

GUIDELINES FOR PSY 499 HONORS THESIS IN PSYCHOLOGY

04/16/01

Students who have completed PSY 201 and PSY 203, and who have a GPA of 3.0 (B) or better, are eligible to enroll in PSY 499, Honors Thesis in Psychology. The thesis is to be based on individual, original research. The student may choose to do a project which involves data collection, or one which is a theoretical synthesis of previous research.

While some students may be able to do all the work for PSY 499 in one semester, it is recommended that some preparatory work be done in a prior semester. Students may obtain credit for such preparatory work by enrolling in an independent study course (PSY 498).

Prior to the semester in which PSY 499 is taken, the student is advised to:

- a. Select a thesis topic and advisor
- b. Select a thesis advisory committee (two department members in addition to the advisor)
- c. Prepare at least a preliminary draft of the proposal
- d. Begin preparing equipment and materials
- e. Gather some pilot data; or, in the case of a theoretical project, prepare a working bibliography

In the semester for which the student is enrolled in PSY 499, the following timetable is suggested:

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|-------------|---|
| 1-8 weeks: | approval of proposal by committee and gathering of data |
| 9-12 weeks: | data analysis and writing the thesis |
| 13th week: | evaluation of the thesis by committee |
| 14th week: | revision of the thesis, if required |
| 15th week: | presentation of the thesis to faculty and students |

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GUIDELINES: PSY 499, HONORS THESIS IN PSYCHOLOGY

1. General Information

- 1.1 **Description:** Individual, original research. May be based on data collection or be a theoretical synthesis of previous research.
- 1.2 **Candidates:** Must have a GPA of 3.0 (B) or better. Students applying for graduate school are encouraged to do an honors thesis.
- 1.3 **Prerequisites:** PSY 201 and 203. Consent of thesis advisor.
- 1.4 **Procedure and Timetable:** While some students may be able to do all the work for PSY 499 in one semester, it is recommended that some preparatory work be done prior to the PSY 499 semester. Recommended "Pre-499" work is listed below in Section 1.4.1. Students are encouraged to obtain academic credit for such preparatory work by enrolling in the independent study course, PSY 496. Section 1..2 gives the procedure and timetable for the PSY 499 (thesis) semester.

1.4.1 Pre-PSY 499 Semester

Selection of thesis topic and advisor. The prospective advisor is responsible for determining whether the scope of the thesis project will allow for its completion in one semester.

Selection of thesis advisory committee. The advisory committee will consist of three members of the department, including the advisor.

Writing of proposal for research by the student according to guidelines furnished by the department. (See Sec. 2.1. or 3.1.) There may be input from the advisor and committee members, if desired. This step involves an initial review of the proposal by the advisor and revisions, if necessary.

Preparation of equipment and materials. This includes the experimental apparatus, recruiting materials, debriefing materials, human and/or animal subject committee approval and consent forms.

Gathering of pilot data (to be included in final proposal). For a theoretical paper, this step would involve the amassing of a working bibliography to be included in the proposal. The final proposal should be evaluated and approved by the advisor by the end of the semester.

The student should be ready to commence the project proper at the beginning of the semester in which they are enrolled in PSY 499, "Honors Thesis in Psychology".

1.4.2 PSY 499 Semester

1-8 weeks: Gathering of data through experiments and/or literature search. For those students who have chosen a one semester format, an advisory committee will need to be selected as soon as possible. Relevant preparations for their projects, as outlined in the Pre-PSY 499 procedures, will also be necessary. For all students, the thesis advisory committee should receive the thesis proposal by the end of week 2. The committee will evaluate the proposal by the end of the following week.

9-12 weeks: Writing the thesis. This step also involves data analysis for an experimental paper. The paper must follow APA format. The advisor should review the paper and offer comments and advice on revisions. The advisor is not to write any part of the paper, however. Criticisms of writing style should be made only when the clarity and conciseness of the paper is in question. Committee members may also be asked to participate in this phase of report preparation.

