

# MASTER'S THESIS GUIDELINES

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## PREFACE: BEGIN EARLY

All [Program in International Relations](#) students (Journalism-IR “GloJo” joint degree students excluded) are required to complete a master’s thesis during their final semester. Students must enroll in the required MA Thesis Seminar that semester when completing the thesis. Consider a topic that interests you intellectually and would be relevant to your anticipated career after your graduation. You should plan to write a thesis on a topic in which you have some reasonable knowledge base developed through your graduate coursework at NYU. For this reason, it is advisable to begin thinking about your thesis topic during your first semester.

You should decisively settle on a thesis topic by the beginning of your penultimate semester. For most students enrolled full-time in our program, this refers to the beginning of their third semester. You are required to submit your thesis proposal toward the end of your penultimate semester (see below for more specific deadlines).

Writing a successful proposal requires being well-informed about the topic you intend to examine further in your thesis. Remember that one of the main purposes of a proposal is to convince others (including faculty members) that you are qualified to successfully undertake and complete the project you propose to pursue. Taking courses on the proposed topic and/or having previously explored the topic in your written work, etc., are a few obvious examples of acquiring such a qualification.

In short, it is good to begin thinking about your topic early and to build a base of knowledge throughout your graduate studies in NYU’s Program in International Relations.

## PRELIMINARY REQUIREMENTS

### Thesis Proposal Workshop

Students writing their thesis need to complete the Thesis Proposal Workshop the semester before they take the Thesis Seminar. For example, students writing in Summer 2024 or Fall 2024 should take the Spring 2024 workshop. Students are strongly encouraged to attend the Zoom workshop sessions. All students are **required** to submit the workshop assignments (literature review and draft proposal) by the deadlines if they would like to take the Thesis Seminar in the following semester.

There are three main assignments for the Thesis Proposal Workshop: a draft literature review, a draft thesis proposal, and a final proposal due to your advisor and the program. Please see the dedicated Brightspace page “M.A. Thesis Proposal Workshop” for specific deadlines. If you do not have access, please email [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu) to be added.

Students will be assigned a faculty thesis proposal advisor (Prof. Nettelfield or Prof. Peker) who will assist in the development of their thesis proposal with input from their thesis advisor.

Please see Brightspace for the schedule and links to the Zoom workshop.

### **Identifying a Thesis Advisor**

Students should identify a thesis advisor with a background related to their area of research. Generally, this can be any full-time or adjunct faculty member within the Program in International Relations or any full-time faculty member at NYU. However, please note that faculty members may have a limited number of advisees and students may need to identify an alternate advisor. The program must approve your choice of advisor.

**Please send the name of your proposed advisor by November 1, 2023, to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu).**

Your thesis advisor will need to review and approve your proposal before agreeing to become a part of your thesis team. Please keep in mind that the thesis seminar instructor and the thesis advisor cannot be the same person. Your thesis advisor serves as your first reader and your Thesis Seminar instructor serves as your second reader.

During the spring semesters, multiple sections of the MA Thesis Seminar are offered, typically taught by each of the core full-time faculty members who also serve as academic advisors. However, in the fall semester and during the summer, only one seminar section is typically offered.

- If you intend to take the seminar and complete your thesis during the summer or fall semester, you must complete the Thesis Proposal Workshop in the spring and submit your proposal by May. Please note that some advisors may not be available during the summer.

The thesis advisor should indicate their commitment to supervise your thesis by signing your [MA Thesis Supervision Form](#). This form should be filled out and provided by you to your advisor in a timely fashion. The advisor should return the form to you, signed and dated. You must then submit the signed and dated form along with your approved thesis proposal to the IR Program office.

## **Enrollment in the Thesis Seminar**

The next step is to decide which section of the Master's Thesis Seminar, INTRL-GA 4000, you wish to take. (Again, multiple sections are offered only in the Spring semester each year, one each in Fall and Summer.)

Note: Students must have no Incompletes to be eligible to register for the Thesis Seminar.

