

SAMPLE APPROVAL PAGE

(↓Title in ALL CAPS, center of page, 3 inches from top↑)

A COMPARISON OF GIRL GANGS
AND BOY GANGS IN
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

(↓ One double space↑)

BY

(↓ One double space↑)

JANE DOE

(↓Triple double space↑)

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Joe Dokes, Department of Sociology, and it has been approved by the members of the candidate's thesis committee. It was submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

(↓Double-double space↑)

Joe Dokes, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor

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Sue Seconddreader, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor

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Theo Thirdreader, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor

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Charlene Chair, Ph.D.
Department Chairperson

Sandra C. Holley, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Date(↓ Two inches from bottom↑)

Thesis Handbook

Department of Sociology



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Write a Thesis?	3
When To Start Your Thesis	4
Your Research Question	5
Quantitative Analysis	7
Qualitative Analysis	9
Applying Theory to Your Topic	11
Selecting an Advisor and Committee	13
Literature Review	14
Preparing the Thesis Proposal	17
Getting Your Proposal Approved	20
Collecting and Analyzing Data	21
Writing Your Thesis	22
Defending Your Thesis	23
Correcting Your Thesis	24
Planning Your Graduation	25
General Guidelines	26
Helpful Links	34
Sample Title Page	35
Sample Approval Page	36

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

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(↓Double-double space↑)

BY

(↓Double-double space↑)

JANE DOE

(↓One double- space only↑)

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

(↓Double-double space↑)

Southern Connecticut State University
New Haven, Connecticut
May 2006

(↓5 inches from bottom↑)

HELPFUL LINKS

The following web links might help you in the production of your proposal and thesis. First, once again here are the SCSU links you will need to go to:

Thesis Proposal and Thesis Guidelines:

<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/tpg.php3>
<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/rtg.php3>

Institutional Review Board (IRB):

<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/rsirb.php3>

And again, the ASA Style Guide can be found at:

<http://www.asanet.org/apap/quickstyle.html>
<http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>

Here are some links with additional information about literature reviews:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/litrev.html>
<http://library.ucsc.edu/ref/howto/literaturereview.html>

To learn more about hypothesis testing:

http://www.cas.lancs.ac.uk/glossary_v1.1/hyptest.html
http://davidmlane.com/hyperstat/logic_hypothesis.html

For tips on English grammar, try:

<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/>
<http://englishplus.com/grammar/>

And for a general glossary of sociological terms:

<http://campus.murraystate.edu/academic/faculty/frank.elwell/prob3/glossary/socgloss.htm>

WHY WRITE A THESIS?

As you know, there are three options available for your exit requirement toward a Master of Science degree in sociology: a comprehensive exam, a special project, and a thesis. There are various advantages associated with all three options, depending upon your goals and needs.

Generally, the comprehensive exam is for students already settled into a career path. Such students are likely to be seeking advancement in their place of employment through obtainment of a Master's degree. The special project involves a direct, hands-on experience that students pursue in order to pursue an extremely specific goal. For example, perhaps a student designs a web site for an organization, or edits a newsletter.

The thesis option is likely to be the best choice if one or more of the following applies to you:

°It is possible that you will want to pursue a Ph.D. at some point in the future.

°You have a genuine intellectual curiosity to study a particular social trend or phenomenon in depth.

°You wish to pursue a new career path, and so want to present yourself in the most favorable way.

If indeed you meet one or more of these conditions, you will probably find writing a thesis to be the most rewarding of the three exit requirements.

WHEN TO START YOUR THESIS

Hopefully, your core courses in methods and theory are training you to think about a thesis topic, and the steps that might be involved. Other courses might also be giving you training and ideas toward the construction of a thesis.

The bulk of your coursework should be completed by the time you start working on your thesis. You do not want a situation in which, after writing a thesis proposal, you take a class that changes your mind as to what you want to do. Still, it technically is permissible to still need another class or two when you start drafting your thesis proposal.

The writing of your thesis proposal will require you to enroll in SOC 590. You will need permission from the Department Chair in order to do this; and for this permission to be given, you will need to have your Thesis Committee in place. Then, when your proposal is accepted, you will be given permission to enroll in SOC 591, during which time you will write the actual thesis.

How you get to these various stages—how you put together your committee or write your proposal and thesis—will be explained in subsequent pages. But remember to think in terms of enrolling in SOC 590, and then SOC 591, toward the end of your career as a Master's candidate.

