A Guide to

Creative Senior Theses in English

(CRWR 701)

Academic Year 2026-27

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Preparing to Write the Thesis: A Timeline

A senior thesis is required only of ENGL seniors pursuing departmental graduation Honors. Any eligible student may write a thesis, which involves independent creative writing at the highest level. If you plan to write a creative thesis, these guidelines are for you.

- **April of junior year**: If you plan to write your project in the Fall, contact faculty with whom you might like to work to see who is available to advise your thesis. Once you have chosen an advisor, register in Banner for your advisor's section of CRWR 701. Talk with your advisor about your project and develop a reading list for the summer. For certain projects, you and your advisor may consider adding a "research term" (for CRWR 560 credit) to allow you to do more research in advance of your thesis semester.

- **November of senior year:** If you plan to write your project in the Spring, contact faculty with whom you might like to work to see who is available to advise your thesis. Once you have chosen an advisor, register in Banner for your advisor's section of CRWR 701. Talk with your advisor and develop a reading list for the winter. For certain projects, you and your advisor may consider adding a "research term" (for CRWR 560 credit) to allow you to do more research in advance of your thesis semester.

- See the "Thesis Requirements" section of this guide for a complete list of deadlines and expectations. **Note that you must have at least a B+ average in three creative writing seminars in order to go forward with a creative thesis.**

Quick Guide to Key Deadlines

Fall Thesis Deadlines	**Spring Thesis Deadlines**	**Task**	**Complete?**
April of prior spring	October of prior Fall	Contact potential advisors; choose advisor; be sure to register for advisor's CRWR701 section in Banner during normal registration	
May of prior spring	December of prior Fall	Meet with advisor to discuss suggested reading or research over summer or J-term	
First week of Fall classes	First week of Spring classes	Meet with advisor to discuss semester plan; double-check that you are registered for thesis	
Friday, Sept. 11, 2026	Friday, Feb. 19, 2027	Joint thesis students only: turn in contract to both advisors and ENGL department chair (see guide)	
Friday, Sept. 18, 2026	Monday, Feb. 22, 2027	Two-page Prospectus plus Bibliography due to advisor and ENGL department chair (see guide)	
Friday, Oct.9, 2026	Monday, March 29, 2027	First section (15 pages) due to advisor (or advisors if Joint)	
Friday, Nov. 20, 2026	Friday, April 23, 2027	Full Rough Draft due to advisor (or advisors if Joint)	
Sometime in November	Sometime in April	Contact potential second and third readers; begin discussions of possible oral defense date/time	
Sunday, Dec. 6, 2026	Sunday, May 2, 2027	Email copy of thesis to advisor	
Friday, Dec. 11, 2026	Friday, May 7, 2027	FINAL DRAFT DUE BY 1:00 PM (see guide for specifics)	
Between Dec. 11 and Dec. 18, 2026	Between May 7 and May 17, 2027	Oral Thesis Defense	
Friday, December 11, 2026 (to be confirmed)	Friday, May 7, 2027 (to be confirmed)	Thesis Presentation & Celebration	

The Thesis Process

1. Choosing a Thesis Topic

Choose a topic that interests you and that will continue to interest you over the course of the semester. Ideally, you will be able to draw on material that you have encountered in earlier classes, perhaps especially your creative writing seminars. The work on your thesis must not duplicate material that you have worked on in prior courses but may have its roots in earlier work. Try to imagine what you'd really like to write: a sequence of poems, a few stories or novella, a play or screenplay, a memoir or piece of creative nonfiction that may involve some research.

Early on, you will wish to focus your topic so that it can be covered well in the limited time and space that you have. Creative theses in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, or drama will vary in length but must be original work. You are testing the waters, trying to find your own voice in the genre, mix of genres, or hybrid genre you have chosen, and where you presumably have some beginning expertise.

2. When to write the thesis

If you intend to graduate in May, you have two options for scheduling a senior thesis: Fall or Spring.

