

# Writing an honors thesis in Linguistics

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## Am I eligible to write an honors thesis?

Any linguistics major with a cumulative total GPA of at least 3.200 is eligible to write an honors thesis in Linguistics. Membership in the UNC Honors Program is not required.

## What are the requirements for the thesis?

- A good Linguistics honors thesis usually asks a specific question about some set of language data and answers that question as thoroughly as possible, considering also the broader implications of the question and its answer for some aspect of linguistic theory.
- An honors thesis must include something original: a new set of data to be analyzed, a novel analysis of familiar data, etc.
- There is no specified number of pages for an honors thesis. The length of your thesis will depend on the nature of your research project. However, it should be more substantial than a term paper or a final project for an individual course. Your thesis advisor will help you determine an appropriate scope for your project. You can also talk to the other members of your honors committee or to the honors advisor if you would like additional guidance.
- When you have completed your thesis, you will defend it before your honors committee (the thesis advisor and two other faculty members). For the defense, you will prepare a 10- to 15-minute presentation that summarizes the main points of your project. The presentation will be followed by a question and discussion period that gives the committee members an opportunity to talk with you about your project. Committee members may also suggest revisions to be made before the final version of the thesis is submitted.
- At the time of the defense, the committee will confer (privately) and decide whether Honors, Highest Honors, or no honors will be awarded. If the committee is not able to make a unanimous decision, two additional faculty members chosen by the honors advisor and the thesis advisor will be asked to read the thesis and help the committee reach a consensus.
- Students who complete honors projects are strongly encouraged to present their research at the annual "Celebration of Undergraduate Research," held in late April. Contact the Office of Undergraduate Research (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/our>) for more information.

## Deadlines

The university sets a deadline for notification of graduation with Honors or Highest Honors. All Linguistics department-internal deadlines are based on this official Honors deadline.

Be sure to find out the official Honors deadline for the semester you plan to graduate.

It is usually:

mid-April            for May graduation  
mid-November      for December graduation

The date for Spring 2009 graduation is **Monday, April 6**. The date for Fall 2008 graduation is **Wednesday, November 12**.

In addition, you will need to register your thesis with the honors thesis archive. The deadline for this for spring 2009 is **April 6** (November 12 for fall 2008). Please go to [www.honors.unc.edu](http://www.honors.unc.edu) and look for the link "Register Your Honors Thesis."

- **Note: New** You must approach your prospective thesis advisor and other committee members and express your interest in doing an honors thesis **by the end of the first week of classes of fall semester** (for May graduation). Failure to approach committee members by this time may mean that when you do ask them later they will have already agreed to be on other committees and you will have lower priority for them.
- **Note: New** In addition to regular meetings with your thesis advisor, you are **strongly encouraged** to meet with your secondary committee members at least **once** during the fall semester and **twice** during the spring semester to keep them abreast of your work.
- Your defense must take place **at least one week** before the official Honors deadline.
  - The defense draft of your thesis should be **submitted** to your committee members **approximately one week** before the defense date. It is important to allow your committee members enough time to read your thesis before the defense.
  - Your **thesis advisor must approve your defense draft** before it is submitted to the other two committee members.
- Two copies of the final version of your thesis should be submitted to the honors advisor within thirty days after the defense. One copy will be archived in the Linguistics department; this copy may be printed on ordinary paper. The other copy will be archived in the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library and must be printed on special paper. Information about the required paper and other formatting requirements specified by Wilson Library is available in a separate handout. There are not many formatting requirements, but your **thesis advisor must sign** the title page, approving the thesis.

This means that you should be in close contact with your thesis advisor and should give them your defense draft **at least two weeks** before the official Honors deadline.

## Timeline for an honors thesis

### Three or four semesters before graduation

(Junior year, for a May graduate)

- Let the honors advisor know that you are interested in writing an honors thesis.
- Start thinking about your thesis project. What topic, language, or area of linguistics are you are interested in working on?
- Decide which faculty member you would like to ask to be your thesis advisor. The honors advisor will be happy to help you with this step.
- You are strongly encouraged to meet with your thesis advisor from time to time during your junior year as you choose a topic and begin the research process.

## Two semesters before graduation

(Fall of senior year, for a May graduate)

- Sign up for LING 691 (Fall) and LING 692 (Spring) during your final two semesters. Both courses are required for Honors in Linguistics.
- Meet with your thesis advisor on a regular basis. Weekly meetings are recommended.
- Confer with your thesis advisor and the honors advisor to choose two more faculty members for your honors committee. You might want to meet with the other members occasionally to keep them up to date on your project and get feedback. **You must have at least 3 committee members. At least two members must be from the Linguistics department.**
- The honors advisor will ask your thesis advisor for a report on your progress at the end of the semester, to make sure that your project is progressing smoothly.

## Your final semester

(Spring of senior year, for a May graduate)

- Sign up for LING 692.
- Complete your thesis defense draft.
- Consult with your thesis advisor and the other two members of your honors committee to schedule a thesis defense by the specified deadline.
- Make any final changes to your thesis after the defense, and submit it to the honors advisor within thirty days.

## For more information

For more information about Honors at UNC, contact the Honors Program in the Johnston Center for Undergraduate Excellence (<http://www.honors.unc.edu/>).