

Cognitive Psychology PhD Program
Masters' Thesis Expectations
4/29/16

These suggestions and requirements are meant to supplement the Department Requirements as listed in the Handbook to provide expectations specific for students in the Cognitive PhD training program.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the MA Thesis is for students to demonstrate that they can use theory, previous empirical findings, and research methods to design, carry out and discuss a study. The scope and design of the thesis project should allow for the reasonable expectation of completion within the first two years of graduate study.

In general, Cognitive masters' projects will involve all phases of a research project, including original data collection. However, the use of an existing data set may be used when the Advisor and Thesis Committee believe the proposed project still fulfills the spirit of proposing, justifying, and testing a novel idea.

Proposal Process

The Cognitive Program requires a formal Prospectus meeting for the MA Thesis. The student is encouraged to meet with potential committee members when there is a reasonably clear sense of the project to determine their interest in serving on the committee and seek their input on further development of the project. As the project is refined, the student is encouraged to update the committee members along the way. When the student and his or her advisor agree on a project, and that the research proposal describing it is ready for review, the proposal is distributed to the committee members.

At least two weeks prior to the meeting, the student should provide the Thesis Committee with a research proposal which includes: a) an introduction to the relevant background literature sufficient to motivate the proposed study, b) a description of the hypotheses to be tested, c) enough detail of the methodology to allow the committee to judge feasibility and potential issues with the tasks, stimuli or design, and d) proposed methods of data analysis, again to allow the committee to evaluate feasibility and appropriateness. Although a student is encouraged to engage in a thorough review of the literature in their chosen area, the introduction to the research proposal should be focused on motivating the study to be done, similar to the introduction to a journal article that reports original research in the area being proposed in your study. It is often the case that an introduction of 7 – 10 pages is appropriate. For the problem being proposed the introduction may need to be longer or a shorter introduction may suffice. The goal for the methods and analysis sections is to be as complete as possible in order to receive informed feedback from the committee on the proposed procedures, materials, design, and analytic methods.

Proposal Meeting

The goal of the proposal meeting is for the student to present the motivation, design and hypotheses for their study, and for the committee to provide consultation and suggest modifications where appropriate. The Advisor should take minutes during the meeting, and send a follow-up memo of

understanding after the Prospectus meeting for approval by the Committee, specifying the changes or modifications being required by the Committee to either the project or the Prospectus as well as the process for approval of the changes (e.g., who approves the changes). The draft of the memo should be done as quickly as possible, but within a week of the meeting. The committee should review the memo within a week of receipt. The final version of the memorandum is shared with the student and the committee members. The memorandum of understanding should reflect what the student, advisor, and committee have agreed to regarding the Thesis work.

Final Thesis

The style of the main body of the thesis should be similar to a manuscript that could be submitted for journal publication. However, students and advisors may wish to include additional materials in Appendices, such as archives of exact stimuli, details of pilot studies, supplementary analyses, etc. The Program's goal is that the thesis may result in a publication, usually as part of a series of experiments that may include the first year project or follow up studies.

When the student and the advisor think a written draft of the completed project is ready for oral defense, the draft is disseminated to the committee. Committee members are asked to provide feedback within two weeks on whether the draft is ready for defense, and if there is agreement, a meeting is scheduled. Committee members can also ask for revisions to the draft if they feel a meeting would not be productive with the current version of the report.

At the defense, the student provides a brief overview of the completed study. The committee may question the student about the project's goals, issues of design and data analysis, and matters of interpretation. The committee may also ask for clarifications or modifications to the final thesis. The Advisor should take minutes during the meeting, and send a follow-up memorandum of understanding after the defense meeting for approval by the Committee, specifying any changes or modifications being required by the Committee to pass the Thesis.

Timeliness of Feedback. Feedback is an important part of the learning process and faculty are expected to respond to the proposal and the final thesis paper within two weeks of receipt of these documents. Feedback is sent to the Thesis Committee chair who synthesizes the feedback and shares it with the committee. The result of this process can be to proceed to oral defense or have the student revise the document prior to oral defense. These decisions should reflect the views of the majority of the committee members.