

Lucia Grauzl'ová

WRITING A THESIS

IN LITERARY STUDIES

A Textbook for Slovak Students of English



2024

STIMUL





FACULTY OF ARTS
Comenius University
Bratislava

DEPARTMENT OF BRITISH
AND AMERICAN STUDIES

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LUCIA GRAUZĽOVÁ

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Writing a Thesis in Literary Studies: A Textbook for Slovak Students of English

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Note: unless stated otherwise, all examples and excerpts used in this book are from theses written by students at the Department of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. I must acknowledge, however, that I have revised and edited most of them to provide readers with polished texts that clearly demonstrate the principles shown in this textbook.

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INTRODUCTION

This textbook was born out of frustration; this is a feeling I experience at the end of every academic year when faced with the task of reviewing and assessing students' theses. They often lack basic requirements: they are not built around a clear thesis statement; they lack theoretical footing; they do not use sources properly; in the Works Cited, they list items that have not been referenced in the body of text; and so on. This is frustrating because these shortcomings are recurring and, in most cases, easily preventable.

Frustration is also what students usually feel when faced with the daunting task of writing a thesis at the end of their bachelor's studies. Although they have already written some essays and short research papers up to that point, they do not see how the skills they have acquired in the process of doing so can also be applied to writing a thesis. Since they regard the thesis as the pinnacle and the capstone of their academic education (and, I admit, they are not wrong), they believe writing one requires almost superhuman skills. Students are frustrated because they feel that they have been students for long enough. Logically, they should know what to do and where to start, but they are not sure how to begin and with what. They seem to be paralyzed by the gigantic scale of the task in front of them. After all, they probably have never been asked to write a paper of more than two thousand words. Now, all of a sudden, they are expected to produce a research project nearly four times that.

This textbook aims to address these frustrations and make the task of writing a thesis less intimidating. I believe this large project will become easier to grasp when broken down into smaller parts. After all, even elephants are best eaten one bite at a time. I will, therefore, guide students through the process of writing the thesis step by step, showing them where to start, what to keep in mind along the way, and how to cross the finish line.

Chapter 1 defines the thesis as an academic genre and points out the specifics of a thesis in the field of literary studies. Chapter 2 helps students identify a suitable research topic and formulate a specific research question and the central claim of their thesis. Chapter 3 advises them on how to approach the choice of supervisor and describes the supervisor's role. Chapter 4 shows appropriate research methods and offers advice on finding and organizing relevant sources. Chapter 5 emphasizes the importance of using sources effectively and ethically, and it introduces citation styles commonly used in the field of literary studies. Chapter 6 describes the typical structure of a thesis, characterizing its individual parts and pointing out the best practices for writing them. Since submission is not the final stage of the process of writing a thesis, Chapter 7 covers how to prepare for a successful thesis defence.

In describing the steps of the writing process, I will inevitably resort to some generalizations. A certain level of simplification is common, and probably also necessary, in all books of this kind. Having said that, writing is a highly individual process; each student should, therefore, approach

the individual steps differently based on their own preferences. As a result, these general guidelines should be regarded as useful starting points that can be adapted to fit a student's own style and the specific demands of their thesis.

Given that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and large language models has become almost standard in student work, I have decided to provide students with tips on how to use these tools productively and ethically throughout the thesis-writing process. Wherever it is relevant, students will find inserts offering guidance on how AI can assist them at a given stage of research or writing. However, they should never lose sight of the importance of critical thinking and academic integrity while using these tools. They should always check with their supervisor to see what uses of AI are permissible at their institution.

Although this textbook has been written with all students studying at departments of English in Slovakia in mind, it may occasionally reflect the specific practices, priorities, and policies of the Department of British and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. I encourage students from other universities to familiarize themselves with the general thesis guidelines provided by their institution and to research how things are done at their department in order to tailor their approach to meet specific institutional requirements. The occasional references to practices at Comenius University do not detract from the general principles in this textbook, which are largely applicable to writing a thesis in literary studies at any department of English in Slovakia. After all, this publication focuses on developing essential skills for writing a literary thesis in English.

First and foremost, I am, and will likely remain, an instructor of literature rather than of academic writing. I believe, however, that my experience in teaching academic writing courses, as well as in supervising and reviewing dozens of bachelor's and master's theses over the years, has equipped me with a solid foundation to guide students through the challenges of crafting a well-researched and well-argued thesis.

