

EL5010 • Senior Seminar II

Thesis—General Guide and Stages

Goals. The Thesis should be an interpretive and well-researched discussion of an important topic in Multicultural or World Literature. Your goal is first of all **interpretive**: you should focus on explaining the meaning of the work(s) you have chosen, through such techniques as *close reading* and *historical* and/or *biographical contextualization*. The Thesis should also be **well-researched**: your interpretation should show awareness of important critical conversations that have taken place about the chosen work(s).

The Thesis Director. You will do much of your work with the Thesis Director. The Director will guide you in planning, writing, and revising the Thesis. The Director will work with you in adapting or altering the procedures below, if necessary, to make your work (within overall Seminar guidelines) productive and effective. The Director will be the primary reader of the finished Thesis; I will be second reader (except for Theses I direct, for which I'll find a second reader). My role in the Seminar will be to provide overall guidance and to lead classwork such as the progress reports, work on research and documentation, and problem-solving.

Stages. Before the Seminar starts, you should have **reread** and annotated the work(s) you'll discuss and should be thoroughly familiar with it/them. You should also have a tentative bibliography (as part of the Thesis proposal) of **ten** or more critical/historical sources **in addition to** the primary work(s). While you and your Director may vary these procedures, the stages below are recommended for most Theses (page specifications are approximate; longer is OK):

➤ **Stage A. Summary of Relevant Critical Views. Usually Week 3. 4–5 pages.** The point of referring to criticism in a Thesis is not to introduce some quotes that mirror your views, nor to offer long summaries and quotation from critics whose ideas impress you. Rather, it is to be aware of and discuss the range of critical views about your topic as you form and discuss your interpretations. To facilitate this familiarity, your first assignment is to produce a summary of relevant critical sources—basically a “book report.” If possible, sort your sources into 2–3 groups that each take a similar approach. Give an accurate, *brief* idea of what each source says. For many sources, 1–2 sentences will be enough; for important ones, several sentences or a short paragraph. Don't argue for or against the sources' views—that comes later. Most critical sources will have their own versions of this summary; we'll look at some examples to help you with this stage of your work. The Summary will help you to:

- clarify your own interpretive thesis
- shape a possible overview of critical views as part of Installment 1
- decide which sources to mention briefly and which need more detailed discussion

OVER

A *Works Cited* list of all sources mentioned, in MLA format, is required to receive credit.

➤ **Stage B. Installment 1. Week 6. About 7 pages.** State the Subject, your interpretive thesis, and the Significance; provide a summary of critical views; begin supporting your interpretation with detailed text discussion. You have done some of this work already: The Subject, a tentative interpretive thesis, and the Significance were parts of the Thesis Proposal, and the summary of critical views can be adapted from that assignment. Revise and combine these into an effective multipage 1st section and begin presenting detailed support for your interpretation. A *Works Cited* list containing the primary work(s) and all other sources discussed so far is required to receive credit.

➤ **Stage C. Installment 2. Week 9. Revision of Installment 1 + about 7 more pages.** Continue the detailed support for your interpretation. At this stage, while keeping the focus on your interpretation, include consideration of **2 or more** critical sources that are relevant enough to your detailed argument to be worth specific discussion. They may contain ideas you support, criticize, or simply find helpful to your discussion. *Works Cited* is required to receive credit. **Note:** While the Thesis requires discussing 10 research sources, some may be dealt with in the summary of critical views and may not require extensive discussion.

➤ **Stage D. Installment 3—complete draft. Week 12. Revision of Installments 1–2 + about 7 additional pages.** Finish the detailed support for your interpretation, including consideration of perhaps **2 more** critical sources relevant to the detailed discussion; sum up and conclude the Thesis as a whole. *Works Cited* is required to receive credit.

Note: If you complete stages A–D on time, you will now have a complete draft and you'll be able to revise and complete the Thesis on time. If you fall behind, you'll inevitably not complete the Thesis by the due date. *Don't fool yourself into thinking you can do a large amount of work in a rush at the end. You can't.*

➤ **Stage E. The finished Thesis. Week 15. Revision of Installments 1–3. About 20+ pages.** Full presentation of your interpretive thesis, support, discussion of relevant criticism, and *Works Cited*.

➤ **Stage F. Presentations of the Theses to the Seminar. Weeks 12–16.** Guidelines later.



NOTE: Weeks when assignments are due will vary from semester to semester.