

Honors Thesis Guidelines

Department of Linguistics

So you're planning to write an Honors Thesis in linguistics—congratulations! Here is some guidance to get you started.

What constitutes an acceptable Honors Thesis project? Your thesis should answer a novel question in linguistics, approach an old question in a new way, or develop new tools for investigating language. The specific topic you take on should be negotiated with your faculty mentor—what counts as an acceptable topic depends on what they're willing to supervise. Likewise, the particular form that your work takes will vary according to the subfield you're working in, and your final product should reflect the standards of that subfield. You should consult with your mentor to decide which of these (or something else) is most appropriate for your topic: an experimental study; a theoretical analysis; a computational model; a sociolinguistic survey. There is no length requirement, but an Honors Thesis should be substantially more ambitious than a term paper for class.

What coursework should I take in preparation for writing my thesis? The Linguistics Department has no courses that Honors students must complete beyond the requirements for your degree or certificate. The Honors College has its own course requirements, and we recommend that you fulfill your CW requirement with HONOR 3200 if you do not fulfill the CW with a linguistics course. We recommend that you have a few upper-level (i.e. 4000 and higher) courses under your belt before finding a mentor, but even in LING 1200 it's perfectly fine to ask the instructor about topics you might like to pursue further with an eventual Honors Thesis in mind.

When and how should I find a thesis mentor? It's never too early to find a mentor! You should plan to spend at least an academic year working on your thesis, so find a mentor no less than a year before you intend to graduate. In other words, during the spring of your junior year, get serious about finding a mentor if you don't have one already. It's important to know what kind of research potential mentors do so that you can contact people whose interests you might share. Talk to your instructors, other students, and the department's Honors Faculty Advisor (Aaron Kaplan) to get this information. Some faculty members also have websites that can be useful. Occasionally, the department has events specifically for Honors students; be sure to attend them so you can meet faculty, advisors, and other Honors students who have gone through what you're going through. These events are good opportunities to get advice as you look for a mentor.

How do I find a thesis topic? You don't—you and your mentor should work out a topic together. When you approach a potential mentor, you're not looking for someone to facilitate a research project you've already formulated; rather, you're looking for someone to help you choose a suitable topic that is appropriate for their expertise and that they are willing to help you complete. If you have specific topic ideas in mind when you talk to potential mentors, be prepared to modify or discard them based on feedback. If you don't have specific topic ideas, that's fine, too! Some mentors even prefer that, and few things warm a linguist's heart more than hearing a student say, "I'm intrigued by what you do, and I'd like to learn more about it."

There are so many areas of linguistics! How do I narrow down my options? As you take linguistics courses, attend colloquia, and participate in other department events, take note of the topics that you find most interesting, whether they come from lectures, papers you read for a class, or papers you write for a class. Ask your instructors if there is a faculty member in the department who knows more about those topics and might be interested in mentoring an Honors Thesis—maybe one of your instructors is that person! All of this helps you decide on an orientation for your thesis (syntax? phonology? semantics?), and you can narrow things down further with your mentor.

What is the approval process for my thesis? When you have finished your thesis and your mentor has approved it, you need to obtain approval from the department's Honors Faculty Advisor and the department chair. Send your thesis to the Honors Faculty Advisor via email; copy your mentor on the email, and in the body of the email be sure to mention that your mentor has approved the thesis. Assuming all goes well (and it should—you're one of our exemplary students, right?) the Honors Faculty Advisor will approve the thesis and forward it to the department chair for his/her approval. There is probably paperwork and a thesis title page to get signed, and that should be done after the Honors Faculty Advisor and chair have approved the thesis. *Budget at least two weeks for this whole process. Approval is typically quick, but neither you nor anyone else involved wants a last-minute scramble!*

What is the timeline for all of this? Here's a good guide:

- Before spring of junior year: take courses, determine your interests, talk to faculty, attend department events.
- End of junior year or earlier: find a mentor, agree on a topic, expectations, regular meetings, etc.
- Senior year: present your work at undergraduate research events, finish your thesis.
- At least two weeks before the Honors College submission deadline:
 - Obtain thesis approval from faculty mentor.
 - Submit thesis to Honors Faculty Advisor for approval by HFA and department chair.

- Obtain signatures.
- Submit thesis to Honors College.
- End of senior year:
 - Attend Honors College Degree Recognition Luncheon.
 - Celebrate!