



Performing Arts Thesis Overview and Guidelines

The following guidelines have been composed to assist you in preparing for and carrying out your performing arts senior honors thesis project. This will ensure your work develops your performance elements while meeting research and writing requirements for the Honors in Major designation. Your thesis director should be a full-time professor and will remain your primary point of contact for decisions regarding form, structure, and content. The performing arts thesis will be based on a student's performance(s) during their junior or senior year.

The performing arts thesis, although based in large part on a performative component, must incorporate a substantial, research-based written component. Along with any high-quality images of the performance where appropriate (with the necessary lists of figures/illustrations, labels under the images, and incorporation within the body of the writing), the thesis has two components: 1) critical introduction and 2) the body chapters which include analysis of the performance in terms of the ideas set up in the critical introduction.

While the length of the performing arts thesis will depend on the student's concentration or specialization in music, theatre, or dance, suggested guideposts include: 15-20 pages for the critical introduction and 20-30 pages for the analysis of the performance. More important than length is quality of thought and writing. (If the thesis is based on an original play, please see the Creative Writing Thesis Guidelines from CLASS).

Prospectus Guidelines for a Performing Arts Thesis

If you wish to pursue a performing arts thesis, include the following components in your 3-5 page prospectus: 1) Project description (3-5 paragraphs) explaining the project's purpose, medium, subject, and proposed structure of the thesis; 2) An artist's statement (3-5 paragraphs) explaining at least five important influences that have shaped your perspective in relation to the project; and 3) Bibliography including the five influences you mention and at least five secondary theoretical, critical, and/or historical sources.

Performing Arts Critical Introduction Guidelines

The critical introduction will synthesize the work of many sources to generate an analysis of your own performing art.

Your specialization in your particular performing art has a history. In preparing to write the critical introduction, first conduct research with the help of your thesis director and library liaison to identify the key writings which outline this history, including theory and practice. From the list that emerges, think about the sources which are most relevant to your project. Ask: which sources allow for a good historical overview of my medium, genre and/or subject matter, and which sources provide important theoretical specificity? Which thinkers, theories, or artistic movements am I "working within" and which am I "working against", and why so? All of these will be useful for your critical introduction.

After you have identified and vetted 8-12 potential sources for your critical introduction, read each source and compose an annotated bibliography. List each source in alphabetical order by author's last name and write a 5-7 sentence annotation under each one. The annotation should include 1) your

summary of the key ideas the source offers and 2) your explanation of performance's connections to the source. On the basis of your annotations, you will be prepared to begin writing your critical introduction. The central aim of this introduction is to situate your performing art within the artistic traditions you are engaging. Use your annotations and refine their order to create a literature review.

Orient your readers with a literature review that details the main historical, theoretical, and artistic thought on your specific performing art. Show how the aesthetic choices you make extend on or depart from this thought by analyzing your own work(s). Finally, reflect on the meaning of your work. What effect on the audience do you ultimately wish to achieve in this project, or what contribution to form/technique do you wish to make and why?

Performing Arts Analysis Guidelines

Extend on the work you started in the critical introduction by going further in depth to show how the aesthetic choices you make create a specific meaning/effect on the audience. You will need to provide comprehensive information on what is being performed. In music, the student should write about the various compositions. In theatre and dance, the student should provide information on the piece performed. The written portion can include extended program notes on the performance.

Interpret your own performance by breaking it into its components and, using your secondary sources, demonstrate how each component contributes to the meaning of the piece and the effect on the audience you wish to achieve. Explain how your choices fit within the literature review you set up. In other words, there should be an interplay between the analysis of your own performance and the explanation of how it is situated within the field.

It is essential that the student works with the thesis director early on to develop the guidelines for the undergraduate thesis project.

Performing Arts Thesis Defense

In addition to their performance(s), the student must complete a senior honors thesis defense before their thesis committee. In this defense, students pursuing a performing arts honors thesis must present an overview of their critical introduction to explain the scholarly conversation in which their performing art is participating, as well as "an artist's talk" which discusses their artistic process and a philosophy of what is important to them in their creative endeavors. Where appropriate, students may include a PowerPoint presentation of the images of their performance.