

MPH AND MS THESIS MANUAL

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Overview

This manual presents thesis guidelines for students and faculty in the University of Washington Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health Program (FSNH or Program). The outline presented here incorporates Program, School of Public Health, and Graduate School requirements and includes a discussion of the standards for acceptable theses, the roles and responsibilities of committee members and students, detailed project guidelines, and a timeline for completing the master's thesis.

Definition of a Master's Thesis

The Graduate School defines a master's thesis as: "Evidence of the graduate student's ability to carry out independent investigation and to present the results in a clear and systematic form."

In addition, the UW School of Public Health defines the master's thesis as: "An original research study that uses rigorous methods that are appropriate to the research question, generates new knowledge, applies concepts and methods from disciplines relevant to public health, and is presented in a scholarly format. The thesis demonstrates the student's comprehensive knowledge of the substantive area of the study and the research methods used. It represents the culminating product of the master's program in which students are expected to integrate and apply the concepts and methods learned in coursework."

The thesis provides a mentored experience for you to develop and test a research question, obtain and analyze data, and write and interpret the results. You will approach the thesis with varied skills in research methods and data analysis. It is important to remember that the thesis is primarily a learning experience, designed to challenge you at your skill level, while adhering to a standard of high quality regarding the questions posed, the analytic methods employed, and the written product generated.

It is expected that your thesis will contribute to the goals and values of the program as well as the objectives of the organization and/or community where your research is conducted. To truly complete the experience, you are encouraged to submit your results for peer review and eventual publication (the result should be a thesis of publishable quality).

The School of Public Health provides additional [guidelines](#) for the Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) requirement of the MPH degree, which can be met by the thesis. An ILE demonstrates synthesis of foundational and concentration competencies. You will be required to select a foundational and concentration competency and document your attainment as required by the School.

Types of Acceptable Thesis Projects

Several types of projects may fulfill the thesis requirement. Each type of study requires a slightly different approach to formulate research questions and obtain and analyze data. Depending on the type of project and research question(s), acquiring data may involve identifying and working with existing datasets or collecting new data. Regardless of the study type chosen, you must apply critical thought, provide systematic analysis, and present clear findings.

Examples of previous FSNH student thesis work are available on the [FSNH Student Project webpage](#). Abstracts and manuscripts for projects completed since Winter 2012 are available via [ProQuest](#). Earlier manuscripts are available in hard copy through [UW Libraries](#).

Some project types are not acceptable theses, including:

- Literature reviews
- Group projects
- Recycled class or practicum projects

There may be exceptions to the above list. For example, a systematic review with a critique and suggestions to the field or a project that significantly extends work that began as a practicum could be acceptable.

If you are uncertain whether your proposed project would be an acceptable thesis, please consult with the Graduate Program Coordinator early in your planning process.

Observational Study

This category includes multiple research designs from nutritional epidemiology, such as cross-sectional, case control, or longitudinal cohort. Descriptive epidemiology covers person, place, and time. Analytical epidemiology looks for causal links between exposure and some health outcome(s). Typically, data analyses are hypothesis driven, with hypotheses, outcomes, and a plan of analysis established ahead of time. Some projects are based on data from original survey instruments; however, most observational studies conducted by master's students are based on secondary analyses of existing databases.

Descriptive Examples

- Kurlak, Emily. The sodium-potassium ratio: adherence to guidelines in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (Delaney/Averill)
- Ulatowski, Krista. District Market: A pilot marketing study (Drewnowski)
- Zheng, Qianxiong. Adherence to Micronutrient Supplementation in Bariatric Patients. (Chan)

Analytical Examples

- Enriquez, Erin. A twin study of the relation between age at dieting onset and to adult BMI and dieting behaviors (Duncan)
- Farnum, Kailee. Self-efficacy of monitoring eating choices associated with autonomy, fruit and vegetable intake and BMI in the MOVE'M Study (Beresford)
- Jew, Jessica. Food Shopping Trip Characteristics Before and After the Light Rail (Saelens)
- Perez, Jonae. Longitudinal Associations between Home Food Environment and Diet Quality in Children (Saelens)

Qualitative Study

Qualitative studies are used to build basic understandings of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. These studies are often applied when there is insufficient understanding to formulate meaningful and rigorous quantitative research questions and designs and when quantitative studies would be inappropriate or misleading. Qualitative research is often the right choice when researchers need basic insights into problems, situations, or solutions. Qualitative studies are usually based on a well-chosen theoretical framework or model.