***You will not be able to enroll in the seminar without having met all workshop deadlines, an approved proposal, and a formally committed thesis advisor.***

Request a registration code via the [Master's Thesis Seminar Enrollment Request Form](#). The request form should be submitted by November 1 for Spring thesis writers (and later for other terms, see below) and requires the following documents and information:

- 1) [MA Thesis Supervision Form](#)\*, filled by you and signed by your thesis advisor to indicate that they approve your proposal and agree to supervise your thesis;
- 2) [GSAS Mentor-Mentee Agreement Form](#), signed by you and your thesis advisor
- 3) The name of your thesis advisor;
- 4) The semester and section number of the specific INTRL-GA 4000 you wish to take and the name of the seminar instructor.

\*Signatures may be electronic signatures or signed and scanned.

After reviewing your documents, the Program will either contact you for further clarification (if necessary) or send you the code. You will need the code to register for the seminar.

To summarize with a hypothetical example, suppose Spring 2021 is student X's last semester. X is required to take INTRL-GA 4000 and complete their thesis in Spring 2021. X should register for this course on, or soon after, registration for it is allowed, usually mid-November. At the same time, X should obtain the registration code. To be able to obtain it, X should already have an approved proposal and a formally committed advisor. To ensure that this happens, X must submit their thesis proposal by the

deadline outlined on the M.A. Thesis Proposal Brightspace page, and simultaneously look for an advisor. X has been advised that writing a good proposal is a serious undertaking and requires preparation.

### **Preliminary Deadlines**

<b>Fall 2023</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
	Sept/ Oct.	Make an appointment to discuss topics and potential research questions
	October 26, 2023	Submit a 2000-word literature view on the topic in Brightspace
	November 1, 2023	Submit the name of your proposed thesis advisor to <a href="mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu">ir.masters@nyu.edu</a> . We will review and approve it soon after.
	November 1, 2023	Submit MA <a href="#">Thesis Seminar Enrollment Request</a>
	November 16, 2023	Submit a 3000-word draft proposal in Brightspace
	December 10, 2023	Submit MA Thesis Supervision Form
	December 10, 2023	Submit final proposal

*\*Submissions should be sent to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu) as well as the appropriate advisor(s).*

# THE PROPOSAL

## Picking a Topic

Both the preparation for and conception of a thesis proposal require reflecting on what the appellation “master’s thesis” denotes. A master’s thesis is not simply a substantial body of written work (a “paper” or “report”). Rather, it bears this name primarily because it advances a thesis—a central proposition or main point of argument. Your proposal should state clearly the thesis you intend to defend in your paper. A thesis statement is a concise, declarative sentence that posits the main point or claim of your project. Of necessity, you can only advance a tentative, working thesis at this stage. In essence, your preliminary working thesis articulates a logical proposition you propose as the best resolution to the central problem on which your project focuses. “The problem” will be further discussed below.

Moreover, a master’s thesis is not simply a thesis written to fulfill a requirement for a master’s degree. It is also expected to demonstrate that its author possesses sufficient knowledge to be called a “*master*” (or “expert”) in a field of study. Indeed, this is the main reason it is called a “master’s” thesis, or the MA degree you are pursuing is called a “master’s degree.” Therefore, a good thesis proposal should convincingly establish that its author is already sufficiently prepared and qualified to acquire such expertise in short order on their chosen research topic.

Bear in mind that you are pursuing your master’s degree in the academic field of international relations (IR), which is tellingly also called “international politics” or “world politics.” For this reason, your thesis project should be pertinent to the study of international relations, broadly construed. It should evidently be about some aspect(s) of international or world (transnational) structures, institutions, actors, relations, and/or processes that have significant political implications.

Our two required “core” courses, International Relations (INTRL-GA 1700) and Global and International History (INTRL-GA 1600), are useful guides to what IR is and does. As such they provide valuable foundations for thinking about possible subjects for your MA thesis research. You may also obtain additional information about International Relations as a research field by surveying the courses taught in our Program and other reputable IR programs, as well as the courses offered elsewhere at NYU that are approved by the IR Program as appropriate general electives. As you select your elective courses at NYU, aim to take courses that will help you build a base of knowledge for deeper research into an area you are especially interested in.

