s/he submits the report in the standardized format (electronic and 2 hard copies) to the department. The final report will carry 50% weightage, divided between the thesis supervisor and the stream coordinators to the extent of 20% and 30%, respectively.

- *The MAP should be from 12,000 to 15,000 words, or around 35-40 pages, excluding references.*
- *It is important to note here that students must meet their guides at least fortnightly in order to evaluate progress on their work and to seek guidance*