THESIS SURVIVAL GUIDE

(for faculty and students)
Simplest summary of all:
You have less time than you think! Frontload EVERYTHING!

Slightly longer (but still simple) summary:
If you get your Proposal or Fair Draft done by October 15th or March 15th, you may finish on time. Otherwise, you probably won’t. This should scare you.

ROUGH SCHEDULE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>THESIS RESEARCH SEMESTER</th>
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<th>THESIS WRITING SEMESTER</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Select a thesis Committee and get your thesis Proposal written and approved in the first half of the semester. There’s no excuse not to, and if you don’t you’re probably screwed.</td>
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<td>Show up for this semester with a lot of the work already done. Meet frequently with your advisor to get everything ready for the Committee as soon as possible. In some cases, you may release these chapter by chapter, but you really need to have your Fair Draft ready for the Committee by mid-semester. If you don’t, you’re definitely screwed.</td>
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<td>Exam Week</td>
<td>You will need to create a Proof Draft and a Final Draft (might take a couple tries) and take care of printing/binding and uploading to ScholarWorks.</td>
<td>Exam Week</td>
<td>Exam Week</td>
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DETAILED TIMELINE WITH ACTUAL DEADLINES:

Deadlines are not recommendations. Deadlines are cliffs. Deadlines are landmines. There is a reason that ‘deadline’ has the word ‘dead’ in it. Don’t shoot for the deadlines. Shoot for much earlier than the deadlines.

ANTIPENALTIMATE SEMESTER:
- Discuss possible topics with advisor. Start establishing broad topic parameters. Begin initial dive into the idea and assess feasibility. Your goal should be to finish this semester knowing (roughly) what your topic will be.

PENALTIMATE SEMESTER:
- Enroll in Thesis Research.
- Select a Committee.
- Write a Proposal. Do it fast. The first draft should take no more than a week and then you’ll go through a couple weeks of revisions with your advisor.
- Circulate the Proposal to the Committee for feedback (expect this to take at least three weeks).
- Revise as needed based on their feedback.
- Apply for Graduation (info HERE). Don’t forget to do this. There are big late fees.
- Get Proposal approved by Committee (they have to sign a form).
- Submit Proposal (with signed form) to Graduate School.
- Begin working on actual thesis.
- Work with your advisor to make an aggressive game plan of what order you will write things in and when you will deliver drafts.

FINAL SEMESTER:
- Enroll in Thesis Writing
- Work with advisor to get the content in good shape
- Eight weeks before commencement – Fair Draft to committee. This should be done by no later than October 15 during fall semesters and the Monday after Spring Break in spring semesters.
- Schedule the Defense. Talk with your advisor about whose responsibility this is. Some advisors do the scheduling themselves; others expect you to handle it. Once you have a date that works for everyone, make sure you reserve a room (usually the conference room).
- Once the Defense is scheduled, submit the Application for Thesis Examination form. The Graduate School has to receive this at least a week before the defense.
- Make revisions to your document as necessary in response to comments from the committee (and in consultation with your advisor).
- Friday, four weeks before commencement
- **Defense Draft** must be circulated to the committee and the Graduate School by this date at the latest.
- Last day to submit [Application for Thesis Examination](#) form to the Graduate School.

- Friday, two weeks before commencement – Very last day to have a **Defense**. Results of examinations to be filed in the Graduate School by Director of the School of Music.
- Immediately following the defense, you will prepare the **Proof Draft**. This will address all concerns/comments/corrections required by the **Committee**.
- Submit **Proof Draft** to Graduate School (and Committee, if required) for review.
- Make revisions required by the Graduate School or committee (if any). The resulting document is the **Final Draft**.
- Submit **Final Draft** for printing/binding and upload to ScholarWorks. (see “Submitting Final Draft”).
- Commencement (Saturday)
- Wednesday after commencement – THE DEADLINE for all theses/dissertations/deficient coursework to be submitted to appropriate offices.
YOUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

Remember that you will be getting emails from the university about upcoming deadlines and requirements. Read these carefully and make sure that you are following through as needed. Your advisor may not be getting these emails, so it is **your** responsibility.
DEFINITIONS, IMPARTED WISDOM and RAMBLING RANTS:
(listed alphabetically)

Assembling the Complete Thesis: This is the part that seems the hardest to so many students and exasperates the thesis advisors. Take responsibility for getting this right.