Examples

- Downs, Nora. Factors influencing water intake at school among youth in King County, Washington: a qualitative study based on the social ecological model (Johnson)
- Najjar, Shelly. Barriers to WIC benefits redemption among participants in Washington state (Johnson)
- Potestio, Katherine. Is healthy happy? The affective impact of the Renton Menu Labeling Project in an adolescent population (Johnson)

Policy Analysis

A policy analysis is a study that critically evaluates the approach, framing, or impact of one or more policies. These studies involve a synthesis of existing and/or newly collected data to answer a specific question about a policy (or set of options) or evaluate policy strengths and weaknesses. A policy analysis usually employs multiple sources and types of information (e.g., literature, documents, interviews, secondary data). It also places the onus on the investigator to identify relevant data and provide clarity, organization, and structure to the analysis.

Example

- Diedrich, Sara. Restaurant Response to the San Francisco Toy Ordinance: Changes in Toy Marketing and Children's Menu Options (Otten)

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a structured study to assess whether a public health program, intervention, or technique was effective at accomplishing its goals (effectiveness or efficacy for interventions). A program evaluation should be guided by a specific set of questions and may involve a mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Examples

- Assessment of nutrition knowledge of parents of children after participation a nutrition education/promotion program.
- Impact assessment of a single or multi-site program.

Case Study

A case study is a detailed review of a unique or important program that captures the background, process, outcomes, successes, failures, and lessons learned including either qualitative or quantitative data or both. The study provides an opportunity to explore a single program in depth, using scholarly approaches to critically analyze that program within the context it was implemented. Case studies may have limited generalizability but are useful to local program staff and providers and can provide useful implementation data information.

Example

- Kirkpatrick, Shannon. The policy process in trails initiatives: The Healthy Communities Moses Lake experience. (Johnson)

Experimental and/or Clinical Study

This type of study focuses on a hypothesis-driven, randomized clinical trial (RCT), another type of clinical intervention, or an experiment. Experimental studies can involve humans or be based on animal models. Assessing the efficacy of a specific treatment is a frequent clinical goal. The limited time and resources available to master's students make experimental studies challenging given that the student must take significant initiative in both designing and executing the project. If planning an experimental study, it is important to work with your committee to ensure the feasibility by planning an appropriate scope of activities and timeline.

Examples

- Ahern, Kelly. Plasma 25-hydroxyvitamin D3 response to vitamin D supplementation in obese and non-obese men and women (Kratz)
- Barton, Sally. Metabolome response to glycemic load in a randomized, controlled, crossover feeding trial in humans. (Lampe)
- Hock, Katrina. Effects of excessive energy intake from fructose- vs. high fructose corn syrup (HFCS)- vs. glucose-sweetened beverages on fasting plasma IGF-1 and IGFBP-3 concentrations (Kratz)
- Parker, Allison. Chronic stress alters serum lipids: effects due to "stress eating" versus metabolic changes (Rosenfeld)

Methodology Development/Improvement

This category examines and evaluates the study design, data collection, or analysis methods used in nutrition-related research.

Examples

- Getts, Katherine. Measuring Plate Waste: Validity and Inter-Rater Reliability of the Quarter-Waste Method (Johnson)
- Kwon, Young Mee (Mya). Development of the DESK (Disinhibited Eating Score for Koreans) Questionnaire: Examining the relationship between eating cues and food intake in the corporate-working population of Seoul, Korea (Neuhouser)
- Partridge, Emma. Accuracy of Volumetric vs. Weight Measurement in Nutrient Analysis for Research (Neuhouser)

Identifying a Topic

Developing the right question is perhaps the most challenging part of research. It is strongly recommended that you choose a thesis topic that is of strong interest to yourself and your committee as the thesis process is long and requires sustained effort.

During your first year, and usually in winter quarter, you will have opportunity to meet with FSNH faculty and learn about potential thesis topics. You are also encouraged to follow up on initial conversations by connecting with faculty both within and outside of the Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health Program to discuss available projects. You will be asked to describe your process for identifying a thesis project when you complete the Graduate Student Portfolio at the end of your first year.

