



Masters Thesis Defense Guidelines

Candidates for master's degrees at Kent State University may be required or may choose to write and defend a thesis. (Students should consult with their units to determine whether they are required to complete a thesis.)

The word thesis used here refers to a formal research investigation on an approved topic. A thesis requires an oral defense and a written paper evaluated by an academic committee convened for that purpose. Culminating projects that substitute for the thesis (non-thesis options) are not regulated by these policies.

The Thesis Committee

When the student has developed a thesis topic acceptable to the advisor, a thesis committee responsible for overseeing the progress of the candidate's thesis is appointed. The Graduate Coordinator in consultation with the student and the student's advisor appoints the members of the committee. This group will consist of at least three members:

1. The advisor, who chairs the committee.
2. At least two additional members from the candidate's department or school.
3. If appropriate, one or more committee members also may be selected from other departments or schools. However, the majority of the committee members must be from the student's home academic unit.

The advisor must be a member of the Graduate Faculty who has been approved to direct theses. The other members of the committee must have at least A-1 Graduate Faculty status. If a co-advisor is used, he or she counts as one of the required members from the student's department or school. (NOTE: only one of the committee members may be A-1 Graduate Faculty Status. All others must have at least A-2 Graduate Faculty Status.)

Special permission must be obtained from the College Dean for anyone on the thesis committee who does not meet the qualifications stated above.

The Graduate Coordinator, in consultation with the Graduate Studies Committee will, as necessary, review the composition of the proposed committee for appropriate balance, and the topic for strength and suitability.

Thesis Topic

All students preparing a thesis are required to file a **Notification of Approved Thesis Topic** form. When the topic has been approved by the advisor and the committee has been formed, the

advisor and all members of the committee, the Graduate Coordinator, and Department Chair or School Director sign the form and forward it to the College Graduate Affairs Office for approval by the Dean. The College office returns a copy of the completed form to the Department or School.

Although a detailed thesis prospectus is not required, a paragraph should be attached to the **Notification of Approved Thesis Topic** form that includes a clear statement of the problem to be undertaken and the procedure or methodology to be used in the research.

The Final Examination (Oral Defense)

When the advisor believes the thesis is ready for preliminary approval, the student will distribute it to the committee. The advisor will designate the time and place of the oral defense and notify all members of the thesis committee. The oral defense should be scheduled to allow a minimum of ten days for all members of the thesis committee to review the thesis.

In the absence of the advisor, the Graduate Coordinator will postpone the oral defense. In the case of long-term absence or enduring illness of the advisor, the Department Chair or School Director, in consultation with the Graduate Studies Committee and the original advisor, should make arrangements for a substitute.

The final oral defense will be open to the university community. The advisor should notify of the time and place of the oral defense to the Departmental or School Office so that it may be announced in a suitable way. The student should provide copies of the abstract of the thesis to the Departmental or School Office so that it will be available to interested individuals prior to the oral defense to familiarize members of the Graduate Faculty with the methodology and findings.

The thesis advisor will act as the moderator at the oral defense. His or her duties are to preside and see to it that all participants act in a civilized, polite, and proper manner. He or she should be familiar with the procedures of the oral defense and has the authority to suspend proceedings should a situation arise that would not be conducive to a fair examination.

The student will open the oral defense with a brief presentation of his or her findings, after which the members of the thesis committee will question the candidate in an order determined by the advisor. Questions dealing with the substance, meaning and usefulness of the research in the thesis are of greatest priority. Inquiries or comments dealing with punctuation, grammatical minutiae, spelling, etc., are out of order. Such comments should be written out and privately submitted to the student and the advisor.

When, in the judgment of the advisor, members of the thesis committee have had an adequate opportunity to question the student, the advisor may open the examination to non-committee members of the graduate faculty, then, as the advisor deems appropriate, to others present.

If, in the opinion of the advisor or upon a motion duly passed by a majority of the committee, it is deemed desirable to discontinue the oral defense, the advisor may recess the oral defense until a time mutually agreeable to the advisor, the student, and the thesis committee.

When the questioning has run its course, the advisor will excuse everyone except members of the thesis committee and, if in attendance, the Graduate Coordinator and School Director. Parliamentary procedure will be followed to determine the success or failure of the student, with the advisor serving as chair.

The student should be evaluated upon both:

- (a) the overall quality and significance of his or her thesis, and
- (b) the oral defense of his or her findings.

A student passes the oral defense and becomes a “candidate” for the degree if he or she passes with no more than one dissenting vote.

The advisor and members of the thesis committee will sign the **Report of Thesis Final Examination form**, and each registers his or her vote of “pass” or “fail.” Thesis committee members may not abstain in this vote. The Graduate Coordinator and Department Chair or School Director also signs the report and the document is forwarded to the College Graduate Affairs Office for the signature of the Dean. The College office returns a copy of the completed form to the Department or School.

Following any revisions required by the committee, the advisor and the Department Chair or School Director must approve the final version of the thesis document by signing the signature page of the Thesis and the Thesis Preparation Approval Form when the student submits the thesis.

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Approved by Graduate Studies Administrative Advisory Committee