

THE MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

General Information

Definition of the Thesis

The Master of Arts (MA) thesis is an extensive, ministry-related scholarly paper for which you earn six hours of graduate credit. The thesis demonstrates your ability to relate fundamental theological and biblical principles to the practice of ministry as well as your ability to do careful research, meet high academic standards, and contribute to the knowledge of Christian ministry.

Purpose of the Thesis

The MA thesis is more than an academic exercise. The final document must demonstrate your growing spiritual and academic maturity and your communication skills. The thesis-writing process will help you develop your ability to:

1. Find truth and affirm truth with love and conviction and to evaluate your findings by the truth found in God's Word.
2. Ask significant ministry questions and then seek answers to those questions through the Word of God; field research; and trustworthy books, journals, magazines, and Internet sources.
3. Find and evaluate relevant sources by taking notes, applying critical analysis, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
4. Work without direct supervision to conduct extensive independent and field research, in consultation with a mentor.
5. Write in a clear and scholarly manner in either English or French.

Length of the Thesis

The overall length of the thesis should be eighty to one hundred pages, excluding the bibliography and possible appendixes. The bibliography normally encompasses from fifty to one hundred books, but an extensive field survey may significantly reduce the number of books referenced. The page limit should encourage you to address, with adequate depth, only one major research issue of ministry practice.

Literature Review

You must not only demonstrate a solid grasp of the literature, but must also exhibit analytical thinking skills so that you can evaluate the strength or weakness of certain sources. In this review, you must demonstrate how each source has contributed to the overall research findings.

Field Research

You are encouraged to perform field research as part of the search for truth in tackling your problem. All field research must have a direct bearing on the question or problem being addressed, as demonstrated by the conclusion reached at the end of the literature review.

Evaluation and Approval

The thesis is judged as acceptable by the academic committee when the following three conditions are met:

1. The total content shows academic excellence. The content refers to the review of related literature, the methods followed, the statement of results, and the suggestions for practical ministry.
2. The format and grammar show skill in communication. This refers to sentence and paragraph structure and the organization of headings, correct spelling and use of terms, and proper utilization of the style manual.
3. The thesis shows relevance to actual modern Christian ministry. The thesis answers questions such as: Does this document make a significant contribution to the student's readiness to work out theology in the African context? Is the student prepared to pursue future independent and self-directed study to find and affirm truth?

Steps to Completing the Thesis

Selection of a Topic

The MA degree program requires that every student focus on one particular ministry problem and write a thesis that attempts to respond to that problem. You will focus on an issue that promises benefit to Christian ministry and furthers theological knowledge. The issue, that is, the subject of your thesis, should be related to Christian ministry and involve the actual practice of ministry. The topic must lend itself to depth of study in order to qualify as a work of graduate-level quality. Through the thesis-writing process, you develop your own God-given skills to perform research and communicate truth.

As you begin the MA program, seek to find a fresh thesis problem, some difficulty or need in society for which you feel a burden in your own heart and for which you want to find a spiritual solution. You may begin by considering some of the problem areas within the church in your own country, perhaps in the area of discipleship, training of children, spiritual maturity, a certain cultural issue, or the need for cross-cultural missions. Two questions may

help you in your selection of a thesis topic: What are the greatest problems I face in my ministry? What topic seems to need the greatest research and development as I seek to be an effective minister?

The course entitled Research Methodology, which comes early in your MA studies, provides direction on how to do good research. This course will prepare you to focus on and choose one particular problem (issue or question) about which you can write term papers and later your thesis.

The thesis comes at the end of your MA studies, but it is advantageous to know your thesis topic early in the MA study period. By obtaining approval of your topic early, you can then do research on that subject during the following months of study and ministry. For several of your courses, you may be able to compose term papers that contribute to the substance of your MA thesis. You can also do field research in the form of a survey at your own place of ministry, thus finding answers to certain ministry questions that arise in your proposed topic.