SUBMITTING THE FINAL COPY:

1. The student must submit for the approval of the Graduate Dean one error-free, unbound, original copy of the thesis on high quality, white bond paper, in a box or an expanding letter-size fiber envelope.
2. The paper stock must be 8.5"x11," 25% rag content, unpunched, white bond paper of at least 20-pound weight. The same brand of paper must be used throughout the thesis manuscript and for the preliminary pages. Erasable paper is unacceptable. **To save money, hold off on getting the thesis printed on this paper stock until you have made all corrections for both your thesis committee and the readers from the Graduate School.**
3. Signatures on the final approval page must be in **black ink**.
4. Students are required to have their Master's thesis microfilmed by Bell & Howell Information and Learning master's thesis publishing service. On top of the thesis, the student should place a certified check or money order payable to Bell & Howell and the completed B&H form. The student should contact the SCSU School of Graduate Studies Office to ascertain the Bell & Howell publishing fees.
5. If the student wishes to copyright the thesis, Bell & Howell will act as the student's agent with the Library of Congress Copyright Office. This service is described in the document, *Publishing Your Master's Thesis: How to Prepare Your Manuscript for Publication*, available from the School of Graduate Studies. The fee for the copyright service is provided in this document and may be obtained from the School of Graduate Studies Office.

APPEARANCE:

1. Fonts

Twelve-point Times Roman, Arial, Helvetica, or Century Gothic are the acceptable font styles. The type must be black and uniform in size, face, and color throughout the manuscript. Boldface typing should not be used. Where underlining indicates italics, either underlining or italics may be used as long as the choice is consistent. The student may not change fonts within the document.

2. Line Spacing and Indentation

The thesis manuscript must be double-spaced. This includes the use of four spaces between paragraphs. Footnotes, bibliographic entries, long quoted passages, items in lists and tables, and captions of figures and tables may be single-spaced. If individual footnote or bibliographic entries are single-spaced, there must be double-spacing between entries. Students are required to use a recognized academic style format appropriate to the student's academic discipline and to be consistent in the application of the style format. Paragraph indentations must be uniform throughout the thesis.

3. Margins

The left, right, top and bottom margins must be one inch. All images must fit within these margins, including the page numbers. These margin specifications apply to all text, figures, charts, illustrations, graphs, and appendices. Any pages submitted with less than the minimum margins will be returned.

4. Reproduction Quality

The thesis document must be clean and free of spots or smudges. Faint, streaked, or uneven copies will be returned to the student through the student's major advisor. Computer printouts or other documents with small and indistinct print may be illegible in microform and should be avoided.

YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION

The first important step in composing a thesis is formulating a research question: What is it that you want to know? Your core methods and theory courses, other classes you have taken, and your own natural interest in the social world have probably gotten you thinking about a fundamental research question that you seek to answer.

Sociology is, of course, a social science. And as scientists, we do not assume we already have all the answers. Rather, we are trained in how to ask questions in the best possible way. In determining your research question, it is useful to pursue existing sociological literature on the topic of your choice. You can find out if anyone else has posed a similar question, and how other author(s) answered it. If someone else has in fact posed a similar question, make sure yours is at least slightly different. For example, if someone has already studied the attitudes of male adult sex offenders on parole, perhaps you can find out about *female* sex offenders, or juvenile offenders, or people currently incarcerated. Another option is to see if your own study will uphold the findings that another author uncovered.

If no one else seems to have asked a similar research question, you can consider yourself a pioneer. This might well help your work get serious attention. But at the same time, it also means that there is less of a sociological foundation to build from. Clearly, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with virtually any research question.

Your research question should be as specific as possible. You have probably already noticed that scholarly readings are usually not called, “People and Drugs,” but rather will be called something like: “Crack Cocaine Usage Among Suburban High School Students.” Sometimes students have a difficult time narrowing down their topic, because they think “everything” is interesting. Nonetheless, this type of specificity must be achieved. Similarly, some students change their minds repeatedly, unable to stick to one idea for long. Past a certain point, you simply have to pick a topic and go with it, bearing in mind that in the future you can always do other studies on other topics.

Likewise, you must avoid multiple topics. For example, “Crack Cocaine Usage Among Suburban High School Students and How the Court System Treats Them when Compared with Inner City Youth,” suggests two different topics.

