

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY**  
**EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM**  
**STUDENT GUIDE FOR COMPLETING A THESIS**  
**Last updated: April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

### **Purpose**

This guide aims to help students in the Experimental Psychology Master's program successfully navigate the thesis process. This guide supplements, but does not replace the Towson University thesis guide, which is on the Office of Graduate Studies website: <https://www.towson.edu/academics/graduate/office/>.

### **Registration**

You will need to register for a total of 6 credits of thesis. If you elect to take all 6 credits in one semester, you register for PSYC 897. If you elect to take 3 credits in each of 2 semesters, you register for PSYC 898.

If you do not complete your thesis by the end of the semester in which you are registered for PSYC 897 or the last 3 credits of PSYC 898, you will have to register for a 1-credit thesis continuum course (PSYC 899) in each subsequent semester (not including summer or minimester) until you complete your thesis.

### **Grades**

You will receive a grade of "IP" (in progress) for PSYC 897 or 898 until you complete your thesis. Once your thesis is complete, you will receive a grade of "S" (satisfactory). Your thesis advisor is responsible for assigning thesis grades and changing IP grades to S.

Thesis continuum (PSYC 899) is graded differently. You will receive a grade of S if you have made satisfactory progress on your thesis or completed it. You will receive a grade of U if you have not made satisfactory progress on your thesis.

Thesis advisors are encouraged to provide written expectations for satisfactory progress at the beginning of the semester in which a student is enrolled in thesis continuum.

## Thesis Advisor

One of the first things you need to do is find a thesis advisor. Generally, this person will be the research advisor that was assigned when you were admitted to the program. You are, however, welcome to ask a different person to be your thesis advisor.

Your thesis advisor must be (1) a full-time faculty member at Towson University, (2) a member or associate member of the graduate faculty at Towson University, and (3) a member of the psychology department faculty.

You should meet with your prospective thesis advisor well in advance of the semester in which you intend to begin your thesis work. For example, if you intend to complete your thesis by the end of Spring, 2023 you should start discussing thesis ideas with your advisor by the end of Spring, 2022. Given that serving as a thesis advisor requires a large time commitment, it is important that you select a topic that is of interest to your advisor (as well as yourself) and obtain your thesis advisor's approval for your thesis idea.

Thesis advisors are expected to be available during the academic year to meet with their thesis advisees. Thesis advisors are expected to give prompt and specific constructive feedback on drafts submitted by their thesis advisees. Please understand that thesis advisors are not obligated to be available during breaks between academic semesters, so feedback may take longer at those times.

## Thesis Proposal

Once you and your advisor have agreed on an appropriate idea, it is time for you to write a thesis proposal.

Thesis proposals must be written in the current version of APA style (exceptions noted below) and contain the following:

Title page

Introduction

- Brief introduction to the topic that identifies why it's important.
- A road map for what will be covered in your paper.
- A thorough integrated review of previous literature on your topic.
  - Be sure to describe relevant methodology as well as results of previous studies.
  - Your literature review should provide a logical basis for your hypothesis.
  - Your literature review should demonstrate your familiarity with the literature that is relevant to your proposed study.
- Overview of the present study.
  - Rationale for your study.
  - Identify the design (e.g., 2 X 2 Between-subjects factorial).

- Hypothesis
- Method
  - Participants or Subjects: number, characteristics, how they will be recruited or obtained.
    - Power analysis is recommended when possible.
  - Procedure: explain, as vividly and specifically as possible and in chronological order, what will happen in the study.
  - Explain the manipulations and measures in detail.
- Proposed analysis
  - Describe the statistical analyses you will use to test your hypothesis.
  - Describe the expected results (a graph may help).
- References
  - Complete list in APA style.
- Figures (if necessary)
  - Graph of hypothesized results
- Appendices (if necessary)
  - Original materials for your study (e.g., questionnaires or stimulus materials you created). Do not include materials developed by others—just describe them in the method section.

Note: All the above elements are covered in depth in Proseminar, which is a required course for all students in the experimental program.

When describing your proposed study, you should use future tense (e.g., I will recruit participants...).

It is likely that you will need to revise and resubmit several drafts of your thesis proposal before it meets your advisor's approval. It is your responsibility to revise your own work as much as possible before submitting each draft.

Once your thesis proposal contains all the above elements and meets your advisor's approval, you are ready to form a thesis committee and schedule a thesis proposal meeting.

### **Thesis Committee Composition**

A thesis committee is composed of your thesis advisor plus at least two additional faculty. Committee members must be members or associate members of Towson University's graduate faculty. At least two committee members (including your thesis advisor) must be from Towson University's psychology department.

