

SOUTHERN MISS Honors College

Honors College Thesis Manual

This manual is intended to help prepare students and thesis advisors for successful completion of the Honors thesis. It serves as both a guide to expectations and requirements and an informational resource for students, advisors, and school directors. Any questions regarding the manual should be directed to honors@usm.edu, or you may call the Honors College office, at telephone (601) 266-4533, and schedule an appointment.

To ensure compliance with Honors College deadlines and expectations, please refer to this manual throughout the writing process.

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I: The Honors Keystone Curriculum: An Overview

The Junior Year: HON 300/HON 301 (Developing the Honors Thesis I/II, 2 credit hours)

These interdisciplinary courses are designed to help Honors Scholars develop their research or creative activities and prepare them for their senior-year thesis projects. HON 300 introduces students to academic research across the disciplines, assists them in assessing their own mentoring needs, encourages them to network with faculty in their discipline, and guides them towards identifying a thesis advisor. HON 301 assists students with defining their research question, developing their working relationship with their thesis advisor, and preparing for and planning their senior-year thesis activities. At the end of the sequence, students are well-prepared for the senior year, with a thesis project plan (to include a completion timeline) in hand.

The Senior Year: Thesis Hours

Thesis Hours: (3 total credit hours): Honors Scholars enroll in three thesis hours (XXX 492H or the equivalent in the major), divided over two semesters (e.g., 2 hours in fall/1 in spring, or 1 hour in fall/2 in spring). Students should be enrolled in at least one thesis hour during any semester in which they are working on their project.

What to Expect from Thesis Hours: Students are expected to treat thesis hours like any other course, determining specific times each week during which they will work on their thesis. Students should designate a minimum three hours per week for each credit hour in which they are enrolled (most will spend more than that). Students must use thesis hours to make consistent progress toward the completion of their thesis; thesis advisors will grade accordingly.

Grading Guidelines: Thesis hours are graded on an A-F grading basis. The grade in research/thesis hours should accurately and honestly assess progress on the thesis, as stipulated in the Thesis Completion Timeline and in conversation between advisor and student. The Honors College will use these grades to assess whether a student is making satisfactory progress in the Honors curriculum. Please view the grading rubric [here](#).

Instructions on Enrolling in 492H: Students should contact their thesis advisor and/or the administrative specialist in their major to open a section of the course, with the thesis advisor listed as the instructor of record. Some schools add students to the class directly; others give students permission to enroll. In any case, students should discuss with their advisor the number of credit hours in which they should enroll for each semester. **NOTE: it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the number of hours for which they are enrolled is accurate in SOAR.**

Enrolling in More Than 3 Credit Hours: Students may enroll in more than 3 thesis hours if their thesis project warrants additional time, but the number of thesis hours should always

correspond to the amount of work expected during the semester. Students who seek to take additional thesis hours beyond the required 3 should seek guidance from their thesis advisor and agree on how much time will be dedicated to the thesis project each semester and confirm their plans with their Honors advisor.

II: The Honors Thesis

General Guidelines: Students and advisors should remember that the Honors thesis is the product of meaningful research and advanced investigation/creation over multiple semesters. The thesis manuscript is the culmination of a student's course of study and should be a document of pride for the student, the advisor, and the academic program.

The Honors thesis should be substantial in scope and result in original findings, new creative work, or a new understanding of a problem or issue. **Projects that resemble term papers, literature reviews without significant analysis and synthesis, or single-semester capstone projects will not satisfy Honors expectations.**

Theses that are deemed to meet/exceed expectations will be deposited in the Aquila Digital Community, where they can be viewed by researchers and scholars from around the globe. Therefore, students should approach the development and execution of the thesis with utmost care and should be prepared for multiple rounds of revisions before submitting the manuscript to the Honors College, to ensure that the final product meets the expectations of the advisor, the school director, and the Honors College.

While the thesis advisor will serve as the student's primary guide through the research and writing process, the Honors College has certain requirements with regard to responsible conduct of research, scope of project, and manuscript formatting. In addition to following their own disciplinary conventions, students and advisors should consult [Award Winning Honors Theses](#) for further guidance on Honors College expectations.