WHAT IS A THESIS?

This chapter

- ⇒ **defines a thesis as an academic genre**
- ⇒ **explains the difference between a bachelor's and a master's thesis**
- ⇒ **introduces the specifics of a thesis in literary studies**

A thesis is an independently written research project undertaken by students in the final year of their bachelor's or master's studies under the guidance of a faculty member (thesis supervisor or adviser). Its completion, submission, and public defence are integral parts of university studies at both undergraduate and graduate levels in Slovakia. The thesis defence is considered to be a state examination, which, according to the Slovak Higher Education Act, is a public final examination required for graduation in any field and which is taken before a committee (National Council, Art. 63). In writing theses, students are expected to demonstrate their competence to independently obtain, creatively use, and develop theoretical and practical knowledge in their field.

The thesis can be thought of as an expanded research paper. Susan M. Hubbuch defines it as “a report that an individual presents to others about the conclusions he or she has reached after investigating a subject and carefully assessing the information he or she had gathered” (3). As the definition suggests, it is a piece of writing which is based on the author's original research on a particular topic and their analysis and interpretation of the findings. This means that the research paper is not merely a summary of what a researcher has read about a subject. The researcher needs to actively – mentally – process the information and establish its relevance; they need to “digest” it rather than merely “absorb” it (Hubbuch 3). The research paper then presents the researcher's own thinking about a subject supported by others' ideas and information.

Research papers can be argumentative or analytical. In argumentative papers, authors present their stand on an issue or a topic and aim to convince their readers of their interpretation of the issue. They make a claim (thesis statement) and back it up with outside source material; they must do research to support and prove their claim. Analytical papers, on the other hand, revolve around research questions, either stated or implied, which their authors seek to explore, evaluate, and answer. Their aim is to establish the meaning of a phenomenon and find out about its “hows” and “whys.” Since analytical papers usually deal with different points of view on an issue or topic, not necessarily taking a particular stance, their thesis statements are not formulated as claims (arguments) but rather take the form of statements that clearly communicate and forecast what they are going to be about.

1.1 A BACHELOR'S THESIS VS. A MASTER'S THESIS

A thesis is a requirement for degree completion in most undergraduate and graduate study programmes in Slovakia. Bachelor's and master's theses differ in length, in their degree of complexity and originality, and in the kind of research conducted.

According to most universities' regulations, the recommended length of a bachelor's thesis is between thirty and forty standard pages (54,000–72,000 characters), and a master's thesis should have fifty to seventy pages (90,000–126,000 characters) (Comenius University, IR 32/2023; Matej Bel University; Pavel Jozef Šafárik University). These limits need to be taken as signposts for orientation rather than as something engraved in stone. Producing a bachelor's thesis of, let's say, forty-five pages is not a reason to get stressed. It is the role of the thesis supervisor and the reviewer to decide if the length of the thesis is appropriate for the topic analyzed or not. On the other hand, meeting the page limit does not automatically mean that a student's treatment of the topic is adequate and that the length of the thesis is sufficient. Sometimes students use more "fluff" than necessary to artificially inflate the word count, which can adversely affect the grade.

Length is an obvious criterion to distinguish between a bachelor's and a master's thesis, but it is not the most important one. These two types of academic papers differ in their complexity and originality. According to the Study Regulations of Comenius University in Bratislava, students writing a bachelor's thesis are expected to independently obtain and use theoretical and practical knowledge, whereas in a master's thesis they are also required to "develop" this knowledge, which indicates that they are expected to contribute to the field (IR 22/2023, Art. 14.3). The regulations for universities' thesis requirements specify that a bachelor's thesis serves to verify if students have an adequate knowledge of the issue they are writing about and if they possess the skills to gather, process, and interpret relevant information. As a result, a bachelor's thesis may have the character of a compilation or a synthesizing literature review. A master's thesis, on the other hand, is supposed to include an element of novelty; it should be based on original primary research, data, and theories that have not been published before, and it should work with verifiable hypotheses and employ adequate research methods (Comenius University, IR 32/2023; Matej Bel University; Pavel Jozef Šafárik University). This, however, does not mean that students at the bachelor's level cannot engage in primary research; they can, but they are not expected to. For this reason, the topics for undergraduate research projects do not usually require students to gather evidence outside the already published works of others; they mostly rely only on secondary research.