A good thesis question is focused, clearly stated, interesting to you and other people in the field, relevant to the science, and answerable. It is worth spending the effort to develop one or more well-focused research questions as it will greatly facilitate planning, conducting, and writing up your thesis research.

Remember, the primary goal is educational. This may not be the biggest or best project of your career, but it will be a valuable experience from which you will learn a great deal.

Forming a Thesis Committee

The Graduate Program Coordinator serves as your advisor until you choose your thesis committee chair and can assist with questions related to the composition of your supervisory committees.

Once you have chosen your committee chair and research topic, you will choose additional faculty (approved by your chair) to complete your thesis supervisory committee. Members of this committee will guide you, serve as your mentors, and evaluate your thesis. Typically, the supervisory committee consists of two to four members.

- **The committee chair and at least one half of the committee must have Graduate Faculty Status (GFS).** GFS is a formal endorsement by the UW Graduate School for faculty members in eligible titles who have been nominated by their departments. All graduate faculty members demonstrate continued excellence in research and are involved in supervising graduate students. To determine if a faculty member has GFS, check the [Graduate School faculty locator](#).
- You may select a committee chair from FSNH Core or Interdisciplinary Faculty or any UW faculty with GFS granted by the Graduate School. If a non-FSNH faculty member is designated chair, at least one FSNH Core Faculty member must serve on the committee.
- Additional members of the committee are selected in consultation with the committee chair but must conform to the Graduate School's requirement that at least half of the committee has GFS. Use the below information in conjunction with advice from your chair and [supervisory committee](#), the Graduate Program Coordinator, the Graduate Program Adviser, the Program, and the Graduate School.

Examples of Master's Thesis Committee Structures

- Committees with two members (at least one of two must have GFS)
 - Chair: FSNH Core or Interdisciplinary Faculty with GFS
Second member: Faculty selected with guidance and approval of chair (GFS not required)
 - Chair: Non-FSNH faculty member with GFS
Second member: Member of FSNH Core Faculty (GFS not required)
- Committees with three members (at least two of three must have GFS)
 - Chair: FSNH Core or Interdisciplinary Faculty with GFS
Second member: Faculty with GFS selected with guidance and approval of chair
Third member: Faculty selected with guidance and approval of chair (GFS not required)
 - Chair: Non-FSNH faculty member with GFS
Second member: Faculty with GFS selected with guidance and approval of chair
Third member: Faculty selected with guidance and approval of chair (GFS not required)
** Either the second or third member must be FSNH Core Faculty*

Student and Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Regular communication between you and your thesis committee is paramount to the success and timeliness of completing your thesis. Although you will receive help and support from committee members, you are the researcher and ultimately responsible for carrying out the thesis work.

You and your committee members must work out a realistic timeline for completing the thesis, including review and commentary on all drafts considering members' schedules and commitments. On average, students submit three to four drafts to their committee before the thesis is ready for final submission. *You are strongly advised to obtain advance confirmation of the committee's availability each quarter.*

Student Responsibilities

First Year (WIN/SPR)

- ❑ **Identify and confirm a committee chair and project.** Then inform the Graduate Program Coordinator ([Cristen Harris](#)) and [Student and Academic Services](#) that you have identified a chair. At this point, the role of faculty adviser moves from the Graduate Program Coordinator to the committee chair.
- ❑ **Register for 1-2 credits of NUTR 700 during spring quarter.** Use this time to become familiar with this Thesis Manual and further define your thesis topic.
- ❑ **Complete the FSNH Graduate Student Portfolio.** You will discuss the steps you have taken to identify a research project, committee chair, and tentative timeline as part of the student portfolio due at the end of spring quarter of your first year.