Honors Thesis Learning Outcomes: The Southern Miss Honors College has the following goals for Honors Scholars as they conduct their thesis research:

- Establish a productive relationship with a research mentor
- Conduct multi-semester sustained inquiry-based research that connects meaningfully to the student's career path
- Design and create a compellingly researched, written, and designed product of a scope that exceeds work completed for a course or capstone project
- Articulate research process and methods clearly
- Contribute meaningfully to scholarly conversations as undergraduate researchers
- Disseminate research results in ways appropriate to research goals and disciplinary standards

Honors Thesis Research Projects: There are three primary forms of the Honors Thesis, and students may choose from the thesis type that best fits their scholarly and professional goals.

Traditional Research Thesis: In a traditional thesis, students conduct discipline-specific research and write an honors thesis. The traditional research thesis is popular for students applying to

professional or graduate schools and students entering professions in which research and written communication skills are prioritized. The length and scope of the thesis varies by discipline, but the final project will exceed the length of a paper written for a specific course and will reflect a sustained, year-long research project. The thesis may build on previous research completed for a class, but it must do so in significant and substantial ways under the direction of the thesis advisor.

Applied Research/Design Thesis: An applied research/design thesis allows students to research and design a product or process of practical use within their discipline. Applied research/design is popular for students in team-based fields such as engineering, marketing, and health-related disciplines. The thesis includes the project information, as well as a research-informed explanation of process and product design and application that situates the project within current scholarship. The length and scope will vary by discipline, but the final project will represent thorough research and a thoughtful product that significantly exceeds work typically completed for an individual class. Students who are part of a research team must also write about their individual role in creating the product.

Creative Research Thesis: A creative research thesis involves research and a creative project, usually in the fine or media arts. Examples include choreographing a dance, preparing a character performance, creating a documentary, composing a musical performance, or writing a collection of short stories. The thesis manuscript includes the final product or a link to the final product, as well as a research-informed explanation of the product and a reflection of the process that situates the project within current scholarship. The length and scope will vary by discipline, but the thesis will represent thorough research that highlights the artist's choices and informs the reader's or viewer's understanding of the creative product in significant ways.

The Honors Code: As a member of the University of Southern Mississippi Honors College, I commit to serving as a leader and role model on campus and to maintaining high standards of academic integrity, personal conduct, and campus citizenship. I will exert a sustained effort to pursue academic and scholarly excellence and to grow both personally and intellectually. I recognize the inherent value of each member of the Honors community, and I pledge to help forge a more equitable, just, and inclusive community for all. I recognize that it is my responsibility to uphold this code and to encourage others in their efforts to do so.

Academic Integrity: Academic misconduct involves deception to improve a grade, earn course credit, complete a degree, or create an unfair academic advantage for oneself or disadvantage to another in the academic community. All students at the University of Southern Mississippi should familiarize themselves with the [Student Academic Integrity Policy](#) to become familiar with what actions constitute academic misconduct, a violation of that policy. Southern Miss values "an approach to academics, research, and personal conduct based on integrity and civility" and the Student Academic Integrity Policy supports that University value. Forms of academic misconduct may include, but are not limited to:

- **Cheating** - Cheating is a broad category of academic misconduct characterized by an attempt to gain academic advantage through inappropriate means or impede the academic achievement of others.

- Plagiarism - The use of another person's or source's words, creative works, or ideas without appropriate quotation or attribution; claiming or submitting for academic credit the work of another.
- Lying - The misrepresentation of one's academic work, lying to an instructor to increase a grade, or lying to an instructor regarding an academic integrity violation.
- Acquiring or Distributing Information Inappropriately - The act of distributing or obtaining course assignments or examination questions or answers from sources not approved by the instructor or proctor (includes, but is not limited to, unauthorized use of the Internet, test banks associated with course text and previous student work).
- Fabrication or Falsification of Data - Any statement of untruth in any matters related to the academic experience, including but not limited to forgery; false claims of authorship; falsification of information, data, or results derived from or related to research or to laboratory experiments.
- Stealing or Defacing - The act of intentionally taking, transferring, defacing, or destroying, without right or permission, any property related to the academic mission of the University, including an attempt to impede others.
- Multiple Submissions - The submission, more than once, without authorization by any instructors involved, of substantial portions of the same work, including oral reports or work submitted for retaken courses.
- Conspiracy - The act of agreeing or planning with any person to commit any violation of the Student Academic Integrity Policy.
- Unauthorized use of artificial intelligence- See the artificial intelligence policy in this syllabus for allowable or non-allowable use of artificial intelligence.