1.2 THE SPECIFICS OF A LITERARY THESIS

A literary thesis is a specific type of academic writing which usually presents the author's idea about a literary text (e.g. a novel, a play, or a poem) based on a careful examination of the text's key components with the support of outside sources other than the primary text(s). It puts forward an argument about the text's possible interpretation (thesis statement) and then attempts to prove it by

means of presentation and an analysis of textual evidence. A literary thesis thus combines argumentation and analysis.

The distinction between a bachelor's and a master's thesis in the field of literature is less clear, as it is impossible to write a literary research paper without doing primary research, i.e. studying a literary text. In literature, the two types of academic papers might thus differ only in length; the scope of the material to research (i.e. the number of primary texts to study and analyze); the theoretical approach employed in the literary analysis; and the character, difficulty, and novelty of the research problem. A literary bachelor's thesis could, for example, focus on an analysis of one literary element (e.g. a theme or a character) in one literary text, or in a limited number of texts, whereas a master's thesis might deal with several aspects of one or more literary texts from the viewpoint of a critical school of thought. Some departments of English, such as the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Prešov, have established concrete minimum requirements for theses in literary studies. Bachelor's theses at the institute are expected to address at least two aspects of one or two literary texts, whereas master's theses must focus on a minimum of three elements in one or two works of literature (Kačmárová 13). A bachelor's thesis may adhere to basic methodologies, such as close reading or thematic analysis. On the other hand, the methodological approach in a master's thesis is more complex and nuanced, often being grounded in specific literary theories and critical frameworks. A bachelor's thesis does not have to offer a novel and original insight into the literary text under analysis, but a master's thesis is expected to include an element of novelty by identifying gaps in the existing literature and proposing new arguments or perspectives. Apart from that, the length appears to be the main point of difference.

CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC

This chapter

- ⇒ **emphasizes the importance of finding a strong research topic**
- ⇒ **introduces examples of possible topics in the field of anglophone literature**
- ⇒ **introduces possible theoretical approaches to the study of literature**
- ⇒ **establishes criteria for developing an effective research question**
- ⇒ **explains the relationship between a research question and a thesis statement**
- ⇒ **provides guidance on how to formulate a strong and effective thesis statement**

The process of writing a thesis starts with the choice of a topic to research. This is often the hardest aspect of any extended research project. It is also the reason why many instructors encourage students to propose a topic of their own. They believe that being able to choose a research topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow – but manageable within the required length and one that is interesting, relevant, and researchable – is half of the success. Selecting a topic involves preliminary research, looking into what has been already said about the topic and what types of sources are available. It entails determining if the topic is viable or not and then either broadening or narrowing it as needed. This requires you to use the skills that are necessary for accomplishing your thesis project. As a result, the ability to identify and refine your own research topic should be a relatively good predictor of your overall performance in the thesis process.

This does not mean that students who decide to choose from a list of possible topics provided by their supervisor are destined to fail. Of course not. Perhaps their job is slightly easier because their teacher would presumably supply them with a specific, ready-made topic which does not need to be tested for viability. (Effective supervisors do not propose topics which are obscure, too complex, or with no available literature to review.) This does not mean that there is no space for students' creativity and individual exploration. Sometimes the offered topics are so generally framed that they may require you to identify your own research problem within that topic. Often-times, you will have to refine and reframe the topic several times before you determine how to approach writing about it.

Whether you decide to select a topic from a list provided by your chosen supervisor, or whether you opt for developing your own topic, make sure the topic is interesting for you in some way or that you have a strong opinion about it. You are not very likely to do a good job if you are not, as Hubbuch suggests, personally invested in the topic. What she means by “personal investment” is that the topic should have “*some personal meaning or importance to you*” [emphasis in the original] (20). If you do not desire to know more about the topic, writing about it might become

a source of personal frustration rather than satisfaction. And this is not a feeling that you would like to live with for a year.

