

Thesis Handbook
MA Program in Media Studies at Queens College, CUNY

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I. THE THESIS

A thesis is required to complete the MA program in Media Studies. Your thesis may be –

- a **scholarly written work** of approximately 8,000 to 10,000 words (roughly 30 to 40 pages); or
- a **capstone project** involving a creative arts production (using film, video, audio, digital, or hybrid media formats); a media prototype; or a non-arts-based practical enactment. Capstone projects are typically accompanied by a supporting document of 4,000 to 5,000 words (roughly 15 to 20 pages).

The thesis may serve as a foundation for further creative and/or scholarly work, as source material for grant proposals to be submitted to funding agencies and/or articles to be submitted for publication, as a demonstration of your abilities and commitment to doctoral programs, or as a professional example of media scholarship and/or praxis. The thesis is the culminating project of the MA degree. It should demonstrate your mastery of a selected topic and mode of inquiry, and represent your strongest work.

MA students should begin work on their thesis after successfully completing the core courses (MEDST 702 and MEDST 703) and 12 elective credits of MA coursework, and no later than their third semester in the MA program. A recommended timeline for completing the thesis is provided in the *Appendices*.

II. ELEMENTS OF THE THESIS

Whether a scholarly or applied project, the thesis involves systematic inquiry into a media-related phenomenon, problem, or question. It must engage coherently and creatively with Media Studies approaches to cultural, aesthetic, historical, political, technological, conceptual and/or theoretical issues. The thesis should demonstrate your familiarity with a substantial body of thought or critical literature and your competence in the application of a reliable and recognizable form of inquiry. While the MA thesis, unlike the PhD dissertation, is not necessarily required to advance new knowledge or break new ground, we expect you to go beyond the mere collection of facts, footage, or references. A successful thesis will demonstrate your abilities for research, interpretation, and synthesis, and allow you to extend and integrate ideas and skills learned over your MA experience.

The thesis must:

- identify a specific phenomenon, problem, or question for study;
- engage critically with relevant Media Studies literatures;
- pursue suitable research methodologies;
- conduct systematic research using recognized secondary and/or primary sources; and
- arrive at a clear and insightful scholarly analysis or practical enactment focused on the selected phenomenon, problem, or question.

In many cases, the thesis is an extended version of a paper/project, or combination of papers/projects, that a student has produced over their MA coursework. As you proceed through your coursework, you should take note of compelling topics, useful approaches, and helpful faculty members. Indeed, you are encouraged to use your courses to explore thesis possibilities and your course assignments to test out lines of inquiry that may evolve into your thesis. It is never too early to discuss your thesis ideas and plans with the MA Director and members of the Media Studies faculty.

TOPIC

The topic for your thesis should be in an area of study that interests you and be chosen in consultation with your thesis adviser (discussed below). The topic should identify a clear and specific problem for investigation, or take the form of a research question that the thesis is designed to engage or answer. Feasible thesis topics may involve a feminist or de-colonial reading or creative production of a media text, platform, or practice; explication or interrogation of prevailing ideology using a practical enactment of media practices or the design of a web/app prototype or other creative intervention; a study of the political economy of, or new creative models of, independent or radical media; or a fieldwork exploration, practical enactment, or creative expression of an experimental media form or subcultural media practice. Your thesis may pursue a theoretical, rather than applied, topic. In this case, your study would not investigate a specific media phenomenon but could, instead, pursue a critical interrogation, whether scholarly or based in an applied practical enactment, of specific elements of Marxist theories of media labor, for example, or digital conceptions of the self, or feminist theories of surveillance or media visibility.

Avoid topics that are so extensively researched that there is little room for new inquiry or ones so under-researched that there is no literature available for you to build on. Your topic should also be realistic in terms of the scholarly and technical resources available to Media Studies students at Queens College. Carefully consider questions like: how long will my proposed research and/or praxis activities take? Are all the materials and/or resources I need accessible to me locally (documents, interview subjects, equipment)? Will my topic require special resources (travel, new language proficiencies, advanced media skills)? However novel, creative, or original your thesis idea, you must work within the limits of the resources available.

While there is no single prescribed structure for a thesis, it is customary to provide a clear statement of the topic as well as the objectives of your project in the Introduction or opening section of the thesis.