13th week: Evaluating the thesis. The final draft will be evaluated by the advisory committee. The student may be asked questions informally on the content of the paper by committee members. Evaluation will be based on the degree of success achieved in carrying out the stated goals of the research proposal (see Sec. 2.1 or 3.1) and the paper's adherence to the APA style guidelines. The committee may (a) accept the thesis "as is" with a grade of "A" or (b) recommend revisions and assign a grade based on its evaluation of the revised thesis. If revisions are recommended, the desired changes must be made clear to the student in writing. No further changes may be required once these stated revisions are made.

15th week: All the approved papers will be presented at a gathering of the department (faculty and students) during the last week of the semester. Presentations will be short (10 min.). There will be time allotted for questions.

- 1.5 Function of Advisor and Committee:** The advisor's functions are to provide (a) general counsel on research implementation (including any ethical considerations), (b) the initial evaluation of both the thesis proposal and the final draft, and (c) a final grade report to the registrar. The committee (including the advisor) has the function of making a final evaluation of the proposal and final draft.
- 1.6 Grading:** A grade will be assigned based on the committee's evaluation of the student's research performance. The committee may defer grading those papers accepted with revisions until the changes are made. The semester grade will be assigned based on the proposal grade, the thesis grade, and the presentation.

2. Data-based Thesis

2.1 Proposal

The purpose of the proposal is three-fold. First, it allows the committee members to decide if the project scope is appropriate. Second, it allows determination of the project's originality. Third, it allows a check of the student's adherence to the appropriate writing format. If the scope is judged to be too broad or the project lacks originality, or the format is incorrect, the proposal will need to be modified. Elaboration on these three criteria follow.

Scope: The student should be able to carry out the proposed project within one semester.

Originality: The proposed project should originate from the student and make a unique (although, possibly not earth-shaking) contribution to the body of knowledge about their chosen topic. The specifics of the project may be worked out in discussions with other students and faculty who are interested in the project.

Format: The proposal format should conform to the outline in Sections 2.1.1 - 2.1.5 as well as to APA Editorial Style guidelines.

2.1.1 Introduction (APA Manual Section 1.08)

Specific Aims: This section of the proposal should contain a brief statement concerning the nature of the project to be undertaken. This statement should contain the hypothesis being tested, a general description of the procedure to be used, and the relevance of the project to psychology.

Historical Background: The introduction should also contain the background and rationale for the project. This includes information from a literature search as should be specifically related to the project's rationale and not be a general review.

2.1.2 Methods (APA Manual Section 1.09)

This section should contain the method and procedures to be used in collecting data for the study. It should contain information on:

Subjects (Who they are and how many)
Stimuli (if any)
Apparatus (or measuring instrument used), and
Specific Procedures to be used.

Each of these four subsections should be appropriately labeled. The purpose of this section is to allow the committee members to judge both the quality of the project and the likelihood that the project can be completed in one semester.

2.1.3 Proposed Method of Analysis

This section should be a statement of how the data gathered in the experiment(s) will be evaluated (usually a statement of the statistical procedures to be used). You should be specific.

2.1.4 Bibliography (APA Manual Secs. 3.104-3.123)

List all sources of information relevant to the project that have been located (though not necessarily cited) up to the time the proposal is written.

2.1.5 Appendices (APA Section 3.90)

This section should include any supporting materials such as consent forms or questionnaires.

2.2 Final Draft

The final draft of the data-based thesis should conform to the outline in Sections 2.2.1 - 2.2.7 as well as to APA Editorial Style guidelines. The criteria to be applied in evaluating each section are noted in 2.2.1 - 2.2.7.

2.2.1 Abstract (APA Manual, p.8, section 1.07)

General Criteria: An abstract is a brief comprehensive summary of the contents. Overall the abstract should be:

Accurate -- It should correctly reflect the purpose and content.

Concise and Specific -- Each sentence should be maximally Informative. (For length, see below).

Non-Evaluative -- The abstract should report rather than evaluate.

