Tips for Thesis Writers  
from former thesis writers

STARTING OUT
- Write a thesis only if you have a topic that you want to think about for nine months.
- Choose your advisor carefully. Be clear about your agreement with him or her, including the direction of your project, how often you intend to meet, and what expectations each of you have.
- Set deadlines for drafts and keep track of them on a calendar.
- Your thesis needs to have a thesis. This may need to be revised and rewritten throughout the process, but you should always be conscious of this evolving argument. A great tip, from Charles Lipson’s How to Write a BA Thesis, is to find models of well-stated arguments in the books and articles you are reading.
- Be sure that you have a clear sense of your argument before completing too much writing. Locate what you’re working on in relation to the work of others.
- There is a point when you have to stop reading—research becomes procrastination, and at some point, you have to begin writing. There will always be more to read, but you need to stifle that urge.
- Create an outline in which each chapter and sub-section explains part of your thesis statement.
- Keep track of your materials and research from the outset—everything you record should include its source. Develop a system to distinguish between your notes and your own thoughts and commentary and those paraphrasing your sources.
- Start formatting your work and citations early on in the process: use Endnote, Zotero, or a similar program beginning with your very first footnote. Figures and images are especially time-consuming to format.

WRITING
- Define your terms and ID’s clearly and, if needed, more than once.
- Take introductions and opening sentences seriously—this is your first and best chance to pull the reader in.
- Subheadings are very useful signposts for your readers, and they can allow you to transition more clearly.
- Use quotations judiciously. Unless the quote is capturing something unique or distinct, you should paraphrase.
- Explain your quotations. Don’t saturate paragraphs with quotes, or use block quotes, without giving them context and purpose in your own words. Explanations are also an important way to let your own voice and perspective come through, and it’s not your work unless it contains analysis of the work of others.
- Use assertive, confident language! Again, this is your argument, and you must establish your perspective.
- Keep your reader in mind when you write—both your thesis readers and your general audience. Make your progression logical, make your transitions clear, and err on the side of over-explanation.
- Your section conclusions are a chance for you to emphasize major points and findings, not to summarize the entire chapter.

EDITING
- Be open to sharing your work! Whether you discuss it with friends, send a chapter to your grandma, or work closely with a Thesis Mentor, be open to others’ input and ideas.
- You can begin editing each section after it’s finished—you don’t need to wait until you have a full draft.
- Don’t make your thesis too long. Longer is not always better. Whatever you’ve written can usually be trimmed down by a third, and it will make your work clear and more direct.
- Be ruthless about removing unnecessary or irrelevant information.
- Read out loud: you will recognize odd phrasing and convoluted sentences more easily when you hear them.
- Aim to finish writing ten days before the deadline. You will need this time to edit.
- Put everything in one Word document (including the title page, table of contents, acknowledgments, abstract, bibliography, and appendices) about a week before the deadline.

EXTRA ADVICE
- If you don’t own a style manual already, we recommend you get one to refer to for grammar, research tips, and guidelines for your citations and bibliography. We like EasyWriter, available online, at Broad Street Books, and on reserve at Olin Library.
- We also recommend the comprehensive resource How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper by Charles Lipson.
- The Writing Programs’ Thesis Mentor Program pairs thesis writers with trained peer tutors. They work together weekly from January to April. Mentors can help the writer plan or revise thesis chapters, offer editorial advice, and assist with time management. You will receive an e-mail about the program in the fall; contact the Ford Fellows in the Writing Programs writingworks@wesleyan.edu or 860.685.2440 for more information.
- Trained peer tutors from a variety of disciplines are available Sunday through Thursday in the Writing Workshop, and numerous thesis writers have made great use of their knowledge. Hours are posted here: www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop.
- A collection of Wesleyan theses (searchable by discipline) is available at: http://wesScholar.wesleyan.edu/etsd/
- More information about the honors thesis process is available at: www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/JB-contents.btt

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