On the other hand, obsession with a topic does not, at least from my experience, render the best results. Being a fan of an author does not automatically translate into being able to produce scholarship about them. Although, as Joli Jensen points out, fans are similar to scholars in that they “find subjects that interest [them], devote time and energy to becoming expert in them, and demonstrate that expertise publicly”; they are not engaged in “interpretative work, based in broader and deeper historical, social and cultural knowledge” (210). Students who are also fans sometimes have problems theorizing about a subject they are passionate about. They may find it difficult to maintain distance to preserve objectivity, stay focused, and sort out relevant from irrelevant information because they know too much; they may display the tendency to “celebrate something for its own sake” (Jensen 210) instead of engaging with the subject critically. This does not mean that being a fan of something is a disqualifying factor. After all, as Jensen indicates, academics are oftentimes fans themselves; however, they distinguish themselves from “mere fans” by possessing “theoretical acumen, academic presentation skills, and institutional credentials” (Jensen 211). This suggests that fandom should be an advantage rather than the opposite. Student writers just need to be aware of its limitations, and fandom should be moderated by the guidance of the supervisor.

2.1 POSSIBLE TOPICS IN LITERARY RESEARCH

Since literary studies primarily centre on textual analysis as an in-depth examination of a literary text or an aspect of a literary text, your thesis project will probably start with the choice of the author(s) and the text(s) you would like to discuss.

This sounds easier than it actually is. Most classic works of literature have been studied from front to back and top to bottom, and so it may be more difficult to identify an angle from which your research project can contribute something new to existing knowledge. While this is not a big issue at the undergraduate level, it may become one when you are a graduate student given that one of the requirements for a master’s thesis is the novelty of the research undertaken. Works by contemporary or lesser-known authors may pose another sort of problem. There may be very little existing research or criticism on them, or this research may be harder to find. Although it is possible to interpret a literary text which has not received much (or any) critical attention, such a task may prove daunting for novice researchers. As a result, it is generally recommended to either

- 1 read “a familiar text or series of texts in an unfamiliar way,” which may involve applying a different, new, or original critical approach to your reading of the text, or “placing it within a different historical, cultural, or literary context”; or
- 2 read “an unfamiliar (but significant) text or series of texts in a familiar way” (“About the MA Research”), which means that you may decide to employ the critical lens that has already been applied to the study of some texts to analyze another (lesser-known) one.

No matter what text(s) you are considering exploring, do some preliminary research before finalizing your topic. W. R. Owens recommends finding “key studies,” looking at the “approaches [that] have been taken to the subject,” and identifying “key issues and questions” and “any possible

gaps, or approaches yet to be explored” (188). An important part of the preliminary research is, as Owens emphasizes, making sure that you can access the materials needed (188). If they are not readily available, you may have to abandon the topic and be prepared to move on to another one.

Avoid topics that are too broad. Bear in mind that the body of material you are going to explore must be manageable. It is impossible to produce, for example, a relevant analysis of satire in the post-war English novel in your thesis project. You simply do not have the time to study such an amount of material, and your treatment of such a broad topic would probably be quite superficial. Select a topic that is narrow enough to be covered in the time and space available and that will allow for some analytical depth.

If you are still at a loss about what topic to choose, Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab offers a few suggestions of good literature topics that may be worth considering:

- A discussion of a work’s characters: are they realistic, symbolic, historically-based?
- A comparison/contrast of the choices different authors or characters make in a work
- A reading of a work based on an outside philosophical perspective (Ex. how would a Freudian read *Hamlet*?)
- A study of the sources or historical events that occasioned a particular work (Ex. comparing G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* with the original Greek myth of Pygmalion)
- An analysis of a specific image occurring in several works (Ex. the use of moon imagery in certain plays, poems, and novels)
- A “deconstruction” of a particular work (Ex. unfolding an underlying racist worldview in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*)
- A reading from a political perspective (Ex. how would a Marxist read William Blake’s “London”?)
- A study of the social, political, or economic context in which a work was written – how does the context influence the work? (“Literature Topics”)

2.2 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LITERARY ANALYSIS

As the topics listed above suggest, one can approach a literary text from a variety of perspectives and with a different goal in mind. As Barry Mauer and John Venecek write, literary research typically focuses on

- 1 bringing readers closer to a text,
- 2 connecting a text to a larger context, and
- 3 connecting a text with other knowledge frameworks such as science. (ch. 4)

These research goals can be achieved by applying various literary theories. Mauer and Venecek refer to them as different “lenses” through which we may look at a literary work. Whenever we change the lens, our view or reading of the text changes as well (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4). The reason is that each of the lenses brings different aspects of the text into the foreground and makes others “fade into the background” (Tyson 3).

