

Reed College Theatre Thesis Handbook

(2024-2025 version)

Ok, here we go.

First thing to do: email your thesis advisor and set up a meeting. You drive the boat on this project.

Second thing to do: learn what the deadlines are (see the next page for a summary)

Third: Have a look at this handbook. The hope is that it will answer many of your questions and lead you to a successful thesis.

Deadlines:

Departmental Thesis Proposal:

Friday, September 13th, noon (2nd week of classes)

Divisional Thesis Proposal:

Friday, October 4th, noon (5th week of classes)

First Chapter Due:

Friday, December 6, noon (last full week of classes)

Mini-Orals:

TBD (End of Fall week 14, during reading period)

Full Draft Due:

Friday, April 4th, noon

Final Document Due:

Friday, May 2nd, by 3p

Thesis year at a Glance

Fall

- First meeting(s) with advisor: Set up a meeting schedule, discuss topic, make an outline for the project, discuss approach to working together.
- Early fall meetings will likely focus on identifying your central question, assembling your reading list, and beginning to find answers to the question: what is the thesis of your thesis?
- If there is a production component, you'll discuss assembling a production team and schedule.
- Deadlines might include: final proposal, bibliography, expanded outline, article and book summaries, in-process writing, draft(s)
- The first chapter of your thesis is due at the end of this semester and there will be a mini oral with your advisor(s) and one other member of the department.

Spring

- Thesis with production components will produce their work in this semester. These students split their time between production work and thesis research and writing.
- This semester, the process should begin to feel clearer. The final chapters are written, along with the introduction and conclusion.
- Be sure to work in the thesis template early, and to keep a running citation list.
- Communication with your advisor is key this semester, as time feels crunched and deadlines loom!

Introduction

Thesis

This handbook is designed to acquaint senior students with the objectives and procedures associated with the senior thesis.

The point of the Reed senior thesis is for a student to engage in a long-term research project in order to investigate some kind of central question. In Theatre, senior thesis (Theatre 470) may take the form of a combined research/ performance project or it may be entirely research oriented. In all cases, the student must submit a proposal for the year-long project for Departmental and Divisional or Committee approval (guidelines for format under Thesis Proposal section of this handbook). At the end of the year, issues raised by the thesis work are discussed before an orals board comprised of four faculty members, at least one of whom must be from outside the Division of the Arts (for Theatre majors) and outside both the Division of the Arts and the Division of the other department of any interdisciplinary major. Students are responsible for contacting faculty members to serve on their orals board and should make certain that invited faculty members will be able to attend the production. Subjects covered during the oral examination may include any item from the student's

years at Reed and are not limited to a defense of the thesis.

Thesis projects are to be undertaken under the guidance of a faculty adviser whose areas of specialization are in line with some aspect of the student's project. The student will meet with this adviser throughout the various stages of the project, including submission of the proposal, research and writing, design considerations, casting, rehearsals, and documentation.

Choice of project is not entirely at the student's discretion; departmental approval is required. Approval will be based on the student's past performance, the merits of the proposal itself, performance on the junior qual., and the scope permitted by the number of proposals and the size of the theatre staff in any given year. Once the proposal has been accepted by the Department, an edited version, prepared in consultation with the thesis adviser, will be submitted to the Division or appropriate Interdisciplinary Committee.

Thesis Productions in Theatre are presented in a festival manner so the ability for the productions to cooperate and collaborate around space, time, and technical aspects is very important. This means that smaller, shorter (60 minutes and under) productions will work better for thesis. Remember, each senior thesis production is presented alongside the others and we want to make an enjoyable experience for our audiences

The Division considers the thesis proposal crucial to inaugurating the year-long thesis project in a timely and well-considered fashion. Because the thesis grade designates not just the quality of the final product but the total educational experience from the beginning of the school year, failure to meet the thesis proposal deadline will result in a lower final grade (minutes of the Division of the Arts, fall 1990). Students failing to make adequate progress in the writing and production processes may be denied a production at any point in the process.

It is important to remember that any artistic/practice/production component is a part of the larger thesis project that includes the written thesis. The area of research and the production component should be interconnected, of long-term interest to the student, and realizable within the context of the Reed Theatre Department.

If a student fails the thesis, they may attempt a second topic; a student who fails a second time in the same field shall be ineligible for graduation in that field.

Part 1 - Proposing the Thesis Project

Thesis Proposal

There are multiple steps to the senior year thesis proposal process. First, in the junior year, each student submits to the faculty a preliminary list of three possible thesis area; this is part of the qual. Faculty review these and ask that the student either revise or continue in one area. Then each student writes a longer, more involved first draft of the thesis proposal. At this stage, this is for the department only so that the department can consider production resources and thesis advisor assignments. Note that students must have completed coursework in the area of their proposed thesis *in advance of the senior year*.