Second Year (AUT/WIN/SPR/SUM)

- ❑ **Review and complete the [Use of Human and Animal Subjects for UW Graduate Student Theses and Dissertations](#) form with your committee chair.** This form is required by the Graduate School to document that you have been advised of human and animal subjects guidelines. It does not replace any human or animal subjects training or application requirements. Once signed, submit the form to [Student and Academic Services](#) for your student file.
- ❑ **Identify and confirm your committee members.** Consult with your committee chair to identify members to serve on your committee who have relevant, complementary expertise regarding your thesis project. (See *Section 4: Forming a Thesis Committee* for committee composition requirements.) Notify [Student and Academic Services](#) of your committee membership and any subsequent changes. They will also review the membership and ensure that the Graduate School and Program requirements for committee composition are satisfied.
- ❑ **Establish a communication plan and timeline with your thesis committee.** Specifically determine when committee members will be expected to review and provide feedback on thesis drafts.
- ❑ **Write a thesis proposal.** Develop the thesis proposal in consultation with your chair. Your proposal should be complete and approved by your thesis committee *before* proceeding with data collection or analysis.
- ❑ **Ensure that all human or animal subjects requirements have been met** (see *Section 8: Human and Animal Subjects*). Consult with your committee chair to determine whether a human or animal subjects application and/or specific trainings is/are required.
- ❑ **Conduct data collection and thesis work with the highest ethical standards.**
- ❑ **Write your thesis.**

Final Quarter

MPH/MS without the GCPD: Typically complete and submit the thesis in spring of the second year.

MPH/MS with the GCPD: Typically complete and submit the thesis in summer of the second year or autumn quarter of the third year following the practice experience.

- ❑ **Review the FSNH Steps to Graduation document**, available on the [Graduate Student Resources webpage](#).
- ❑ **Check thesis formatting.** Confirm that your thesis has the correct formatting required by the Graduate School and ProQuest: [Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation website](#).
- ❑ **Submit the final draft of your thesis in journal article form to your committee members at least four (4) weeks before your intended graduation date.** If the full draft has not been provided to your committee by that time and you have not received prior approval for a different deadline from your chair, you should expect to graduate the following quarter.
- ❑ **Publicly present your thesis to faculty, students, staff, family, and friends.**
 - ❑ **Schedule your thesis defense.** Work with your committee as early in the quarter as possible to arrange a mutually acceptable date/time and location (in person or via Zoom) for your presentation. One hour is usually sufficient for the presentation, although you will want to leave extra time for set-up/preparation at the beginning and questions at the end, as well as for your committee to discuss and vote. Please contact [Student and Academic Services](#) if you need assistance with in-person room reservations.
 - ❑ **At least three (3) weeks prior to defending, send your thesis title and the date/time/location of your presentation to [Student and Academic Services](#).** SAS will prepare and distribute a defense announcement to the Program community two (2) weeks before your presentation. You may be asked to review a draft, so please respond as soon as possible.
- ❑ **Submit your final thesis to the Graduate School.** Instructions for thesis submission are found on the [Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation website](#).

Committee Chair Responsibilities

- ❑ **Establish with the student a mutual level of expectation about the scope of the project**, taking into consideration the time constraints of the student's academic program.
- ❑ **Assess the student's ability to carry out all parts of the proposed thesis project.** If gaps are identified, advise the student on how to gain the skills necessary for project completion.
- ❑ **Assist the student in identifying appropriate committee members.**
- ❑ **Ensure all committee members have read and approved the thesis proposal** (i.e., a brief overview of the problem statement, data collection process, and proposed analyses) early in the thesis process.
- ❑ **Negotiate with committee members the extensiveness of their roles.**
- ❑ **Assist the student with establishing a communication plan and timeline.** Specifically determine when committee members will be expected to review and provide feedback on thesis drafts.
- ❑ **Assist the student with UW Human Subjects or IACUC application or exemption**, as well as other potential human subjects requirements.
- ❑ **Assist with mediation if conflict arises.**
- ❑ **Complete the student's Culminating Experience Form/Integrated Learning Experience (ILE) portal form and sign the [Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form](#)** to convey successful completion of the thesis presentation and thesis approval.
- ❑ **Provide interim and final grades for thesis work** (CR is recommended) via NUTR 700.

Committee Member Responsibilities

- ☐ **Read, give advice, and sign off on the initial thesis proposal.**
- ☐ **Work individually with the student on the thesis aspects** for which the committee member carries primary responsibility.
- ☐ **Read drafts and provide comments to the student and chair in a timely fashion,** consistent with the communication plan and timeline provided by the student.
- ☐ **Attend meetings requested by the student or chair.**
- ☐ **Sign the [Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form](#)** to convey successful completion of the thesis presentation and thesis approval.

