

A
Brief Guide
For Sociology Honors
Thesis Students

Dartmouth College

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Table of Contents

Preface.....	2
Testimony from an Alumna	
Honors Thesis Timeline and Department Requirements	
Senior Year Planner	
Part One: First Steps.....	5
Why Write a Thesis?	
Getting Starting	
Identifying a Method	
Getting Funding	
Other Considerations (course planning, etc.)	
Part Two: Managing a Project.....	11
Time Management and Goal-Setting	
Reference Managers	
Keeping a Journal (Research and Personal)	
Tips on Collecting Data	
Tips on Analyzing Data	
Part Three: Writing a Thesis.....	16
When Do I Start Writing?	
The Drafting Process	
Resources for Writing	
Example Outline of a Thesis	
Part Four: Final Touches.....	20
How Do I Prepare for the Presentation?	
Other Opportunities for Sharing Your Work	
Formatting the Final Document	
Final Checklist for Success	
Reflection (again and again!)	
Gratitude (Don't forget thank-you notes!)	
Appendices.....	24
College & Library Resources	
Further Reading	
Acknowledgments	
Plan for Upkeep	

Preface

Testimony from an Alumna

Dear Future Sociology Thesis Writers,

Towards the end of my junior year of college, I made a choice that you are either currently facing or have already decided on: to write a thesis, or not? I chose to write an honors thesis in the Sociology Department for a number of reasons: 1) I had a cool topic idea, 2) I wanted to dip my toes in the waters of original research, and 3) I wanted to one day attend grad school. The street cred from saying “I’m doing a senior honors thesis” aside, these seemed like good reasons to pursue an honors thesis in my major.

Being on “the other side of the pond,” I consider the experience of doing a thesis to be among the best I’ve had at Dartmouth. It was the first time I truly had the freedom to be curious, manage my own project, and learn how I work best as a student. Don’t get me wrong: there were definitely humbling moments of stress, frustration, and demotivation. However, there were also great “epiphany” moments and wonderful opportunities to meet and work with interesting new people. A number of resources helped me make the most of my thesis experience; so, the purpose of this guide is to streamline the most helpful resources for sociology thesis students.

This guide should, in one space, provide you with the many tools available to you as a thesis student at Dartmouth: institution-specific resources, disciplinary-specific resources, and advice from people who have been in your shoes – or somewhere on the road near where your shoe falls. Every thesis and every student is different, so this guide in no way tries to tell you how to do a thesis: that’s for you to figure out! But, along the way, there are plenty of things, places, and people that are there to support you!

Best wishes for a fun and successful thesis,

Morgan C. Matthews '15

“Your thesis is like your first love: it will be difficult to forget.” – Umberto Eco

Honors Thesis Department Requirements and Timeline

Please consider the following honors program eligibility requirements and timeline when making the decision to write a thesis in the Sociology Department.

Who is eligible for the Honors Program?

- Anyone with interest in writing a thesis who meets all of the following criteria:
 - 3.0 or higher College GPA
 - 3.3 or higher Major GPA
 - Completed Soc 10 and 11
 - Completed Soc 15 or 16

Timeline*

- **Junior Spring:** Identify a Sociology Faculty Thesis Advisor
- **Senior Fall (or earlier):** Submit Thesis Proposal by Week 3
- **Senior Winter:** Evaluation of Progress by Department
- **Senior Spring:**
 - Preliminary Draft Due to Advisor + Second Reader by Week 5
 - Final Draft Due to Department by Week 8
 - Oral Presentations in Week 8

* Keep in mind, honors thesis students will also typically be invited to a dinner with the College President in the winter/spring term and an Academic Honors Dinner in mid-May. Furthermore, thesis students can be nominated to participate in the President's Undergraduate Research Symposium at the end of May.

Students who receive a B+ or higher on their theses will receive department honors. High honors may be awarded for exceptional work by a vote from the faculty.

Check out past sociology thesis writers' projects:

<http://sociology.dartmouth.edu/undergraduate/honors-program/past-honors-theses>

Senior Year Planner

Use this template to set goals and deadlines for completing parts of your thesis throughout senior year!

Summer						Interim
Fall	1	2	3	4	5	Interim
	6	7	8	9	10	
Winter	1	2	3	4	5	Interim
	6	7	8	9	10	
Spring	1	2	3	4	5	Interim
	6	7	8	9	10	

Part One: First Steps

Why Write a Thesis?

It's senior year! Start working on your Dartmouth bucket list, apply for jobs and/or grad school, and... finish the literature review for your thesis? There are many reasons why someone would choose to undertake a thesis in his or her last year at Dartmouth. Here are some past sociology thesis students' testimonies on why they chose to write an honors thesis:

"I decided to write a thesis because a professor encouraged me to write one. She said that it would be an enjoyable experience. I also decided to write a thesis because my project is something I have talked about with friends for a long time, so I just decided to create a project based on that!"

"I was really interested in the topic and wanted to challenge myself by doing a higher level of research than I normally get to do in my classes."

"I first started thinking of writing a thesis my sophomore year when I joined the Mellon Mays program here at the College. The program encourages each student to write a thesis in preparation for graduate work."

"I took several classes that, in one way or another, related to my thesis topic. So, my thesis built on this passion I had developed over several terms and that I wanted to pursue in independent research."