Coherent and readable -- Present tense to describe results; past tense for variables manipulated.

Specific Contents: Specifically, the abstract should:

-Be 100-500 words in length.

-State the problem under investigation (in one sentence if possible)

-Specify subjects used --number, type, age, gender, and species, etc.

-Describe experimental method used -- apparatus, data collection procedures, tests used, generic names of drugs and dosage, etc.

-State findings (including statistical significance levels).

-Give conclusions and implications or applications.

2.2.2 Introduction

The introduction section of the final draft is a refined extension of the introduction section of the proposal. See thesis proposal guidelines for this section.

2.2.3 Methods

The methods section of the final draft describes in detail how the study was actually conducted. This section should be based on the guidelines used for the methods section of the thesis proposal. The methods section of the final draft should be written in the past tense.

2.2.4 Results (See APA Manual, Sec. 1.10)

Purpose: The purpose of the results section is to summarize the data collected and statistical analyses. DON'T discuss implications of results in this section.

General Content: First, the main results or findings should be stated. Then the data should be reported in sufficient detail to justify conclusions.

Mention all relevant results -- even those that run counter to the hypothesis.

Summarize Data -- report means and standard deviations. Do not report individual scores or raw data unless a single-subjects design is used.

Tables and Figures: Tables and figures may be used to report data clearly. However, do not needlessly repeat the data in several places. Always tell the reader what to look for in a table or figure. Refer to tables and figures in the text. All figures and tables should be clearly labeled.

Statistical Presentation (See APA Manual, Sec. 3.54, for examples of presentation of statistics in the text.): In reporting inferential statistics, include information about the obtained magnitude or value of the test, the degrees of freedom, the probability level, and the direction of the effect. Be sure to include descriptive statistics (e.g., means or standard deviations). Assume that the reader has a knowledge of statistics. Basics assumptions (i.e., rejecting the null hypothesis should NOT be reviewed.

2.2.5 Discussion (See APA Manual, Sec 1.11)

Purpose: The purpose of the discussion section is to evaluate and interpret the implications of the results with respect to the original hypothesis.

This section should examine and interpret the results as well as draw inferences from them.

It should emphasize any theoretical consequences of the results and the validity of your conclusions.

Content: The discussion section should begin with a clear statement of the support or nonsupport of the original hypothesis.

Similarities and differences between your results and the literature should clarify and confirm your conclusions.

Negative results should be accepted as such without an undue attempt to explain them away.

You should identify the practical and theoretical implications of the study, suggesting improvements on your research and/or propose new research.

The discussion section should be guided by the following questions:

What have I contributed here?

How has my study helped to resolve the original problem?

What conclusions and theoretical implications can I draw from my study?

2.2.6 References (See APA Manual, Secs. 3.94 to 3.103)

The reference section provides a comprehensive list of all material cited in the final draft. All citations in the manuscript must appear in the reference list, and all references must be cited in the text. Note that the reference list contains works actually cited in the paper. A bibliography lists works for background or further reading. The final draft should have a reference list, not a bibliography.

The reference section should be double spaced and references should be listed alphabetically following APA format. The APA Publication Manual provides examples which should be followed meticulously.

2.2.7 Appendices

As in the proposal, this section should include any supporting materials such as consent forms or questionnaires.

2.3 Presentation

2.3.1 Purposes

The oral thesis presentation will be given at a gathering of psychology faculty and students. A relaxed, informal atmosphere is to be expected at presentations -- hopefully, arousing minimal anxiety. The purposes of the presentation are to:

Provide **experience** with research presentations for the thesis student, and

Provide **enlightenment** on the results and conclusions of your thesis for those attending the presentation.

2.3.2 Guidelines

Though presentations will not be formally evaluated on quality, the following guidelines may help make the experience more valuable for presenter and attendees:

Limit the actual presentation to about twenty minutes.

After the presentation, time will be allotted for questions from the attendees. Prepare ahead to answer questions you think they might have.

