

B.A. THESES IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH BOHEMIA

For general guidelines concerning the submission of the thesis proposal, the submission of the thesis, and the format of the thesis, see the Dean's Decree 05/2024.

The Department of English issues the following guidelines concerning the contents and the form of B.A. theses in English and American literature.

Topic

The topic of the thesis is chosen by the student based on consultations with the future supervisor of the thesis. The topic and the choice of the supervisor are approved by the Head of the Department after the thesis proposal (zadání) is submitted.

The topic must fulfil the following requirements:

- The topic deals with the analysis and interpretation of important literary works originally written in English.
- The chosen topic will lead to academic research, meaning that the student will endeavour to discover one or more aspects of the work that are not obvious to a casual reader.
- The topic should be limited to the scope of a B.A. thesis which usually means you will be able to deal with only one or at most two literary works in the required depth.
- The topic should be very narrow and as clearly outlined as possible.
- It is strongly recommended to choose canonical works (such as works from the B.A. Exam reading list) on which a significant amount of research has been published. Recent popular genres such as Young Adult or fantasy will only be accepted in special cases, where the student can demonstrate that a. there is extensive research on the text, b. they are familiar with this research and c. there is a gap in the research that is worth exploring.
- While students are expected to study relevant historical and biographical background materials, the main focus of the work should be the interpretation of a literary work rather than a journalistic-like reporting of facts about the writer or the historical period.

How to choose your topic for a literary thesis?

There are many ways to come up with ideas for a research topic and develop them into a B.A. thesis proposal, but the following tips may be useful in the process:

- Make a list of authors or works that you have particularly enjoyed reading or studying and consider what more you would like to learn about these works.
- Ask a question that interests you about the work (i.e., “Does Jo in *Little Women* behave like a boy because she is an emancipated woman or because she might be transgender?”).
- Make a statement that you will be able to support with arguments in your thesis (“Bartleby suffers from a post-traumatic stress disorder”).

- Alternatively, you can start with a general topic that you find interesting, for example, “Women’s writing in the Victorian era”, and then narrow it down to a particular question in one or two works, for example, “Writing as a profession for women in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott”. Look up scholarly research on the area you are interested in to discover additional aspects or issues that you may want to pursue.
- Look up the topics of previous theses written in the department to get a more concrete idea of possible topics. It can also help you find the best supervisor for your topic.
- If you are interested in working with a particular supervisor look up their research interest and list of publications on the department website.

Suggested areas of research

The department encourages students to pursue their personal research interests and accommodates a wide range of subjects and methodologies. The following list presents a broad research area that students can choose to engage with:

- A comparison of 21st-century literary work with classical works which have influenced the writers, or show significant similarities.
- Subjects listed on teacher’s pages on the department website.

Structure

The structure of the work must follow a logical breakdown of the particular topic. Ideally, each chapter will make a separate claim that will support the overall argument of the thesis. We are aware that many students have learned to separate their research into a “theoretical part” and a “practical part”, but this structure is rarely suitable for theses about literature which consist of interpretation rather than the application of a theory. Note that the structure of your thesis should reflect your emphasis and main research area.

The number of chapters is left to the decision of the student in consultation with their supervisor but the number of 2-4 chapters is recommended.

While students would need to acquaint themselves with the biography of the writers they discuss and the historical background of their period, there is no requirement to include a biographical or historical chapter in the thesis. A short review of the pertinent facts in the introduction is enough. Biographical or historical information should be presented at greater length only if it forms an essential part of the topic of the thesis, and the writer must keep in mind that such information should be directly relevant to their interpretation of the chosen literary text or texts.

For more on the principle of constructing an academic text, please consult the department’s Essay Writing Guidelines, available on the departmental website.

Writing Process and Credit (zápočet)

First semester – 7SBP1

The winter semester will be devoted to planning and researching in preparation for writing the full thesis. At the end of the semester, the students will have a clear and detailed plan that will enable them to complete the writing of a thesis in the summer semester at the level required by the department.

Students enrolled in the course will be required to deliver the following work products in order to pass the seminar:

Product 1: Updated research question and annotated bibliography

Product 2: Annotated bibliography

Product 3: Detailed chapter plan

Product 4: One full chapter

Further details and materials will be provided on the Moodle site for the seminar, a general meeting at the start of the semester and individual consultations with supervisors.

Second Semester - 7SBP2

The summer semester will be devoted to writing the thesis in consultation with the thesis supervisor.