Registering for Thesis Credits

To register for independent study or thesis credits, you must submit an Independent Study Registration Agreement available on the [Graduate Student Resources webpage](#). A form must be submitted **each quarter** you register for thesis credits and should document the tasks you will be focusing on in the specific quarter.

You must enroll for a minimum of 2 credits of anything in the quarter in which you plan to graduate (the quarter you complete your oral thesis defense and submission of your thesis to the Graduate School). If you have already completed the 9 required NUTR 700 thesis credits prior to your final quarter, you can meet the two-credit enrollment requirement by registering for additional thesis credits or another course.

**If you are planning to present your thesis but will not graduate during the quarter you defend, please follow the steps for arranging and publicizing your presentation. Wait to submit your master's degree request and thesis until the quarter in which you graduate.*

Thesis Proposal

After you finalize your thesis committee and establish your timeline, the next step is to write a thesis proposal. The proposal describes the purpose of your study and the methods for accomplishing them. This requirement ensures that thesis projects are based on sound and rigorous research methods and provides you an important opportunity to develop research design skills with expert guidance from faculty.

Thesis Proposal Structure

The thesis proposal is typically 3-5 pages plus any graphs or tables and should be structured in the format presented below. Writing a proposal requires the student to be explicit regarding plans to execute the thesis. The format can be adapted to individual project needs and constraints as deemed appropriate by the committee chair.

- I. **Title Page:** Project title, student's name, committee chair, committee members, and date. If the committee is not yet formally constituted, indicate potential committee members being considered, including a chair.
- II. **Specific Aims:** List the project's immediate goals in terms of research or practice questions to be answered. The overall purpose of this line of investigation should indicate the importance of the specific information being sought through this study. This section should not exceed one half-page in length and may be shorter.
- III. **Background and Significance:** Describe the scientific context for the study, briefly summarizing the existing body of knowledge and/or the context and issues to be addressed in the practice setting. This should *not* be an extensive literature review; rather it is meant to allow the student to demonstrate a basic understanding of the issue or field to be studied. Keep references to a minimum by citing only those that are most relevant. This section should identify the gaps in knowledge which the proposed project will help to fill. One to two pages is usually enough for the proposal, but you will expand on this for your thesis manuscript.
- IV. **Methods:** The format of this section may be tailored to meet the needs of the specific project being proposed. This should be the longest section of the proposal, usually 2-3 pages in length.
- V. **Limitations:** Describe any limitations that are beyond the control of the project (those that have already been decided upon or implemented) that may affect results of the thesis work or may influence the interpretation of the study results.
- VI. **Timeline:** Provide an approximate timeline for completion of the project's various stages.
- VII. **Budget:** Provide a budget outlining anticipated costs.
- VIII. **References:** Provide citations to key literature references used in the proposal.

Obtaining Approval of the Thesis Proposal

It is required to obtain approval of the thesis proposal by all members of the thesis committee. The student should provide each committee member with a copy of their proposal. A meeting of the committee may be needed or helpful to discuss improvements to be made. Ideally, committee feedback on the proposal, whether by meeting or otherwise, should be provided within two weeks of proposal receipt.

Once edited, the revised thesis proposal should be resubmitted to the committee for final review (a meeting may not be necessary if revisions are minimal). You have reached an important milestone when your committee has approved your thesis proposal, as your committee is essentially declaring that your research question and the methods for answering them are acceptable. Once this step is complete, you have a "green light" to begin your thesis work.

Human or Animal Subjects

Understanding the history and background that led to the creation of Institutional Review Boards (IRB), Human Subjects Committees, and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) is critical when pursuing research. The Graduate School and the Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health Program each have requirements that help ensure the protection of human subjects.

The Graduate School requires all graduate degree students to discuss human or animal subjects requirements with their thesis chair and then file a [Use of Human and Animal Subjects for UW Graduate Student Theses and Dissertations](#) form.

Those aspects of a student's thesis project that involve human or animal subjects (e.g., subject identification and recruitment, data and/or specimen collection or analysis) must be reviewed and approved in accordance with UW policies and federal regulations before the research can be initiated. Unless the project qualifies as "exempt" under these regulations, the review and approval process can take several months, so you should begin the paperwork as early as possible. Each student is responsible for maintaining documentation of their project's approval throughout the course of the thesis work and through graduation. Information regarding human subject use is available from the [UW Research Human Subjects Division](#); information regarding animal use is available from the [UW Office of Animal Welfare](#).