Below, I will describe the most common theoretical approaches that literary scholars often apply to studying literary texts:

New Criticism

New Criticism is a text-oriented approach which dominated literary criticism in English-speaking countries for a long time. New Critics assumed that the meaning of a literary text was intrinsic to the text itself, which means that it is independent of external contexts such as the author's intentions or historical background. As a result, they primarily focused on the thematic, structural, or formal characteristics of a literary work. Their preferred method was the "close reading" of a literary text – a method you may be familiar with from the classroom. If you are reading a text "closely," you are analyzing its constitutive elements – such as structure, language, symbolism, and imagery – to arrive at its meaning. Such an approach necessitates detailed work with text because it selects and interprets meaningful passages from the text, looking into "‘why’ and ‘how’ the various parts of the text relate to each other" (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4). The evidence for a particular interpretation of the literary text is thus found in the text itself.

Structuralism

A structuralist approach to literature is based on the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure. Its aim within literary texts is to uncover "the structure that allows texts to make meaning" (Tyson 220). John Webster explains that to find the structure, we need to look "beyond (and below) surface features" as the structure can be found in "deeper and more abstract elements that underlie surfaces." Structuralists, therefore, focus on patterns, conventions, and binary oppositions. They claim that many of these appear in literature across time and culture and are thus universal. To clarify this even further, Webster provides an example of two plays from different cultures and time periods – Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* – which, on the surface, tell different stories, but which, under analysis, are revealed to "share many 'structural' elements – including a son-hero who spends the play enacting the role of detective in the murder of his father while engaged in a deep relationship (!) with his mother." As is evident from this example, the structuralist approach is primarily concerned with the narrative dimension of texts and their shared structural features, such as plot, character, and setting.

Genre studies

Genre studies can be regarded as a structuralist approach, as it also focuses on structural elements and patterns in collections of narratives. According to Mauer and Venecek, it analyzes the defining features of a literary genre and examines how well a literary text adheres to, diverges from, or redefines these conventions (ch. 4); for example, a genre analysis of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* could aim to demonstrate how the play adheres to the genre conventions of a tragedy despite the humble origin and unheroic nature of its protagonist.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a theoretical approach to literature that emerged in France around the 1950s in response to structuralism. It disapproves of “structuralism’s insistence on frameworks and structures as access points to ‘truth,’” stressing the instability of meaning (“Poststructuralism”). In simple terms, poststructuralists claim that we cannot know. “Truth,” in their understanding, is not fixed but rather “changes based on your cultural, political, social, and economic position in the world” (Quiogue Andrews 351). This uncertainty of knowledge has a profound impact on literary interpretation as literature is also viewed as not having a singular meaning. We cannot know the author’s intended meaning, so a text’s meaning depends on the reader. As readers bring different sets of experiences to the act of reading and their own unique understanding of the meaning of words, they usually produce different interpretations of the same text.

The general instability of meaning also affects the binary oppositions (e.g. black–white or good–evil) which structuralists viewed as the fundamental organizing principle of human understanding and as the structure through which meaning is generated. Unlike their predecessors, who considered them stable and fixed, poststructuralists claim binary oppositions are constructed, fluid, and constantly shifting. Moreover, they also question the equality of the terms in binary oppositions. They claim that one of the terms is usually privileged (for example, “male” in the binary opposition of male/female), which creates hierarchies and power structures. This awareness points to the inherently political nature of language. By deconstructing texts, i.e. critically analyzing them to uncover their hidden complexities, we can reveal how language perpetuates certain worldviews, silences certain voices, and maintains existing power structures. As you will see, many of the critical approaches I will describe below are, in essence, poststructuralist.

Cultural studies

Cultural studies theories, such as New Historicism, regard “all texts as connected to society” (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4) or embedded in “the socio-political and cultural conditions of the time in which they were written” (Long 263). They are examples of context-oriented approaches; therefore, if you would like to approach a literary text from this position, you have to connect it to “at least one political or social issue” (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4). New Historicists believe that literary texts are “never neutral or objective” but are always linked to conflicts for power (Long 264). They are viewed as replicating certain “knowledge systems (known as discourses),” and researchers using this approach try to understand how and why they are reproduced in the texts and how they are linked with the distribution of power in society (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4).