Students are responsible for submitting their work on time on the schedule agreed with their supervisor. Please take into consideration at least two weeks to receive the supervisor's feedback in response to each submission of a part of the work. If students send their work to the supervisor a few days before the final deadline without prior consent, they risk not being able to submit it in that term.

Please note that students defending in August **must submit their full thesis no later than the end of June** since supervisors are often away during the summer.

Formal Requirements

The minimal length for a B.A. thesis is 25 pages of double-spaced text (45,000 signs) without the bibliography.

You can find further information about how to format and submit the thesis on the departmental website.

Language and Style

The thesis can be written in English or Czech. The standard of language use is part of the assessment.

The thesis should be written according to the norms of academic research and follow the department's [Essay Writing Guidelines](#).

Theses written in English should follow the most recent edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, for a summary of the MLA Style guidelines see the Purdue University OWL website.

Theses written in Czech should follow the norm ISO 690.

Use of sources

Primary sources

The student must use a printed book edition of the primary text interpreted in the thesis or electronic editions created by a reputable publisher. In case of doubt consult with your supervisor.

Regardless of the language of the thesis, the interpretation must be based on the English original of the work, not a Czech translation.

Secondary sources

The research for the thesis must be based on academic secondary sources and students must prove their ability to use them effectively.

In order to ensure the student is using high-quality and up-to-date sources of information, students must use peer-reviewed research. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they are using appropriate sources. Exceptions can be made for specific topics where research is unavailable in consultation with the supervisor, and the introduction to the thesis should explain the reasons for using non-academic materials.

The following ways are recommended for finding appropriate materials:

- Publications available in the university library.
- Articles found in academic repositories such as JSTOR or ProQuest.
- Articles from academic journals devoted to a specific writer or topic, e.g., *Journal of Beckett Studies*, or *Victorian Studies*.
- Books published by university presses or academic publishers.
- Note on academia.edu: texts published on this platform are uploaded by users and are not checked for academic value. You can only use materials from this platform if they have been published in a peer-reviewed journal or book.

The following sources are not commonly acceptable as secondary sources:

- Student theses of all levels and universities.
- Student guides and literary analysis websites such as SparkNotes, Litcharts, Cliff Notes, etc. These guides are usually created by unqualified writers and can be misleading or erroneous.
- General audience popular history or culture sources, such as YouTube videos, TV documentaries, websites of cultural institutions (e.g., the British Library), or any other source that has not been peer-reviewed.
- LLM (AI) tools.

Incorporating secondary sources

- Secondary sources should be used to support the student's argument or present a point of view the student wishes to comment on. They must not replace the independent thinking of the student.
- Quotes must be introduced to explain their relevance to the line of argumentation, never use a quote to open a new paragraph.
- Excessive use of quotations may be considered plagiarism. Students need to present their materials and claims in their own words.

Plagiarism

It is essential to clearly mark all the quotations and refer to the source at the end of the quotation or paraphrase. If you paraphrase someone else's idea, it must be clear from the text that it is a paraphrase, not your original idea, and the source must be referred to immediately after the paraphrase. Failing to refer to your sources can be a serious problem and amount to plagiarism. The use of AI tools to generate the text in whole or in part is also considered a form of plagiarism. If plagiarism is detected, the thesis will not be accepted for defence and other sanctions may follow.

Thesis Evaluation

Each thesis is evaluated by the supervisor and an opponent who both submit a report summarising their assessment before the defence. The evaluation consists of different aspects of the research and academic writing skills exhibited in the thesis. Students can find the evaluation forms on the thesis seminar Moodle site and are encouraged to consult them while working on the thesis so they can meet the criteria stipulated in them.

The reports will also suggest questions for discussion during the defence which the students will use in their preparation for this stage.

Defence

The thesis defence provides students with the opportunity to discuss and defend their work, taking into consideration the evaluation by their supervisor and opponent. This is not an exam, however, the student is expected to come prepared to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their thesis and provide satisfactory answers to the questions and criticisms raised in the reports.

The defence usually has the following format:

- The student briefly introduces the topic of their thesis, the chosen method and the conclusions reached. The supervisor and the reader summarize their reports.
- The student responds to the supervisor's and reader's commentaries and criticism as necessary.
- In the following discussion, in which all members of the defence board may participate, the student answers questions concerning various aspects of their work, the broader context of the topic, and the direction for future development of the research.
- The final grade incorporates the reports submitted by the supervisor and the opponent, as well as the student's performance at the oral defence. A good defence can convince the committee to raise a student's grade, while poor presentation and inability to answer questions may result in a lower grade than that suggested in the reports.
- The defence is in the language of the thesis.