THESIS WRITING

A quick resource guide
Yes, you CAN write a thesis!

Information in large part from Charles Lipson’s *How to Write a BA Thesis* (The University of Chicago Press, 2018)

**W**hy should you write a thesis?

- YOU get to choose the subject matter & plumb its depths!
- Your thesis shows - both to yourself AND potential employers or graduate schools - you can manage a large-scale autonomous project to completion successfully.

**W**hen should you begin?

- The earlier you start, the better!
- Begin thinking about your thesis - and the steps required - during your junior year for best results!

**W**hat are the key steps to writing a thesis successfully?

- Pick a subject you are truly interested in - you'll be spending a LOT of time on it!
- Pick an advisor/professor with whom you really click.
- Work with that advisor to zoom in the subject focus.
- Turn that focus into an answerable question where you don't already know the answer. This is the core of your thesis.

**H**ow do you get there?

You might be wondering how you get to that point. Admittedly it's not a quick undertaking. The process is not a sprint, it's a marathon - you have to pace yourself.

But you can **absolutely** do it if you have the right tools for success in your toolkit!
Advance Preparation

- Check your school's institutional repository (for the University of Arkansas it's ScholarWorks@UARK) for recently submitted theses; see who the advisors are for students in your field.
- Ask students who have recently completed a thesis about their experience with advisors.
- Research potential advisors - what's their "specialty?"
- If choosing from several potential advisors, "interview" them but also realize you yourself are "auditioning" so come prepared!
- Take advanced, specialized classes to help expand knowledge & methods, and home in on a subject.

Research & Reading

- Aim for good questions when thinking of and researching your topic.
- Write down citation information as you read to avoid digging for it later.
- Put together a good reading list from the usual sources of books, articles, and journals.
- Include reference librarians & footnotes from those books, articles, journals, etc. as sources.

Preparation

- Find a good work space in which you can concentrate - minimal distractions, etc.
- Pick the time of day you work best in - when you're most alert & focused.
- Turn off your phone, or only look at it/answer once an hour.

Organization

- Set & impose deadlines on yourself.
- Back up digital data in at least 2 places (one cloud-based).
- Keep a to-do list & update it daily; this is your planning session.
- Pro-tip: Keep a separate daily to-do list, too. It's a good idea in general!
- Organize tasks by priority - do high-priority ones first, especially if they're unpleasant.
**Writing Tips**

- Write lots of notes! To yourself, in general, etc.
- Write down ideas, questions, & thoughts that come up, along with background information to remember where your head was when you wrote the note.
- Try to write a set amount of words each day.
- Try freewriting, looping, and prewriting (see Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* pp. 274-75).
- See the excellent information on note taking, properly citing quotations, & avoiding plagiarism in Lipson's book on pp. 44-51.
- Review your work periodically.
- Model the final length of your paper on a good article. Check journals in your field to emulate length & breadth.
- Most importantly - write **every day**!

**Time Management**

- Have regular meetings with your advisor; use them as mini-deadlines for sections.
- Schedule time **every day** to work on your thesis (yes, meetings with your advisor count).
- Do things in small steps on a regular schedule.
- Make small, specific, and achievable goals.

**Review**

- Pick a time frame to review writing & notes periodically (once a week is ideal).
- Look for patterns in your thoughts/ideas; see if they fall into 2-3 groups.
- Bounce some of these ideas off of professors, friends, etc. These conversations help you understand your own thoughts better.
- File away any ideas that no longer interest you or inspire more questions & thoughts.
This handy chart - depicting the valuable information in Charles Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis* - shows an at-a-glance visual timeline of an average thesis.
In General

- Give yourself credit for the accomplishments you make!
- If you must criticize yourself, do so helpfully & constructively, not harshly & destructively.
- Reframe - things are not failures or setbacks, but challenges!
- Utilize your school's resources if you need them - you pay for them after all, use them!
- Lipson's book offers information on procrastination, writer's block, & other issues in Chap. 17, *Overcoming Problems*.
- Lean on your support systems - family, friends, loved ones. Let them know about this big task you're undertaking and don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it!

This Doctor Who meme is here to emphasize Isaac Newton’s First Law of Physics:
An object at rest tends to stay at rest, and an object in motion tends to stay in motion.

So get in motion writing that thesis!

Remember - knowledge is power!
The more you know and can prepare, the better you can do.
You gain a lot of confidence by being prepared, and being prepared means gaining knowledge!