Submission of the Thesis Topic Approval Form

Once you decide on a topic, you then complete the Thesis Topic Approval Form and submit it to the dean of the MA program. Your proposed topic must be approved by a mentor, who is chosen for you, and by the academic committee. Sometimes the selection of a thesis topic involves sharing ministry needs, concerns, ideas, and interests with faculty leaders to refine the topic.

A sample approval form is attached at the end of this paper. This form lists the various information required for approval of your thesis topic. In the Research Methodology course, you will learn how to present concisely your thesis problem and how to write the background information, which tells how you came to sense this particular need or burden in your life and ministry.

You are not required to list all your bibliographic resources on this form, but you should be able to ascertain that enough library resources are available to assist you and list a few of the major sources. You may also explain any field research you hope to carry out.

Submission of the Detailed Proposal

Once your topic has been approved, you may proceed to write your detailed proposal. This proposal covers some important issues to be included in the first chapter of the thesis and is a key document in the development of the completed thesis. In the proposal you identify the scope of the research and the hypothetical result. You explain the various methods you will use to carry out your research. You explain why you feel this is a significant problem for which you seek an answer.

The proposal should be long enough to present a detailed overview of the intended research project. Although the form itself is only one page, you should be prepared to write from five to eight pages.

Specific elements to include in a detailed proposal are:

1. Background story. You should first tell the story of the event in your life that led you to think of this particular ministry problem (issue, need, question). How did you become interested in this topic?

2. **Problem statement.** The statement of the problem is the expression of a special burden, need, or question that you have concerning reaching people for Christ or discipleship or mission outreach. It should be a specific question that has not yet been answered. It should be short, encapsulated in one sentence.
3. **Purpose statement.** This is a brief statement of the purpose of the thesis, answering the question, What do I hope to do as a result of finding a solution for the problem in this research? It expresses your intention to research in God's Word, among godly authorities, and in a possible field survey to find an answer to your research problem or question.
4. **Significance.** Who will benefit from having this problem solved? How will they benefit? Why is this research problem important?
5. **Definition of terms.** Identify the special terms you will use that need to be defined. These terms may be certain words, phrases, acronyms, etc. For example, you may write about "youth." What age group does this encompass? Are they Christians or non-believers?
6. **Limitations of the study.** Do you face any problems that will limit your ability to complete good research on this project? Are you limited in the months available, in the use of library facilities, or in computer availability? You may want to explain this.
7. **Delimitations of the study.** This concerns the parameters (boundaries or restrictions) that you set at the beginning. For example, "My study will concentrate on the youth in the city of Accra, and it does not describe youth in other African cities." Another example is, "My study concerns four churches in the northern region of _____ and their missions outreach programs. It does not describe in detail what other churches do in missions."
8. **Methodology.** Methodology refers to the techniques you will use to collect your information and data. Your explanation may include what kinds of books or articles you will look for in library research or what steps you will take in field research. Many students fail to take advantage of the survey method of research. A survey involves interviews with a few major questions among a restricted group of people in your area of ministry. A survey can be extremely useful in revealing the actual thinking of people in the area and can provide valuable data, quotations, and answers to vital questions within the topic. You can also use a questionnaire, but these are generally not as complete or revealing of true attitudes. A case study of one person or one group is also an excellent method for research in ministry.

For the initial proposal for the mentor, this presentation of methodology may be short, as you are simply stating how you hope to go about finding an answer. In the actual third chapter of the thesis, entitled METHODOLOGY, you will give a more detailed explanation of the procedures followed.
9. **Presuppositions.** You will approach your research with presuppositions or assumptions. These may be factual issues that you consider common knowledge by many people, and therefore issues that you need not need elaborate on, or your understanding of an issue that shapes your thinking, or beliefs you take for granted. You need to identify these for your readers.

10. Bibliography. In this initial proposal, you will list just a few sources. In the final bibliography, called REFERENCES CITED, you will list every book, journal, magazine, and Internet site used in the paper, in alphabetical order by the author's last name.
11. Hypothesis. The hypothesis is your expected findings or expected result, which is a guess. Because of your initial reading, you usually have a tentative idea of what to expect as a result of your research.

