

This guide provides a basic outline for the thesis writing process that can be applied to empirical and library-based research theses. It was developed by Writing Fellows at the Brainard Writing Center who have experience writing their own theses and working with other students writing theirs. We hope to be general enough to be helpful for students from various majors and descriptive enough to provide guidance at each stage of the writing process. Always be sure to follow the timeline and directions provided by your professor.

## BRAINSTORM

### Brainstorming Topics

Make a list of potential topics that you might write your thesis about. Do some initial research, finding a few sources for each of your topics. Narrow down your ideas based on 1) your level of interest in the topic and 2) the availability of information. If you want to discuss your ideas with a writing fellow, make an appointment at the Brainard Writing Center. We cannot give you feedback on the content of your ideas, but we can discuss them with you and ask questions to help you consider other points of view. Sometimes talking about your ideas with another person is enough to help you figure out what you do or do not know.

### Final Topic Selection

Based on your research, pick your topic. Your topic should be relevant to your major and interesting to you. It should be something that you feel you could spend a semester (or whole year, if you have a pre-thesis class) studying. Be sure that sufficient resources exist on your topic to meet the source requirements of your thesis.

### Developing Research Question

Using what you know about your topic and your preliminary research, develop a research question that you will explore in your thesis. Developing this question will help guide your research as you continue working. Answering it will lead to an arguable thesis. You might start by asking a few general questions before narrowing them down to one or two specific ones. If you are struggling to develop a solid research question, or just want to talk, come to the Brainard Writing Center to discuss your ideas with a writing fellow.

## RESEARCH

### Finding Academic Articles

As a student at Carthage College, you have access to academic article databases and websites. These sites will be helpful for you while looking for sources for your thesis. If you need help finding sources, contact the library liaison for your discipline (<https://carthage.libguides.com/liaisons>). You may email them directly or at [help@carthage.edu](mailto:help@carthage.edu).

### Incorporating Sources Into Writing

You will use your sources to guide the argument you make in your thesis. You should use these sources to help craft your thesis statement, provide evidence, and explain relevant concepts. Although writing fellows cannot tell you how to use your sources, we can help you incorporate them into your thesis by guiding you through the relevant writing skills for constructing a solid argument with supporting evidence.



## Citations and Bibliography (regular and annotated)

For every source your reference in your writing, you should include a complete in-text citation as well as a reference list at the end of your paper. There are many different types of citation styles, so be sure to check with your professor to make sure you are using the right one. If you have questions about citing sources, bring your paper to the Brainard Writing Center for feedback. Some professors will require you to write an annotated bibliography. The Brainard Writing Center can help with these too.

## DRAFT

### Outline

One way to help organize your ideas is to create a working outline of your thesis. Include all the major points you would like to make. For each point, note your ideas and what sources you might use to support them. If you want feedback on an existing outline, or help creating a new one, make an appointment with the Brainard Writing Center. All you need for your appointment are your sources, any completed writing (however much or little that might be), and your ideas. If your outline is detailed and contains a substantial amount of text, feel free to schedule an asynchronous, written feedback session. If your outline is less detailed, or if you wish to discuss your ideas and organization with a writing fellow, it is better to make an in-person or live virtual appointment.

### Writing

Once you have an argument and some supporting points, the next step in the process is to begin writing. It is helpful to get feedback frequently during the drafting stage to ensure your ideas are understood the way you intend, your organization is clear, and you address gaps in the argument. You can come to the Brainard Writing Center as frequently as you like. Appointments are about an hour, so it is best to work on small chunks of your thesis during multiple appointments rather than the entirety of it during a single session. Some questions to bring to ask a writing fellow: Is my work organized well? Is my work written at a formality level appropriate for my audience? Does the argument in my conclusion match the argument in my introduction?

## REVISE

### Getting Feedback

Getting feedback is essential to the writing process, so we recommend you seek feedback often. Your professor should be your primary source of feedback, and many thesis classes include peer review. Additional feedback can come from a variety of sources, including another trusted professor, close friends, classmates, family, and (of course) the Brainard Writing Center. Be aware that you will receive different feedback depending on your audience. If you receive conflicting advice, fellows at the Brainard Writing Center would be happy to discuss strategies with you.

### Using feedback

Once you receive feedback, the next step is to consider revisions you might make. Remember that this is your thesis and whether you incorporate the feedback you get or not is up to you. Even so, consider all of the feedback you receive, even if some of it is hard to hear or you disagree with it. Follow the feedback that helps you. Be sure to re-read your entire thesis on your own and use Grammarly@edu to check grammar and get additional word choice suggestions. Grammarly suggestions need to be evaluated before acceptance. Fellows at the Brainard Writing Center can help you make informed choices regarding Grammarly advice.

## PRESENT

### Creating and Practicing Presenting Your Work

At some point in the process, you will likely need to present your thesis in some way. Each department has different requirements for thesis presentations. Common types include elevator talks, defenses, short presentations, and posters. The Brainard Writing Center can help you decide how to organize your presentation, what to include on slides, help you proofread any written work, and give you feedback on the organization of your speech.

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