Determining if Review is Needed

Most theses that involve gathering data from or about people will require review from a UW Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB). The first place to look is the [UW Research Human Subjects Division](#) webpage (look in the "Getting Started" box). Your committee chair will be instrumental in helping you sort out what type of review is needed and when.

Other Institution Review Boards

It is equally important that you and your thesis chair consider where your research will take place and whether a human subjects application needs to be filed with a host organization, Ministry of Health, or other entity. If a second review is required, it can potentially add months to the overall thesis timeline. Having a colleague/counterpart in the host organization to help answer questions and interface with the IRB can be immensely helpful.

Timeline

The time required for approval varies considerably, depending on the volume of applications at the time of submission. To allow enough time for the entire process, we recommend a minimum of two months for an Exempt application and up to four months for a Minimal Risk or Full Review application.

This includes the writing of the protocol and application forms, requesting letters of permission from outside collaborators or agencies, review and sign off by faculty thesis advisors (for students), sign off by the Program Director, and then time for the UW review committee's questions and final approval.

Final approval by the UW Human Subjects Division may take as little as one week (as is typically the case with concurrence for most Exempt applications) but may require two months for Minimal Risk and Full Review applications. If your Exempt application is denied and ends up being referred to the Minimal Risk review committee, you will need extra time.

Standard Thesis Format

A standard thesis format includes four sections: **Introduction**, **Methods**, **Results**, and **Discussion**. These are the typical sections of an academic journal publication, although the organization of your own work may be different and should be discussed with your committee. The organization of subsections may vary, depending on the topic and the preferences of the student and committee. Sample outlines for a quantitative and qualitative thesis are provided below.

We encourage you to apply an appropriate “checklist” from the research community to guide the conduct and reporting of your results. Below is a list of some relevant guidance:

- STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology) offers a checklist of items to be included in reports of observational studies. There are different lists depending on the study design: <http://www.strobe-statement.org/checklists/>.
- CONSORT (Consolidated Standards for Reporting Trials) provides an evidence-based minimum set of recommendations for reporting randomized trials: <https://www.consort-spirit.org/published-statements>.
- COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) presents a 32-item checklist for reporting qualitative results and study methods. Available at <https://academic.oup.com/intqhc/article/19/6/349/1791966>.

Sample Quantitative Thesis Format

1. **Abstract**
2. **Introduction:** Introduces the problem, previous research on the problem, and research question or questions.
3. **Methods:** Describes the research methods used in the study in detail.
 - a. Study setting
 - b. Selection of study subjects
 - i. Source
 - ii. Sampling method/recruitment
 - iii. Criteria for eligibility/exclusion of cases
 - c. Description of intervention (if any)
 - d. Data collection
 - i. Source (e.g., questionnaire, interview, record review, vital records)
 - ii. Protocol for typical subject
 - iii. Steps taken to assess and assure data quality
 - e. Analysis (as applicable)
 - i. Sample size/power considerations
 - ii. Hypothesis testing/generation
 - iii. Definition of key analysis variables
4. **Results:** Statistical methods provide a clear, systematic presentation of results, linked back to the research questions and conceptual model. It does not include interpretation or discussion of results.
 - a. Characteristics of the study sample, including the number of subjects and the response rate.
 - b. Table(s) or figure(s) addressing each research question. Tables and figures usually progress from univariate, to bivariate, to multivariate analyses. Text highlights (but does not duplicate) results shown in tables and figures.
5. **Discussion:** Provides the opportunity to discuss the findings, compare them with previous research, and consider the implications of the findings.

- a. Study strengths and limitations
 - b. How key findings compare or contrast with previous work
 - c. Implications of findings
 - i. For the theory or conceptual model described in the Introduction.
 - ii. For public health practitioners or clinicians
 - iii. For future research
6. **Appendixes:** Contain detailed materials related to the thesis, such as cover letters to respondents, instructions for computing a scale score from the raw data, documentation of the mathematical equations used in the data analysis, etc.