Be sure to also consult [The International Relations Research Guide](#), created by the IR Subject Specialist Librarian at the NYU Bobst Library, Dr. Aruna Magier.

In any event, you should consult your advisor and other members of the IR Program faculty to determine whether your chosen topic is appropriate for a master's thesis in IR. Be sure to have these consultations with faculty before you begin writing your proposal.

## **The Purpose of Writing the Proposal**

The purpose of requiring a thesis proposal is to ensure that you can successfully complete your master's thesis. More specifically, it is to ensure that:

- Your topic addresses a significant international-relations problem;
- You have interesting, albeit tentative, hypotheses that will inform your study;
- You have already acquired sufficient theoretical and factual knowledge to think plausibly about your research problem and its resolution;
- You can independently conduct research to obtain sufficient information to complete the thesis;
- You have conceived a well-organized plan (or "road map") for presenting the information cogently;
- You have identified appropriate methods and methodology for conducting your research and analysis;
- You are familiar with our required style guide, the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) (Notes and Bibliography format).
- The proposed project can be satisfactorily completed within the specified timeline and length. In our Program, your completed thesis must have 11,000-13,000 words in your manuscript, excluding bibliography, citations, text boxes, and appendices.

*\*It is worth noting that the art of proposal writing is relevant to all sorts of careers you might pursue in the future, and so should be taken seriously for this reason as well.*

## **Further Resources for Good Proposal Writing**

Given that IR is animated by different kinds of research and inquiry (theoretical, historical, social-scientific, etc.), the expected components and the structure of a thesis proposal can be described only generally and abstractly here. You should be able to obtain more specific ideas about these components in your courses, especially the ones that deal with research methods and academic writing. In any case, the art of proposal and thesis writing itself demands serious consideration and research. The following texts are recommended for this purpose:

Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Lisa A. Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*, 3. edition (London: Sage, 2016).

Christopher Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations* (London: Sage, 2015).

Mats Alvesson and Jörgen Sandberg, *The Context of Constructing and Formulating Research Questions* (London: Sage, 2013).

Lisa Harrison and Theresa Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics & International Relations* (London: Sage, 2013).

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 4th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 2008).

Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (eds.), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Doing a Literature Review," *Political Science and Politics* 39, no. 1 (2006): 127-32.

Frank P. Harvey and Michael Brecher (eds.), *Evaluating Methodology in International Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

Greg Scott and Roberta Gamer, *Doing Qualitative Research: Designs, Methods and Techniques* (Boston: Pearson, 2013).

Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).



## **Components of the Proposal**

Your proposal should have the following components. *The proposal should be approximately 2500-3000 words.*

### **1. Working Title**

The title of your master's thesis will likely change as your research progresses. Nevertheless, it is important to provide a succinct working title in your proposal, which should capture the spirit of your project.

### **2. Introduction**

Begin with a succinct description (one to two paragraphs) of the research project you intend to pursue and why it matters either for scholarly debates or policy developments (or both). This description should clarify the *topic* and formulate the main *problem* of your project. This may be a puzzle, a gap in the literature, or a pressing policy problem/ issue.

### **3. Research Question and Hypotheses**

A clearly stated international relations/ affairs thesis question. The research question should be narrowly focused, allowing you to answer it thoroughly and effectively during the span of one semester (and in approximately 50 pages). It needs to be backward-looking; you may include forward-looking policy recommendations at the end of your thesis based on the preceding analysis (but you don't have to). In addition, address the relevance and significance of this research project, providing a brief, but thoughtful, justification for the need to examine and resolve the specified problem or questions. How does your thesis project make an original contribution to and build on existing literature? What are the advantages of your analysis in comparison to alternative interpretations that have been offered? Identify any working hypotheses you may have.