The Honors Thesis is a great opportunity to learn about a topic or issue you are interested in on a deeper level. This is an opportunity to "do" sociology and use the skills you have learned during your Dartmouth career. You get to build a working relationship with a faculty member. You gain transferable skills from managing your own project, managing your time independently, writing a lengthy and polished document, and communicating your research orally in a final presentation. And, if you are considering applying to graduate school, the honors thesis has the added benefit of giving you experience doing the kind of research one would do as a graduate student, but scaled to an undergraduate level.

Tip: Check out the links to the blogs and radio show below, which are about thesis writing in general.

Blogs: <http://thesiswhisperer.com/>; <http://lolmythesis.com/>

Radio: <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/05/06/college-senior-thesis-student-roundtable>

Getting Starting

Choosing a Topic

The most critical step towards writing a thesis is, arguably, choosing your topic. Your thesis topic should reflect *personal interests*, fit with your *long-term goals*, and be something that is *new or unique* in some way. Think about what you want to get out of your thesis experience early on; these considerations are especially critical when you are selecting a thesis topic.

Keep these ideas in mind when you are choosing a topic:

- You will be working on this project for upwards of **one year**. When was the last time you committed to anything for an entire year? ... So, make sure you choose a topic that you *enjoy* and can stay interested in for a long time.
- Think **BIG**... and *small*. Some of the best ideas might seem crazy at first, so don't be afraid to think outside of the box. However, you also want to select a project that is feasible. The best way to know the difference between great and infeasible is to talk with people who are familiar with your field of interest and have worked with thesis students before.
- Read or watch the news. Some of the best ideas for social research come from paying attention to what is happening in your community and the world.

Faculty Tip

Start by choosing a topic you care about, or are at least interested in enough that you could see yourself working on it for a year or more.

Faculty Tip

Most topics start out broad and grandiose. They need to be narrowed down and very specific.

Alumni Advice

"My project is very much related to my Dartmouth experience. I wanted to write something that expressed the experience of myself, but also other students who I knew were going through similar or very different situations."

Meet Amy Witzel, Your Subject Librarian!



Photo Credit:
Dartmouth Library Website

"When could I make the best use of my subject librarian?"

When...

You are working on your literature review, Amy can help locate the key research on your topic.

When...

You are first thinking about a topic, Amy can connect you with handbooks and other literature review articles that can spark ideas and help focus your topic.

Anytime...

You need help locating resources or getting access to information, Amy can help you navigate the library bureaucracy.

Identifying an Advisor

“What is the role of the advisor?”

Think of your thesis advisor as the person who will be a mentor to you throughout the course of your project. Although different professors have different advising styles, (s)he will generally help you develop your topic, work through challenges you face when collecting and analyzing data, and provide advice as you draft your thesis. Your advisor will also be the person who grades your thesis, as well as your second reader.

There are a number of things to consider when looking for a thesis advisor:

- **Expertise:** You might look for an advisor whose research interests or methodological experience aligns with your project. You can learn more about professors' research by reading their profiles on the Sociology Department's website: <https://sociology.dartmouth.edu/people>

Alumni Advice

“Having someone in your subfield is really helpful because when you're first starting out, you need someone who knows what's been done in the field and can say ‘Oh, no, that's already been done’ or ‘Yeah, that'd be great, people would be really interested in that!’”

- **Personality:** Each professor has a different personality, different interests, and different styles of advising. Think about what kind of relationship and support you want from your advisor by communicating with people *early*. The best way to feel out a professor's personality is to take a class with him or her!

Faculty Tip

Find someone who is interested in working with you, even if they may not be an expert on the topic.
Find someone you feel comfortable with.

Alumni Advice

“You want to pick a mentor you're going to be able to work with. The best way to make sure this happens is to communicate what you want and need clearly, from the very beginning. Maybe you want them to provide feedback every week or you need someone pushing you and motivating you by giving you deadlines. Professors will generally try to work with you to give you the support you're looking for – make it easy on them by letting them know what that is!”

- **Schedules/Workload:** While your thesis is going to become a major part of your life for the next few months, your potential thesis advisor likely has a lot of other projects and things happening in their lives. Get a sense of a potential advisor's upcoming schedule and workload, because you want to make sure you get the support you need at the time you will need it most!

Identifying a Method

Once you figure out what you want to study, you will also need to decide the best way to answer your research question(s). Often, the kinds of questions we ask lend themselves to particular methods. For instance, if you are interested in understanding a *process* of human experience, a qualitative method such as semi-structured interviews might be the best bet for answering your research question. However, there are other considerations you should think about when selecting a research method:

How much time do you have to do this research?

- If you want to collect original data, plan ahead! This is especially true of the more time-intensive methods, such as interviews and ethnography.

What data is actually available to you?

- Sometimes we are constrained by the data that has been collected by other people. A list of databases at the bottom of this page can help you find data that has already been gathered!

How have other social scientists gone about answering similar questions?

- Often, you will be able to find a model on which to justify your methodological decisions.

Don't be afraid to use multiple research methods!

- Plenty of social scientists are moving towards "mixed methods" approaches to research.

Methods Used in Sociology (Detailed in Sociology 11)

- Surveys
- Content Analysis
- Historical Research
- Ethnography
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Network Analysis
- Experiments

Faculty Tip

Be open. Don't rule out a particular method before thinking through the best way to answer your research questions.

