

GUIDELINES FOR THE MFA THESIS BOOK

Purpose and Goals

The thesis book is both a visual document and an intellectual synthesis of a student's creative work over the course of the MFA program. Its completion marks the culmination of a progression from student to professional, and its form should reflect that level of achievement. The thesis book should display a mastery of the analytical tools and knowledge necessary to discuss the student's work within the larger discourse of artistic practice and, and as such, it should be useful for gaining entry into the professional world of art. At the same time, the thesis serves as a point of reference and document for posterity, and it remains with the university as an archive of each student's creative research.

The thesis book must reflect a clarity of thought and an ability to verbally articulate visual and formal intentions. It is a carefully written document that combines photographic records of the work with a written account that is convincing, has a coherent structure, and displays clear prose, substantially free of grammatical or syntactical errors. This intellectual and creative synthesis will arise out of a series of conversations with the student's committee, particularly in the wake of the ATC presentation. In order to achieve a coherent and convincing statement of the work, the thesis must go through several drafts before arriving at its final state.

The thesis book should be a 30-40-page document that includes a minimum of 5,000 words of text (excluding table of contents, bibliography, captions, etc.). The text will closely examine the content, development, and theoretical concerns of the work. The thesis book should also contain images that are sufficient to illustrate the student's work, supplemented, where appropriate, by images of the work of other artists who have exerted significant influence. Text and image will, ideally, work together to build the main ideas. Hence, the text should, as a general rule, convincingly interpret what can be seen in each of the images contained within the thesis book. The thesis book should also situate the student's work within contemporary art practices and theories; analyze the relationship of the work to relevant antecedents; and give an account as to how the student's work builds on or critically engages such antecedents. The written component of the thesis book should be produced concurrently with the student's studio work, rather than before or after the studio component is completed. This writing might already begin to be drafted in courses, such as ART 282 A-B and ART 200W.

Requirements and General Format of the Written Thesis

The thesis book should be bound and formatted on archival, 8½" x 11" paper. It should use a standard 12-point font for the main text and a standard 10-point font for footnotes. All text and images should fit within the following margins: Left - 1.5"; Right - 1.25"; Top - 1"; Bottom - 1". Images and text should appear on one side of the pages only, with the pages being bound together on the left. Each image must have a

descriptive a caption, and the captions should be listed together with their pages numbers immediately following the table of contents. Electronic versions of the thesis should also be submitted. Students should check with the Graduate Advisor for current electronic submission guidelines.

The title page must include the following: a thesis title, the name of the student, the names and signature lines of each member of the committee, and the date of graduation. Photographs should be glued or bonded to the pages using archival materials that will not decay over time or damage the paper. Images may also be printed directly on the pages from electronic files.

Each thesis needs to have, after the title page, a minimum of five sections in the following order: 1) a table of contents; 2) a list of image captions with corresponding page numbers; 3) a one page summary of the work; 4) an expanded statement of the work, and 5) a bibliography of relevant sources. The expanded statement may be further subdivided in various ways according the needs and expectations of each student and committee. However, each subsection must then be listed in the table of contents, and each page after the list of captions must be numbered, beginning with 1.

The student must submit a full-length draft of the thesis book, including illustrations, to all members of the thesis committee at least six weeks before graduation. All drafts of the thesis book must be thoroughly proofread before their submission to the committee. No later than two weeks prior to graduation, the student must provide a copy of the final draft of the written thesis to each member of the committee and to the graduate advisor.

[For details on the format of footnotes and bibliographic entries, consult the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, each available in the King Library. Choose only one of these formats, and be consistent.]

Content and Organization

The expanded statement of the thesis book must include the following elements, outlined below as numbered points or tasks.

The text of the thesis book must contain:

1. An **Introductory Overview** that explains the focus and significance of the student's studio work, both from the point of view of artistic intention and from the point of view a broader set of issues. The explanation should envision a professional audience.
2. An **Analysis of Artistic Context** that describes and discusses the visual and textual works that are most relevant to the student's work. This part should demonstrate an awareness and understanding of historical precedents and/or

contemporary parallels of thought, together with the relevant critical issues and theories. The discussion should be more than just a description of these aesthetic parallels or theoretical influences. It should also include a critical analysis of how such precedents have entered into to the student's own ideas and transformed the resulting work.

3. An **Artistic Interrogation** that discusses the student's work in terms of one or more artistic problems or challenges that the work seeks to open up, interrogate or possibly resolve. Here the thesis needs to move beyond an awareness of precedents and influences in order to assert the specific character of the student's work, including preliminary intentions, driving concepts, and issues, perhaps initially unknown, that were discovered in the process of developing the work.

4. An **Analysis of Material and Process** that discusses the significance, appropriateness and integrity of material and formal processes employed in the studio work. Here the thesis will explain how the appearance and material choices for the work are thought out, deliberate and defensible. This section could include technical discoveries that were made in the development of the work. Examples could range from the choice of a certain size of canvas to the procedures used in transforming found objects.

5. An **Analysis of Signification** that discusses the tensions, resolutions or ambiguities between form and content, and/or between process and meaning, as these arise in the student's work. Here the thesis will critically analyze the relationship between and among these components of the work. For example, if the work is a portrait, how does the manner of production or formal character represent the supposed 'subject' of the portrait?

6. An **Evaluation of Development** that explains any shifts in intentions, process or practice over the course of the MFA program. In this part the thesis will explain whether these shifts gradually evolved, or whether there was a sudden or accidental series of discoveries or changes in consciousness. This discussion may merge with part 3 above. Mention may also be made of future projects that have emerged in this process, but students should refrain from extensive speculation on work not yet accomplished.

While each thesis must cover all six areas of content, there are many different ways the elements could be integrated into one coherent thesis. A number of elements might intersect or overlap within a single section. For example, it might make sense to discuss historical precedents as part of a discussion of process or material. Conversely, some of the elements may need to be broken down into multiple, logically coherent units. It may also make sense to describe the work in a series of episodes while covering all six elements within each episode. The appropriate structure should be generated in consultation with the student's committee.