Inevitably, they focus on how the texts address concepts such as class, gender, race, nationality, and religion. As a result, critical theories like feminism, Marxism, postcolonial criticism, critical race theory, and queer criticism can be all considered examples of cultural studies approaches to the study of literature. Since all these theories share “a desire to change the world for the better,” they are often applied to point out how literary works are complicit in the promotion of “sexist, classist, racist, heterosexist, or colonialist values” (Tyson 6).

Feminist criticism

Feminist critics explore the role gender and sexuality play in how literature is produced and distributed. They draw attention to the lesser prominence of female voices in the world of literature and their stereotypical association with certain, usually second-rate, literary genres (e.g. romance). To repair this historical injustice, a researcher using this approach might, for example, want to discover female authors in genres that are typically regarded as the male domain, such as the Western. Feminist critics also deal with the representation of gender identities in literary works, considering how the texts reinforce or challenge society's patriarchal norms. A feminist reading of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* would, therefore, focus on how patriarchy controls the lives of women and restricts their intellectual and emotional freedom, or how their social roles as mothers and wives cause a split in their personal identities.

Marxist criticism

A Marxist analysis of a literary text is based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Just like other cultural studies approaches, it regards a literary text as a product of the society in which it originated, but its focus is mainly on the socio-economic circumstances of its production. Marxist criticism considers how these conditions are reflected, reinforced, and critiqued in the analyzed text. A Marxist critic may also show an interest in how a literary text portrays the relationships between the haves (bourgeoisie) and the have-nots (proletariat) and the capitalist system and its effects on society. As a result, discussions of class struggle, power dynamics, and social inequalities often dominate a literary analysis from a Marxist perspective. Such an interpretation of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* could focus on the plight of the working class during the Great Depression and interpret Lennie and George's dream of owning their own land as the working class's desire to escape exploitation and achieve autonomy.

Postcolonial criticism

Postcolonial criticism is a critical approach that questions the hegemony of the West in literature by concentrating on literary works produced by cultures that emerged in response to colonial rule. As a theoretical framework, it seeks to examine the presence of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies within a literary text (Tyson 418). A postcolonial reading explores the power dynamics between colonizers and the colonized and the representation of these groups in the text. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a postcolonial analysis could highlight how African characters in the novella are described in dehumanizing and animalistic terms, attributing it to the colonial ideology that reduces the colonized to "the Other." The novella would be read as an expression of the colonial mindset and a reinforcement of the cultural hegemony of the European colonizers over the African natives.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that emerged from legal studies but which is used in literary studies. It examines how race and racism influence the production and interpretation of literary texts. Critiquing the dominance of whiteness in the literary canon, it seeks to foreground previously marginalized voices, often unearthing counter-narratives that question dominant literary traditions. It also

analyzes how works of literature perpetuate or challenge racial ideologies, or how these influence the representation of characters and themes in literary texts. A CRT analysis of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* could, for example, interpret Pecola's desire for blue eyes as a symbol of her internalized racism – a concept central to CRT. It would show how she views herself through the lens of the dominant white culture, which associates Blackness with ugliness and inferiority.

Queer criticism

Queer criticism is a theoretical approach indebted to queer theory. It focuses on how literature represents sexuality, gender identity, and heteronormativity, and how it upholds or subverts the traditional views of gender roles, sexual orientations, and binary oppositions (e.g. male/female and heterosexual/homosexual). It could, for example, be applied to an analysis of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. A queer reading of the novel could foreground the unusually close bond between Ishmael and Queequeg, which is filled with affection, mutual care, and physical intimacy (sharing a bed), which seems to go against what is traditionally expected of male friendship and suggests a non-normative expression of sexuality.