Need to brush up on Stata? Visit this resource from UCLA to get caught up on statistical analysis techniques:

<http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/>

Databases for Social Research

- General Social Survey <http://www3.norc.umd.edu/GSS+Website/>
- ICPSR <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/index.html>
- OECD <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/>
- WHO <http://www.who.int/research/en/>
- iPoll <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/ipoll/index.cfm>

Getting Funding

“Can I get funding for my thesis?”

Yes! UGAR (Undergraduate Advising & Research) offers up to \$2000 per term for Senior Honors Thesis research. An application through Canvas is necessary to receive funding for senior year research, and grants are awarded for costs that are **directly** related to the research. Also, Rockefeller Center offers up to \$1000 grants through their Senior Honors Grants program.

For the most up-to-date deadlines and application forms:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ugar/undergrad/grants/index.html>

<http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/studentopps/thesisgrants.html>

“What do I need in order to apply for a grant?”

The proposal for grant funding includes:

- Summary of the project
- Timeline for your research
- Recommendation from your advisor
- Unofficial transcript
- Committee for the Protection of Human Subject approval* (if necessary)

* Note: Your thesis does not necessarily have to be department/CPHS approved in order to *apply* for a grant; however, department and CPHS approval is necessary to actually receive the grant.

“What kind of things might a grant cover for an honors thesis in Sociology?”

- Incentives for participants
- Cost of transcribing interviews
- Survey costs
- International travel expenses
- Rental equipment

“What tips do past thesis students have for getting funding?”

Start early! The applications come faster than you think. Also, plan at least a term in advance to see if you will need funds. For example, if you know that your project will include transcriptions, then it is best to get funding for that project so someone else can transcribe for you. Transcribing can be tedious and more work than you have to do!

Other Considerations (course planning, etc.)

In anticipation of a busy year, there are a number of things you can do to help set yourself up for success.

Take the Research-Related Classes Beforehand.

Aside from the topical classes in the sociology department (like gender, political sociology, race and ethnicity, etc.), three research-related courses are critical to your success in doing a thesis: theory (Soc 15 or 16), statistics (Soc 10), and research methods (Soc 11). Without the knowledge and skills you gain from these classes, it will be very difficult to process and understand your data. Take these classes *before* senior year!

Anticipate Extra Time to Get CPHS-Approved.

Human subject research requires approval from Dartmouth's internal review board, or the Center for the Protection of Human Studies (CPHS). It often takes 2-3 weeks to get through the approval process. So, plan accordingly for these "hoops" to jump through before you can begin collecting data.

Alumni Advice

"The CPHS approval process was fairly straightforward and painless for me actually. I think a lot of that has to do with my advisor having checked over my materials beforehand as well as her being very familiar with the process. Just anticipate that the committee will almost always want more documentation than you provide, and allow time for that exchange and review process in your research timeline."

Plan Senior Year Courses Strategically.

If you know early on that you will be doing a thesis, it is best to try to schedule a lighter course load for your senior year. If you can, get the harder classes out of the way as soon as possible. Take an independent study (Soc 80) in the fall to work on your literature review and/or collect data. Also, consider taking only two classes senior spring to finish writing!

Alumni Advice

"During the fall, I took a class that lined up with topics I was addressing in my research. Winter term, I explored departments I hadn't taken classes in, and none of them dealt with my research. Spring term, I knew I would be writing a lot for my thesis, so I did not take any writing-intensive classes."

Tip: If you are working on your thesis during a leave term, you can change your status in DartDoc to "Scholar Abroad" under "Change Personal Information." This way, the library can scan and email book chapters from the stacks to you.

Part Two: Managing a Project

Time Management and Goal-Setting

One of the biggest challenges with a long-term research project is staying focused and on-track to finish with ample time to perfect your final product. When getting started on your thesis, it will be beneficial to find a method of managing your time and setting goals that works for you. There are a number of tools that can help you do this:

- **Calendars/Planners**

There is a senior year calendar located on page 4 of this guide that you can print out and write-in long-term goals and deadlines. You can also find weekly and term-long planners on the Academic Skills Center's website:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/handouts.html>

Alumni Advice

"I spent my whole fall going over the literature, and although this gave me a good grounding in the lit, once I started my project, I found it going in unanticipated directions. That meant I had to do a lot more reading!"

- **To-Do Lists**

Some people find daily "to-do" lists helpful ways of managing their time. These are especially useful for keeping track of day-to-day goals and meetings.

- **Work Logs**

While working on your project, keep a log where you keep track of your emerging ideas and what you have to do.

- **Your Advisor**

Another good tool for keeping you on track for meeting your goals is your advisor. By setting deadlines with your advisor, you have someone else to which you are accountable, and this can motivate you to push for those deadlines!

Faculty Tip

I write "to-do" lists constantly. Before going to sleep I make a note about what I need to do tomorrow.

Faculty Tip

A Dropbox folder or some other file-sharing setup to keep you and your advisor on track is a must.

Alumni Advice

"I had a schedule with my advisor where every week something was expected from me. Most times I did not complete the work by the deadline, but I always had something I had written for the week. This was extremely helpful because this schedule got me to finish *something* every week."