Sample Qualitative Thesis Format

1. **Abstract**
2. **Introduction**
 - a. General introduction
 - b. Describe the problem
 - c. Describe the state of existing literature and the “gap”
 - d. Describe the purpose of this study
3. **Description of theory, framework, or model**
 - a. Overview of previous frameworks that have been applied in this arena
 - b. Description of your framework
 - i. Strengths & limitations
 - ii. Comparison with other approaches
 - iii. Concluding statement about why you chose this theory, framework or model
4. **Methods**
 - a. Procedures
 - i. Subject recruitment procedure
 - ii. Procedures of how data were collected
 - iii. Human subjects sentence
5. **Instruments:** Description of questionnaire or discussion guide, how it was developed and pre-tested
6. **Analysis techniques**
 - a. Development and testing of coding structure
 - b. Determinations of interrater reliability
 - c. Thematic analysis techniques: reference and follow one of the standard qualitative research books and/or papers
7. **Results**
 - a. Describe the sample
 - b. Reliability and validity of analysis methods
 - c. Thematic results (often using the framework as a guide to presentation)
8. **Discussion**
 - a. Overview: focus of the study; overview of the significant findings
 - b. Comparisons with framework and existing literature
 - c. Implications
 - d. Limitations of the study
 - e. Recommendations
 - f. Summary paragraph
9. **Appendixes:** Detailed materials related to the thesis. May include letters to respondents, interview questions, or other supporting information.

Start Writing

While classes have well-defined start and end dates, a thesis has far less structure and can vary considerably in content and duration. In most cases, your ability to complete a thesis without delay depends on what you know about the **topic and research methods, individual skills in time management, organization, working with other people, and knowledge of thesis requirements** imposed by the UW Graduate School. These guidelines are designed to help you navigate the thesis terrain from beginning to end.

While it may seem obvious, a key step in completing your thesis is simply to start. There are several sources of inertia that can slow or deter a student from starting the thesis: lack of time, comfort with structured course work and discomfort with a less-structured thesis, feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task and no clue of where or how to begin, stress from personal or family problems, and so forth. The best way to overcome this inertia is to make a commitment and start the process. Once your thesis committee approves your thesis proposal and you have obtained approval from the Human Subjects Division, you may begin!

Writing and Revising as you Work

If you have not yet completed the Introduction and Methods sections of your thesis, now is a good time to do so. By completing the two chapters now, you must only write the Results and Discussion chapters later. In short, breaking up the writing into manageable pieces increases the likelihood that you will complete your thesis on schedule.

As you perform your study, you undoubtedly will encounter several methodological issues not addressed in the thesis proposal. When the way to solve these issues is unclear, you should obtain advice from one or more members of your committee on how best to address them. These steps also decrease the likelihood that committee members will find problems with your study after it is completed.

Rather than operating in "crisis mode" and contacting committee members only when problems arise, it is strongly suggested that students and faculty speak on a regular basis to monitor progress and address any problems that may emerge. The frequency of meetings may vary during different stages of the thesis process, with more frequent meetings (e.g., every two weeks) in the first and last stages, and fewer meetings in between. You should meet periodically to discuss the data analysis and interpretation of results.

Completing the Write-Up

After all analyses are completed, you should write the first draft of the Results and Discussion sections. Once completed, the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections should be submitted to the committee for review. **In most cases, students find they must revise their sections at least two times before all committee members will approve them.** The revisions can take a month or more to complete, depending on the study and the student.

Some general points to keep in mind about preparing an acceptable thesis are:

- Approval of the content, writing quality, and format of the thesis is determined by the committee chair and members.
- Neither the Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health Program nor the Graduate School require your thesis to be a certain length. Therefore, it is wise to negotiate expectations about the length of your thesis with your committee.
- It is recommended to use the length and format of an article in a scientific journal. This still allows wide variation, but as a rough guideline typically entails:
 - 2,500-4,000 words
 - 5-10 tables or figures
 - Appendices for supplementary tables or copies of data collection instruments, as needed
- The "Program Authorized to Offer Degree" on your title pages is Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health.

Students must carefully review the Graduate School formatting requirements on how to prepare the Title Page, Copyright Page, and Abstract: [Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation website](#).