You should select faculty whose interests and/or expertise are most relevant to your thesis.

Thesis committee composition must be approved by the program director prior to holding a thesis proposal meeting. You should submit to the program director a brief written justification for the thesis committee composition (use the form on p. 9 of this document or provide the same information in an email).

Once you have received approval from the program director, you must initiate the thesis committee approval DocuSign form, which is available at the bottom of the following website: <https://www.towson.edu/academics/graduate/office/>.

### **Thesis Proposal Meeting and Approval**

You should submit a final draft of your thesis proposal to your committee members at least 7 days prior to the thesis proposal meeting.

At least three committee members (i.e., advisor plus at least two additional committee members) must be present (in person or via videoconference) at the thesis proposal meeting. If there are scheduling problems, you may add or replace a committee member with approval from the program director.

At the thesis proposal meeting, you are expected to provide a brief presentation of your thesis proposal; about 10 minutes is appropriate. Then, committee members will ask you questions about your proposal. Questions may focus on your understanding of the literature, the design of your study, recruitment of participants, ethical issues, or the proposed analyses. The main purpose of the proposal meeting is to ensure the success of your project, so it is likely that committee members will suggest that you make changes to improve your study.

After your thesis committee members have approved your proposal (this may be at the end of the proposal meeting or after you have made the changes your committee has requested), you should complete the thesis proposal approval form, which is included in this document (p. 10) and submit it to the program director.

### **IRB/IACUC Approval**

All research involving human participants must be approved by Towson University's Institutional Review Board. All research involving animals must be approved by Towson University's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. IRB and IACUC applications are available on Towson University's website.

Because the committee may request that you change your methodology, it is best to wait until your thesis committee has approved your thesis proposal before you request IRB/IACUC approval.

### **Resources for Completing your Thesis Research**

You may need lab space and other resources to complete your research. Before completing your thesis proposal, consult with your thesis advisor to make sure you will

have access to all of the resources that you need. If you need to purchase materials for your thesis (e.g., software, animals, animal food), you should consider applying for a Graduate Student Association (GSA) award. Information on GSA awards is available here: <https://www.towson.edu/academics/graduate/gsa/awards.html>.

### **Completing your Thesis Research**

Once your thesis proposal has been approved by your thesis committee and IRB/IACUC, you may carry out your research.

We recommend that you pre-register your thesis study on a site such as <http://osf.io>.

You should complete data collection and analyses as described in your thesis proposal. If you need to make changes to your procedures or analyses, you should obtain approval from your thesis advisor, who will consult with committee members if appropriate. The sample size for your study should meet or exceed the sample size you specified in your proposal.

### **Writing the Complete Thesis**

The complete thesis should conform to the formatting guidelines published by the TU Office of Graduate Studies (see their website). Where formatting is unspecified by TU, you should follow APA style.

The complete thesis should include the following:

Title page

Abstract

Introduction

- Brief introduction to the topic that identifies why it's important.
- A road map for what will be covered in your paper.
- A thorough integrated review of previous literature on your topic.
  - Be sure to describe relevant methodology as well as results of previous studies.
  - Your literature review should provide a logical basis for your hypothesis.
  - Your literature review should demonstrate your familiarity with the literature that is relevant to your study.
- Overview of the present study.
  - Rationale for your study.
  - Identify the design (e.g., 2 X 2 Between-subjects factorial).
  - Hypothesis or objectives

Method

- Participants or Subjects: number, characteristics, how they were recruited or obtained. Include justification of your sample size (e.g., power analysis).

- Procedure: explain, as vividly and specifically as possible and in chronological order, what happened in the study.
- Explain the manipulations and measures in detail.

### Results

- Describe the statistical analyses you used to test your hypothesis.
- Describe the results of each analysis in detail and provide descriptive (e.g., means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (i.e., the values of statistics such as  $r$ ,  $F$ , or  $t$  and  $p$  values).
- Include effect size and confidence intervals where appropriate.
- Tables and/or graphs may be used to supplement the description of the results.

### Discussion

- Interpret your results in the context of previous literature.
- Discuss the applied and/or theoretical implications of your findings.
- Identify limitations of your research and avenues for further research.

### References

- Complete list in APA style.

### Appendices (if necessary)

- Original materials for your study (e.g., questionnaires or stimulus materials you created). Do not include materials developed by others—just describe them in the method section.

When describing your completed study, you should use past tense (e.g., I recruited participants...).