You may want to consider analyzing a text through the lens of another scientific discipline. Some approaches derived from other fields include:

Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytical criticism is a literary approach that applies theories of psychology, particularly those developed by Sigmund Freud and later expanded by figures such as Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan, to the analysis of literary texts. It operates on the assumption that literary texts are similar to dreams in that they often reveal the author's repressed desires and fears. As a result, psychoanalytic critics view characters in a literary work as "projections of the author's psyche" and trace "[their] own childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations, and such" within their behaviour (Delahoyde). It is, however, assumed that these are expressed indirectly, often through the use of symbolism within the text. For example, a Freudian reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can apply Freud's idea of the psychologically divided self to interpret Victor and the Creature as two aspects of the same person: Victor representing the rational, socially acceptable self and the Creature embodying the repressed instinctual drives of the unconscious.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a literary approach that emerged in the late 20th century "as a response to growing concerns about environmental degradation and the impact of human activity on the planet" (Long, ch. IX). It explores how texts represent and interact with the natural world, focusing on the interplay between literature and the environment. Ecocritics are interested in how literature reflects ecological concerns and in its potential to raise awareness of environmental issues. For instance, an ecocritical analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* could investigate how the environment shapes the personalities and actions of the characters in the novel.

This list of critical approaches is not exhaustive. There are many others you may want to consider when formulating a research proposal. Whichever you choose, it can help you uncover new dimensions of the meaning in the analyzed literary text that might otherwise remain hidden.

Further reading

Lynn, Steven. *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory*. 7th ed., Pearson, 217.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006. **(very useful because it includes sample essays applying many of the critical approaches described in this chapter to an analysis of F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*)**

2.3 AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH QUESTION

If you have decided on a topic that is narrow enough and clearly defined, you can now proceed to the next step of the research and writing process, which is finding and formulating a good research question. “A focused and well-designed research question” is, as Andrew J. Romig points out, the cornerstone of your thesis project (11) because it gives you “a clear sense of direction in your research” (Hubbuck 22). While a research topic outlines an area in which you will be gathering information, a research question further narrows down the focus of your research and clarifies exactly what you would like to know about the topic.

Formulating a good research question will probably require some more reading on your part. First of all, carefully re-read the literary text(s) you have chosen for analysis. Secondly, familiarize yourself with relevant academic sources (articles, reviews, and interpretations of the text[s] under analysis), particularly those that have been published recently, so that you can identify the key debates on your topic. While reading them, focus only on the main ideas and arguments. As they are usually found in the abstract, introduction, and conclusion, read those first. Remember the purpose of preliminary research is only to develop a research question, not an answer to it, so it is not necessary to read the articles word by word or follow the line of argumentation closely. You will probably do so at a later stage of your project.

An important part of this process is writing down all the questions that occur to you over the course of reading. They can relate to your topic of interest or the primary source(s) you are planning to analyze. Do not censor yourself. Simply write down any questions that come to mind, no matter if they have the potential to lead to an academic analysis or not.

Evaluation comes only after as many questions as possible have been brainstormed. Now you need to go back over your list to determine which questions are potentially good research questions. According to Christian Decker and Rita Werner, a research question always takes the form of “an open-ended” question (170). Unlike a closed-ended question, which permits one possible answer or a limited number of responses, an open-ended question allows for a multitude of different answers. As a result, such a question cannot be aimed at finding facts. “Encyclopaedic questions,” as Made-

leine A. Dahlgren and Gunilla Oberg term them in their categorization of questions, are “characterized by the use of interrogatives such as ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘which,’ ‘where’” and typically require “an unambiguous and not too complex answer” (270–271). Research questions, on the other hand, tend to ask “how” and “why” and have no obvious answers. If there is an answer to them, it needs to be inferred from the interpretation of available material/data. Since answers to research questions depend on interpretation, they are open to discussion.

In addition to analytical nature and debatability, authors also emphasize two other criteria for evaluating research questions: interestingness and feasibility (see Romig 12–13; Price et al., ch. 2). The question you raise in your thesis should not be interesting only for you, but also for the academic community of which you are a member. Paul C. Price et al. identify three factors that make a research question “interesting in this sense”: “the answer is in doubt, the answer fills a gap in the research literature, and the answer has important practical implications” (ch. 2). When applied to literary studies, it means that there must be a reasonable chance that someone else would provide a different answer to the question; your answer should be arguable, and your question should not have yet been properly answered by other researchers. It is difficult to speak of the practical implications of literary research. After all, as Gina Wisker asks in her chapter on research methods for the arts and humanities, “What kind of change can analysis of literary texts possibly produce?” (252). Despite that, even in literary research, we should still be able to answer the “So what?” question regarding our research question. Why should anyone care about the answer? Why is it significant? No, it is not likely to change the world, but it may still, as Sharin F. Schroeder puts it, “bring a useful increase in knowledge to people who have an interest.” No matter if your question has been raised before, or if you are the first to ask it, you must always be prepared to explain why you think the answers other researchers have offered are insufficient and how you are planning to contribute to the debate about the analyzed literary text.

