

How to prepare a Thesis ‘Road Map’

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Prepare your thesis map in a document and send it back to academic_learning@umanitoba.ca by April 28, 2024

NOTE: Submitting your thesis map is a requirement for attending.

Before you come to bootcamp, we want you to produce a “road map” of your thesis. This document will help you identify what writing needs to be done to finish your thesis. Please read this whole document before starting and send any questions to academic_learning@umanitoba.ca

Why are we asking you to do this activity?

We want you to make a plan to write at least 5,000 words with an aim to write 10,000 words. These words can all be in a couple of specific chapters, or they can be parts of all the chapters. A thesis map helps you organize the writing as a list of actionable things to do rather than a bunch of thoughts and ideas swirling around in your head.

The Thesis Road map document is for you, but we will be reviewing your map to assess your support needs. If we think your map is not complete enough, we will be in touch. You can make this document in MS Word or your preferred program, but you’ll need to use one that handles tables.

Making a useful thesis road map will take you at least a couple of days. Some people find it can take longer than a week.

As tempted as you will be, please don’t rush through this step. People tell us the thesis road map is a total game changer and continues to be valuable as they finish their thesis. Inger has used this method of organizing herself (and others) through eight published books: it works.

Step One: produce some summary statements

Start with some overall direction statements at the top of the page - this helps us understand your overall topic and match you with people with similar interests.

Complete the following sentences and include them as bullet points at the top of the document:

- What is your thesis about - but in just one sentence (plain language please, no more than 50 words):
- This thesis contributes to knowledge by (up to 100 words):
- This study is important because (up to 150 words):
- My key research question(s) are:

Here's an example of how to set out these responses from Inger's thesis:

- *Thesis in a sentence:* "Gesture does important knowledge work in the design studio"
- *This thesis contributes to knowledge by:* Analysing gesture behaviour of teachers and students at work in four different design studios I analyse what kind of *work* gesture can do when teachers and students talk to each other about design propositions. I show how gesture can operate with speech and representations to create architectural meanings and architectural subjectivities and even the design studio itself. (57 words)
- *This study is important because:* Architectural education has always involved enculturation of some sort – training in a way of being and doing as much as a set of skills. In the contemporary academy the design studio is the main location for this enculturation, but rationalising processes have been going on in universities world wide for some 30 years. In some places, like here, the amount of time architecture students spend with their disciplinary cohort is being reduced and many other aspects of teaching and learning are being moved to online or blended formats. Without bodily presence the design studio would be a different *kind* of teaching and learning environment. If we don't know what gesture contributes its special role risks being lost because it becomes difficult to effectively *translate* what it does to other formats (130 words)
- **Key research question:** *What work is gesture doing in the design studio?*
Sub-questions:
 - *How do architecture teachers and students gesture when they work on designs together?*
 - *Do students and teachers produce different kinds of gesture when they use different kinds of representations (drawings, models, computer images etc.)?*

- *Can we categorise these gestures into 'types'? Are there patterns of gesture behaviour that we could call 'architectural'?*
- *What work is the gesturing doing to making meaning in the design process?*
- *How does gesture help the students and teachers perform the design studio together?*

Step Two: prepare a writing table.

Pull out your latest thesis annual progress report - it should contain a chapter outline. If it doesn't, or it's out of date, you'll need to draft a new one. We want you to turn this chapter list into an actionable writing plan using the table format below.

We find this format works for most people, but feel free to modify it if you want to add more information.

You can attempt to map out all the chapters in detail (highly recommended), or you can just concentrate on a few where you want to add the most words.

Remember, you just need to plan out about 10,000 words of work.

Note: Tables can work better in landscape format, but it's too hard to do that in Google, so ours is shown in portrait.

Thesis Title:

Proposed Thesis Length: (be as specific as you can - don't just say "100,000" because that's the maximum.)

Due date: (this should be the date that you plan to submit to the university - it may be before or after the date that is currently in the system as your maximum completion time)

List of chapters: (include your current chapter list here, with proposed word counts if possible)

Chapter to work on at Bootcamp - Title and Synopsis

(No more than 200 words.)

Briefly describe the content in this chapter and what it contributes to the overall thesis.

How does it progress the argument, answer your research questions and/or inform the reader about the topic?

State of the subsections

Every chapter will have subsections. Most thesis subsections are 500 - 2000 words, but they can be longer or shorter depending on the topic.

If you don't yet have subsections look at the guidance below about how to outline.

Colour your subsection headings:

Blue - needs editing, but generally ok.

Brown* - I see the "through line" here. It needs some thinking work, but I generally know what it's about and where my argument/explanation needs to go.

Red - I have no idea what goes in here. Gah!

Next Actions / Notes

Assess what you have in your subsections.

Write some notes about the writing that needs to be done.

These notes are for you - they don't have to make sense to us.

It helps if you can guess at how many new words you need to write for each section.

