

# SENIOR THESIS BOOT CAMP:

## STEPS TO TACKLE YOUR THESIS

1. Choose a topic.
  - Pick something that interests you. Your topic also needs to be doable—something too broad or too specific will be difficult to accomplish.
  - Begin meeting with your advisor and/or committee. They can help you make sure that you are headed in a strong direction.
2. Set some goals for yourself.
  - Theses are usually quite long, so think about how you want to break up the workload.
  - For example: By March 5<sup>th</sup>, I will have completed the outline of my thesis. By March 12<sup>th</sup>, I will have completed the literature review.
3. Conduct your research and take many notes.
  - Make sure to talk with your thesis advisor and/or committee about which kind(s) of literature/support you will be using in your thesis. Unless otherwise instructed, it is most likely that you will be using primary sources. Primary sources are works that are original and often a first-hand account of an event. For example, research studies and original historical documents (such as the Constitution) are primary sources. If a source provides an interpretation of the Constitution or of a scientist's research, it would be considered a secondary source. Secondary sources are not original or first-hand accounts.
  - Look at research guides and encyclopedias (both general and specialized) to get a basic understanding of the background of your topic. Encyclopedias often provide a list of subtopics that may be useful.
  - Make an appointment with the librarian who is the liaison for your discipline. They can give you helpful tips on navigating through the research databases, how to use key words or symbols to yield relevant results, and how to use RefWorks to keep a running bibliography. You can make an appointment through the library's homepage.
  - Consult the library's research guides, databases, and catalog.
  - Use a double-entry journal to keep track of your research. The research and citations will be on the left side, and your response will be on the right. You can use these responses to fill in your outline.
  - Make sure to keep a running list of search terms. You will need this for your methods section.
  - Be mindful of any gaps that exist in current literature. Your advisor may expect you to fill in those gaps.
  - For each source, you should summarize, analyze, synthesize (make connections), and evaluate for quality.
4. Brainstorm, make an outline, and get yourself organized.
  - Think about how you want to organize your work. Think of your working thesis statement and how your claim can be broken into different subcategories. The

literature that you have found should fit into different “pockets” of your main topic. For example, if you are writing your thesis on why college students drop out after their first year, you could probably have sections including alcohol and drug use in the first year, stress, homesickness, financial issues, etc.

- There may be overlaps in your literature. As long as it is not repetitive, literature that fits into more than one category can allow for effective transitions from one section to another.
  - Make an outline with what you have thus far. Write in complete sentences—this will save you time when you begin drafting. If it is in complete sentences, you can copy and paste parts of your outline into your paper. Then, you only need to elaborate on those points and include transitions.
5. Begin drafting.
    - Use your outline as a guide for your paper. Make sure to use appropriate evidence, and fill in any gaps that exist in your outline.
    - Take it one chapter at a time. Revisit the goals that you made for yourself. Make sure that you are on schedule.
    - Always back up your work in multiple places.
    - Check in regularly with your advisor and/or committee.
    - Always consider your audience when writing your thesis.
  6. Revise, revise, revise!
    - Revise your paper first for global issues like organization, flow, and transitions.
    - After you have completed the big picture, go back over your paper for sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation.
  7. Format your paper and add any final touches.
    - Make sure that your paper and references/works cited are in the correct formatting style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).
    - Make sure that page headers, section headers, and the title page are all formatted appropriately, as well.
    - Proofread for any more revisions that need to be made.

As a reminder, you can visit the Wilmer Writing Center at any point during this process! We suggest working with the same tutor throughout the process.

Tips were retrieved from:

Axelrod, R., & Cooper, C. (Eds.). (2015). *The Concise Guide to Writing*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Hamilton College. (2017). *Writing a term paper or senior thesis*. Retrieved from <https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/writing-a-term-paper-of-senior-thesis-history>

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. (2014). *Honors Theses*. The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill. Retrieved from <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/honors-theses/>