If you commit an act of academic misconduct, sanctions ranging from resubmission of work to course failure may occur to the possibility of receiving a grade of "XF" for the course, which will be on the student's transcript with the notation "Failure due to academic misconduct." Furthermore, academic misconduct is a violation of the Honors Code and can result in your suspension from the Honors College. Should you be accused of academic misconduct, please visit the [Academic Integrity Website](#) or email integrity@usm.edu for any questions you may have about your rights and about the academic integrity process.

AI Use: The goal of the Honors Thesis is to develop your capacity for critical reasoning through in-depth and sustained research, the use of gained knowledge, experience, and perspective, and as such, the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not permitted. Any use of AI tools for creation of content in the thesis may be considered a violation of The University of Southern Mississippi's Academic Integrity policy and the Honors Code. Your thesis advisor should provide guidance regarding non-generative technologies, including translation and access software, spelling and grammar checkers, and may reserve the right to send any submitted work through AI detection software. The use of unauthorized AI tools will result in consequences deemed appropriate by your thesis advisor, the Honors College, and will be subject to the Academic Integrity Policy at The University of Southern Mississippi.

Responsible Conduct of Research: In the course of their junior year, all students will complete the CITI training (common course for students) and complete a form indicating whether IRB/IACUC approval is required for their projects.

IRB/IACUC Requirements:

- Students working with human subjects or vertebrate animals must apply for approval to do so by the University review board. **No data may be collected until the respective board approval has been obtained.** Obtaining protocol approval is the responsibility of the student and the thesis advisor.
- **Students whose projects require IRB or IACUC approval must include the respective protocol approval letter as an appendix in their final thesis.**
- More information about IRB/IACUC:
 - [IRB Guide](#) for research involving human subjects
 - [IACUC Guide](#) for vertebrate animal research
- Please contact the [Office of Research Integrity](#) for IRB/IACUC-related questions.

Thesis Scope and Length: The Honors College considers the thesis to be a document that results from several semesters of research/investigation/writing—one worthy of an Honors Scholar. The thesis should thus be appropriately ambitious and significant in scope and should involve original research/creative discovery. As stated in the General Guidelines, “term-paper” style projects, literature reviews without significant analysis and synthesis, or single-semester capstone projects will not satisfy Honors expectations.

The Honors College does not establish specific length requirements, leaving it to the student and advisor to ensure that the thesis meets disciplinary expectations for scope and rigor. However, for many disciplines, a good guideline is that the thesis should match the scope and length of a conventional, scholarly article in the student’s and advisor’s field of study. Given disciplinary variation, some projects have more body text (e.g., theses in the Humanities) while some have less text and more charts/graphs/figures (e.g., STEM and Social Sciences theses).

Thesis Organization: Recognizing that each discipline has its own approach to producing an effective scholarly/creative project, the Honors College does not prescribe what components should be included in the body of the thesis or how those components should be organized. Students and advisors should follow their own disciplinary expectations, using published literature and/or recent [Award Winning Honors Theses](#) to guide them.

Thesis Writing Style: As with organization, writing style will vary by discipline. Students should consult their advisors and published research/writing in their field to determine the style of academic writing that is appropriate to their discipline. However, while such conventions as use of active/passive voice, first/third person, etc., will vary, **academic writing in general is formal (non-colloquial) and requires meticulous proofreading with regard to grammar, spelling, and other mechanics.** Thus, students should build into their completion timeline a final stage of proofreading/revision. Theses that are submitted to the Honors College with significant errors will be sent back immediately for editing, thus delaying review.

Documentation Style/Works Cited/References/Bibliography: Documentation styles are discipline specific; thus, students should consult with their thesis advisor regarding the method of documentation that is most appropriate for their discipline and project. Note that, regardless of style, documentation should be meticulous and inclusive of all sources used in the thesis.

The USM Library offers [general guidelines about a multitude of styles](#). Students can also consult [USM Libraries Citation Help](#) for a reference management software package like [Endnote](#), [Mendeley](#), or [Zotero](#).

Thesis Formatting: You must use the [Honors thesis template](#) for basic formatting (e.g., pagination, headings, table of contents, figures, margins, spacing, and font size) of the required preliminary thesis pages and of subsequent chapters. **Theses in Mathematics will use LaTeX format.** For details and further information, please contact Dr. James Lambers.