Your research question might add to a topic that has already been explored sociologically at length. For example, quite a few studies have been done on street gangs, and maybe you want to study some additional dimension of this phenomenon. But you also might pursue an exploratory thesis. Exploratory research looks at a phenomenon that is either relatively new, or for some reason has heretofore been ignored. Exploratory studies often prove useful to applied settings such as agencies or social activist networks. They also can attract attention in the academic world for their novelty.

Once your research question is formulated, you need to decide what type of method to use to answer it.

7. Reproduced Published Materials

Photocopy reproduction of published material must be legible and conform to the pagination and margin requirements.

8. Widows and Orphans

“Widows” and “orphans” are terms that refer to isolated single lines of paragraphs that appear at the bottom or top of a page. These should be avoided. There should be at least two lines of a paragraph at the top or bottom of each page of the text of the manuscript.

9. Appendix or Appendices

The appendix (or a series of appendices) immediately follows the main text. The appendix includes material that may be helpful to the reader of the thesis but may be too long for inclusion in the text or footnotes. The title, APPENDIX, appears only on the first page of the section, in capital letters centered two inches from the top. Examples of such material include questionnaires, letters, original data, sample forms, and vitae. Reference should be made in the text to the inclusion of these materials in the Appendix. Each appendix is a separate subdivision of the text and must begin on a separate page. Each appendix must be listed in the Table of Contents.

10. Bibliography or References

The bibliography lists all sources cited in the text either by direct quotation or by reference. The title, BIBLIOGRAPHY or REFERENCES, appears only on the first page of the section, in capital letters centered two inches from the top. The listing begins four single-spaced lines below. The bibliography or list of references is normally the last item in the thesis following the appendix. There are several formats for bibliographic entries depending on the discipline and the format style of the discipline. You must use the ASA style guide in formatting your references.

4. Illustrations

Each illustration must be referred to in the text and it must be placed after, and as near as possible to, the first reference to it in the text. All illustrative materials in the thesis must be prepared on paper that is the same weight (or stronger) and use the same font type as elsewhere in the manuscript. If illustrations are mounted, dry mounting must be used. Illustrations may not be mounted with rubber cement, staples, mucilage, or photo-mounting corners. Illustrative material must be drawn or computer-generated in black. Material may be laser-printed or drawn in waterproof, permanent ink. Color will reproduce in microfilm as shades of grey. Color should be used only if it is essential to the thesis.

5. Photographs

It is recommended that the student use a high quality, high contrast copying machine to reproduce photographic material for submission in lieu of photographs. If original photographs are used, they should be printed on single-weight, fiber-based paper with a matte finish. All prints must be processed for nationally established standards for chemical permanence. Black-and-white prints are preferable. Photograph page number placement follows the standard pagination requirements.

6. Oversized Materials

Oversized materials should be reduced to 6"x9" when legibility can be maintained. When reduction is not appropriate, oversized materials may be presented in two ways. A horizontal figure too wide to fit on the manuscript page may be mounted on another sheet of paper at the left-hand margin, and folded like a fan. The folds must be contained within the right-hand margin. A figure too long and too wide may be folded and inserted into a 6.5"x9" envelope that is mounted on another sheet of paper.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The nature of your research question should guide you in how to proceed methodologically. You should pursue **quantitative** data if your research question suggests one or more of the following:

°You want to uncover general trends from a fairly large population (as a general rule, fifty or more people).

°You want to find out if one condition is significantly related to another. (For example, does education level affect people's attitudes toward welfare?)

°Your question suggests yes/no answers, or other kinds of discrete, straightforward categories. (For example, "Yes, I believe in God, and I am a registered democrat.")

Quantitative analysis can be applied to many kinds of data, including:

°A survey (or questionnaire) that you compose yourself.

°A pre-existing data set, such as the General Social Survey (GSS), the U. S. Census, or numerous criminal justice data sets that are available.

°Archival records that you input yourself. (For example, the marriage records of New Haven over a ten year period).

°Statistical content analysis, such as looking for patterns of wording in old magazine articles or textbooks.

Sometimes, students assume that quantitative data is more “difficult” because it involves statistics. This is not necessarily true. Programs such as SPSS perform the statistics for you; in some instances, online analysis can be directly performed on pre-existing data sets. Also, the kind of research question involved in quantitative data is often quite straightforward; either education affects attitudes toward welfare (for example), or it does not. And if your research question lends itself to a pre-existing data set, your data has already been collected for you.

