

On Thesis Writing

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Dear thesis writer,

We are proud that you have chosen to cap off your undergraduate studies with a thesis! While writing a thesis is definitely challenging, it is an equally rewarding experience that will help you delve deeper into the work of an anthropologist and explore a topic that fascinates you.

Some things that we learned along the way:

- **Only you can write your thesis.** You can meet with your advisor, your DUS, your fellow thesis writers, and your subject librarians all you want...but they can't write your thesis for you.
- **Stay in touch with your advisor(s).** They have agreed to advise you because they are willing to help! It may be scary not knowing where to start, so early advising meetings can help you brainstorm and get recommendations for literature to read. Later in the process, they can listen to your broader ideas and also offer comments on your drafts. Though much of your thesis writing will be independent, do not be afraid to reach out when you have questions or need advice.
- **Set deadlines—particularly for yourself.** The thesis writing process is definitely flexible, and the timing is all up to you and your schedule (apart from the departmental deadlines). That being said, you will want to divide the work in a manner that provides ample time for revisions and reflection (letting ideas sit for a couple days may be very helpful). One possible way to tackle the process, which Paul personally found effective, is to dedicate the summer and fall semester to early literature review and original research/data collection. Then, when the spring semester comes around, you can set a meeting schedule with your advisor that doubles as a drafting schedule (for instance, you can attempt to draft one sub-section before each weekly meeting). However, some thesis writers and advisors prefer drafting to begin in the fall semester; this will make the pace a bit more comfortable.
- **Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and just go.** Sometimes, the initial reluctance to begin writing can be more difficult to overcome than actually writing. So rather than anxiously staring at your outline, just try to start writing, and you may be surprised to see that writing the second and third sentence will be much easier than writing the first sentence.
- **A messy something is better than a nice nothing.** Rather than worrying about whether your draft or a part of your draft is refined enough to send to your advisor for feedback, just send it to your advisor. You don't want to spend an extraordinary time refining a rough draft only to hear from your advisor that you're way off track.
- **Break up the writing in a manner that suits you.** When drafting your thesis, you do not have to write it linearly. Instead, you can start by writing the parts that you find most interesting or relevant. You may find it helpful to write separate body sections before organizing them and then tackling the introduction and conclusions. Also, the methods section and bibliography may be some of the most straightforward sections to write, so you can always work on those if the other parts seem too daunting at the time (although you can avoid actually writing a bibliography and instead merely generate it in about two clicks if you properly use a reference manager; see below).
- **Back up your work.** While we were both lucky enough to not have lost anything in the process of writing our theses, we have certainly heard stories of students losing their fieldnotes, drafts, etc. Google

Drive (Brown provides unlimited storage), Dropbox, and OneDrive are some good options. It was a demoralizing feeling when a paper copy with all of Poom's notes for editing and revisions on an intermediate draft of a past research paper was stolen (this was his second semester at Brown). Poom's laptop, also stolen, wasn't a big problem; he simply found another computer and logged into his documents, all of which were safe in the cloud. Unfortunately, those hard copy notes were lost forever, and Poom had to try and remember the notes that he had written on the hard copy of that fifteen-page paper.

- **Use a reference manager.** Zotero is truly amazing, and it is free to use; the University also supports other proprietary reference managers. The Brown University Library frequently holds workshops on Zotero and other reference managers. The main purpose of you choosing to write a thesis was *not* to spend hours writing, editing, updating, and proofreading your citations and bibliography. That's where a reference manager will come in; you should use it to keep track of the sources you have used, the sources you intend to use, and sources that you might possibly use. You will thank yourself later. So long as you properly input your sources in the beginning, the reference manager will be able to generate your bibliography (this process takes a few clicks and a few seconds of waiting...and voilà! Your bibliography!)
- **Take a deep breath and stay focused on the present.** A thesis may be longer or scarier than anything else you have done as an undergraduate, but you should not let that dissuade you from pursuing your goals. You will have a whole year to work on it, and we know you can get it done.
- **No one is forcing you to write a thesis.** If you have second thoughts about writing a thesis, own your feelings. This piece in the Brown Daily Herald was written by an A.B. honors candidate in Hispanic Literatures and Culture who felt that she ultimately decided to do a thesis for the wrong reasons (<https://www.browndailyherald.com/2018/03/05/savello-18-thesis-writing-passion-pressure/>). Remember that whether or not you decide to complete your thesis, you can still graduate from Brown with meaningful experiences from within and outside the department. Writing a thesis may not be for everyone, and there are other ways to make the most of your final academic year. If you're feeling miserable about writing your thesis, talk to your advisor. It's okay if you decide to not continue with your thesis.

Best of luck to you as you embark on what may be the most exciting, challenging, and rewarding part of your undergraduate career!

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Thesis title: *Beyond Popular Discourses of Military Families: Families of Servicemembers*

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