In the very beginning of the senior year, each student sends a formal proposal to the department and then, after receiving feedback from the department, a revised proposal that goes to the division. The departmental proposal is usually longer and contains additional information about any proposed practice component of the thesis.

A thesis proposal is a critical articulation of the topic to be investigated and, when relevant, the proposed

production's relation to that topic. *Remember: the focus of the thesis is on the research question, not the production. If proposed, a production component exists in order to test the ideas in the thesis.* The proposal should also discuss elements that will shape the production. Even at this early point in the project, the department must be convinced that:

- you have a clear focus of study for the written thesis
- you see the challenges inherent in your proposed project and production, if you are proposing one.
- you have a plan in mind that addresses these challenges in a manner that will allow the project to progress to a satisfactory conclusion within the limits of the Reed College Theatre Department's resources.

Please understand that your proposal will be considered on the basis of information you provide, as well as your academic and collaborative performance in the department and on the qual. Once approved, changes in production scale or resources such as personnel, time, or money, must be reviewed and approved by the department.

Your proposal will include a description of your approach to creating the world of the play and a Thesis Student Checklist. To complete the checklist, you will need to make tentative decisions about personnel; budget; scheduling; and set, light, sound, costume and make-up design.

FORMAT FOR THESIS PROPOSALS

The thesis candidate should follow the Division of the Arts thesis proposal format, even though the original proposal may exceed the Divisional word count limit. The proposal must include the following information:

- Topic to be investigated and rationale
- Approach to the topic: structure or methodology
- Schedule of research and writing
- Annotated bibliography

If production work is being proposed, the proposal must also discuss:

- Choice of script and rationale.
- Production approach and rationale briefly outlining your understanding of the world of the play, why the play is of interest to you and how you hope it will affect the audience.
- Those aspects of production that you imagine will provide the greatest challenges to your production team. Include specific moments and/or an aspect of each area of design that offers such challenges.
- A completed Thesis Student Checklist (form below).

Thesis students also need to be aware that the budget for each production is \$500, supplemented by existing departmental resources and departmental budgets covering scripts and royalties.

Guidelines for selecting the performance text

The student is responsible for securing rights and royalty information. No production work can proceed until rights are secured. Performance rights for many play scripts can be secured through either Samuel French, Inc. or Dramatists Play Service. Catalogues for both these firms are available online, as are forms for requesting performance rights and ordering scripts. You will need to provide the following information:

- dates of performance
- auditorium capacity
- ticket prices (\$5.00 General, \$3.00 Seniors, Students, Reed Faculty & Staff)[2]
- producing organization ("Reed College Theatre")

Please contact Charlie Wilcox once you have selected a play and know the rights-holding organization, and he can help you with processing the rights request and paying royalties.

Occasionally playwriting students are interested in adapting for the stage a non-dramatic literary work. Permission should be secured from the copyright holder before any work begins on such a project, as experience indicates that permission for such adaptations are frequently denied by the copyright holder. All students should be aware that copyright regulations prohibit

major alterations or edits of dramatic works. If you have questions regarding rights, please talk to your adviser.

The following guidelines should assist you in considering reasonable size and scope of productions; observance of these guidelines will help facilitate approval of the proposal.

Steps to take to have a production component for your thesis:

1. **To direct:** you should have taken Directing and served as Assistant Director on a faculty or guest artist-directed mainstage production.
2. **To design:** you should have taken Introduction to Design and served as Assistant Designer on a mainstage production in the design area in which you are proposing to work.
3. **To dramaturg:** you should have served as Dramaturg on a mainstage production, and taken Dramaturgy and at least one Theatre History course.
4. **To do a Theatre History or Performance Studies thesis:** you should have taken coursework in the area you seek to study (i.e. if you want to write a thesis on a topic related to gender, you should have taken Gender and Theatre).
5. **To write a play, adaptation, and/or translation:** you should have taken Playwriting and, ideally, Dramaturgy.