Tip: Download the thesis template and begin typing your manuscript in the template from the beginning. Doing so will make it much easier to conform to the formatting standards required by the Honors College. Or, you can copy and paste sections of your thesis into the template as you complete them. Just be sure to maintain all formatting for headings, subheadings, and table of contents; this typically means typing the headings individually and copying chapters individually. If you are copy and pasting, it should be done in stages as opposed to all at once.

For additional formatting help, please see our [website](#) for tutorial videos. You may also schedule an appointment with Kelli Sellers (kelli.sellers@usm.edu) for one-on-one help.

Accessibility: “The University of Southern Mississippi is committed to being an inclusive community where everyone is encouraged to participate in our programs and activities, especially individuals with disabilities.” To that end, all theses must meet accessibility standards as outlined by law (**i.e., styled headings, spacing, Alt text for all images, graphs, tables, and figures**). All of the guidelines can be found [here](#).

[Click here](#) for information on formatting alt text in Microsoft Word.

For information and tips for writing descriptive and clear alt text, [click here](#).

File Format and Size: The thesis must be submitted in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx); the file size should not exceed 41 MB. Please compress images if the file size is too large for submission.

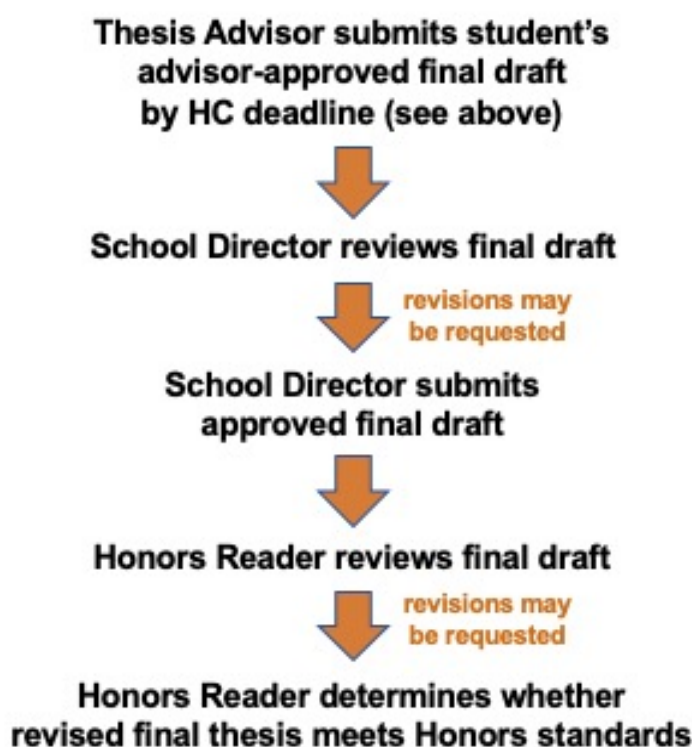
III: Thesis Submission and Approval Process

Deadlines: The dates by which the thesis advisor must submit the final, revised thesis to the school director for approval are as follows:

April 15 (Spring) | **July 15** (Summer) | **Nov. 15** (Fall)

Note that students may elect or be required to submit their thesis the semester before their intended graduation (see FAQs).

Thesis Submission Workflow:



Students should send the thesis draft to the advisor for review well ahead of the Honors College deadline and be prepared for the draft to require multiple revisions before it is approved by the thesis advisor.

Once the manuscript meets with the thesis advisor's approval, the thesis advisor will submit it to the school director using the [Thesis Approval and Submission Form](#). The school director must approve the thesis, thereby indicating that it meets the standards of the discipline.

Directors will submit their approval or rejection to the Honors College Coordinator using the [Thesis School Director Approval Form](#). If the School Director decides the manuscript needs more work, they will

follow up with the advisor and student after submitting the form. Once the director has approved the thesis, the Honors College will send it to an Honors Reader for review.

By the time the thesis reaches the Honors College, it should be a carefully edited manuscript that student, thesis advisor, and school would be proud to make available to the public in Aquila.

Honors Reader Assessment: Upon receipt of the director-approved thesis, the Honors Reader will review the manuscript and will send any requests for revision back to the student and thesis advisor. Bear in mind that the Honors Reader receives dozens of manuscripts at the same time; the Honors College will return feedback to student and advisor as soon as possible.