Quantitative analysis involves the formulation of a **deductive** research question. This means that you are imposing a hypothesis (or educated guess) upon the data. In other words, rather than simply say: “I wonder if education impacts people’s attitudes on welfare,” you would hypothesize that education will (or will not) be significantly related to attitudes on welfare. Then, you would perform your statistical analysis to test this hypothesis.

FORMATTING:

1. Headings and Subheadings

The student may use headings and subheadings to subdivide chapters or sections, but a consistent sequence of headings as identified in the style guide selected must be followed. The student may not change the sequence and style of headings from chapter to chapter. Once the sequence is chosen, it must be followed consistently throughout the thesis. All chapter headings are positioned two inches from the top of the page.

2. Pagination

Lower-case Roman numerals are used to number all pages preceding the text. Although the preliminary paging begins with the title page, no number appears on that page. The page immediately following the title page is numbered with a lower-case Roman numeral. Beginning with the first page of the text, all pages are to be numbered with Arabic numerals consecutively throughout the thesis document, including the appendix and the bibliography or list of references. The Arabic numerals must be positioned at the bottom of the page, centered between the margins. Page headers or running heads may not be used in the thesis.

3. Tables and Figures

The term “table” refers to a columnar arrangement of information, often data sets, organized to save space and convey relationships at a glance. The term “figure” refers to graphs, drawings, diagrams, charts, maps, or photographs. All such details should be inserted in the text near where they are first mentioned. A table or figure may appear on the same page as the text that refers to it on a separate page. Each figure or table must be numbered and have a caption. Captions are placed below figures and pictures and above tables. Captions may be single-or double-spaced.

8. Table of Contents

The Table of Contents must include all chapter headings, the bibliography, and appendices. Preliminary pages are not included. Entries are double-spaced. Sub-headings are block-indented by half an inch. The headings of major sections (i.e., chapters, bibliography, appendices) are written in all capital letters. Table of Contents headings must be identical to those in the text. Page numbers listed must be right-justified and connected to the appropriate entry by a line of evenly spaced dot leaders (periods). The words TABLE OF CONTENTS must be centered on the page two inches from the top of the first page only.

9. List of Tables (if tables appear in document)

The heading, LIST OF TABLES, appears centered on the page two inches from the top of the first page only. All table numbers and captions are listed exactly as they appear in the text.

10. List of Figures (if figures appear in document)

The heading, LIST OF FIGURES, appears centered on the page two inches from the top of the first page only. All figure numbers and captions are listed exactly as they appear in the text.

11. Other Lists (e.g., nomenclature, definitions, glossary of terms, etc.)

The appropriate title in all capital letters is centered two inches from the top of the first page only.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis should be employed if your research question suggests one or more of the following:

°You want to explore the in-depth behavioral patterns of a specific group of people in their everyday setting.

°You want to talk in-depth to a relatively small group of people to see if there are patterns in form or content regarding their beliefs or life histories.

°Your research question suggests complex categories or patterns that could not be contained in yes/no, straightforward survey categories. (For example, “Here are some of the ways in which pro-choice Catholics explain their complex beliefs.”)

Qualitative analysis can be applied to many kinds of data, including:

°A field study, in which you observe and/or participate in the activities of a group or organization.

°Unstructured, in-depth interviews, usually audio- or visually recorded.

°A qualitative content analysis, in which you look for complex patterns in print or visual media.

°A combination of these data, such as performing both a field study and in-depth interviews.

Historically, students have sometimes gone the qualitative route—and then proceeded to perform interviews and report findings that suggest they actually should have worked quantitatively. They report numerical totals within straightforward categories, and leave out the kinds of in-depth responses that are at the heart of working qualitatively. To correctly report and analyze qualitative interviews, you must transcribe what you have recorded and listen to it or observe it many times to determine any underlying patterns that might be there. You will want to feature lengthy and colorful quotes in the actual thesis, to demonstrate the nuanced kinds of patterns you are describing.

If quantitative studies are deductive, then qualitative studies are **inductive**. This means that there is no hypothesis. Instead, your research question is much more general. For example: “I wonder why some Catholics are pro-choice.” You then construct an explanation incrementally, adding as you go along.

It is also possible to create a study that is both quantitative and qualitative. This is called a **triangulated** approach. There should be a genuine justification for doing this type of study, given your research question. Mixed-method studies can be quite a lot of work, and should not be undertaken simply to “show off.” But if you feel it is important to find out both large-scale statistical trends and also do in-depth interviews, this might be the best approach to take.