RATIONALE

The central issue or group of issues that lie at the core of your thesis topic must be delineated so as to articulate why the media phenomenon, problem, or question you have selected requires investigation. You must consider the various cultural, historical, institutional and/or political economic contexts that provide the rationale for and justify the importance of your project. Your case for studying an issue and the manner in which you approach it will be strengthened if you demonstrate that the topic has not been adequately dealt with in the

existing literature. You will be expected to describe, reflect on, and justify the importance of your study in the thesis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual assumptions, guiding values, and organizing presumptions that inform your project make up your theoretical framework. Your thesis may, for example, adopt a queer or feminist theoretical framework, or use critical race or Marxist theory to guide which factors or variables the thesis will investigate. Your theoretical framework guides the questions you pose as well as the approach you choose in responding to those questions. Draw on material from your courses to decide which theoretical frameworks you find most compelling as well as how they should be synthesized to inform and structure your project. You will be expected to describe, reflect on, and justify your theoretical framework in the thesis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology concerns the manner in which you conduct your investigation. Research methodologies that are emphasized in the MA program include **interpretive approaches** that are associated with the social sciences, and which focus on qualitative observation or examination of media phenomena, problems, or questions; and **critical approaches** grounded in cultural, historical, textual, institutional and/or political economic analysis of media (for example, Marxism, feminism, or post-structuralism). Both approaches emphasize questions of social conflict and relationships of power in society.

You must decide the approach, or methodology, that is best for your thesis, choosing between, or combining, various approaches to inquiry. You will be expected to describe, reflect on, and justify the basis of your research methodology in the thesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether a written work or a media praxis project, your thesis must be located in relation to one or more extant literatures about, or related to, the topic. The task of placing your project in dialogue with ongoing scholarly and/or activist discussions and debates requires a critical review of these literatures. While you are not expected to review *all* the relevant literatures available, your literature review should synthesize major differences of viewpoint or approach across principal works that have addressed the topic, and highlight key debates or dialogues that the thesis engages. While we recommend you undertake the conceptual work of a literature review, it will be up to you and your adviser to decide if the thesis should include a separate Literature Review section.

SOURCES

Your critical review of relevant literatures should be based on systematic research aimed at gathering **recognized secondary sources** about, or related to, your topic. These materials are typically authored by reputable scholars, historians, legal analysts, and media and policy experts, and include academic analyses, interpretive articles, book reviews, and informed

commentaries. Your thesis may also require **primary sources**, including media artifacts like photographs, posters, audio and video recordings, advertisements, newspaper reports, laws, legislative hearings, personal correspondence, and oral interviews.

All MA students should be familiar with Rosenthal Library's *OneSearch* online feature, which allows you to search books, audio, and video in the CUNY library catalog as well as articles from scholarly journals, popular magazines, and newspapers. In addition, you must be proficient in the use of online scholarly databases with particular relevance for scholarship in media studies. These include *Academic OneFile*, *Academic Search Complete*, *Communication and Mass Media Collection*, *Ethnic Newswatch*, *Gender Studies Collection*, *JSTOR*, *Lynda*, *National Newspapers Premier*, *Nexis Uni*, *ProjectMUSE*, and *Social Sciences Full Text*. You have free access to these and other databases via the Rosenthal Library website. Off-campus access requires a valid Queens College ID.

ANALYSIS /PRAXIS

In consultation with your adviser (discussed below), the thesis should be organized to present a clear and substantial analysis, creative production, or practical enactment focused on your topic. This is the main body of your project, and should be geared to presenting a cogent argument, or response to your research question, based on your findings or evidence, analysis, interpretation, and/or the gist of your media praxis endeavor.

III. THE THESIS PROCESS

The thesis process involves a series of cumulative steps in which you plan, develop, and execute your project. These include:

- defining and outlining the topic;
- locating the topic in relation to relevant literatures;
- identifying the object of analysis, and the scope and scale of the project;
- evaluating and selecting the theoretical framework and research methodology;
- designing the analysis/scripting or planning the praxis project;
- conducting the analysis/creating the praxis project;
- revising/editing based on comments and suggestions from the thesis adviser and second reader (discussed below);
- delivering the final version of the thesis.