Make sure that you are using the Graduate School’s guidelines for font, spacing, margins, etc. right from the start. For your convenience, along with this guide, The School of Music provides a template MSWord file with all the fonts, margins, etc. already set up, so using that can be a big help. We have created THIS video to show you how to use this file to automatically generate your Table of Contents and List of Musical Examples.

If your thesis includes a large musical composition:
- Use very small margins in your notation program (as small as possible) and make sure your music has no page numbers.
- Export all the pages as images (jpg at 300 dpi is best).
- Insert all the images in your Word document. Be careful to double-check that they are in the correct order. They should automatically conform to the existing margins.

Make sure that ALL the pieces of the thesis are in the document and complete (see the guidelines to make sure you’ve got all the sections).

If you are using the automatic Table of Contents and List of Musical Examples feature, then the last thing you should do is to right-click on those and select “update entire field“ so you know the page numbers are all correct.

Then export the completed document as a PDF file.

You will need to do this entire process at LEAST two times... probably three. Once for the Defense Draft, once for the Proof Draft, and one last time (if needed) for the Final Draft. Remember that we will inevitably ask you to add one sentence to the introduction which will bump every musical example and chapter heading onto a new page. This is why it is helpful to have MSWord automatically generate the Table of Contents, etc. Either way, it must be meticulously checked. Be prepared for this and take it with good humor. There’s no way around it.

Committee – Your committee will include your thesis advisor plus two other music faculty members (usually people you’ve studied with) and one outside member assigned by the Graduate School. Select your committee in consultation with your advisor. Make sure they know when you plan to defend. No faculty member is obligated to be on your committee and there are many reasons why they might decline.
Defense – In the School of Music, the thesis defense is an oral examination (typically two hours) with your committee in which your work is scrutinized and discussed. Your thesis advisor will dictate the order of events and serve as moderator. Although preferences differ among professors and may depend somewhat on the topic, a typical defense involves:

- Introductions (if necessary)
- Candidate makes a short oral presentation (10-15 minutes) summarizing main topics surrounding the thesis.
- Floor is opened for questioning. Questions from the committee might be philosophical, factual, technical, analytical, artistic, etc.
- Once questioning is completed, the candidate will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. Once they have come to a decision, they will call the candidate back in.

Possible outcomes of the defense are:

1. Your document is perfect, you wow us with your eloquent command of the subject, we pass you without reservation, sign your forms, and it’s all hugs and champagne. (Just kidding. This never happens)
2. We pass you but ask that you make a few final revisions to your document. We sign your forms and submit them to the Graduate School and rely on your honor to make the changes we requested. (This happens a lot)
3. We tell you that you WILL pass, once you’ve addressed some substantive issues in your document – usually things that can be fixed in under a week. In this case, we generally hold your signed forms hostage until we’ve seen the required changes. (This is also pretty common)
4. The committee feels that your thesis and/or defense needs major revision and that we cannot pass you at this time. This also reflects a major failing on the part of the supervising professor since we shouldn’t allow a thesis to proceed to a defense in cases where it cannot pass. In this case (particularly late in the semester) a student may elect to enroll in an additional semester to complete the project and a subsequent defense will be required. (This is extremely rare.)
5. You fail. You are expelled. You are shamed publicly and barred from all further academic study. Your family crest is ripped asunder. (This never happens)

Advice about your defense:

- Be on time.
- Dress in a manner so as to make a good impression.
- Be articulate and well-prepared.
- If you are defending online, make sure you have an excellent internet connection and reliable hardware. Test it ahead of time and make sure you look good on the screen.
- Make sure you have your thesis document handy either in physical form or electronically.
Notes for advisor:

- Only the “Report of Thesis Exam” form is needed. You do not need to file the comprehensive exam form.
- The fancy signature pages with gold seal are not actually required by the university but are nice to have in the bound copies. Assuming that this is desired, you’ll want to have the appropriate number of signature pages handy on the day of defense.
  - 1 for the ETRC in the Library
  - 1 for the School of Music
  - 1 for the thesis advisor
  - As many additional copies as the student wants.

Defense Draft – The second full version of your document, and the one that is used for your defense. It must be in PDF format. This draft reflects all the revisions arising from the committee’s first round of comments, and also includes all front and back matter.