If you intend to graduate next February, you may also write a thesis in your "super senior" Fall.

3. Thesis length

In fiction or nonfiction theses, approximately 30-35 pages is the normal range. For poetry, 12-15 poems, totaling about 20 pages of writing, is typical. A short play might be 30 pages in length. For mixed genre theses or other creative forms, appropriate length can be determined in consultation with your advisor.

4. Style

Theses should be typed, double-spaced, with footnotes at the bottom of the page or at the end of the paper (if necessary in nonfiction projects). You may use double-sided pages if you wish.

5. Thesis Deadline

The thesis deadline is not flexible. There will be a penalty of one third of a grade per day for late submission unless you provide a formal dean's excuse by the deadline. See page 4 of this guide for this year's deadlines. These deadlines have been designed partly to ensure that the faculty has time to schedule an oral defense for all students.

6. First Steps

Your first priority is to present a two-page, typewritten prospectus with a tentative bibliography (for nonfiction projects if applicable). Your prospectus should include a chapter breakdown for prose projects, if possible (sometimes this will not be relevant). The prospectus should also indicate the scope of your project. You should submit this prospectus to your

advisor(s) and to the ENGL department chair as early as possible in the semester; the official deadline can be found in this guide.

After that, it is time to start writing. Even if you are not finished researching, start writing what you know as soon as you can. The act of writing will bring your topic into sharper focus, and will help you understand what else you need to know in order to finish your thesis. You might end up discarding or completely revising this first draft, but the effort will not have been wasted. Rough drafts do not stop when writing begins; the two are closely related and dependent on each other. Expect to do many revisions.

Your writing schedule will be developed in consultation with your advisor during the first weeks of the semester.

Remember that the writing of your CRWR thesis should reflect your own independent work. We expect that your advisor will provide you with constructive and helpful feedback on your drafts, and you should show your work to other students whenever possible, to get as much feedback as you can. It is not acceptable, however, to have other people (including parents, former teachers, other Middlebury faculty or students) do the important thinking, writing, and revising for you. All of the words in your thesis should be your own, unless they are included in quotation marks and a source is cited. You must provide a source for borrowed ideas as well as borrowed language. You will write and sign the Honor Code statement on your final essay, indicating that it is your own work.

7. Finishing the thesis

Give yourself at least a week to reread your final draft and to make final revisions, to refine your prose, to eliminate typographical and other errors, to check the accuracy and form of your citations, and to tighten your argument or narrative so that it is as clear as possible.

The final version of your thesis will have several components that appear in a logical order. Once you have compiled (and checked) your bibliography and have polished the thesis itself, you'll need to create a title page, and, if you wish, a table of contents, acknowledgements, etc. In general, these elements are included in the following order:

1. title page
2. acknowledgements (optional)
3. table of contents (optional)
4. thesis, with footnotes and/or endnotes if relevant
5. "works cited" and "works consulted" lists, if relevant

8. Submitting the thesis

On the **Thesis Due Date** (see page 4 of this guide for deadlines), you must send a digital copy to your adviser and readers (unless otherwise requested) and hand in one hard copy of your thesis to the ENGL Department Office, 306 Axinn, by 1 p.m. The department will pay for one photocopy and a basic plastic binding if you take your thesis to Reprographics (FIC) to be copied. You are not required to bind your thesis, however.

9. Thesis defense

Every thesis student will have an oral defense. You, your advisor, and two additional readers (if possible) will discuss your thesis with you for about 50 minutes, commenting on aspects of the work, asking that you elaborate on things that could be confusing or undeveloped, etc. A strong thesis defense may raise the grade on a thesis, particularly if points are clarified and elaborated on well. The thesis defense is part of your project and should be taken seriously. Preparation for the defense will be discussed with your advisor. Thesis defenses are generally scheduled within two weeks of the thesis due date.

After the thesis defense, your advisor will write you a letter summarizing the readers' responses to your work and will share with you your final grade on the project.