THESIS STUDENT CHECKLIST

Name of Thesis Candidate: _____

Production title: _____

Author: _____

Agency [if performance rights are required]:

Date permission applied for: _____

Royalties cost: _____

Production info:

of Roles with a brief description of each:

of Locations/Sets:

of required costume elements:

Possible quick changes for makeup and costume:

Special effect needs :

Personnel Needed:

Director	_____
Dramaturg	_____
Stage Manager	_____
Choreographer	_____
Music Director	_____

Design:

Set	_____
Costume	_____
Light	_____
Sound	_____
Make-up	_____
Props	_____
Projections	_____

(indicate if already known, any and all collaborators by name. Note: production teams have to be approved by the department. Not all shows require all roles)

Note: *Students are not guaranteed a production component for their thesis. Student thesis proposals with a production component will be assessed based on the student's demonstration of skill in their proposed area, committed collaboration, and willingness to take and incorporate feedback from the department. Decisions will also be based on the Department's overall production calendar and capacity.*

PART 2 - Thesis Categories

Suzan-Lori Parks writes “content determines form and form determines content; that form and content are interdependent” (“Elements of Style”, 7); this is true for thesis. The subject you choose to research influences the shape your thesis will take. There are multiple options, some with more focus on productions, others with more focus on creative and/or critical writing. Your advisor can help you consider options for your thesis proposal and what form best suits your research. Remember that your focus should be on the big question: what do you want to research? If you are interested in production work, what ideas are you testing?

For any thesis work: what are the stakes of your inquiry?

All theses should address the question: why this play, why now?

The shape of each thesis will depend on what you are researching. The components will be decided upon in consultation with your advisor.

Options for thesis work:

All Theatre department connected thesis documents will likely fall into one of these categories and formats:

1. Production thesis

This applies to both productions that are realized and hypothetical productions (design projects on paper, dramaturgy theses, etc...)

Thesis includes:

- i. Pre-production research and analysis:
 - 1. Script analysis/close reading
 - 2. Production research
- ii. Critical analysis of production:
 - 1. Critical analysis per guidelines: a detailed discussion of your project and the choices you are making in production.
- iii. Documentation of production:
 - 1. Photos, program, records of the final product

2. Playwriting, adaptation, or translation thesis

- a. Original play
- b. Critical analysis afterword per guidelines
- c. Possible staged reading of new play as part of process, with afterword per guidelines.

3. Theatre History and/or Literature and/or Performance Studies thesis

- a. Multi-chapter thesis (decided in consultation with your thesis advisor) with a focus on close reading, critical analysis, historical and theoretical research.

4. Theatre/Lit who pursue production

- a. Production thesis with 2-3 chapter written thesis
 - i. Research and literary analysis
 - ii. Analysis of the dramatic text (and, when relevant, related texts) in performance:
 - 1. Script analysis/close reading
 - 2. Production research
 - iii. Critical analysis of production:
 - 1. Critical analysis per guidelines: a detailed discussion of your project and the choices you are making in production.
 - iv. Documentation of production:
 - 1. Photos, program, records of the final product

5. Theatre/Lit without production

- a. Same as #4 without a production component, with the addition of literary analysis.

6. Theatre/Dance

- a. Depends on if it is a history/theory thesis, or production. If the former, follow Theatre/Lit guidelines; if the latter, the focus is on generating a new production, and writing about it in an afterword.

7. Ad hoc interdisciplinary thesis

- a. The shape of this thesis will depend on the subject researched and the agreement of advisors for both departments. This thesis form must have approval from faculty in both departments.

Production Thesis Categories and Guidelines

Thesis productions have a budget of \$500, to cover costs outside of scripts and performance rights, which the department has set aside other funds to cover. Thesis students can submit receipts for reimbursement or request advanced funds for specific purchases to the administrative coordinator; you will not be given a part or whole of the production budget without appropriate documentation of the use of funds.

Technical requirements (scenery, lighting, costumes, properties, sound and special effects) must be modest, as resources are minimal. Every show poses technical challenges. The departmental thesis proposal must recognize these in a clear and detailed fashion.

Actors, designers, and artistic and technical staff must be currently enrolled students. Technical, design and all artistic collaboration assignments require departmental approval.

Thesis projects can rehearse for 15 hours/week with no single rehearsal lasting more than 4 hours. 10 min. breaks are required every 90 minutes. Between casting the show and the beginning of the official first rehearsal week, the cast can rehearse for a maximum of 2 hours/once per week.

All theses that include a production component should fall into one of the following broad types:

Directing Thesis Production

- Max length of play = 60 minutes
 - Maximum number of performers = 7
 - Production Space = Blackbox
 - Production Calendar = 6-10 weeks
 - o Rehearsal Guidelines:
 - *5 weeks + tech, 15 hours/week max*
 - *no more than 4 hours in a chunk. 10 min. break every 90 minutes.*
 - *between casting and beginning of first rehearsal week, can rehearse max. 2 hours/once per week.*
 - All collaborators must be currently enrolled Reed students and all require departmental approval
- It is expected that students undertaking directing projects will have taken at least one semester of directing and assisted a faculty director on a department sponsored production.
 - Students can not direct plays they have written.
 - Students may not work on multiple thesis projects, or a thesis project and a mainstage show, at the same time.