Fair Draft – The first full version of the document that you provide to the full committee. This can be in MS-Word or PDF format. It is acceptable for the Fair Draft to be missing some front and back material (table of contents, bibliography, etc.), but the entire body of the document must be complete. It must also represent your best attempt to follow all style and formatting guidelines including margins, spacing, citations, illustrations, musical examples, etc.

Final Draft – The version of your thesis that lives in posterity. It must be in PDF format. This is the document that will be printed, bound, and uploaded into ScholarWorks. It should reflect all corrections required by the committee and the graduate school and be as error-free as possible.

Formatting – Nothing causes more unnecessary problems in a thesis than formatting problems. This is something that the student must take full responsibility for. The three most valuable assets to help with this are:

- The very helpful and complete guidelines provided online by the Graduate School. Here you will find careful explanations of every part of your document as well as examples.
- This document and its accompanying templates and examples.

Graduate School – The staff of the graduate office are there to help you. Their office is on the fourth floor of the Liberal Arts (North) building. Their phone number is (936) 468-2807. They also have provided ALL the information you need to know to meet deadlines, conform to formatting guidelines, and graduate on time. It is all here: http://www.sfasu.edu/academics/orgs/graduate-students-faculty/theses-exhibitions-dissertations/masters-theses.
**Length** – There is no “normal” for thesis length. It should accomplish what your proposal promises in an in-depth and cogent manner.

**Musical Examples** – Most music theses include musical examples. When the example is included to illustrate compositional or theoretical points, it is important to annotate the musical example in such a way so as to draw the reader’s eye to the germane content. Give each musical example its own number and short descriptive title and list these both below the example and in the list provided in the front material.

![Musical Example 1](image1.png)

**Musical Example 1** – Third Reiteration of the Pleistocene Motive

![Musical Example 2](image2.png)

**Musical Example 2** – Ascending 0235 Pattern

**Parts of the Thesis** – The following list is drawn from the Graduate School’s website, but with a few additional commentaries as appropriate for music students.

1. Flyleaf – a blank page for protection in binding.
2. Title Page – conventional page showing essential bibliographical information (see sample form A).
3. Signature page – serves as a formal record of approval (see sample form B).
4. **Abstract** – An abstract is required by the Graduate School. It should be comprised, in 150 words or less, of a brief, concise description of the problem, methods of approach, salient results obtained, and conclusions and their significance. The abstract will be published in Thesis Abstracts and therefore will largely determine who utilizes the thesis in the future.

5. **Preface** (Optional)

6. **Acknowledgements** (Optional)

7. **Table of Contents** – a paginated guide or outline listing primary, secondary, and tertiary headings.

8. **List of Musical Examples** – a paginated listing of all musical examples (with titles) that appear in the document.

9. **List of Figures** - a paginated listing of all figure captions as they appear with the figures they accompany. Used only when thesis contains figures.

10. **Text** - the main body of the thesis (see form C). It can contain as many chapters as is appropriate for the content. If your thesis includes a major composition, it will be included as a chapter.

11. **Bibliography** – Format must be consistent with style followed throughout the thesis. Your bibliography should be inclusive and contain not only those sources cited in footnotes, but also all sources that contributed to your knowledge of the subject. Do not “pad” your bibliography with sources you did not actually consult.

12. **Appendix** (Optional). In theses that analyze major works, it is sometimes appropriate to include a full copy of the work as an appendix.

13. **Vita** – a brief autobiographical sketch emphasizing the student's educational and professional experience. Thesis typist and style manual are identified at the bottom of the page (see sample form D). The appropriate wording for this is:

   The style guide for this document was *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (ninth edition) by Kate L. Turabian.

**Proof Draft** – This is the version of the thesis that reflects all the required changes arising from the defense. It must be in PDF format. This is sent to the Graduate School and (if required) to the committee for proofing.