Your thesis advisor is expected to provide timely and specific constructive feedback on drafts of your complete thesis. It is likely that you will need to revise and resubmit several drafts of your thesis before it meets your advisor's approval. Once your complete thesis meets your advisor's approval, you can distribute copies to all committee members and schedule the thesis defense meeting.

### Thesis Defense

You will need to provide committee members and your thesis advisor with a complete copy of your thesis at least 7 days prior to your thesis defense.

You will also need to communicate with committee members and your thesis advisor to establish a date and time for the defense. Thesis defense meetings usually last between 60 and 90 minutes, so they should be scheduled accordingly.

At least three committee members (i.e., advisor plus at least two additional committee members) must be present (in person or via videoconference) at the thesis defense meeting. If there are scheduling problems, as a last resort, you may add or replace a committee member with approval from the program director.

You are expected to give a presentation (of about 15 minutes) that summarizes the purpose, method, results, and conclusions of your thesis study. Because your committee has already approved the method at this point, your presentation should emphasize results and conclusions. After (and/or during) your presentation, your thesis committee members will ask you questions about your study and issues raised by your thesis. Your thesis advisor can help you anticipate the types of questions that are likely to be asked.

Thesis defense meetings are open to the campus community (i.e., other students, faculty, and staff) as well as anyone else you would like to invite. Attendees who are not members of the thesis committee are welcome to ask questions but will be asked to wait until all questions from the committee have been answered first.

After the question-and-answer session, you and anyone who is not a member of the thesis committee will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. At this point, the thesis committee will discuss their overall evaluation of the thesis and any revisions that may be needed. Your thesis advisor will take notes and summarize this information for you. If revisions are necessary, the committee will decide if they need to see a revised copy of the thesis before granting approval or, alternatively, if the thesis advisor will be responsible for ensuring that the revisions are made.

### **The Finishing Touches**

If, at your thesis defense meeting, you were asked to revise your thesis you should submit the revised thesis to your advisor for approval. If required, once your advisor grants approval, you should submit the revised thesis to your whole committee.

Once your thesis advisor and committee members have approved your thesis, you will need to initiate the post-defense thesis approval form DocuSign, which is available at the bottom of this website: <https://www.towson.edu/academics/graduate/office/>. You will also need to follow TU thesis guidelines for final submission of your thesis.

### **Deadlines**

The TU thesis guidelines include approximate deadlines for completing your thesis. The most important deadline is the one for submission of your final thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies. Mark this date on your calendar and then work backwards to figure out appropriate deadlines for completion of the defense, the complete thesis that is given to committee members at least one week prior to the defense, and so on.

### **Thesis Assessment**

Our program uses the thesis to assess students' attainment of several program learning goals. After the defense, your advisor and committee members will complete the assessment form (p. 11) and submit it to the program director. The assessment data remains confidential and is reported to the office of assessment in aggregated form. Your thesis advisor is responsible for administering this assessment.

### **Publishing Your Thesis**

You should discuss publication opportunities with your thesis advisor. As part of this discussion, you and your advisor should agree on what will be necessary to publish your research, who will complete the additional work, who will be included as authors on a journal submission, and the order of authorship. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is a good reference for understanding intellectual property rights.



**Justification for Thesis Committee Composition**

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Title (tentative) \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis advisor/chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Justification for Committee Member 1 (describe committee member's relevant expertise):

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Committee Member 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Justification for Committee Member 2 (describe committee member's relevant expertise):

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## EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY THESIS RATING SCALE

The following items are student learning goals that are implemented through coursework within the Experimental Psychology Program. At the completion of the program, each student should demonstrate mastery of each goal. Theses are used to assess student competencies, therefore, please enter the number that best describes your agreement with the following statements as they pertain to the thesis.

1= Strongly disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly agree

Statement	Rating
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to analyze previous research.	
This student cited appropriate research literature in the written thesis.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to effectively synthesize previous research.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to clearly and effectively communicate research material in writing.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated advanced knowledge of at least one content area (e.g., cognitive, social, learning, neuropsychology) within the field of psychology.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to analyze research data with appropriate statistical techniques.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to interpret the outcomes of statistical tests.	
In the written thesis, this student demonstrated the ability to effectively design research studies.	
In the thesis defense meeting, this student demonstrated the ability to clearly and effectively communicate research material orally.	

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT:

\_\_\_\_\_ **PASS**      \_\_\_\_\_ **REVISE/RESUBMIT**      \_\_\_\_\_ **FAIL**

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Sign \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_