4. Abstract

The abstract should provide a succinct, descriptive account of the thesis. The abstract should not exceed 150 words, should be double-spaced, and should adhere to the same style manual as the thesis manuscript. The abstract should include pertinent place names, names of persons, and other proper nouns. These are useful in automated retrieval. A lower-case Roman numeral is used on the abstract page.

5. Dedication (optional)

The dedication is brief, single-spaced, and centered on the page (horizontally and vertically). No heading is used. The word “To” customarily begins the dedication.

6. Epigraph or Frontispiece (optional)

The epigraph is centered on its own page (horizontally and vertically). The text is single-spaced. No heading is used. The frontispiece or illustration is centered on the page (horizontally and vertically). It may be accompanied by a title, which is centered and positioned below the illustration.

7. Acknowledgement/Preface/Support (optional)

This section begins with the title ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS centered in all capital letters two inches from the top of the page. The text begins on the fourth line below the heading and is double-spaced. This page is used to thank those persons who have been instrumental to the student in completing the degree requirements. Acknowledgement of grants and special funding received to support the thesis research also may be made on this page.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Here are some of the main points to keep in mind as to the formatting of your thesis. Refer as well to the thesis guidelines from the School of Graduate Studies.

ORDER OF PRELIMINARY PAGES:

1. Title Page

The thesis title should be concise. It must occur consistently in every respect, including punctuation, capitalization, and hyphenation, on the abstract and approval forms. On the title page, the identical title must appear in all capital letters with each line centered on the page. The degree date should be the month in which the degree is conferred, e.g., May, August, or January. The title page is not numbered, but it is counted.

2. Copyright Notice (optional)

Copyrighting of the thesis is optional. If included, the copyright page follows the title page and is not numbered. The copyright symbol © should appear with your full legal name and the year centered between the margins on the page, e.g.,

© Copyright by David Akai Carter 2000

If opting to copyright, the student must indicate this choice on the Bell & Howell contract and submit the copyright fee.

3. Approval Page

The approval page contains the title of the thesis and the signatures of the thesis advisor, committee member(s), department chairperson, and Graduate Dean. The name of each signing committee member should be typed under the appropriate signature. Signatures should be in black ink. The student must ensure that the form of the student's name is consistent on the manuscript title page, abstract page, and approval page. A lower-case Roman numeral is used on the approval page.

APPLYING THEORY TO YOUR TOPIC

Sociological theory is used to inform a study in numerous ways. In quantitative studies, an existing theory or terminology is often used to generate an hypothesis. For example: “Based on Durkheim’s concept of anomie, I hypothesize that youthful offenders will have less self-direction than non-offending youth.” Theory can also guide the construction of your questions, if you create an original survey. In qualitative research, an existing theory or idea might help to shape or guide what you observe, or how you observe it. For example, perhaps you decide to perform a dramaturgical or ethnomethodological analysis. And in any kind of study, theory is often used to explain the findings or results.

“Theory” can of course mean many things. Besides the range of theories you are exposed to in a theory class(s), sub-areas such as criminology, race/ethnicity or gender might have even more theories or key terminologies that potentially could be applied to a study. Whatever theory or theorist you use will provide a certain lens through which you will observe some things more than others. For example, structural functionalism enables the researcher to observe what is being studied as a working whole, and how the various components of it contribute to this whole. Contrarily, if you use Weber’s theory of bureaucracy, you would focus more on how the phenomenon in question signals rules and red tape. Marx would lean you toward focusing on the social conflicts and inequalities that are present.

As with research methods, the theory(s) you employ should suggest the best possible fit. If you want to study rules and red tape, you would pick Weber, and not Durkheim or Marx.

Also, some theories might be better suited to certain kinds of methods. New and creative kinds of connections between theory and data are made all the time, so it is difficult to say there are any unshakeable rules here. Still, it might be useful to consider that more macro theories are better suited to large-scale data, such as that found in survey analysis. Small-scale, micro theories are likewise more often applied to field studies, or other qualitative approaches. But again, there can be exceptions. Sometimes, too, different theories are combined. Not surprisingly, once again, it all relates back to your research question.

Of course, you need not decide all of this in isolation. As a basic idea starts to take shape in your mind as to what you want to find out and how you might go about doing it, you will also want to select a Thesis Advisor, as well as the other members of your Committee.