Research, Writing of First Draft, and Revisions

Once the proposal has been approved by the mentor, you will continue to research by taking notes and writing. The proposal becomes a major part of chapter 1, the introduction to the thesis. Typically a student takes about a year of study and writing to produce a complete first draft. With this in mind, you should make a schedule for yourself to submit portions of your paper to your mentor and schedule appointment times to discuss the revision of that portion with the mentor.

You should complete your revisions by May 1 of the year in which you hope to graduate. The normal time limit to complete the Master of Arts degree program is six years. Any extension beyond six years requires the approval of the academic committee. If a student attempts to submit a final thesis three times and is not able to complete requirements for his work, he may be terminated from the program without the degree.

The Final Thesis

After making the last minor corrections, you should submit the final manuscript to your mentor as soon as possible. The mentor will then sign his approval for the whole thesis and certify to the academic committee that you have satisfactorily completed the program. You will submit two copies of the final paper—one copy of loose sheets without binding and one bound copy—and one copy on CD, in a large envelope by October 1 of the year of graduation.

Suggested Arrangement for the Content of the Thesis

The Preliminaries

The preliminaries, sometimes called the front matter, are the pages preceding the main content of your thesis. Your actual thesis content begins with chapter 1, Introduction, which is page 1 (Arabic numeral) in your thesis. All pages that follow are numbered 2, 3, 4, etc. The preliminaries have Roman numerals as page numbers, as you see below, but you do not put any actual page number on any page until you come to the Table of Contents.

The following is the suggested order for items in the preliminary section of your thesis:

Title page i
Blank page ii
Approval page iii
Dedication page iv

Acknowledgments page v
Table of Contents vi
Illustrations vii
Tables viii

Introduction (8-10 pages)

The first chapter of your thesis is the introduction. Your heading appears two inches from the top of the page as follows:

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of your thesis contains the elements listed below. The first page begins with the title, as shown. This title comes two inches down from the top edge of the paper. Each item in the introduction should be a level-one heading.

Background of the problem
Statement of the problem
Purpose of the thesis
Significance
Definition of Terms
Limitations
Delimitations
Methodology
Presuppositions
Hypothesis, expressed as a thesis statement

Literature Review (20-25 pages)

Chapter 2 of your thesis is the review of literature, the sources you read in order to find an answer to your research problem. The example of the heading for this chapter is below.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review shows that you have made a thorough investigation of your subject, finding as much information as you possibly could about the question. You may begin by stating how much has already been written about your subject, but that you searched within a particular issue of that subject.

In this chapter you list books and other sources that contributed to the final results for your thesis. You are not giving a summary of each book, but rather evaluating the worth of the sources for your results. Try to organize your literature review, using subheadings, by various issues that appear in your thesis, not by just listing books and evaluating each one separately. For example, you may have one paragraph about a certain issue and list all the books you found concerning that issue. Then you may explain in a new paragraph how one of

those authors in particular had a more complete and helpful answer. You may discuss an author or book in some detail, telling why this author is credible, or you may discuss his style of writing, or mention that he has a detailed index or bibliography which helped you.

When you search for a book on your topic, you are looking for a reputable and credible author. You need to ask, Who is this author? What is his belief? Is he honest? Does he have much experience in his field?

You must also consider the publisher, as some publishers are thoroughly evangelical, others are liberal, and some are even antagonistic to religious belief. It is the same for those who publish journals. You must consider the source, and evaluate whether you can trust what the journal tells you. This assessment is especially important to apply to Web sites on the Internet, which may be reliable or biased or even false.

You must also look at the date of publication, which may be important for certain statistics.

Methodology (8-10 pages)

Chapter 3 of your thesis presents your methodology. The example for the heading for this chapter follows:

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter you give a more detailed description of the procedures or steps you followed to find the results of your thesis. In your proposal you stated how you planned to use a certain method. You have now completed your investigation, and in this chapter you can state with more detail and certainty how you found your answer.