Honors Readers are concerned primarily with matters of scope (appropriately ambitious), readability, and formatting. Honors Readers are not content experts; the Honors College relies on schools/programs to ensure that theses meet disciplinary standards. Students and advisors should not expect the Honors Reader to serve as a copy editor or line-by-line proofreader. Please note that manuscripts with a significant number of mechanical/grammatical errors will be sent back immediately for editing before being submitted to a full review.

Students are allowed one opportunity to make revisions based on the Honors Reader's feedback. Once the revised manuscript is returned and reviewed by the Honors Reader for a second time, the manuscript will receive one of the following designations:

- Exceeds Expectations (approved): thesis is an example of exceptional scholarship in the author's field of study. The thesis goes above and beyond expectations in terms of purpose and scope for undergraduate scholarship. The thesis is free from grammatical and stylistic errors and is formatted using the thesis template provided by the Honors College.
- Meets expectations (approved): thesis meets expectations for purpose and scope, is free from grammatical and stylistic errors, and is formatted using the thesis template provided by the Honors College.
- Minimally meets expectations (approved but will not be uploaded to Aquila): thesis has a clear purpose and participates in the research goals of the student's field of study. It is generally free of errors and is formatted correctly, but the thesis may not meet the standards for scope and length and lacks thorough analysis.
- Fails to meet expectations (not approved; student will not graduate from the Honors College): thesis may be incomplete, may not be formatted correctly, and does not meet the expectations of the Honors College regarding scope, length, and purpose.

Aquila: Should the approved Honors thesis be deemed to meet expectations, students will be asked to complete the [Aquila Research Taxonomy Form](#). This form grants the Honors College permission to upload the thesis to the Aquila Digital Community. Your thesis should be accessible in the repository the semester after your graduation. The Honors College has the right to withhold any thesis from publication in Aquila.

Thesis Embargo: Students and/or thesis advisors who do not want the manuscript to be available in Aquila at the time of graduation must make a formal request to embargo the thesis. The thesis advisor must complete and submit the [Embargo Request Form](#). Embargoes are granted for a maximum of two

years. If you have further questions about Aquila or the embargo process, please consult [Ms. Kelli Sellers](#).

Extensions: A one-week grace period will be granted if deemed necessary and if the request is endorsed by the thesis advisor. After the extension period expires, the student must roll their graduation over to the next semester and enroll in one additional thesis hour. **Students requesting additional time should contact [Ms. Kelli Sellers](#).**

Failure to Complete: Honors Scholars are expected to complete all requirements, including the thesis, by the established deadlines. Students who feel they are at risk of not completing the thesis should reach out to their Honors advisor and their thesis advisor to develop a completion plan. Note that in such cases the Honors College may hold scholarship funds until a completion plan is established. Students who do not complete their thesis will be suspended from the Honors College and may be asked to return a prorated share of their award to the University of Southern Mississippi. (For more information, see the [Honors College Student Handbook](#) and the appropriate scholarship stipulation agreement.)

IV: Thesis FAQs

Is funding available for Honors theses research? Yes. There are opportunities to apply for research funding in the [Honors College](#) and through the [Drapeau Center for Undergraduate Research](#).

Can I complete a thesis outside my major? Students may complete a thesis outside their major. However, before making that decision, you should ask yourself whether you are academically prepared by having taken the relevant coursework to undertake a scholarly or creative project outside your own major and discuss your level of preparedness with your chosen thesis advisor.

What if I am a double major? You may choose to pursue a thesis in one of your majors or may decide on an interdisciplinary project (possibly with an advisor and a co-advisor from each area).

I will be student teaching and completing an Honors thesis. What now? Licensure students may choose to complete their thesis project prior to student teaching, or they may choose to complete up to two final thesis hours while engaged in student teaching. Students and their thesis advisors must notify the [Director of Educational Field Experiences](#) of the student's plan to enroll in thesis hour(s) while student teaching.

I will be completing an internship and completing an Honors thesis. What now? Students are typically expected to complete their thesis projects before they undertake internships required for their degrees (e.g., in kinesiology, social work). Students who are unable to complete the thesis project prior to and who thus seek permission to enroll in thesis hours while completing their internship must request permission from their thesis advisor and from the director of the school.

Can I submit my thesis a semester before my expected graduation date?

Yes. Some students may want to submit the thesis early because they know that their final semester will be busy (capstone courses, internships, student teaching, heavy course load, etc.) However, the student should discuss this decision with their Honors College Academic Advisor and with their thesis advisor in advance.