PLANNING YOUR GRADUATION

As a thesis student, it is up to you to plan ahead as to when you will be graduating. Theoretically, it is possible to draft an approved proposal in one semester, and write an approved thesis in the next one. And sometimes students have accomplished this. But often a proposal and/or thesis requires two or more semesters. Virtually no one drafts a proposal or thesis that is letter-perfect the first time around. It is normal to expect rewrites from your committee members. Your data gathering or analysis might result in unexpected delays. Moreover, the School of Graduate Studies will send your proposal and/or thesis back for corrections if all its guidelines have not been followed.

It is important to be realistic in planning your graduation. For example, if you are starting a Ph.D. program or a new job pending attainment of your M. S. degree, you will want to inform the appropriate parties as to when you realistically will be finished.

You must personally apply to the Graduate School for your Master of Science degree. You should check in with the Graduate Coordinator, to make certain that all of your requirements have been met. If you apply for graduation too far in advance of when your thesis realistically will be accepted, you might have to re-apply, in the event that your first application expires.

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact the Graduate Coordinator.

CORRECTING YOUR THESIS

When you turn in your thesis to the Graduate School, be sure to ask for a receipt. It also is recommended that you e-mail your Advisor stating that you dropped it off at a certain date and time, to further ensure that there is a record of your having done so.

The Graduate School will have your thesis read by two anonymous faculty readers. They will each write down their comments, noting what corrections need to be made. These comments will be sent back to your Advisor, who will then arrange to send this information to you, as well as discuss the input from the readers. You should make all the required corrections before resubmitting the thesis. For example, if you were asked to make six changes and you only made five of them, the thesis will be returned to you for further corrections. It also might be a good idea to include a cover letter, written in concert with your Thesis Advisor, noting the changes you have made, to eliminate any ambiguities.

Once no more corrections are needed, you can print off the final, linen bond copy of your thesis, as per the Graduate School thesis guidelines. At this time, you will need to produce a second and final approval sheet (in **black ink**). This verifies that the other readers are aware of the changes that were asked for, and confirm that you have made them.

Your grade for SOC 591 is not to be given until the Graduate School has stated that the thesis is ready.

SELECTING AN ADVISOR AND COMMITTEE

You do not have to be one hundred percent certain as to your topic, method, or theoretical approach before selecting a Thesis Advisor. In fact, your Advisor might steer you in certain directions here as part of his or her job. Nonetheless, it is good to have some idea of what you want to do before selecting an advisor. Perhaps there is a faculty member who specializes in your general area of interest, or who specializes in the type of research method that interests you. The Graduate Coordinator can help the student select an advisor, and should at some point be notified as to the composition of your committee.

As the student, you yourself ask the faculty member to be your thesis advisor. Similarly, you ask two other full-time faculty members to be your additional thesis readers. One of these readers can be from outside of the sociology program. All three readers must be members of the graduate faculty—and, of course, should also suggest compatibility with the topic you have selected.

You will work more closely with your Advisor than with the other members of your Committee. Nonetheless, input from the other readers also should be followed. It is good to communicate with all three readers from the outset, so that your eventual thesis will be greeted favorably.

You are now ready to begin your proposal—starting with your literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As you begin your proposal, you should become familiar with the sociological scholarship that pertains to your topic. The purpose of so doing is two-fold: first, you must demonstrate that you are an expert on your general topic; and second, you must demonstrate that no one else has quite written about the same thing.

The scholarship in your review can include books, chapters from anthologies, and scholarly journals. Whatever the type of reading, it should be scholarly in nature. Among other things, this means that it was peer reviewed—that other scholars in the field read the book, chapter, or article and found it worthy of publication.

If it is a book or anthology, a good way to tell if it is scholarly is if a university press publishes it. There are other leading scholarly presses as well. If in doubt, you can consult a librarian or your thesis advisor. **You should avoid using textbooks as references in your thesis.**

The bulk of your literature review—if not all of it—should come from scholarly journal articles, as they tend to be the most up-to-date sources. Through Buley Library's online databases, you can access scholarly journal articles through the "Sociological Abstracts" database. This will give you an abstract, or summary, of a given article. You might also try the "Social Science Citation Index." However, be mindful that while there often is overlap between different social sciences, the focus is not always especially sociological.

DEFENDING YOUR THESIS

Through your Thesis Advisor, a final defense of your thesis will be announced within the department. It must be at a date and time in which your entire committee can attend. Other faculty and students might also be there, and you furthermore can invite family and friends.