In the first couple of minutes, attempt to summarize your hypothesis and methods.

Spend the majority of the presentation time on presenting your results and conclusions in a clear and concise fashion. After summarizing your results, be sure to tell why they are important, in terms of their implications for future research, theory, and/or practice.

Use audiovisual aids, such as overhead transparencies and/or handouts to convey more important thoughts in less time. Such aids should be brief, to the point, and involve tables, charts, or graphs where possible.

Follow the additional guidelines, presented in “Material for Oral Presentations” (APA Publication Manual, 1994, pp. 339-340)

3. Theoretical/critical Analysis Thesis

3.1 Proposal

The purpose of the proposal is three-fold. First, it allows the committee members to decide if the project scope is appropriate. Second, it allows determination of the project’s originality. Third, it allows a check of the student’s adherence to the appropriate writing format. If the scope is judged to be too broad or the project lacks originality, or the format is incorrect, the proposal will need to be modified. Elaboration on these three criteria follow.

Scope: The student should be able to carry out the proposed project within one semester.

Originality: The proposed project should originate from the student and make a unique (although, possibly not earth-shaking) contribution to the body of knowledge about their chosen topic. The specifics of the project maybe worked out in discussions with other students and faculty who are interested in the project.

Format: The proposal format should conform to the outline in Sections 3.1.1 - 3.1.3 as well as to APA Editorial Style guidelines.

3.1.1 Purpose, Rationale, and Methods (APA Manual Section 1.08)

Statement of Purpose: Briefly state the nature of the project to be undertaken. Clearly identify the topic area and specify the purpose of the

paper as being either the development of a theory or a critical analysis of current research trends.

Rational: Present background information relevant to the topic area and explain the rationale for the project. Include information from a preliminary literature search.

Methods: Give a general plan that will be followed for a search of the literature. Spell out the scope of the literature search, specifying what will and will not be included.

3.1.2 Proposed Critical Analysis: Describe how you plan to analyze or evaluate the existing literature and what you will contribute either in terms of developing a new theory or suggesting new directions in research.

3.1.3 Bibliography (APA Manual Secs. 3.104 - 3.117)

List all sources of information relevant to the project that have been located (though not necessarily cited) up to the time the proposal is written.

3.2 Final Draft

The final draft of the theoretical/critical analysis thesis should conform to the outline in Sections 3.2.1 - 3.2.5 as well as to APA Editorial Style guidelines.

3.2.1 Abstract

Briefly summarize the contents of the paper: 75-100 words in length.

State the topic (in one sentence, if possible.)

Give the purpose, thesis, or organizing construct and scope.

Describe the sources used (e.g., published literature, personal observation, etc.)

3.2.2 Purpose, Rationale, and Methods

Present the history of the problem; review major research findings relevant to the problem area.

Describe existing theories and explain why they are not adequate to account for the above findings.

Spell out the approach you took to formulate either a new theoretical position or a new research direction; e.g., what types of evidence did you look at; how did your evaluation of the evidence differ from previous approaches.

3.2.3 Critical Analysis

Present a critical and detailed analysis of specific research and theoretical papers, using original sources.

Divide into sections according to topic areas, showing cohesive organization and logical flow within and between sections; either building up the pieces of a new theory or clearly pointing out the necessity for new research avenues.

3.2.4 Conclusion

Summarize your analyses of the major research and theoretical approaches.

For a theoretical paper, state your theory and emphasize how it ties together previous findings. For a critical analysis paper, propose new research avenues that will resolve difficulties with current research.

Discuss the implications of your theory or the contributions that your new avenues of research will make to the body of knowledge in this area.

3.2.5 References

List all sources cited in your paper according to APA guidelines.

3.3 Presentation

Same guidelines as in 2.3.1 - 2.3.3 with one exception to 2.3.3: the first couple of minutes of the theoretical/critical analysis presentation should be devoted to a brief summary of the **purpose** and **rationale** of the thesis and the **method** by which past literature was located, selected, and evaluated.