THESIS ADVISER

The thesis is written under the supervision of a thesis adviser. This arrangement is designed to allow you to progress through the thesis process in a systematized and supported manner. The thesis adviser guides and supervises your work at every stage of the process (planning, outlining, conducting research, drafting/planning, revising/editing, submitting). Your adviser is responsible for determining that you have the necessary skills to undertake your thesis project (e.g., that you have taken the appropriate production, theory, or methodology classes), and that your thesis meets the standards for graduate work in the Media Studies department.

You must select a thesis adviser from among the fulltime faculty members in the Media Studies department. Faculty profiles listing fields of expertise and major works are available at: <https://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Degrees/DAH/MediaStudies/MA/Pages/People.aspx>.

It is your responsibility to ask for meetings with potential advisers, prepare any materials the faculty member requests in advance of such a meeting, and present your ideas coherently and cogently when you meet them. Be aware that a faculty member is not obliged to accept a request to serve as your thesis adviser. It is never too early to explore areas of interest with potential advisers.

Some students choose to approach a former course instructor to find out if they are willing and available to serve as the thesis adviser. Others may find it useful to do some exploratory thesis-related work by enrolling in MEDST 797: *Special Problems* with a professor who may become the thesis adviser. The format of a *Special Problems* course is set by you and the faculty member collaboratively, and typically combines an agreed-upon set of readings, guided research toward preparation of a literature review or thesis outline (discussed below), and tutorial discussion. You must obtain approval from the professor before enrolling in *Special Problems* with them.

We strongly recommend that you secure a thesis adviser **no later than your third semester in the MA program**. If you need help with this process, please consult the MA Director or any fulltime faculty member in Media Studies.

Once a faculty member agrees to serve as your adviser, it is your responsibility to arrange regular meetings with them and to develop a timetable for the various phases of research, production/enactment, and writing. Negotiating with your adviser in advance about tasks to be completed before each meeting helps to break down the thesis into manageable steps and to avoid procrastination. Most students meet their adviser once every other week and more frequently as the thesis nears completion. You should consult with your adviser as often as you both feel is necessary to make steady progress on the project.

THESIS OUTLINE

You are strongly discouraged from proceeding to the research or writing stages of the thesis until the project is green-lit by your adviser. We recommend that you prepare a thesis outline for your adviser in which you lay out the core ideas and plan for your project. Typically, a thesis outline should run approximately 500 to 1,000 words (roughly 2 to 4 pages) and include:

- a tentative title for the project,
- a tentative timetable for completion;
- a brief description of the topic or formulation of the research question;
- an outline of the theoretical framework and research methodology;
- a map of the literature review, and
- a working bibliography of sources.

We strongly recommend that you have your thesis project green-lit by your adviser by the end of your third semester in the MA program.

DRAFTS & REVISIONS

The bulk of the thesis process, completed during your third and fourth semesters in the MA program, entails you submitting drafts of the thesis, or portions of the thesis, on an agreed-upon timetable, and your adviser returning comments and suggestions on those drafts. You must be registered for MEDST 790: *Thesis* during the semester you expect to complete the thesis. Please be aware that *Thesis* is only offered during the fall and spring semesters. Fulltime faculty are not available for thesis advising during the summer or winter intersession.

As a general rule, you should deliver a **first draft** of the thesis no later than the second week of the semester you plan to graduate. You and your adviser will decide the expectations of this first draft – how long it should be, how much detail it should contain, the form it should take, and so on.

After you complete whatever additional research, rethinking, rewriting, or other work the adviser asks for, you will then submit a **second draft** of the thesis no later than the sixth week of the semester you plan to graduate. Again, the expectations for the second draft should be negotiated between you and your adviser. If the second draft still has substantial problems, you may be asked to rewrite again, as many times as the adviser determines is necessary to meet appropriate standards for graduate work in the Media Studies department.

SECOND READER

If the second draft is generally acceptable, you and your adviser will select a second reader for your thesis. The second reader serves in an advisory capacity to the adviser and consults on the project after the second draft of the thesis is substantially complete. If the scope of your project requires it and your adviser supports it, you may consult the MA Director about asking a faculty member from a different department or an external expert or media practitioner to serve as your second reader.