For an hour, you will present your study. While PowerPoint is not absolutely required, it will probably make for a more cogent presentation. You should basically follow the same format you have used all along: What you were interested in finding out, how you went about trying to find it out, and what you actually did find out.

Then, for another hour, the audience will ask questions—starting with your adviser and the other members of the committee. When this second hour concludes, your committee will briefly meet to confirm that your thesis is ready to be signed off on. It is not uncommon for the committee to decide that it will sign off on the thesis with the expectation that more minor revisions will be made.

Once you have this preliminary signature sheet (and the thesis seems otherwise complete by university standards), you will turn your thesis in to the Graduate School. However, your work is not quite finished . . .

WRITING YOUR THESIS

Once you have analyzed your data, you will report your findings in the form of a thesis. Just as was the case with your proposal, the Graduate School has guidelines that must be followed. You will again want to make certain that your thesis is correctly formatted per these guidelines. And still again, you might want to hire a proofreader to make certain that these guidelines (as well as rules of grammar and style) are met. For more information go to:

<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/rtg.php3>

The format of the thesis is quite similar to that of your proposal. You will once again introduce your research question and theoretical orientation in your **introduction**, which will be followed by your **literature review**. Then within your **methods** section you will describe your actual data collection, and how you analyzed it. This is followed by the **results**—what you actually found upon analysis of the data. (If you are working qualitatively, you would probably have one or more sections here that reflect the patterns or categories that emerged from your analysis.) You will once again end with a **discussion** or **conclusion**. Still yet again, your **reference** section must be correctly formatted and complete.

You should be getting input from your Advisor as you draft your thesis, and also feel free to consult with the other readers. Once there is a general sense amongst your readers that the thesis is ready, you will arrange to give a final defense.

Through either of these data bases, you can find out if SCSU carries the journal (in which case you can acquire it from the stacks), or if you need to order the article through Interlibrary Loan. Still another source available through Buley's online databases is the "Academic Search Premier," which covers a wide range of disciplines and topics. Through this source, you can acquire full online journal articles (though not all journals are available online). Check off the box for "Full Text," as well as the box for "Peer Reviewed." Otherwise, the search can bring up articles from non-scholarly newspapers and magazines.

Hopefully, as you start reading your articles, you will find that they fall into certain patterns around your issue. Potential categories for sorting out the articles can include but are not limited to:

- °Different theoretical orientations
- °Different research methods, data collection, or sampling
- °Different specific focus or research question
- °Different conclusions

Ideally, you should find yourself forming, say, two to five general categories of readings. When it comes time to write up your literature review, instead of just saying in an unfocused way, "Smith said this, and Jones said that," you can instead say something like: "In pursuing recent literature on my topic, I found that it fell into three general categories."

Some topics have been the source for hundreds, if not thousands, of studies. Usually, the most recent scholarship on a topic utilizes older studies, so when in doubt look at the newest scholarship first. A good general practice here is that unless the study is a true classic in the field, articles less than ten years old are preferable.

If your research is exploratory, it will be under-researched to date. One of the challenges of an exploratory study is finding existing literature on a topic of which little if anything has been done to date. In such instances, see what literature there is that comes closest to being relevant for your topic.

Your literature review will not only be part of your proposal, but will also be part of your thesis. And if you later write any articles based on your findings for presentation at scholarly conferences or submissions to scholarly journals, you will once again draw on these same references. Thus, in conducting your literature review for your proposal, you are also laying the groundwork for future endeavors.

Once you have a sense of the existing literature on your topic, you are ready to start drafting your proposal.

COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

Once your proposal is approved, you will need to enroll in SOC 591, and gather your data. How you accomplish this should be consistent with what you outlined in your proposal. Some minor variations might emerge out of necessity, but if such is the case you will be expected to explain and justify why you made these changes.

The collection of data is an extremely important aspect of the research act. Hopefully, you selected a strategy that is extremely appropriate given what you are trying to find out, and also can be reasonably accomplished, given the time frame you want to work within.

If you have been given instructions by the IRB, these must be followed absolutely. If a potential interviewee decides not to participate, you must respect his or her wishes.

Once your data has been gathered, you now must analyze it—again, in manner as consistent as possible with what you outlined in your proposal. If you are working quantitatively, your main purpose is to see if your hypothesis can be rejected, performing as rigorous a statistical analysis as possible. When working qualitatively, your analysis will be somewhat more fluid, constructing as you go along. Ultimately, though, general patterns or categories should emerge from your data.

When you have collected and analyzed your data, you are ready to compose your thesis.