V: Thesis Tips & Tricks: Advice for Writers

Getting Started:

- As you get started, consult the thesis completion timeline you and your advisor developed in HON 301. Using that timeline, and in conversation with your advisor, prepare a detailed schedule that identifies specific research tasks and goals, and schedule regular meetings to discuss your research progress, the preferred organization of your thesis manuscript, and, eventually, draft versions of completed thesis sections.
- Organize your project into small, achievable goals that you accomplish week by week and month by month. This approach will make it all seem less overwhelming and will ensure long-term success.
- Keep in mind that you may want or have to adjust the goals you established before undertaking the actual research once your project progresses. That is part of the joy of discovery! It is ok if your project changes in the course of your drafting and research process.

Before You Panic:

- If you are worried about your ability to write your thesis manuscript, it should be comforting to you to know that everyone—faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates—experiences the same feelings about academic writing: angst, fear of failure and of peer criticism, and anxiety and self-doubt about the importance of our research and writing. To keep you from feeling stuck with writer's block and procrastinating to a point where you no longer have the time to write a quality Honors thesis, below are some hints and tips for goal setting/time management that you may find useful.

Goal Setting and Time Management:

- **Manage the many different demands on your time during your senior year as you prepare for graduation and your professional career beyond.**
 - Review and prioritize your main academic, professional, and social life goals.
 - Be realistic about what you can achieve each day, and don't forget that you cannot be in two places at the same time.
 - Adjust your daily routine to free up time for thesis writing.
- **Develop a plan and establish a daily thesis writing routine.**

- Choose the time of day during which you think and write best (morning or evening) and set aside a block of 60-90 minutes on your daily calendar for thesis writing.
- Choose a quiet location (e.g., a library carrel) and eliminate external distractions (turn off your cell phone, email, the Internet, and don't let your friends chat with you during your scheduled writing time).
- Do not let internal distractions (worries about the thesis advisor's feedback, feeling overwhelmed, exam deadlines, etc.) keep you from writing.
- Do not let other activities (*"I'm too busy to write today"*) interfere with your daily writing time, and do not wait until you are "in the mood" to write!
- Use a kitchen timer to manage your writing time, if you think that may be helpful, and take a break every 30 minutes or once you have achieved a set writing target.
- **Set daily writing goals and hold yourself accountable.**
 - Set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) = small, manageable daily writing assignments.
 - Write a concrete, manageable portion of your thesis every day (e.g., a specific portion of the Results section, several paragraphs of your Introduction).
 - Measure the progress you have made on your goal by looking at the number of pages or words you have written, or which tasks you have completed already.
 - Assess how realistic (attainable) this goal was for the allotted time period and revise your goals, if necessary.
 - Assess if what you wrote that day furthered your goal and thesis progress (was relevant), or whether you simply got side-tracked.
 - Set specific deadlines for completing each writing goal (time-bound).
 - Track your thesis writing progress regularly and send portions of your thesis to your advisor for feedback on time according to your thesis completion timeline.
 - Reward yourself for meeting daily and weekly writing goals and thesis writing milestones by taking some time for yourself (take a walk, chat with a friend, have a coffee, etc.)!

- **Some reasons for procrastination and writer's block.**
 - You feel overwhelmed by how hard it is to write or even get started.
 - You are easily distracted from your writing routine and frequently engage in other activities (*"This will only take a minute"*).
 - You worry about all the details you have to think about when writing the thesis (checking and ordering the sources, annotating and formatting figures and tables, etc.).
 - You have self-doubt about being able to produce a thesis of high quality and therefore consider writing a futile activity.
 - You are bored with and/or do not enjoy the writing process.
 - You are afraid of what your thesis advisor will say about your draft.
- **Some writing tips that may help you deal with procrastination and writer's block.**
 - Allow yourself plenty of thinking time (don't rush!), then put your thoughts on paper.
 - Do not strive to create perfect sentences, paragraphs, and thesis sections; just write SOMETHING!
 - Allow yourself to make mistakes, take multiple (possibly wrong?) approaches to express your thoughts.
 - Talk about your ideas with a friend or your thesis advisor.
 - Trust yourself and don't worry if you do not see the "bends in the road" and the "light at the end of the tunnel" immediately.
 - It is normal to have to revise your first drafts (often several times) to develop what exactly you want to convey in the final version of your thesis.