Each step of your research process should be carefully explained. How did you find the books? What subject headings were important? Did you look for information in any magazines? In journals? Did you do field research by interviewing people? If so, what questions did you ask? What particular group of people was surveyed? How many were surveyed? How did you find biblical truth to relate to your thesis?

Results (45-60 pages)

Chapter 4 is the main part of your thesis. The sample title for the chapter follows:

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter is the heart of your paper. Here you present all the results of your search for an answer to the thesis problem or question.

Begin by repeating the thesis statement you presented in chapter 1, then give results from your reading, interviews, and other research that proves your answer.

Try to organize this material in the way that best helps your reader to understand the problem and the answer. Consider the words of your headings and subheadings. Consider revision of the headings to present your answer by using words or phrases that are parallel in form. For example, you could begin each heading with a word that is similar in meaning or

language to the next heading and the next heading. In this way, the reader may have a clearer understanding as he reads headings that correspond to previous headings.

Conclusion (8-10 pages)

Chapter 5 of your thesis is your conclusion. In this chapter you do not add any new facts or statistics, but you may reflect to synthesize your thinking and make recommendations. An example for the title of the chapter follows:

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Take care not to base your answer (conclusion, solution) to your thesis study on your own opinion or viewpoint. Your answer should be composed entirely from synthesis of the thinking of authorities within your sources.

It is important that you not just summarize, but develop implications for ministry from what you have found. You may have one or more ideas that you plan to use, or suggestions for others to follow. You may offer recommendations for further research.

Bibliography

The last part of the thesis is the bibliography, where you present a list of all the books, journals, Internet sites, and other sources actually used for the thesis. This is entitled REFERENCES CITED; an example of the heading follows:

REFERENCES CITED

If you want to present additional information in the form of an appendix, you may title it as follows:

APPENDIX

Format Issues

Title Page

The sample title pages in *Turabian* (page 379) and the *PATHS Form and Style Guide* (page 124) show the format of a title page. Be sure that you have a two-inch margin at the top and the bottom of this page. Balance the other items in the middle part of the page by adding line spaces, as shown in the examples.

Remember that this is actually page i of your thesis, because it is part of the preliminaries. No page number appears on the page. This page is followed with a blank page, which is actually page ii, but again no page number appears on the paper.

Margins

All of your margins are one inch for the thesis. Remember that you do NOT justify any college paper; instead, you have a “ragged” right margin, as in this document. This setting is called “Align Left.”

Font

For the text of the thesis, use Times New Roman 12 point. For the footnotes, which you use to present references in the thesis, use Times New Roman 10 point. This is the standard default for MS Word.

Also remember to put in italics all titles for books, magazines, journals, and newspapers. When you refer to a specific article in a magazine, journal, or newspaper, put the title of that article in quotation marks, such as “New Church Planted in Abuja.”

Spacing

Use double line spacing for all submission of final papers, as in this section. Single spacing is used within a block quotation, within the sentence of a footnote, within the book title entries in a bibliography, etc. When you make a list of items, or a list composed of sentences, within your paper, you double space between the listed items or sentences. Block quotations also have one space before and one space after the block quotation.

Put two line spaces between text and a subsequent subheading. If two headings come together, then put only one space between them. Note the example for one line space at the beginning of this document, when headings appear together, without text between them.

Within the text, only one space follows the punctuation mark at the end of a sentence, and only one space follows a colon.

Pagination and Indents

All page numbers should appear in the upper right corner of each page. This is the MS Word default, one-half inch from the top and one inch from the right side of the page.

The first page in your paper to actually display a number is the TABLE OF CONTENTS page. Since this is part of the preliminaries, it will most likely be page v, because the pages before it do not have numbers printed on them (title page, blank page, dedication page, acknowledgments page).

Roman numerals are used for the preliminary pages, such as v, vii, etc., while Arabic numerals, such as 1, 2, 3, etc., begin with chapter 1.