Devised Thesis Production:

- Maximum length of show = 30 min
- Maximum number of performers = 5
- Production Team encouraged to include (director, assistant director, and/or dramaturg) - check specific project with your advisor
- Same rehearsal guidelines as directed shows
- It is expected that students undertaking devising projects will have taken a semester of devising and at least one other performance creation class (playwriting, advanced directing, puppetry, etc.)

Acting Thesis Production:

- It is expected that students undertaking acting projects will have taken at least two semesters of acting and/or performed in department sponsored productions.
- Occasionally a role in a faculty directed production has served as an acting thesis project. This is not always possible, so acting students should be aware of the likely need to develop an independent project in collaboration with a student director. Actors should not direct themselves.

Playwriting Thesis Production:

- Maximum 3 week rehearsal process
- Maximum 6 hours per week for first two weeks; 10 hours for the last week
- Maximum length of show = 60 minutes
can either be the whole show or an excerpt if the play is longer than 60 minutes.
- Production Team must include: director, stage manager, dramaturg
- Rehearsal process is primarily for the benefit of the playwright and about the development of the writing; rewrites throughout the process are encouraged.
- Playwrights should not be a reader/actor in the production.
- Can use shop resources within reason. One hour for pull. Costume guidelines: one piece

per character. Scene Shop guidelines: Nothing can be newly constructed for the production.

- It is expected that students undertaking playwriting projects will have taken at least one semester of playwriting. Dramaturgy is strongly recommended.

- The text should undergo at least one department work-in-progress reading to solicit comments from faculty and fellow students before the script's final revision.

- The level of production (ranging from a basic reading with music stands to a script in hand reading with minimal staging) is a matter that is negotiated between the playwright and the department.

Design Thesis Production:

- It is expected that students undertaking design projects will have taken at least two semesters of design and/or assisted faculty designers in department sponsored productions.
- Occasionally a design position for a faculty directed production has served as a design thesis project. As this arrangement is not always possible, students should be aware of the likely need to develop an independent project as a backup..
- Student designers may choose to collaborate with a fellow senior on a production or develop a project of their own, assembling a team that meets with departmental approval.
- A design thesis production component can take the form of a non-realized paper or sculpture project. In this case the details of what this will entail need to be worked out in advance with the design faculty and staff.

Dramaturgy Thesis Production:

- It is expected that students undertaking dramaturgy projects will have taken at least one semester of dramaturgy and collaborated with a faculty director on a department sponsored production.
- Student dramaturgs may choose to collaborate with a fellow senior on a production or develop a project of their own in collaboration with a student director. The guidelines applied to directing theses should be observed.
- Dramaturgs may also pursue paper projects that result in a casebook and critical study, and do not feature a production component.
- Occasionally a dramaturgy position for a faculty directed production may serve as a dramaturgy thesis project. As this arrangement is not always possible, students should be aware of the likely need to develop an independent project.
- As dramaturgy theses can take various forms, any dramaturgy thesis should be developed in consultation with dramaturgy faculty.

Part 3 - Thesis Process

Meetings with Thesis advisor

Every advisor works a little differently. As an example of one approach, Kate Duffly gives these guidelines to her thesis advisees:

At least one FULL day (24 hours) before each meeting, send me an email with the following information:

- (a) what has been done since the last meeting?
- (b) what questions do you have?
- (c) what are your plans for the week(s) ahead?

If you cannot make a scheduled meeting, please let me know the day before by email if at all possible.

If you want me to read pages, you must send them two full days (48 hours) before our meeting. I want to be able to read these carefully to give you feedback and I will not be able to do so if I don't receive them within this agreed upon timeline.

Thesis Deadlines (again!)

Listed below are deadlines related to thesis work. The exact date on which each of the following occurs shifts each year. See your thesis advisor and the Division of the Arts calendar for specifics.

Departmental Proposal Deadline:

Noon on the Friday of 1st Week of classes for Thesis with Productions in the Fall Semester.

Noon on the Friday of 2st Week of classes for Thesis with Productions in the Spring Semester and for Thesis without a production component.

Divisional Proposal Deadline:

Monday of the 5th Week of classes.

Each senior (for theses to be completed spring) to have one electronic copy of their senior thesis proposal to Charlie Wilcox, Divisional Administrative Coordinator. The body of the proposal is not to exceed 750 words; every document should include the name of both the student and the adviser. The Division requires an annotated bibliography as part of every thesis proposal. Follow the guidelines on the divisional thesis proposal template.[1]

First Chapter Deadline

Monday of the last week of classes during the first thesis semester. This should be followed by a thorough discussion between the student and the thesis adviser regarding the work so far and a plan for the second semester.