#### **4. Literature Review**

A literature review provides an overview of current, most advanced knowledge on a specific topic. It is designed to allow the author to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in the existing, credible research. It should explain how you are situating your research project in relation to the pertinent scholarly literature and it should succinctly articulate how some of the prominent authors/texts understand, and claim to resolve, the problem and point out the extent to which they have succeeded and/or fallen short.

A good literature review should be a coherent whole. With section headings, it should clearly identify each body of scholarly literature under review. It should address the key arguments and findings in each work, not merely describe the book in general terms. Furthermore, you should integrate your discussion of individual works and bodies of literature and not merely summarize them in succession. Conclude the section reflecting on the implications for your study. Ultimately, the literature review should make a coherent argument about how your project situates itself in relation to the pertinent bodies of scholarship under review.

Your literature review should also be sufficiently rich and well-informed, proving that you are reasonably familiar with some of the principal works that have considered the problem both theoretically and factually. While there is no predetermined consensus on the exact number of works a proposal should review, 12-14 might be reasonably considered the minimum. This number should grow considerably by the time you complete your master's thesis.

#### **5. Research Design: Methods and Methodology**

This section should answer the following questions:

- a. What research methods will you use to collect data or evidence (e.g., content analysis, archival research, ethnography, meta-analysis of existing literature, surveys, interviews, etc.)?
- b. What methods will you employ to analyze your data (e.g., qualitative and/or quantitative methods, etc.)? Will you use any specific software to analyze your data?
- c. What types of sources and resources will you use (e.g., scholarly works, expert professionals [via interviews], archives, databases, etc.)?
- d. How will you organize your information (e.g., case studies, historically, thematically, a combination of these, etc.)?
- e. What is the rationale or logic behind all the above (what is your justification of the chosen methodology and case selection)?
- f. Discuss the limitations of your study.

Please include scholarly references that address your chosen research method(s).

## **6. Bibliography**

List the principal sources mentioned in your proposal. You may add another list of unmentioned sources that you expect to use while developing your project. Please follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) Notes and Bibliography Format for all notes and bibliographic entries.

### **Additional Resources**

Please see the Brightspace page for readings and additional resources.

## **THE THESIS**

### **The Master's Thesis Seminar and Completion of the Thesis**

All Thesis Seminar instructors have the same basic aim, which is to help you convert your proposal into a fine thesis. Individual instructors, of course, may have somewhat different teaching styles, reading assignments, participation requirements, and deadlines for the completion of different elements of your thesis. As in other courses, Thesis Seminar instructors explain these expectations and requirements on their syllabi and communicate them throughout the semester. Contact your specific instructor if you have any questions, and concerns.

However, two due dates are the same for all master's students in International Relations: the dates for submitting: 1) the final draft, and: 2) the final version of the thesis. These standard, Program-wide due dates are noted in the next section. The following are a few general pieces of information you should keep in mind after enrolling in the thesis seminar.

By now, you have basically committed yourself to writing your thesis on a specific topic or research area. Although you are expected to constantly revise and further develop your thesis until it is done, your main topic should not change. Changing from one research area to another will most likely delay your graduation. However, you should

continue to refine or reformulate your statement of the research problem (and thus your “research question”) as you proceed with your research, analysis, and writing.

Both your thesis seminar instructor and your thesis advisor should be engaged sufficiently with your work so they are able to assess your progress and help keep you on track until your thesis is ready for submission. Consult with both to determine the expected extent and frequency of supervisory contact. Overall, they should be sufficiently familiar with your written work and able to advise you on what you need to do throughout the semester.

### **Thesis Submission Steps and Deadlines**

For each semester, there are two thesis submission deadlines, which are indicated below. Typically, these deadlines are set two weeks apart. The first deadline is for the submission of *the final draft* of your thesis to your thesis advisor and the second for the submission of the *very final version* of your thesis and several other documents to the Program.

By the first deadline, submit the final draft of your thesis to your advisor. Also, fill out your [Master's Thesis Reader Sheet](#) and send it to your advisor at the same time.