The standard indent for a college paper is one-half inch, which is the MS Word default.

Abbreviations

When you abbreviate a long name that has an acronym, spell out the full name the first time, and then follow this with the acronym in parenthesis. Then you may use the acronym in subsequent instances. An example would be Assemblies of God Graduate School of Theology (AGGST). In this way the reader knows what the acronym means.

Spell out the names of the books of the Bible, such as Genesis or Revelation.

For other questions regarding abbreviations, refer to the *PAThS Form and Style Guide* (pages 16-19) or *Turabian* (chapter 24).

Capitalization

All titles of books, journals, and newspapers should be in headline caps. When you have an article (a, an, the) in the title, the article is not capitalized. When you have a preposition in the title (e.g., of, to, for, according, with), the preposition is not capitalized. Verbs are capitalized, even short ones such as “is” or “are.” Three examples follow:

The Theology of the New Testament

The Gospel according to Paul

Why Our Churches Are Growing

When a name referring to a member of the Trinity, such as God, appears in the form of a pronoun, this college does not capitalize the pronoun. An example is, “God sent his Son into the world”; the word “his” is lowercase.

Quotation Marks

Whenever you quote a person or a book in a paper, use quotation marks. If you want to quote only some of the words, you may use ellipsis marks to indicate the part you have omitted. Type ellipsis marks with spaces between them. The correct ellipsis form is . . . and not the periods . . . without spaces.

If you have a quotation with five full lines or more, make it a block quotation, with the whole quotation indented to the right one-half inch and no quotation marks. Just the fact that you have put the quotation in a block shows that it is a quotation.

Every block quote has one line space above the quote and one line space below the quote.

Numbers

In general, you will spell out whole numbers from one through one hundred and all round numbers after that. Use Arabic numerals for the other numbers. However, there are several exceptions. Refer to the *PAThS Form and Style Guide* (pages 28-33) or *Turabian* (chapter 23).

Lists

In the thesis, when you are listing items or putting sentences in a list, do not use bullets, such as •••, with your list. Rather, list the items without any symbols or any numbers. If the use of numbers, such as 1, 2, 3, etc., is appropriate for your list, then you can number the list. Double space (add one blank line) between items in the list. Remember that you do not use a period at the end of an item in a list, unless that item is a complete sentence.

Headings and Subheadings

For each new chapter in a paper or each major section (e.g., Dedication, Acknowledgments, Abstract, List of Tables, List of Figures, List of Abbreviations, List of Illustrations, Table of Contents, Appendix, Sources Consulted), put a title at the top. This title is typed in ALL CAPS and is not boldfaced or italicized. It is centered and appears two inches from the top of the page. An example of a properly typed heading is:

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The text which follows a major heading is a first-level subheading. This first level is centered, with headline caps, and in boldface type. The second-level subheading is centered, with headline-style capitalization. The third-level subheading is flush left, with headline-style capitalization, and italicized. See *PATHS Form and Style Guide* or *Turabian* for examples and for fourth- and fifth-level styles for subheadings.

When you are composing a paper with a topic under a level-one subheading, and you have two or more separate subjects within that topic, then you should make those subjects level two. This shows your reader that these level-two subjects are each part of the level-one topic. You must have two or more subheadings to make a new section (i.e., to use a lower-level subheading). Two line spaces are made before every subheading, but if two headings come together, then only one space comes between them.

Outline for Table of Contents

See the sample outline in the *PATHS Form and Style Guide* on pages 125–126. The instructions for outlining are found on page 42 at 2.10.1 and 2.10.2.

Try to make your thesis outline short, with perhaps only one or two levels shown. You are not required to include all subheading levels in your main Table of Contents.

M.A. Thesis Topic Approval Form

Student's name

Mentor's name

Thesis topic (in one sentence)

Background information

Resources

Student's signature _____ Date _____

Mentor's signature _____ Date _____

Approved by Academic Dean _____ Date _____