Below is an example of how to fill in this table, again from Inger’s thesis

<p>Chapter One: The spaces of architectural education (Background 10,600 words)</p> <p>This chapter provides background for readers who might not be familiar with the history of architecture education. It explains how architectural education has developed over the last thousand years in Western Europe and how this tradition was translated in the Australian context. The chapter argues that the spaces of architectural education have always been the product of socio- material relations, from the medieval guilds to contemporary academia. This chapter argues that how and where bodies are mobilised produces different kinds of architectural subjectivities: “master mason,” “master artist” and “knowledge worker.”</p>	<p>Subheadings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prologue in the form of a story about a design studio 2. Studying the design studio 3. Donald Schon gets lost in translation 4. The design studio as a way of thinking 5. An alternative proposition (the story of the recalcitrant photocopier) 6. Mr. Corrigan’s sighs (design studio as performance) 	<p>Finish timelines and didactics (2000 words)</p> <p>More explanation of main themes in research to date (about 500 words)</p> <p>Look up the AQF and write about “governmentality” in pedagogy. (1000 words)</p> <p>Mr Corrigan’s sighs:</p> <p>Use field notes to construct narrative about Corrigan’s design studio (1500 - 2000 words)</p>
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***The Brown parts are the best bits to tackle in Bootcamp!**

Brown bits are the areas of your thesis ripe for adding words - especially with the “first draft” mentality we will be pushing at Bootcamp. Use these bits as a basis for planning where you want to add words.

The blue bits are very tempting, but you might find yourself editing and not progressing the word count. It’s good to know where they are so you don’t get drawn in too much.

The red bits can be a bit daunting when you are under pressure, but you might be surprised what comes out when you start writing in the way we encourage you to at bootcamp. Our philosophy is “make a mess, then clean it up.” Your thesis road map table can act as a way to capture thoughts and ideas about what might be in the red bits as you write.

Depending on how long you have before boot camp starts, you might be able to do work on the

red bits and move more of them into brown. Go for it!

Help please! My thesis is too much of a mess to make a map!

Relax, this is normal. We find a surprising number of people have not thought about their thesis as a whole for a while, or ever for that matter. If you found your materials and chapters are not planned enough to put in the table, here's two techniques to create a bit more order:

Technique one: The Snowflake method when the chapter is still really formless

The snowflake method enables you to plan the "story spines" of your writing while keeping your plan flexible and responsive to change.

Begin expanding your chapter outline by including a short synopsis of around 300 – 400 words. This is essentially an abstract for the chapter. Ask yourself:

- What are the main points this chapter needs to cover?
- What resources/evidence will I need to draw on to demonstrate these?
- How does this chapter relate to my overall argument?

When you have the synopsis ready, make a list of provisional subheadings under the chapters. This is the second level of organisation. These subheadings should show the order in which you plan to arrange material you are writing. Add a provisional word count for each subheading (ideally you should have no more than 2 pages between each subheading).

Under each subheading, try to put a third level of detail to your plan. This should be a series of sentences that act as a "storyline:" they capture what each paragraph under the subheading will cover.

You can start this third level with a messy list of whatever you think should go under the subheading. This can be notes to yourself, reminders, bits of data and analysis, lists of literature – whatever you like. Remember, as a general rule academic writing should contain some or all of the following elements:

- "Knowledge claims" or "truth statements"
- Inferences / speculation / propositions
- References to prior work
- Definitions

- Evidence/examples
- Acknowledgement of counter arguments / examples
- Conclusions

Now have a go at putting this detail into the map format above. Make sure you chase up as much of this detail as you can before you come to Bootcamp.

Technique Two: The reverse outline method when you have a bunch of messy stuff that doesn't look like a chapter yet.

This exercise is adapted from materials published on the Explorations in Style blog by Rachel Cayley (<http://explorationsofstyle.com/2011/02/09/reverse-outlines/>) and on various writings by Dr Claire Aitchinson on the “story line” technique.

A reverse outline is a plan made from an existing draft. The idea of the reverse outline is to diagnose any potential problems with your arguments and identify ways forward without mucking around too much with the existing text and potentially destroying good work.

Here is a step-by-step approach:

- 1) Number the paragraphs in your original chapter draft.
- 2) Cut and paste sentences containing the key idea from each paragraph into a new document, preserving the paragraph numbering. If none of the sentences has the key idea, write a brief sentence capturing what the paragraph is about (or should be about).
- 3) You should end up with a list of sentences that capture the “storyline” of the chapter. Read through the new document and be ruthless – is there a coherent story emerging?
- 4) If you feel the overall story does not flow properly, or has gaps, rearrange the sentences in your story line and add in new ones as appropriate. New sentences should have the number plus a letter – i.e. 7 then 7a, 7b etc.

When you are happy with your story line, have another go at filling in the table. Before the bootcamp, make some time to cut and paste anything useful from your existing writing back into a new document and put comments over it about where you want to add words.

I'm a historian / Lawyer / Mathematician: none of this will work for me.

Hello lovely people! I have heard this complaint consistently over the last 10 years.

First of all - I hear you, but some of it *will* work. Give it a go at least. Send us whatever you manage to do with a note at the top about your circumstances.

Mathematicians: it's usually the stopping to format equations that gets in the way of "flow." We recommend just drawing it on paper, snapping a photo and inserting that into your document as a placeholder. However, sometimes the work IS the creation/formatting of the equations - if that's the case for you, chat to us. We can 'count' equations as words so you still get the rewards and a sense of how much progress you have made. Identify which ones you need to make before you come to bootcamp.

Historians / Lawyers: your biggest problem seems to be marshaling sources with a high degree of precision. I know doing this at bootcamp, without all your physical stuff, can be a source of anxiety. Also, the nature of the work means you feel the need to check stuff all the time, breaking writing flow. To get the most out of Bootcamp, you need to find ways to minimize this "churn" by treating the writing like a stir-fry: cut up your ingredients as much as you can in advance. We recommend you look at the notes for ['Building a second brain for writing'](#), for some ideas about managing your information down into digestible "chunks."