Oral Presentation

An oral presentation of the master's thesis is a program requirement and usually takes place the quarter you plan to graduate. If the presentation is made near the end of the quarter but there is insufficient time for completion of the thesis, you may pay a [Graduate Registration Waiver](#) of \$250 (see *Section 13: Submission to the Graduate School*) or register for 2 credits the next quarter to obtain additional time for completion. Please work with [Student and Academic Services](#) to schedule and publicize your thesis presentation.

The ability to synthesize and summarize one's work into such a framework is a useful professional skill. It requires that the student practice their presentation, edit content accordingly to fit the timeframe, and think about how to best use audio-visual technologies.

At minimum, the oral presentation should be scheduled for one hour to include the presentation and questioning from the thesis committee. The presentation should cover:

- Thesis background, study methods, results, discussion, and recommendations, as appropriate.
- Recognition of committee chair, committee, and any sponsoring organization (if appropriate).

Submission to the Graduate School

The [Graduate School Thesis/Dissertation website](#) walks through the steps required for a successful final submission of a thesis.

Steps to highlight:

- Remember to submit a scanned copy of your signed [Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form](#) to the Administrative Documents section of the UW ETD Administrator Site **no later than 11:59 p.m. PST on the last day of the quarter you will graduate.**
- Also upload your thesis to the UW ETD Administrator Site by **11:59 p.m. PST on the last day of the quarter you will graduate.** If you submit your document after the deadline, you will graduate the following quarter and must register for 2 credits or pay the \$250 Graduate Registration Waiver Fee
- You may finish and present your thesis prior to your graduation quarter, however, the Graduate School requests that you wait until your quarter of graduation to submit it.

[Graduate Registration Waiver](#)

A \$250 Graduate Registration Waiver is an optional fee paid in lieu of registration. It is available to master's students who:

- 1) Did not submit a [Master's Degree Request](#) prior to the deadline for the quarter in which all degree requirements were completed, *or*
- 2) Completed all degree requirements but needed additional time to format their thesis.

If you pay this fee, you have **14 calendar days** (directly following the end of the quarter in which all Graduate School and graduate program degree requirements are met) to turn in your thesis. Note that if you pay this fee you will graduate in the quarter following the fee payment period. This delay may influence the grace period for student loans, so you should check with your lender, if applicable.

Thesis Publication

Your goal should be dissemination of the thesis results. Everyone benefits when a student's thesis is published, although it is not a requirement for graduation. Submission and response to reviewer comments can take several months, but the benefit of publication is clear:

- Your work becomes known to colleagues, which builds your reputation and resume.
- The field of public health benefits from the dissemination of your thesis results to other interested professionals for purposes of building future research and replication of results. As professionals, we have an ethical responsibility to publish our work and communicate the issues raised by participants to help their voices be heard.
- Faculty committee members benefit in several ways. First, the collaborative work is widely communicated, and future researchers can build upon it. Second, faculty can be credited for senior authorship on publications.
- Non-faculty collaborators benefit by being recognized for their contributions.

Co-authors on a publication usually include those individuals who made a "meaningful scientific contribution" to the work. These people are typically the thesis chair, committee members, and any others who played a key role in the project. You and your chair should reach tentative agreement about who will take responsibility for preparing the thesis for publication and about the identities and listing order of co-authors. While a publication usually has co-authors, the thesis must be authored by the student alone.

Culminating Project/Integrated Learning Experience (ILE)

While MPH and MS students have different competency requirements at the Program and School levels, all Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health (FSNH) master's students must identify two competencies to meet/achieve through the Culminating Experience.

MPH students are required to complete an Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) that demonstrates the synthesis of foundational and concentration competencies as defined by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). In consultation with your thesis chair, you will select at least one foundational competency and one concentration-specific competency appropriate to your educational and professional goals. You will then log them in the [ILE online portal](#) at the beginning of the project and evaluate the attainment of these competencies at the end of it. Your thesis chair will also evaluate the student's competency attainment in the portal. Student and Academic Services will verify completion through the portal as part of your steps to graduation.

In consultation with their thesis chair, **MS students** will select one concentration-specific competency and develop an additional competency appropriate to their own educational and professional goals. You will report your progress meeting these goals using the Culminating Experience Form found on the [Graduate Student Resource page](#). Your thesis chair will evaluate your competency attainment on the form, as well, which you will submit to [Student and Academic Services](#) for tracking as part of your steps to graduation.