**Proposal** – This is the document in which you demonstrate viability by describing (in detail) what your thesis will be, how you will execute it, why it is original, and how it relates to existing work in your field. It should use the same formatting guidelines as the thesis, and it contains the following parts:

- **COVER PAGE**: Use this signature page as your cover. Make sure you’ve already filled in the appropriate fields.
- **TITLE**: The statement of title at this stage of thesis writing may be tentative. However, it should reflect the central purpose of the study in a brief but accurate and comprehensive manner.
• INTRODUCTION: One or more paragraphs should introduce the reader to the subject of study. The introduction may indicate several of the important sources for the proposed study.
• OBJECTIVES: The student should state clearly the central purpose of the proposed study and the specific objectives to be addressed.
• LITERATURE REVIEW: This section should indicate the extent to which the student has become acquainted with the relevant literature and other resources available on the subject. It may also be used to lead into the following section. Provide a description of major works that relate to your topic, as well as an assessment of where the existing literature falls short. In music, this may also include musical literature – for example, if a composition thesis is utilizing spectral techniques, then it is helpful to list other spectral works that have a bearing on the new piece.
• JUSTIFICATION / SIGNIFICANCE / CONTRIBUTION: The student should justify the proposed research. It should be explained how the study will add to present knowledge and/or modify existing theory or practice in the discipline.
• PROPOSED METHODS OF STUDY: This statement should explain how the student will undertake the study. Note: this is NOT a list of what the content of your paper will be... this is a step-by-step procedure of how the work will be done.
  o At the end of this section, make note of the book, manual, or journal that will be used as a style guide for the presentation of this thesis. For music students, this will most often be Turabian, but this will be determined in consultation with your advisor.
• BIBLIOGRAPHY: This is where you show the committee how much research you did. You should include not only the specific sources cited elsewhere in the proposal, but all the sources that you consulted which contributed to your understanding of your topic. A good bibliography draws upon a wide variety of sources (periodicals, books, websites, musical scores, dissertations, etc.). Do not “pad” your bibliography with works you didn’t actually consult.

Style Guide – Your style guide is one of your most important resources, and you will refer to it often. In music, the most common style guide for theses is Turabian. Depending on your topic and area, though, your advisor may require that you use a different one. Make sure you have the most current edition and be proactive about adhering meticulously to the style guide requirements for all matters of grammar, punctuation, citation, etc.

Submitting the Final Draft – This is the final hoop you have to jump through. Pay careful attention to the instructions and don’t wait until the last minute.
• Number of physical copies:
  o The Graduate School requires one hard copy for retention in the ETRC (paid for by SFA).
  o The School of Music requires two hard copies (paid for by School of Music).
  o The School of Music will also pay for up to two copies for the student.
• Students preferring to have signed and sealed signature pages for additional copies, should deliver signature pages only, to the Graduate School for signature and seal. For online students, your advisor may do this for you, or you can forego this to make things easier. It is not required.

• Because many of the thesis candidates in music are distance students, we suggest the following submission procedure (which works fine for both resident and online students). ALL of these activities must be completed by no later than 12:00 pm on the Wednesday following commencement.

THE STUDENT:

- Once the **Final Draft** is ready (and any desired signature pages prepared) email the document to both your thesis director and Micki Gunter in the Graduate School office (gunterml@sfasu.edu). She will provide you with any additional forms that are needed.
- Upload your **Final Draft** (without signature page) into the Theses and Dissertations section of SFA ScholarWorks (http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/etds/).

A tutorial link is included in the Theses and Dissertations tab of SFA ScholarWorks.

THE ADVISOR:

- Ms. Gunter will share the thesis file with the print shop electronically – you do not need to do so, BUT you still need to initiate a print order as follows.
- Ask Missy for a FOAP for the printing costs.
- Go to the “Printing Services” link in MySFA (under the “Resources” tab).
  ▪ Select “Thesis & Dissertation” on the left.
  ▪ Complete the required fields with “Thesis of [student name]”, page count, etc.
  ▪ Indicate the number of copies needed (usually 5 – three for SFA and two for student).
  ▪ In the “Notes” field, include the following information:
    - Print 1-sided on thesis paper. Interpolate provided signature pages delivered through campus mail. (Only include this if appropriate). Each thesis/dissertation should be placed in an individual envelope with an extra copy of the title page taped to the front of the envelope. Deliver to Sara Padelford in the Library (Box 13055).
    ▪ Click “Add to Cart.”
    ▪ Verify information and then click “Check Out.”
    ▪ Supply the non-taxable FOAP, then click “Place Order.”
- A few days after completing this process, it is not a bad idea to contact Ms. Gunter and the Print Shop to verify that everything was received properly.

**Topic** – Remember that a master’s thesis is expected to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge. Choose a topic that already excites you, and one that you feel is underrepresented in the existing literature. Your advisor will help you refine it into something substantial but achievable.