You should secure a second reader no later than the eighth week of the semester you plan to graduate, and provide them a draft of the thesis as soon as they come on board the project. Expect comments and suggestions for revision from the second reader. Your completed thesis should reflect these comments and suggestions.

THESIS COLLOQUIUM

All MA students must give a thesis colloquium in order to complete the MA degree. The thesis colloquium involves a 20-minute public presentation in which students discuss their project followed by questions and comments from assembled Media Studies professors and students. Only MA students who have completed their work on the thesis are invited to give a colloquium. Thesis colloquia are typically held on the last two Wednesdays of the fall and spring semesters from 5:30 to 6:20 PM in G200.

FINAL SUBMISSION

When your adviser is satisfied that the thesis is complete and meets the standards for graduate work in the Media Studies department, they must fill out, sign, and submit a **thesis approval form** to the MA Director (sample provided in the *Appendices*).

In addition, you must prepare a **thesis abstract** running approximately 350 words, which summarizes the topic, approach, and main conclusions of the thesis. The abstract should not be part of the thesis itself nor should it be included in the Table of Contents. With your permission, the Media Studies department may feature your thesis abstract on the MA website.

If you have completed all other requirements for the MA degree, submission of the final thesis and thesis abstract to the MA Director makes you officially eligible to graduate.

IV. MANUSCRIPT SPECIFICS

GENERAL CONVENTIONS

The final thesis must be free of all handwritten notes, line-edits, and corrections. A high standard of presentation, grammar, and spelling is expected.

The manuscript should be typed or word-processed, using 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Use double spacing for the main text, and single spacing for block quotes and footnotes or endnotes. Media praxis projects that include scripts, treatments, and/or other portfolio elements should follow standard formatting conventions.

You may use in-text citations throughout the thesis as well as numbered footnotes or endnotes to include bibliographic and other notations as needed.

While every thesis varies in its elements, structure, and organization, the use of chapters, sections, and/or subsections to organize the manuscript is customary. We recommend dividing the thesis into chapters or sections, including an Introduction and a Conclusion. Chapters should be numbered, and every chapter should begin on a new page. Judicious use of subheadings within chapters can be helpful to readers as long as you are consistent with style (bold type, all caps, etc.) for a given level of heading.

All manuscript pages must be numbered, and page numbers should run consecutively from the Introduction or opening section to the Bibliography/References or Appendix(ices).

Tables, graphs, figures, images, and illustrations must be captioned, sourced, and numbered. Use the chapter number as a prefix. For example, tables in Chapter 2 should be numbered Table 2.1, Table 2.2, etc. Figures should be numbered in the same way, i.e., Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, etc.

PRELIMINARY PAGES

Among the preliminary pages of the manuscript, you must include a Title Page (sample provided in the *Appendices*) and a Table of Contents. If your thesis includes tables, graphs, figures, images, and illustrations, include lists for these elements, and additional entries in the Table of Contents entitled List of Tables, List of Graphs, List of Figures, and so on. As needed, you may also provide lists of acronyms, terms, and translations of terms. In this case, the Table of Contents should include entries entitled List of Acronyms, Glossary of Terms, and Translations of Terms.

The preliminary pages may include an Acknowledgements section.