10. Presentation of your thesis

All thesis students are expected to participate in the end-of-semester celebration of the critical and creative thesis writers. Each writer presents a short summary of, or reading from, their work for a gathering of friends and faculty members. This is a joyful community event that celebrates everyone's hard work.

11. Evaluation of the thesis

CRWR senior theses are read by the project advisor and two other readers, who may be an ENGL/CRWR faculty member or a faculty member from another Middlebury department. In the case of joint theses, theses are read by both project advisors and one other reader, who may be an ENGL/CRWR faculty member or a faculty member from another Middlebury department. You and your advisor should discuss options for these additional readers; you should contact them as early as possible in the semester to ask for their participation. After the defense, your advisor and each reader will independently and anonymously assign a numeric grade to the thesis into which will be factored your performance in the thesis defense. The final grade for the thesis will be the average of the grades given by your advisor and readers. This grading scale will be used to convert the numerical average to the final letter grade:

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
A	93 – 95.99*
A-	90 - 92.99
B+	87 - 89.99
B	83 - 86.99
B-	80 - 82.99
C+	77 - 79.99
C	73 - 76.99
C-	70 - 72.99
D	60 - 69.99
F	0 - 59.99

*95.99 is the highest grade possible, not 100, since we do not give A+'s.

Thesis Requirements and Deadlines

I. Form

Thesis: In fiction or nonfiction theses, approximately 30-35 pages is the normal range. For poetry, 12-15 poems, totaling about 20 pages of writing, is typical. A short play might be 30 pages in length. For mixed genre theses or other creative forms, appropriate length can be determined in consultation with your advisor. The title page should be prepared according to the example provided in this booklet. The department will pay for one photocopy in a basic plastic binding if you have it done at Reprograpics (FIC). Three copies of your thesis must be submitted to the ENGL Department office, 306 Axinn, by the deadline.

II. Deadlines

No alterations to the deadline schedule will be made except in extraordinary circumstances. Unless otherwise noted, **all deadlines fall at 1 p.m. on the stated day**. You will NOT be able to turn in your thesis to Campus Security or to leave it outside the ENGL department office or in faculty mailboxes after hours. You will have to turn it in the next day, and it will be considered late. Be aware that there is great demand for the use of college printers at these deadlines. Don't wait until the last day to print.

Extensions will not be granted for computer breakdowns. You are responsible for learning all of the correct procedures for backing up your writing and for avoiding computer viruses. Be sure to save your work in at least three distinct places.

Please see the Quick Guide to Deadlines on page 4 of this Guide book for specific dates.

Joint Thesis Requirements

The senior work of joint majors must demonstrate in a single project an integration of the two majors that the student has elected. The project will be jointly advised by a faculty member from each of the two relevant departments, and these faculty members and an outside reader will evaluate the thesis.

Joint majors are required to draw up, in consultation with the supervisor of ENGL Senior Creative Work and their advisors, a contract describing the requirements for their senior thesis, including frequency of meetings and due dates for sections and drafts. Students must plan to meet with **both** advisors (individually or together as desired) throughout the semester Such a contract will specify deadlines, citation form, and any other requirements for joint senior work that have been agreed upon by advisors and student. (For example, students writing a joint creative thesis in CRWR and a language department may be required to utilize sources in multiple languages; there may be a workshop in one department; there may be criteria for evaluation in addition to those for the ENGL creative thesis itemized above.) This contract must be submitted to the ENGL department chair by the end of the first week of classes.

For students who are joint majors in ENGL and Theatre and who wish to pursue a joint project that involves directing or acting, senior work will normally comprise two full-credit classes, ENGL 0708 and THEA 0708. These classes should wherever possible be taken in the same semester, with the understanding that a central goal of the joint major is the thorough integration of both aspects of the major. A single-credit, single-semester joint project remains an option for those who wish to pursue a joint thesis that does not include a practical component such as acting or directing.