Reference Managers

Remember that really helpful theory chapter you read in Socy 15? Or that article you found browsing Google Scholar the other day? No? You should have used a reference manager! Not only are reference managers helpful because they make doing bibliographies fast and easy, but they also allow you to store, sort, and sometimes even annotate literature. For those reasons, finding a reference manager that works well for you is extremely important! The following are a number of reference managers you might consider:



Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Free (through the College)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cannot use offline- Written material only
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Free download- PDF editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inaccuracy with some older pdfs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Free download- Great for multimedia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cannot annotate pdfs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Most professional- Free sharing- Spell Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Costs money

For a more advanced comparison of reference managers, see this website:
<https://www.library.wisc.edu/services/citation-managers/comparison-chart/>

Advice from an Alum

"A Dartmouth Librarian introduced me to Zotero as a reference manager, and I was very grateful for that! Reference managers are useful in general because they can usually be connected to your browsers, so you can just clip an article online that you find interesting and/or will use in your paper."

Tip: Be aware that while useful for managing literature reviews and keeping citations organized, automated services will need editing because people often encounter challenges with formatting!

Keeping a Journal (Research and Personal)

During the course of your project, you will make methodological decisions, learn new things about your population or topic, and have innovative ideas. Recording these decisions, thoughts, and ideas will help you process these ideas or better understand the theory you use in your thesis. Also, a journal is a great place to reflect on your overall experience so you can take what you learn while writing a thesis with you in future projects and other aspects of your life!

Your journal should be kept in a format that best suits your preferences for organization. Some people prefer a leather-bound notebook organized by date; others prefer a word document that allows someone to search for key words within the document.

Another new platform a faculty member suggested for recording your research ideas is Evernote. This free application allows you to write to-do lists, clip articles you find online, write notes, tag notes and ideas for easy searching, and organize ideas by project or topic.

Faculty Tip
Begin writing immediately. If nothing else, keep a journal of your research strategies, successes, failures, new ideas and the like. Always keep your hand in it.

Whatever method you choose for journaling, make sure you don't lose track of your thoughts and ideas; otherwise, you will regret it later!

Alumni Advice

"As you get further along in your project, you'll start to have ideas, brilliant little thoughts about how to better integrate your theory or how to move your project forward, how your findings interrelate – WRITE THEM DOWN! Whether it's a journal or your phone, designate one place for all those amazing ideas."

From C. Wright Mills' essay, "On Intellectual Craftsmanship"¹:

"As a social scientist, you have to... capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflection, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman. But how can you do this? One answer is: you must set up a file, which is, I suppose, a sociologist's way of saying: keep a journal." (196)

¹ Mills, C. Wright. 1959. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship." Pp. 195-226 in *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tips on Collecting Data

Although not all theses require you to collect original data, it can be very gratifying to produce new data for your thesis research. And, original data allows you to address questions that can't be answered using existing data. However, there are a number of considerations and challenges that past thesis students have faced when collecting original data. You are not alone! Here are a few things you might think about or face when writing a thesis, and how past students have addressed these ideas and challenges:

"I have a low response rate! What should I do?"

There isn't necessarily a "magic number" of responses you need for a thesis; however, it can be frustrating when you have a low response rate for interviews or surveys. Before you start a project, you might think about whether incentives are an appropriate way to encourage participation in your study. Also, sometimes the way you reach out to people makes a big difference: is email really the best way to reach your target population? Finally, it is important to talk with your advisor if you are having these challenges; not only will it keep your advisor up-to-date, but he or she also likely has suggestions for addressing this challenge!

Faculty Tip

Be sure to keep your advisor up to date about your progress along the way – there is no shame in encountering bumps in the road. Ask for help and advice when you need it!

"It feels uncomfortable to take notes during interviews!"

There is a lot of finesse involved in doing interviews, and certain aspects of interviews (such as taking notes) might feel unnatural for you or your interviewee. One way you could handle this is to explain to your interviewee the purpose of taking notes for your research and ask if they feel comfortable with you doing some note-taking. You could also take minimal notes during interviews and make time immediately after interviews to flesh out your personal/theoretical/methodological and field notes. Finally, don't forget to ask your advisor about this obstacle!

"How do I do justice to my research participants?"

It might feel like a lot of pressure to be responsible for accurately portraying your target population's social experiences when you are collecting your data. In this way, you want to do your best to do justice by your research participants. Be very critical of bias in the questions you ask and the way you ask these questions, and be honest about flaws in your research. Your best is the best you can do!

Tip: Equipment, such as audio and video recorders, is available for a 3-day checkout period at Jones Media Center. This equipment could be helpful for fieldwork done on campus. For off-campus fieldwork, see the Sociology Department about equipment for long-term use.

Tips on Analyzing Data

You have a theory. You've done some background research on the literary body your study draws on/adds to. You have data to work with. Now you are ready to start analyzing your data! The way you analyze your data depends on the approach you are using: some methods tend towards hypothesis testing, and others allow you to build an analysis based on the data you collected (as is the case with grounded theory). While your approach can vary, there is advice common to *any* of the approaches that may be used in analyzing sociological data.

Faculty Tip

With quantitative studies, you may need to tweak your variables, coding, techniques multiple times. With qualitative work, you should be analyzing your data from your first interview/survey/trip to the field.