First Draft Deadline for Spring/Fall Thesis:

Monday of the week after fall break.

Seniors to submit a complete first draft of theses to advisers (see below).

First Draft Deadline for Spring Graduates:

Friday of the week after Spring Break.

Students first draft of their complete theses are to be handed into their thesis advisers. The grade given for a Reed College thesis designates not just the quality of the final product but also the total educational experience of the thesis course from the beginning of the school year. One of the most rewarding portions of that experience is the final weeks during which the thesis adviser and student together work over, for the first time, a nearly complete product. This is not merely a matter of rewriting and putting text into final form, of retouching a few points or of refining a few acting gestures, but rather of considering essential concepts which often emerge only after the total product can be seen whole. Because the Division considers this an essential portion of the thesis course, any student who does not meet the first draft deadline should not expect to graduate at the regular time. If, in spite of this, the thesis is accepted for graduation, the final grade for the thesis course will be lower. (Minutes of the Division of the Arts, May 1982)

Mini-orals:

All theses of any form will include a 45-60 minute mini-oral near the end of the first semester of thesis work. This will include two faculty from Theatre, and, in the case of interdisciplinary work, the advisor from the other department.

Orals Board

Upon completion of the senior thesis, each student must take a comprehensive oral examination. Oral exams normally occur during the period between the end of classes and the beginning of final examinations. A schedule of oral exams is prepared by each division or department and is posted at the registrar's office and in the PAB faculty pod.

The oral exam, approximately two hours in length, is conducted by an examination board composed of Reed faculty members and, in some instances, other experts. This examination includes the thesis topic and should relate the thesis to the larger context of the student's studies.

The orals board typically consists of four readers: your advisor, a first reader from within the Theatre department, another reader ('third reader'), and a fourth reader from outside of the Art Division (which includes Art, Music, Dance, and Theatre Departments). Reed College requires that at least two faculty members (in our case, from the Theatre department) be present at an oral examination to be admissible. In conference with your advisor, you may have input in the selection of your first reader from within the department, depending on availability of Theatre faculty.

You have the opportunity to invite your third and fourth readers. Your third reader can technically be any faculty member or, with approval by your advisor, another expert in the field. Regularly, but by no means as a rule, this third reader is a member of the Division of the Arts, or even another faculty member from the Theatre department. This has certain logistical advantages (see below). Your fourth reader can be any faculty member or outside expert, as long as they are from outside the Division of the Arts (or both divisions, if you are an interdisciplinary major).

If a student has a production component as part of the thesis then the Orals Board members must have attended at least one performance or the final dress of the production. This allows for each reader to have a more holistic view of your entire thesis project, but keep in mind that it does present some logistical issues that you will have to prepare for.

Orals schedules for the divisions of the Arts, HSS, Lit & Lang, and PRPL are usually released on the Friday of the eighth week of classes in a given semester. There is a general expectation that students will not ask fourth readers (or, if you should choose, third readers) from outside your division to sit on your board until after the schedules have been released. While this has some origin in the pomp and circumstance of Reed tradition, it also has practical purpose; faculty cannot guarantee that they will be able to sit on an orals board outside of their division until their own divisional orals schedule has been

released, as intra-divisional orals would take precedence over outside orals. This system does not completely work for Theatre majors, however, because nearly all thesis productions take place before the schedules have been released, meaning you would have to invite your orals board to a performance before they can guarantee that they can sit in your orals. It is therefore recommended to invite 'backup' board members from outside the department to your production. That way, if your planned fourth reader cannot attend your orals, you will have a pool of other faculty to choose from. Likewise, if you invite an out-of-division faculty member to be your third reader as well as your fourth reader, you have twice the chance that a reader may have a conflict. If you select someone from within the division, however, the administrative coordinator can guarantee their spot on your orals when they are scheduled. Let administrative coordinator Charlie Wilcox know your prospective orals board as soon as you can; the earlier he knows, the more he can do to prevent any schedule overlaps or snafus.

Part 4 - Thesis Document

The Reed Library website has several [thesis document resources](#).

CUS is on hand to assist with any formatting questions. They have put together a great [resource page](#).

[The Reed Senior Handbook](#) has a ton of great resources for your senior year, including advice and resources re the thesis document.

Note on Citation Style

The Theatre Department recognizes both MLA and Chicago as acceptable citation styles for the thesis document, as long as one is used consistently. The choice should be an informed one between the student and the thesis advisor(s).

