choosing a topic

the master’s essay is designed to refine skills by substantially re-thinking and re-envisioning a previously considered idea. ideally, the topic evolves from a paper already written for a graduate course. it need not be the final or major paper for the course. the best essays almost inevitably result from getting started early.

the annotated bibliography

a 10-reference annotated bibliography should be submitted along with the proposal. this is a list of citations to books, articles and documents followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph. more information can be found at http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm

essay advisor

once a topic has been determined, a faculty advisor should be chosen. the advisor must have expertise in the subject; it is advantageous if the advisor has also taught the student in a graduate course. once an advisor has agreed, a schedule for the various stages of the essay should be arranged. the advisor will read the primary text(s), recommend secondary materials, and offer feedback and guidance during the writing process.

the review committee

one reader on the review committee should be familiar with the subject; the other can be outside the area. these readers and the advisor form the review committee that will read the essay and participate in the essay review with the student.

the master’s essay review & evaluation

about ninety minutes in length, the essay review is an extensive discussion between the committee and the student about the essay’s strengths and weaknesses, the revision process, and the essay’s relation to the student’s future interests or plans. as the culminating project for an advanced degree in english, the master’s essay is evaluated on its originality, intelligence, and depth of thought; its careful synthesis and use of secondary sources to refine the argument; a clear, logical and effective organization of ideas; and smooth, efficient, graceful, error-free prose.

the abstract

an abstract for our library will be required with the final copies. it should re-establish the topic of the research, give the main objective and present the methodology used, as well as the main findings and conclusions.

master’s essay presentations

at the end of the semester, students writing the master’s essay speak to interested students, faculty and family about their topic and their experiences in the writing process. students attending these presentations have found it especially helpful in looking ahead to writing their own essays.