GETTING YOUR PROPOSAL APPROVED

Once your proposal is drafted, a meeting is held with the student, the thesis advisor, and the required readers. Based on this meeting, the student makes further refinements to the proposal before turning it in for signatures of approval. **The student's advisor, the department chair, and the Dean of Graduate Studies must approve the proposal.**

If you are going to be interviewing or observing live human subjects, you must consult the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain permission to do so. This permission will, in fact, be required before the Graduate School can approve your proposal. Go to the following link for more information:

<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/rsirb.php3>

It might be a good idea to have your proposal professionally proofread, checking not only for grammar and style but also to make certain that the Graduate School guidelines have been followed to the letter. A proofreader can also ensure (for example) that all of the sources listed in your main body are also contained in the reference section.

If there are any inconsistencies in your proposal, it will be returned to you for corrections before it can be given final approval. **Only when the Graduate School has approved your proposal can you begin SOC 591**, at which time you will gather your data and write your thesis.

PREPARING THE THESIS PROPOSAL

First, you should obtain a copy of the School of Graduate Study's requirements and guidelines for thesis proposals. You can obtain a copy of these from the Graduate Office in Engleman B018. This information is also available online at:

<http://www.southernct.edu/departments/graduatestudies/tpg.php3>

It is important that you follow the Graduate School guidelines to obtain final approval of your proposal.

There is no absolute rule as to the length of a thesis proposal. Probably, it will need to be at least ten pages long; if it is more than twenty pages, you are probably going into more detail than is needed. Whatever the exact length, there is a format that the proposal should follow.

You begin with the **introduction**. This is a usually one or two page long. It consists of a thorough yet concise posing of your research question. In so doing, you can include the theoretical orientation that will be framing your analysis. Your introduction should conclude with a brief listing of all the subsequent sections, so that the reader knows what to expect. ("In this proposal, I will first review current sociological literature that is relevant to my topic, Next, I will . . .")

Following the introduction is your **literature review**. A good rule to follow is to allow yourself no more than one paragraph per article that you are reviewing.

In fact, if there are a great many articles to be discussed, perhaps you can mention more than one in the same paragraph, if multiple studies are similar in nature. This is where classifying the various readings pertaining to your topic will be of great use. It will help you to present the literature review in a concise and organized manner. Remember that the purpose here is not to go into every small detail of a given reading, but to briefly summarize what was studied and what was concluded. The main point to communicate is how each and every study you mention differs from the one you are proposing.

In general, good scholarly writing avoids redundancy, but in a literature review it sometimes cannot be helped. You may find yourself having to come up with several different ways of saying: “Unlike the study I am proposing, this one was quantitative, and studied only males,” or whatever the distinction in question is.

Following your literature review, there is your **methodology**—how you propose to study what it is you want to study. You will state what your data set will consist of, how you will acquire it, and how you will analyze it. (It is possible that your theoretical orientation will be expanded upon in this section.) It sounds simple, but this is possibly the most important section of your proposal—it is your justification for why you are going to try to answer your research question in the manner you have selected. The reader should agree with what you have outlined; he or she should not think that you should really do the study quantitatively instead of qualitatively (for example) or that you are picking the wrong size or type of sample.

In quantitative proposals, you would state your hypothesis, and the independent and dependent variables you will develop to test it. Describing your methodology in a qualitative study can be a bit more tricky: You do in fact need to give a reasonable indication of what you propose to do. Yet since you are working inductively, you do not yet know precisely what your specific data will be. Good communication with your Thesis Advisor, and the studying of other qualitative studies, should help to guide you.

Your final section of the proposal will be the **discussion** or **conclusion**. Here, you will briefly recap all you have discussed thus far. You will then note limitations of your research. No one study explains “everything,” and you will want to keep doubters at bay by stating in advance what your research will not accomplish. For example: “My sample will be limited to the New Haven area, and as a qualitative study it cannot be generalized to the population at large, etc.” Next, you will discuss how your project will contribute to future research: “Future studies will be able to build upon my findings in the following ways.”

To keep the reader focused, it is always a good idea to remind the reader at the end of each section what is coming next. For example: “Having outlined some of the key sociological literature relevant to my topic, I will now discuss how I plan to pursue my topic methodologically.”

Your **references** should follow the Style Guide of the American Sociological Association (ASA). There are numerous online links to this Guide, including:

<http://www.asanet.org/apap/quickstyle.html>

<http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>

