

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS WHEN WRITING YOUR MA IN MEDICAL SCIENCES THESIS

## GENERAL THESIS QUESTIONS

### What length does your thesis need to be?

- Lab theses must be a minimum of 35 pages. The average length is 35-55 pages
- Library theses must be a minimum of 45 pages. The average length is 45-60 pages.

### How many readers do you need for your thesis?

- Each student must have a first and second reader for their thesis. The first reader must be a GMS faculty.
- A copy of mentors current C.V. must be provided if a student is performing their thesis work outside of BU or under the direction of a BU faculty member who is not a GMS faculty. The student submits the mentor's C.V. along with a completed special appointment form to GMS. Upon approval the student is notified and the non-GMS mentor can serve as their second reader. The first reader must be a BU GMS faculty.
- Sometimes a BU faculty that is not a GMS faculty can serve as your first reader but this is reviewed on an individual basis.

### What forms do I need to complete?

- Thesis title page with tentative title and signatures of your two readers
- Special appointment form including your mentor's C.V. for students doing a lab thesis at an institution other than BU or who have a non-GMS faculty mentor
- Thesis agreement form if performing a laboratory thesis to earn honors credit

### What is the minimum allowable font size for the body text in a thesis? Appendices? Figures? References?

- Twelve point font should be used for the text in the main body of the thesis, appendices, and figures.
- Common fonts are Arial and Times and occasionally Palatino (11 point).
- 11pt or 10pt font should be reserved for block quotes, footnotes, references if desirable and for tables that cannot fit within the margins at 12pt.
- You should always maximize font so as to have improved readability or legibility.

### What is the policy about reproducing figures and inserting quotes from another published work?

A student can quote up to a page and a half total from one source, single spaced without asking for permission. If you quote a few lines throughout the thesis, you should roughly add them up at the end and make sure you are within the allowed 1.5 pages.

When reproducing figures from websites or publications, a 3 figures per publication limit is set.

This limit is placed by ProQuest, the company that microfilms and scans BU dissertations. Four or more reproduced figures requires permission so if you can find the same figure in another source, then its best to use that source rather than asking for permission.

Additionally, when reproducing figures its best to reproduce only the figure and write your own figure legend. Legends reproduced from the original text often have font that is too small.

### **What is the correct formatting of the thesis?**

All theses must be double spaced with margins of 1.5 inches top and left, 1 inch right and bottom. Single spacing can be used for individual references with double spacing between each reference. Tables and figure legends can be single spaced provided font is 12 point.

### **I can't get the page numbering correct between the prepages and the main body of the thesis. Is there a trick?**

There are several tricks with respect to page numbering for prepages and main document. The prepages are numbered in roman numerals (i, ii, iii) and the main thesis is numbered in Arabic (1-50). There are no page numbers on page i and ii of the thesis (title and reader approval pages). Prepages are numbered starting on iii and continue iv, v, vi, and so on to include the Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, List of Tables and Figures and Abbreviations.

- To not have page numbers on the title page and reader approval page you should first insert a section break (not a page break) at the end of pages i and ii. Do not put any page numbers on these first two pages.
- On page iii insert page numbers, formatted as i, ii, iii, designating the numbering to start on page iii.
- At the end of the prepages insert another section break.
- On the first page of main text, the Introduction, insert page numbers changing the page number format to 1, 2 with numberings starting with the number 1 (i.e. Do not continue numbering from the previous section).

### **What is a reasonable time estimate for the review and editing stage of the thesis?**

Most students take 2-3 months to write the thesis – this does not include additional time performing research in the laboratory or in the library. Sometimes an outline is completed early in the process if requested by reader(s). The draft is completed and sent to one or both of the readers for comments and is followed by an additionally editing stage where edits are incorporated. The near final draft is again submitted to your reader for a second review. The second reader may want to read early drafts or may prefer to review only the more final draft. This is something you should discuss with your second reader early in the thesis process. Most students usually need one to three rounds of editing with their primary mentor. Some students prefer to submit their thesis section by section for more feedback. Successful completion of your thesis is dependent on leaving enough time for this review/editing stage.

Students should have a draft of the thesis to their readers 4-6 weeks before the submission deadline so busy faculty have time to review and critique with ample time for revision. The thesis needs to be reviewed by the Registrar (Millie Agosto) before the final printing.

### **Does my thesis need to be publishable?**

NO. Some students are able to submit their thesis for publication to a peer reviewed journal but it is not a requirement. Many students complete their thesis in April for May graduation and continue on in a laboratory for several months in order to do additional work for publication. The only requirement for a thesis is that it have a novel conclusion. This is true for both lab and library theses.

### **My results are not coming along as quickly as I would have liked and I won't be able to have a draft of my thesis to my readers 4-6 weeks before the deadline. What should I do?**

If data is delayed for any reason and you still want to try to complete your thesis by the desired deadline speak to your readers directly and ask them if it is acceptable for you to hand your thesis draft in closer to the deadline. Also as you are continuing to perform experiments, collect data and do statistical analysis you should be writing the thesis. The thesis can be completely drafted while you are still working in the lab. The prepages, intro, methods, references and vita can be in near final form and you can write a skeleton draft of the results and discussion even though data is not all collected. Providing your readers this incomplete draft for review early can really save time if you are nearing the submission deadline and still collecting data.

### **What should be included in my abstract?**

Thesis Abstracts should be a summary of the research completed and should clearly state the background, purpose of the studies, methods utilized, the results, a brief discussion and conclusions. The Abstract for a library thesis should also follow this similar format by providing a purpose, key information and conclusions.

Some students writing up a lab thesis formally divide the abstract into the following sections: Objective, Methods, Results, and Conclusions and others write the abstract in paragraph form but still include similar content. The abstract should not be a vague generalized paragraph.

### **What is the list of journal abbreviations?**

When completing your reference section you need to either add a list of journal abbreviations before the main reference list or write out the complete name of the journal when listing each individual reference. The format is shown below with the abbreviations being alphabetized.

JAMA	Journal of the American Medical Association
J. Biol. Chem.	Journal of Biological Chemistry
J. Neurobiol.	Journal Neurobiology