Writing a Thesis in the Research MA Comparative Literary Studies: Guidelines and Procedures.

1. Aims:

An RMA thesis is a scholarly text in which you are expected to contribute, on the basis of independent research, to a debate within your discipline. It should be structured around a central research question (set out in the introductory sections) to which it provides an answer (set out in the conclusion).

The central research question should be clearly formulated at the beginning and its relevance to scholarly discussions within the discipline set out. The body of the text should show how you went about trying to answer this question, why you proceeded the way you did, and what your findings were. In your conclusion you should analyze your findings in the light of your original question and explain the broader implications of your conclusions.

The thesis should be written in correct and clear English;¹ it will normally be around 30,000 words long and may be no longer than 40,000 words (including notes and bibliography).

You must hand in your thesis the RMA office at the end of your two years of study in the RMA programme; this means by the end of block 4 (if you started in September) or by the end of Block 2 (if you started in February). Failure to meet the deadline will adversely affect your final grade.

2. Assessment and assessment criteria:

Your thesis will be assessed and graded by your supervisor and by a second assessor who has not been involved in the supervision. The second assessor is appointed by the programme coordinator. You will hear the outcome of the assessment from the RMA office within 10 days of having handed in your thesis, including a readers’ report on the strengths and weaknesses of your thesis.

In judging your thesis attention will be paid to the following:

1. Sharpness of focus (is the central research question well conceived?)
2. Knowledge of field (is it clearly situated in a scholarly debate? Have you shown that you know the relevant literature and discussions? Do you show a critical awareness of the limitations of different positions?)
3. Quality of research (do you provide adequate coverage of the relevant primary and secondary sources?)
4. Methodological strengths and weaknesses (have you clarified your methodological choices? have you been consistent in the way you went to work?)
5. Coherence of the argument (is your argument consistent? Does your evidence justify your conclusions?)

¹ Students in the Comparative Literary Studies programme may be permitted to write their thesis in French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish if this is appropriate to their topic and specialisation. Advance approval is required from the programme coordinator.
6. Quality of the writing and professionalism of the presentation (Is your writing correct, clear? Does it show a sense of style and composition? Are all your source references presented according to academic norms?)

7. Originality (does it show evidence of scholarly creativity? Of independent critical thought?)

1. Procedures and Planning:

- **Semester 1-2**: In making your work plan you should plan to write your thesis in the final (i.e., 4th) semester of your programme;
- **Semester 3**: By the end of the third semester you should have identified your research topic and, with the help of the programme coordinator, found a member of staff who is available to supervise your thesis;
- **Semester 4**: In this period you prepare and write your thesis. You will do so in stages:
  i. In order to facilitate the planning of their research and the writing an annual thesis lab. will be organized from February onwards. You are expected to participate actively in the thesis lab. Information about dates will be sent through email and Blackboard.
  ii. The first step in developing your thesis is to write a thesis proposal. Below you will find guidelines regarding the content of this proposal. Your thesis proposal must be submitted to your supervisor and second assessor and approved by them, by 1 March (for those who began in September) and by 1 October (for those who began in February) at the latest.
  iii. You can expect regular feedback from your supervisor; deadlines for submitting chapters are established on a case-by-case basis.
  iv. The final date for submitting the final version of your thesis is 10 days before the end of block 4 (for those who began in September) or block 2 (for those who began in February). In some cases, those who finish in the summer months may be allowed to submit at a later date (but never later than 15 August), but only by prior agreement with the supervisor and second assessor.
- **Handing in**: 3 hard copies of your thesis plus a digital copy to be handed into the RMA office by 31 August or on 31 January, depending on whether you started the programme in September or in February.
- **Results and Graduation**: the supervisor will inform you of your grade within 10 days of submission, and will send you a copy of the readers’ report to explain the grade.

Research MA Comparative Literary Studies: Thesis proposal

Name:
Student number:

Thesis Supervisor:

Second Assessor:

1. **Title**
   
   *What is your working title?* Try at this point to be as descriptive as possible so that the central topic is clear.

2. **Main research question [max 100 words]**

   *What is your specific topic?* [i.e. what will you be actually examining]. Describe very briefly what you intend to study, what is the question you want to ask with respect to this phenomenon, and why it is important to ask this question (i.e. what general debate will be advanced).

3. **Status quaestionis with regard to your specific topic [200-300 words]**: summarize how this particular topic has been treated before so that it is clear how your approach will be different, but also (if relevant) where it builds on earlier work in the field. i.e. indicate how your project will bring our understanding of this phenomenon forward.

4. **Disciplinary framework of main question [200-300 words]**

   *To what more general scholarly debate do you want to contribute?* What are the broader implications of your particular case? i.e. to what more general debate do you want to contribute? And how will your particular study advance this debate?

5. **Research design and methods**

   *How do you actually intend to go about getting your answer to your main question?* i.e. what method or methods will you use? If you are going to make a selection of texts of concentrate on a particular period, explain the rationale behind your choices.

6. **Planning**

   *How do you plan to go about your work?* Indicate the different blocks of work and the time you intend to devote to each phase.

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2 Depending on the nature of your project sections 2, 3, 4 could gain greater emphasis. But the important thing is (1) that you show that your project is ABOUT something- i.e. there’s something interesting in the world (a book, set of books, writing practices, reactions to books or writings) that we don’t yet know enough about and (2) that by studying this thing we can gain greater insight into something more fundamental in culture/literature about which there has been discussion. N.B. there should be a ‘narrative of innovation’ underlying your project which places itself in a scholarly debate and then indicates how, by examining something very specific, it will help ‘move that debate’ forward.