CONCLUDING PAGES

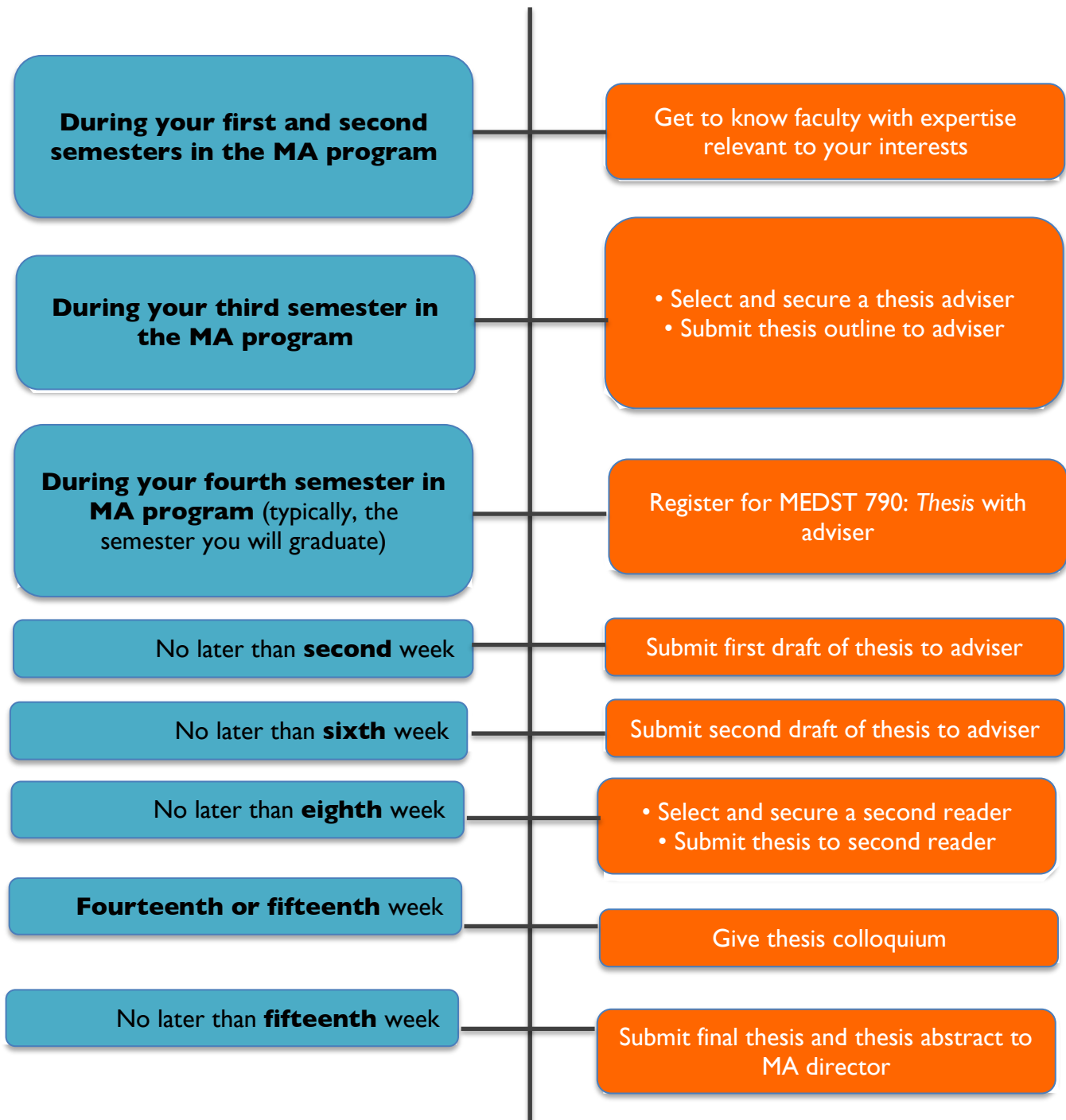
A Bibliography or References section is required at the end of the thesis. This list should be alphabetized (by author last-name), double-spaced, and should be formatted using hanging indents. Please use a single established citation system (MLA, APA, Chicago).

In rare cases, a thesis may include a separate Appendix(ices) section. Depending on your topic, this may contain supplementary statistical material, extracts from official publications, literature search strategies, or methodological details.

APPENDICES

THESIS TIMELINE

This schedule is designed to help you meet all deadlines for completing an approved MA thesis in the Media Studies department. You and your thesis adviser are free to develop your own timeline, provided you meet all the requirements listed below. This list provides the *last possible dates* for required and recommended steps. Nothing prevents you from completing any of them earlier.



SAMPLE THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Queens College of The City University of New York
Thesis Approval Form

(Name of Student, please print)

a candidate for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** has satisfactorily completed a Master's thesis entitled:

(please print)

This thesis is approved by the Department of **MEDIA STUDIES**.

Signature of Thesis Adviser

Name of Thesis Adviser (please print)

Date

For a Masters of Arts thesis, two copies of this form must be sent to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research before the due date set by the Office of the Registrar. The Dean will, in turn, send one copy to the Registrar as official notification of the approval of the thesis.

GS-1/79

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

Thesis Title

Name of Student

Name of Thesis Adviser

Name of Second Reader

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Media Studies in the Graduate Division of Queens College of the City University of New York

Month/Year of Final Submission