Analysis is a process, not a one-time event.

Well-developed analyses will occur from the time you have data until the time at which you submit your thesis. While it may feel as if the "analysis phase" is complete, you will continue analyzing your data as you draft your paper and discover aspects of your analyses that are weak or incomplete, or need to be reframed to get at your main point.

Record everything!

It might seem repetitive to say this, but do NOT forget to write down your thoughts while you are analyzing your data. Nothing is more frustrating than making a connection or having a great idea as you are falling asleep, but losing that unrecorded idea.

Keep a pulse on the literature.

While you're analyzing your data, keep the literature and theory in mind. This will help focus your analysis and will be handy when, in your writing and presentation, you have to discuss the significance of your study and how your findings speak to the established literature. Make a point of looking for new studies that may appear while you were collecting your data: someone else might be working on similar research questions and you should be aware of these studies!

Be open to surprises and unexpected findings!

If your hypotheses are not "confirmed" by your data, this doesn't mean you did something wrong or do not have anything worthwhile to say from your findings! It is just as interesting to disprove a logical hypothesis, as it is to "prove" a theory. Furthermore, keep an eye out for unexpected findings, including negative cases, when analyzing your data. This will help give your final product another level of richness, and could serve as a springboard for future research!

Faculty Tip

When I am developing statistical programs (i.e. Stata .do files), I have learned to include lots of notes throughout that help me remember decisions I have made along the way.

Part Three: Writing a Thesis

When Do I Start Writing?

The consensus on the question of when to write is: early and often! Although it is tempting to put off writing, keep in mind that it is much easier to revise and edit written material than build your thesis chapters from ground zero. Writing takes many forms in the process of doing a thesis and what you write will change substantially by the time you are finished drafting and revising.

"There is greater purpose in writing than completing an assignment." – Nancy Sommers²

Writing can take the form of:

- Notes on readings or annotated bibliographies
- Reflection on research strategies, successes, and failures
- Methodological, theoretical, and analytic memos
- Concept maps, graphs, and tables
- Outlines of chapters
- Partial and full drafts of sections or chapters

Faculty Tip

You should write at least a little bit nearly every day – even if it's just notes to yourself; thoughts that pop into your head about one part or another of your project, etc. Note as well that you will write and re-write often. To write is to think, at least for me.

All of these written materials are the structure on which you will build your final, printed thesis. Your notes will help you formulate ideas and make coherent arguments, and your drafts will help you critically analyze and improve your arguments.

So, don't wait to start writing until your ideas are completely formed! The first draft of your thesis will pretty much be a brain dump. Worry about getting everything on the page first, even if it's not logically coherent. Then, polish your paper to make your writing look nice and sound punchy once all of your thoughts are on paper!

Alumni Advice

"For those times when you need inspiration and it's just not coming, do what works for you. If you're tactile, write down all the topics on note cards, and sit on the carpet and arrange them in groups. If you're verbal, find someone to talk about your project with, and record your back and forth: you'll have great ideas in response to their feedback, and you can let the conversation flow freely knowing you can go back to the recording later and recall that brilliant revelation you had!"

² Sommers, Nancy and Laura Saltz. 2004. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year." *College Composition and Communication* 56(1):124-149.

The Drafting Process

Unless you love making revisions to your writing, the drafting process may feel like the most tedious step in completing your thesis. However, this is when you will strengthen and clarify your arguments, rethink your framework and/or conceptualizations, and receive feedback that can only make your thesis better. While you're drafting your chapters, keep a few pieces of advice in mind:

Work on one section at a time

It can be overwhelming to receive criticisms that challenge your arguments or reveal weaknesses in your thesis. Step back, and be thankful that someone cared enough to give you feedback that will help you strengthen your arguments. Then, work out the kinks one section or chapter at a time. If you have ideas for improving another section, write yourself a note (in a journal, memo, or on a planner) to make this change later.

Faculty Tip

Start with the assumption that people are coming from a good place. Take criticism seriously.

If you get the same comment/criticism more than once, chances are your peers are onto something.

Be open to criticism

One of the hardest things to do is to learn to take critiques. But if you learn to take them and integrate them into your work, your work will improve ten-fold. If you are ever unsure of the significance of a criticism or suggestion you have received, talk to your advisor or other mentors about this feedback.

Revise, Revise, Revise!

Give yourself plenty of time to make revisions! You may receive feedback from your advisor, other faculty mentors, peer thesis writers, and other people you ask to read sections of your thesis. When you think you have a theoretically solid draft, schedule an appointment with RWIT to get the perspective of a layperson on your final draft. Not only could they ask for clarifications, but they could also help you catch typos and grammatical errors that you want to omit before turning in the final version of your thesis to the department.

Alumni Advice

"Sometimes I would find a book on the shelf that I'd searched on the catalog and then just browse the other books in that area. Some of my more interesting sources I found by accident - by just sitting in the aisle of the library pulling books off of the shelves."

Tip: In Word, go to "View" and select "Focus." This view setting blocks out all distractions, allowing you to work on drafting your paper with complete focus!

