

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

School of Environmental Studies Graduate Program Guide

Guidelines for Reports & MES Theses

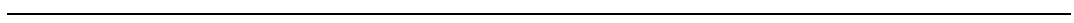
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Guidelines for MES Reports & Theses

- A Master's report or thesis in the School may take several forms, examples of which include:
 - Empirical testing of a theory, convention or concept;
 - Investigating the causes of a phenomenon pertinent to environmental studies;
 - Explaining trends which are cogent to environmental studies;
 - Exploring an environmental issue;
 - The formulation of a solution to a specific environmental problem.
- In every case, the topic should have practical significance and lead to original insights into the environmental issue on which the report or thesis focuses. Topics may be multi-, inter-, or single disciplinary. However, where the disciplinary focus is narrowly defined, it remains essential that the report or thesis be informed by extra-disciplinary approaches both in its formulation of the topic and in its consideration of any conclusions reached.
- Reports and theses must be based on original research. While not strict requirements, empirically-based theses will usually analyze primary data and be of publishable quality (in whole or in part). Empirically-based reports may make use of primary or secondary data collection, and may or may not be publishable.
- Where topics are not amenable to, or primarily based on, empirical research, reports and theses are distinguished in terms of the depth and breadth of critical and constructive engagement with the issue, originality of arguments, or theoretical contribution.
- The workload associated with a thesis is equivalent to that required in four term-length courses; a report is analogous to two courses. A report, however, is not just half of a thesis or a poor thesis. Each must stand on its own and demonstrate to the supervisor and the other examiner(s) that the student can pursue independent research.

THESIS AND REPORT PROPOSALS:

- Each student is expected to submit a brief thesis/report proposal to their supervisor/advisor, for his/her approval as soon as possible upon registration. Every attempt should be made to complete this in the first semester.
- The student is not allowed to commence the proposed research until the supervisor or advisor has approved the proposal and the Graduate Research Ethics Board (GREB) has approved the plan (if it will involve human subjects). Work involving animals will be managed under the University's animal care policy.
- The proposal should be developed in close consultation with the supervisor or advisor. It is anticipated that all students will enter the program with supervision having been already

arranged with a faculty member of the School. Once the proposal has been reviewed by the student's supervisor or advisor, it will be forwarded to a second faculty member for his/her review and comment. The supervisor/advisor will be solely responsible for approving, rejecting, or requesting revisions to the proposal.

- Proposals are normally 4-6 pages long for reports and 6-8 pages for theses (not including a preliminary bibliography of at least 10 resources) and contain answers to the following questions:
 - 1) What do you propose to study?
 - a) environmental issue.
 - b) research question(s).
 - 2) Why do you wish to pursue this area of study?
 - a) Your reason for interest in the issue.
 - b) Your goals and objectives.
 - 3) How will you address your research question?
 - a) Your level of preparation (e.g. coursework, work experience, etc.)
 - b) Your research approach (e.g. describe the indicators/variables that you will examine, sources of information, and how you will analyze your data to answer the research question(s)).
 - c) Your work schedule and general chapter outlines.
 - d) Your preferred structure of supervision (e.g. scheduled or as-needed meetings, modes of submission for review, etc.).

STRUCTURE OF A THESIS (RESEARCH STREAM):

- A thesis will normally develop from a body of literature, and either challenge a theoretical construct developed in the literature, or attempt to confirm a theoretical proposition.
- A thesis must include a comprehensive critical review of the relevant literature from which it is developed and should make a scholarly contribution to that literature.
- The length of a thesis should be a maximum of 100 double-spaced typewritten pages. Any deviation from this length will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Graduate Coordinator.
- All graduate theses or dissertations **MUST** conform to the minimum style and form requirements as detailed in the [General Forms of Theses](#).

- In the case of non-empirically based theses the exact format taken should be discussed in detail and agreed with the supervisor prior to submission. It will generally follow an accepted format in a discipline appropriate to the student's project and approach.
- When the student and supervisor feel that the thesis is ready for examination, a thesis examining committee will be struck. The committee consists of:

Chairperson
 Head of the Department (or delegate)
 Supervisor(s)
 Examiner
 Examiner

Notes:

1. At least one member of the Thesis Examination Committee shall be external to the candidate's home department but internal to Queen's (usually from a cognate department) unless permission has been granted from the School of Graduate Studies.

2. Normally, the Chair of the Thesis Examination Committee for Master's students shall be external to the candidate's home department. However, a Chair from the candidate's home department is permitted, provided that one of the examiners is external to the candidate's home department. The Chair of the Master's Thesis Examination Committee is not a voting member of the committee.

3. Normally, one of the examiners shall be external to the candidate's home department. However, all examiners could be from the candidate's home department, provided that the Chair of Committee is external to the candidate's home department.

4. The Graduate Coordinator or Head of the Department shall be responsible for approving the composition of the Examining Committee and signing the applicable departmental form.

- The committee reads the thesis and if they believe it is ready to be orally defended, an oral examination is held.
- The student is informed immediately of the result of the oral examination. According to the School of Graduate Studies rules, a thesis is assessed in one of the following categories on the basis of the written thesis and the oral defense:

1. Passed;
2. Referred; or
3. Failed

The student should consult the regulations of the SGS for the exact meaning of these words and the implications for possible additional work after the thesis defense,

STRUCTURE OF A REPORT (COURSE STREAM):

- A Master's report may take a variety of forms. Empirically based reports will generally apply known concepts and procedures to a specific situation and limit their conclusions in both time and space. All reports should offer methodologically defensible answers to specific research questions and, where appropriate, may recommend specific solutions to a well-defined environmental problem.
- A report will demonstrate a student's ability to work independently in applying research methods to a particular environmental issue.
- A report is expected to be a maximum of 60 double-spaced typewritten pages. The report should be printed double-sided.
- There is no prescribed format for a report but the following guidelines are recommended for empirically-based studies. (Deviation from these guidelines should be agreed with the supervisory committee prior to submission):

Abstract (one page) presents the key findings

Executive Summary (2-3 pages). Identifies the questions addressed by the project, briefly discusses the method and data sources used, and highlights key findings and recommendations.

Chapter 1 - Introduction: The general problem or issue to be examined is identified and its setting is briefly described. The rationale or justification for investigating the problem is explained.

Chapter 2 - Methodology: This provides a critical discussion of the methods employed, especially in terms of their relation to those used by others to research similar questions. This chapter should set out the methodological "terms of reference" for the study and fully describe the methods used, the data gathered, and the instruments and analyses applied to gather the data. The criteria used to evaluate the method's effectiveness should be discussed.

Chapter 3 - Investigation: The problem or issue is described in detail and analyzed using appropriate analytic tools (e.g., statistics). The research results and any conclusions reached are discussed and evaluated.

Chapter 4 - Recommendations: The final chapter may offer recommendations for applying the research to practical concerns and recommend specific courses of action.

- In the case of non-empirically based report the exact format used should be discussed in detail and agreed with the supervisor prior to submission. It will generally follow an accepted format in a discipline appropriate to the student's project and approach.

- The examination committee for the Master's Report will consist of two members: an external examiner who is not a member of the School faculty and the faculty advisor. The Director of the School establishes the examination committee, normally when advised by the report supervisor that a report is ready for examination. The committee may be established earlier if requested by both advisor and student.
- A unanimous decision of the two examiners is required to pass the report (with or without revisions). In the event that the two examiners cannot come to a consensus, the Director of the School will act as a third examiner, and the approval decision will be made by a majority (two out of three) vote.