Students wishing to write a joint creative senior thesis with FMMC must take 3 CRWR workshops, and those wishing to write a screenplay for their joint thesis must take specifically FMMC/CRWR 106-Writing for the Screen, and FMMC/CRWR 341-Writing for the Screen II—prior to beginning the thesis. Such projects must be on topics approved by advisors in both departments.

Students writing a joint thesis in HIST or HARC should register for HIST 700 and HIST 711 or HARC 710 and HARC 711, and attend the required HARC thesis workshop

[Sample Title Page]

The River Runs to Jordan
A Novella

Edward Smithson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of English, Middlebury College

May, 2007

I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this work.
[signature]

Funding Sources (SRPS)

Awards: Up to $1200 (Oct. 1, Jan. 24, or April 15 deadlines) and up to $350 throughout the academic year as funding permits.

Overview: SRPS is designed to support senior research projects, and these may be relevant for some creative nonfiction theses. For 2020-21 the upper limit was $1200; however, the average award is about $500. Expenses are reimbursed (see the approved expense types below) and must occur after your application is approved. Prior summer expenses may be reimbursed in October only if an application is submitted for preview prior to beginning the project.

Selection: Funding will be awarded on the basis of the quality of the application and the availability of funds. Preference will be given to students who do not have access to funds in their major departments. You may receive only one award from the SRPS. Students who will have senior status during their project dates may apply. If you have questions about whether you are eligible please contact the Undergraduate Research Office (URO).

Faculty Endorsement: Students must have a statement of support from the faculty advisor for the project and be enrolled in the appropriate independent study and/or thesis course during the relevant semester(s) of work. The online application submission is also sent to your project advisor, who can then reply to uro@middlebury.edu with their endorsement.

Accessing Funding:

Funding notification will be emailed approximately 3 weeks after the application deadline. Otherwise, rolling applications are reviewed weekly.

Reimbursement: Reimbursements for expenses incurred require scanned or e-receipts and a completed URO Funding Receipts and Summary Form. You will only be reimbursed for activities that were approved in your SRPS application. Reimbursements take 2-3 weeks to receive payment.

Direct Charges: Materials can often be ordered directly through your department coordinator. Cash advances for human subjects are also available. All requests require at least 7 business days for processing.

Reimbursements for projects are due before the end of the academic year of the award or before you graduate. Reimbursements take 2-3 weeks so if you are leaving campus or closing your bank account due to graduation, please plan accordingly.

Approved SRPS Expenses:

Supplies- needed to conduct research. Some equipment purchased shall remain the property of Middlebury College for future use by other students.

Travel to conduct interviews, fieldwork, or research- save all travel related receipts and keep track of all mileage.

Compensation of research subjects- compensation as a gift certificate from a College facility such as the Grille or the College Store is preferred. However, arrangements can be made to pay small cash stipends (up to $10 each) with the appropriate documentation.

Photocopying of research materials (not thesis proposals or completed theses) - a receipt must accompany reimbursement requests for photocopy expenses.

Please note that requests to purchase computer programs, technological resources, books or media need to be checked with LIS to see if the college doesn't already own or is willing to purchase for general use. All non-consumable resources will remain property of the college and need to be turned in to URO at the completion of your project.

Because they are limited, these funds are intended to support the conducting of research, rather than the presentation of research results.

Please contact URO if you have reimbursement needs that are not listed above.

More information can be found at https://www.middlebury.edu/office/teaching-learning-research/student-resources/undergraduate-research/funding/senior-research-project-supplement

James M. Meyer Grant

In addition, the Creative Writing program awards funds for travel related to creative non-fiction theses and independent projects. Such travel generally takes place in winter term. See https://www.middlebury.edu/college/academics/english/student-resources/james-m-meyer-grant and application procedures. Applications can also be found in the office of the Department Coordinator, Axinn 306. Your project proposal must be emailed to Molly Johnsen at mjohnsen@middlebury.edu by a set day in mid-late October (watch for an announcement).