Resources for Writing

Beyond your advisor, there are several on-campus resources that can assist you in writing and polishing drafts of your thesis. The writing process should really be a social undertaking, and feedback from readers is perhaps the best resource for improving your thesis. **RWIT, fellow thesis writers, and friends** can supplement the corrections your advisor suggests to you. Also, there are a number of **scholarly resources** that can be found in the appendix ("Further Reading") to this guide that can help improve your writing.

"What can RWIT do for me as a thesis writer?"

Use RWIT as a regular client! You can book one-hour sessions online. Bring any writing (notes, an outline, or a chapter), and a tutor can assist you with anything from thought development to grammar! RWIT is especially helpful for giving a layperson's perspective on your thesis. Tutors can suggest global edits as well as point to places where you need to define concepts!

On a smaller scale, RWIT offers a tutoring program for thesis writers to which thesis students can apply through the Director of RWIT. This service is offered on the basis of staff availability, so if you are interested, reach out to RWIT early on!

Faculty Tip

You have to be completely ruthless with editing your work – that is, willing to completely rework sentences, sections, and whole chapters. Over time, you can become good at doing this yourself to your own writing, but you will always need comments and criticism on your writing to make it better. You should view anyone willing to read and offer comments on your work as the gift that it is.

Fellow thesis writers/students

Often, your fellow thesis writers and classmates can be excellent resources for you while writing. Some students may be working with similar populations, theory, and/or literature, and could have substantive or logical recommendations for you. Even getting feedback from a student completely unfamiliar with your topic can be beneficial, as such a person can point out where you need to define a concept or better clarify an argument you are making.

From Harry Wolcott's book,
*Writing Up Qualitative Research*³:

"Writing is the most satisfying scholarly activity in which I engage, and the most visibly lasting. Nevertheless, a few rare moments of ecstasy over something well written or favorably reviewed are meager compensation for all the agony endured to achieve it." (12)

³ Wolcott, Harry F. 1990. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Example Outline of a Thesis

The following example thesis outline describes a common order of chapters, as well as the sub-headings often included in a well-written thesis. Between 2010 and 2014, honors theses in the sociology department averaged 105 pages; however, this varies significantly depending on whether the thesis used quantitative or qualitative methods. Rather than worrying about how long your thesis is, concern yourself with making sure your analyses are comprehensive and well organized.

Title Page

- Thesis title, name, department, advisor, and date

Abstract

- Thesis title and approximately 200-word description of the thesis

Acknowledgements

- Give your gratitude to anyone who made this project possible (i.e. the department, specific faculty, family, respondents, etc.)

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

- “Draw in,” overview of study, research questions, approach, significance, and roadmap of the thesis

Chapter 2: Literature Review

- Situate your study within the theory, social context, and key scholarship

Chapter 3: Methodology

- Describe your sample, data collection, concepts/variables, data analysis, ethical considerations, and strengths and limitations

Chapters 4-6: Results

- Present the findings from your research and relate to the theory driving your analyses in 2-3 results chapters

Chapter 7: Discussion

- Relate findings to key research, significance, strengths and limitations of research/findings, and future directions

Appendices

- Recruitment materials, research instrument, code sheet, CPHS materials

References

For advice in greater detail about writing each of these sections, see the “Drafting the Thesis” section of Harvard’s Sociology Thesis Guide:

http://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/thesis_guide_sept_2012.pdf

Part Four: Final Touches

How Do I Prepare for the Presentation?

The thesis presentation is your opportunity to share your findings with the department, students, and friends/family as well as get feedback that will be helpful in making your final revisions. You can practice for the presentation by running through it in front of friends, your fellow thesis writers, and even an RWIT tutor! Also, audio record your practice presentations in order to analyze your speaking habits and note what you are spending too much time talking about.

Alumni Advice

"Start working on your presentation as soon as you have results. Working on it will force you to think about your main points, what is truly important to get across to the audience, and what your contributions to the literature are."

Faculty Tip

Look at the presentation as an opportunity to get feedback on your work! Also keep in mind, by the time you get that far along, you probably know more about the topic than anybody in the room!

Tips for designing your presentation:

- You only have **20-25 minutes** to present.
- Try to tap all the main sections/chapters of your thesis (context, literature review, methods, etc.), but **focus on your results**. Do not make the mistake of spending too much time on your literature review!
- Distill the **most important** points of your thesis for the presentation, but be prepared to address *all* aspects of your research in the Q&A.
- Anticipate questions about your research and include **extra slides** that could help you address these questions.
- Make sure your PowerPoint slides are free of grammatical errors and typos!
- Don't forget to thank anyone who helped you accomplish your thesis!

A sample of questions you could be asked during your presentation:

- If you had the ideal dataset to answer your questions what would it be?
- What are the major theoretical implications of your project?
- What is the biggest weakness in your project? (The one you would like to correct or improve if you had to do it all over again.)
- Why should we care about your findings?
- What aspect of your project/findings surprised you?
- If you had infinite resources, what would you do differently with your project?

Tip: If you can't answer a question, do the "artful dodge." Make the questioner feel good about asking the question and tease out the general logic behind their question to start a dialogue. Do NOT just answer, "I don't know." Also, bring a pencil to write down good feedback or criticisms of your work!

Tips from Princeton: <http://www.princeton.edu/~archss/webpdfs08/BaharMartonosi.pdf>

Other Opportunities for Sharing Your Work

After spending up to a year of your life (or more) working on your thesis, wouldn't it be great to share the fruits of your labor with people interested in your research? There are a number of venues at which you could present your thesis. Keep in mind that several of these organizations require an application, so plan ahead!