This final draft should contain all sections of your thesis, as well as all the complete citations and bibliographical information. All citations and bibliographical entries must follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) (Notes and Bibliography format). It should include the correctly formatted [Master's Thesis Title Page](#) and follow the [MA Thesis Formatting Guide](#). It should be cogent, polished, and properly formatted. Ideally, the final draft of any scholarly work requires relatively minor revision—if any at all. In our Program, the completed thesis must be 11,000-13,000 words in your manuscript, excluding bibliography, citations, text boxes, and appendices. Bear in mind that this due date indicates *the latest date* your final draft must be submitted to your thesis advisor. Consult your thesis advisor to determine if they prefer an earlier submission date.

Your thesis advisor will likely suggest further edits/revisions. If you have taken the proper steps along the way, in consultation with your advisor and seminar instructor, these should not be very substantial. You must promptly and diligently implement these suggestions and resubmit the thesis to your advisor to receive their final approval. In your final submission to your thesis advisor, be sure to attach the completed [Master's Thesis Reader Sheet](#).

It is your responsibility to fill out the reader sheet and supply it to your advisor, who should simply sign, date, and return it to you. Make sure to enter all information correctly.

The name of the advisor should be placed in the first row of boxes below the line “If you approve, indicate by signing and dating next to your name.” The name and signature of your thesis seminar instructor should populate the boxes in the second row. (The Program will request the signature of your instructor after you submit your [Master's Thesis Reader Sheet](#) and the other documents, noted below.)

Your thesis advisor would indicate their approval by signing the [Master's Thesis Reader Sheet](#) and the signature line on your [Master's Thesis Title Page](#), and returning them to you, hand-signed and scanned or e-signed.

Failure to properly fill or format any of the forms and documents may delay your graduation.

The processes described in the preceding paragraphs must be completed before the second deadline, when you are required to submit the final version of your thesis, together with your advisor-signed Master's Thesis Title Page and Master's Thesis Reader Sheet to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu), cc'ing your thesis advisor and thesis seminar instructor. All documents must be in pdf.

## **Thesis Timeline**

Please see below for key due dates.

Note: If the dates below fall on a weekend or holiday, the deadline will become the next business day. Please note, too, that all deadlines end at 5 pm.

If you have any questions about the timeline and due dates below, please consult your academic advisor.

### **January Graduation**

*Students graduating in January enroll and complete the Master's Thesis Seminar in the Fall semester.*

#### **Mid-April**

Fall registration begins by appointment for students.

**May 1:** Request a Thesis Seminar registration code via [Thesis Seminar Enrollment Request Form](#).

#### **December 1**

Submit the final draft of your thesis to your advisor.

#### **December 15**

Submit the final, approved version of your thesis, together with your advisor-signed Master's Thesis Title Page and Master's Thesis Reader Sheet to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu), cc'ing your thesis advisor and thesis seminar instructor. All documents must be in pdf.

### **May Graduation**

*Students graduating in May enroll and complete the Master's Thesis Seminar in the Spring semester.*

#### **November**

Spring registration starts by appointment for students.

**November 1:** Request a Thesis Seminar registration code via the [Thesis Seminar Enrollment Request Form](#).

#### **April 15**

Submit the final draft of your thesis to your advisor.

#### **May 1**

Submit the final, approved version of your thesis, together with your advisor-signed Master's Thesis Title Page and Master's Thesis Reader Sheet to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu), cc'ing your thesis advisor and thesis seminar instructor. All documents must be in pdf.

### **September Graduation**

*Students graduating in September enroll and complete the Master's Thesis Seminar in the Summer.*

#### **Mid-February**

Summer registration begins by appointment for students.

**May 1:** Request a Thesis Seminar registration code via [Thesis Seminar Enrollment Request Form](#).

#### **August 1**

Submit the final draft of your thesis to your advisor.

#### **August 15**

Submit the final, approved version of your thesis, together with your advisor-signed Master's Thesis Title Page and Master's Thesis Reader Sheet to [ir.masters@nyu.edu](mailto:ir.masters@nyu.edu), cc'ing your thesis advisor and thesis seminar instructor. All documents must be in pdf.