Dartmouth Classes

Sometimes, the research you are doing for your thesis is relevant to a class you are taking (for your major, or otherwise). Ask your professor if (s)he is willing to let you share an excerpt from your work as part of a class. This is a great opportunity to practice talking about your research, as well as get feedback from an interested audience in advance of your final presentation!

President's Undergraduate Research Symposium

Every year, honors thesis writers are selected to share their work with the Dartmouth community vis-à-vis a poster session in Berry Corridor. Thesis writers are selected to participate, in part, on the basis of advisor recommendation in January. Let your advisor know, at the beginning of winter term, if you are interested in this opportunity. See the following link for more information:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~president/programming/undergradrsc.html>

Conferences at other Colleges & Universities

Occasionally, other colleges and universities will have calls for undergraduate research submissions to conferences or symposiums. For instance, three Dartmouth sociology thesis writers presented at Harvard's "Diversity, (In)Equity, and Social Justice Undergraduate Research Conference" in 2015. Keep an eye out for these opportunities (and ask your advisor to send such calls for submission along to you)!

Eastern Sociological Society

The regional sociology conference, ESS, accepts submissions from undergraduate students doing original research to present at the Annual Meeting (in late February-early March). Annual meetings often take place in Boston or New York – easily accessible by way of the Dartmouth Coach! See this link for more information:

<http://www.essnet.org/annual-meeting/undergraduate-submissions/>

American Sociological Association Honors Program

Finally, the ASA has an honors program for undergraduates doing original research and demonstrating excellence in their course of study. You must be nominated by a faculty member to be selected for this competitive program. See the link below:

<http://www.asanet.org/students/honors.cfm>

Formatting the Final Document

After presenting your thesis and receiving feedback from your advisor and second reader on the preliminary full draft of your thesis, you have the opportunity to make revisions. Then, you will then give the revised version to your advisor for final approval before printing.

For your planning purposes, you will need to make your final draft into a PDF in order to print your thesis (paid for by the department) at Gnomon Copy. You will have to place your order *no less than 4 business days before* your advisor would like to receive the final bound copy at the end of spring term.

The Department Administrator will email out more information about this process in May of senior spring before you meet with Gnomon Copy.

From Harry Wolcott's book, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*⁴:

"In writing, results are what count; the end justifies the means. How much coffee you drink, sleep you lost, days you 'waste,' even how awful your first drafts look – none of these really matter. Be ever mindful of Becker's wise counsel that 'the only version that counts is the last one.' (1986, p. 21)" (37)

Final Checklist for Success

As the end of your journey through your honors thesis nears, be sure you have done the following:

- Revise, revise, revise!
(Make sure you will be proud of the final, bound copy of your thesis, which will be kept in the Sociology Department and Rauner Library!)
- Make sure you got enough printed, bound copies for one to go in Rauner.
(Future students may be interested in perusing your work!)
- Thank your advisor and second reader!
(Show your gratitude by handwriting a thank-you card.)

"All that remains might be the sensation of handing your thesis to someone in the departmental office and then walking into a possibility-rich, almost summer afternoon. It will be difficult to forget." – Hua Hsu⁵

⁴ Wolcott, Harry F. 1990. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

⁵ Hsu, Hua. 2015. "A Guide to Thesis Writing That is a Guide to Life." *The New Yorker*, April 6 (<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-guide-to-thesis-writing-that-is-a-guide-to-life>).

Reflection (again and again!)

To get the most out of your thesis-writing experience, make sure you make time to reflect, again, after you have finished your presentation and submitted your printed, bound copy to the department.

Research shows that, to transfer knowledge from an educational experience to other contexts, you need to process that experience in a synergistic way,⁶ such as through reflection. Have a conversation with someone (fellow thesis writers, advisors, friends, or family members) and/or write a personal essay about your thesis experience.

Faculty Tip

No research is perfect. Any project falls short of perfection. Any project is open to criticism. This goes for senior theses, PhD dissertations, books, journal articles, etc.

Here are some ideas about what you could reflect on:

- What did you enjoy most/least about doing your thesis?
- If you could “reset” this year, would you do anything differently?
- What advice would you share with a future thesis student?
- Which skills you gained from doing a thesis do you see yourself using in your work/school arrangements next year? In your dream career?

“A thesis represents an investment with an uncertain return, mostly because its life-changing aspects have to do with process... We might even think of the thesis as a formal version of the open-mindedness, care, rigor, and gusto with which we should greet every new day.” – Hua Hsu⁷

Gratitude (Don't forget thank-you notes!)

Finally, take time to appreciate the time and effort your advisor(s) and second reader put towards your thesis and your advancement as a student. Thank them in person. Write thoughtful thank-you notes that your leave in their department mailboxes.

Expressing your gratitude will make both you and your mentors feel good, and this is a great way to close this chapter of your undergraduate career!

⁶ Pea, Roy D. 1987. “Socializing the Knowledge Transfer Problem.” *International Journal of Educational Research* 11(6):639-663.

⁷ Hsu, Hua. 2015. “A Guide to Thesis Writing That is a Guide to Life.” *The New Yorker*, April 6 (<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-guide-to-thesis-writing-that-is-a-guide-to-life>).

Appendices

College & Library Resources

The following is a list of College resources, and Library resources specifically, that most thesis writers will find useful!

College Resources

- **RWIT** (Student Center for Research, Writing and Information Technology)
Make an Appointment (for a layperson's perspective and drafting help):
<https://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/support-writing-research-and-composing-technology/students>
Contact RWIT to learn more about their Thesis Tutoring Program and see if this resource is a good fit for your needs:
RWIT@dartmouth.edu
- **UGAR** (Undergraduate Advising and Research)
Undergraduate Research Grants (for thesis funding!):
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ugar/undergrad/grants/index.html>
→ Leave Term grants, Senior Honors Thesis grants
Contact UGAR with any questions about funding:
Undergraduate.Research@dartmouth.edu
- **ASC** (Academic Skills Center)
Visit the ASC Website (for time management and learning tools):
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/learningstrategies.html>
Contact ASC with questions about Learning Strategies:
Academic.Skills.Center@dartmouth.edu
- **Evans Map Room**
To learn how to draft and print a poster, visit the Evans Map Room website:
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/maproom/printingfaq.html>
- **Free Software**
Atlas.ti (for qualitative analysis):
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/comp/soft-comp/software/downloads/windows/atlasti.html> http://www.dartmouth.edu/comp/soft-comp/software/downloads/mac/atlas_ti.html
- **Stata** (for quantitative analysis):
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/comp/soft-comp/software/statistics/stataintro.html>
Statistical Software Support (Contact Jianjun Hua for more information):
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/comp/soft-comp/software/research/stats.html>

Library Resources for Thesis Students

Spaces to Study

- Limited number of “scholar studies” for which you can apply
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/bakerberry/circ/scholars.html>
- Group study spaces (for collaborating with other thesis writers)
<http://libcat.dartmouth.edu/booking/studyrooms>

Staying Organized

- Library Lockers (for convenient book storage)
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/bakerberry/circ/lockers.html>
- Citation Managers (free through the college)
<http://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/c.php?g=59506&p=382057>

Research Tools

- Sociology Research Guide
<http://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/sociology>
- Student Plus Library Account (extends borrowing privileges)
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/circ/undergraduatestudent.html>
- Interlibrary Loan Services
 - DartDoc (scholarly articles)
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/res-share/dartdoc/>
 - Borrow Direct (books)
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/res-share/borrowdirect/>
- Fieldwork Equipment in Jones Media Center (audio and videorecorders)
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/mediactr/equipment/>
- Past Undergraduate Theses in Rauner Library
<http://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/dissertations>

Writing

- American Sociological Association Style Guide
<http://libcat.dartmouth.edu/search/X?asa+style+guide>
- The Little, Brown Handbook (and 35+ other writing and grammar handbooks)
<http://libcat.dartmouth.edu/record=b2992280>

Further Reading

If you are interested in learning more about various aspects of the process behind sociological research, take a look at some of these scholarly resources:

General

Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Qualitative Research

Creswell, John. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weiss, Robert W. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press.

Quantitative Research

Long, J. Scott. 2008. *The Workflow of Data Analysis Using Stata*. College Station, TX: Stata Press.

Writing

LaRocque, Paula. 2003. *The Book On Writing: The Ultimate Guide to Writing Well*. Arlington, TX: Grey and Guvnor Press.

Mills, C. Wright. 1959. "Appendix: On Intellectual Craftsmanship." Pp. 195-226 in *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richlin-Klonsky, Judith, Ellen Strenski, Roseann Giarrusso. 2001. *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*, 5th ed. New York: Worth Publishers.

Silvia, Paul J. 2007. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Sword, Helen. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wolcott, Harry F. 1990. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Further Reading cont.

Presentation

Axelrod, Robert. 1985. "Tips for an Academic Job Talk." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 18(3):612-613.

Evergreen, Stephanie. 2013. *Presenting Data Effectively: Communicating Your Findings for Maximum Impact*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Other Thesis Guides

Harvard University Department of Sociology

http://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/thesis_guide_sept_2012.pdf

Princeton University Department of Sociology

http://sociology.princeton.edu/files/undergraduate/soc_ug_writing_guide.pdf

University of California, Berkeley Department of Sociology

http://sociology.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/documents/student_services/writing_guide/Writing%20for%20Sociology%20Guide%20Second%20Edition.pdf

Acknowledgments

A number of people were consulted throughout the development of this guide, and made the centralization of the resources noted in this guide possible.

A big thank-you to:

Nick Van Kley, RWIT Director

Hannah Levinger, RWIT Tutor

Amy Witzel, Subject Librarian

Judy Danna, Sociology Department Administrator

Sociology Department Faculty

Past Thesis Writers

Plan for Upkeep

The idea for and creation of this Sociology Thesis Guide, in true Dartmouth fashion, was student-initiated. In order to preserve this guide as a resource for future thesis writers in the Sociology Department, it is recommended that future students take an active role in maintaining and updating this guide. Links, for example, frequently become outdated. Also, it is encouraged that students who encounter new problems or challenges that are not captured in this guide provide testimony or create new sections of the guide that can support future thesis writers.

"The heart of education as a practice of freedom is to promote growth." – bell hooks⁸

⁸ hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.