There are many questions that may be potentially interesting and debatable, but not all of them are answerable. To determine the feasibility of your question, Romig recommends taking into account “the availability of resources” (Do you have, or can you get, access to a sufficient amount of relevant source material?); “the actual contents of your source material” (Can your answer be supported by the resources available to you?); and the time available for conducting your research (Can you do all the research necessary for answering your question within the timeframe that you have?) (12–13). Only if you can answer “yes” to all of these questions is your research then worth pursuing with the potential for successful completion. Careful consideration of these factors will prevent you from wasting your time working towards a dead end.

Importantly, not all literary research projects explicitly state their research question(s). In some cases, the question is implied and can be inferred from the paper’s title, argument, and analysis. More advanced writers prefer to allow their text to unfold more naturally without rigidly adhering to a formal research structure. They rely on the reader’s ability to uncover their paper’s central concerns. This does not mean, however, that you can just abandon the task of formulating your research question. Even if you decide not to state it explicitly in your paper, your analysis should always be guided by a well-defined research question. Without it, your paper is likely to lack focus and coherence.

A thesis can attempt to answer more than one research question. The more sophisticated your project is, the higher the number of your research questions will be; however, it is advisable

that they form a sequence of closely interconnected questions. If the questions logically build upon one another, your paper will appear unified even as it provides a comprehensive analysis.

Be prepared to revise or refine your research question as you go on with your research and writing. It is perfectly normal that new insights and perspectives emerge as you dig deeper into a topic, which may require you to adjust your research question to remain relevant. For example, you might initially believe that your research question addresses a gap in the research on the novel you have chosen to analyze, but then you discover an article that answers a very similar question. To avoid duplicating the answer, you may need to refine your research question, giving your research a slightly different direction. Don't worry – this process of refinement is a natural and essential part of scholarly work.

The final point to consider is the form the research question takes in your own writing. Although research questions are formulated as direct questions at the beginning of the research process, they typically take the form of indirect questions in the text of your thesis or paper.

Research question: an example

Direct question:

How have late-20th-century artists engaged in recuperating the figure of Angélique, an enslaved Portuguese woman?

Indirect question:

This article examines the complex issue of Black heroism through the legacy of the figure of the enslaved Portuguese woman Angélique, who set Montreal on fire in 1734. It looks into **how late-20th-century artists have engaged in recuperating this figure through the analysis of two specific iterations, the plays of Lorena Gale (*Angélique*, 1999) and George Elliott Clarke (*Beatrice Chancy*, 1999).**

(Cuder-Domínguez 323)

2.4 AN EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENT

Crafting a good research question matters because it leads to formulating the central argument of your thesis. Your answer to the research question is what academic writing guides typically call a “thesis statement.” In the broadest terms, a thesis statement establishes the overarching proposition or claim of your paper. It is like “a sign-post that signals [the paper’s] destination” (Perez et al. 25). It is the main idea or point around which your thesis revolves. Ideally, the thesis statement takes the form of “a single, complete, and grammatically correct sentence” (Romig 26) which tells your reader what topic you are dealing with in your paper and what you want to say or prove about it. For this reason, the thesis statement is a required part of an introduction to a research paper, usually found near its end.

Since the thesis statement defines the structure of your paper, it is important to create a working version of it in the early stages of your thesis project to ensure you do not lose sight of its overall direction. A well-crafted thesis statement prevents your paper from becoming scattered or unfocused. However, just like the research question, it will most likely need revision as your paper develops.

The thesis statement must possess certain characteristics to fulfil its purpose. The faculty at Harvey Mudd College suggest evaluating thesis statements according to the SAFE method, where SAFE is an acronym summarizing the four important qualities that good thesis statements should have. According to the college's webpage, they should be:

- Significant

A thesis statement should go beyond the obvious. It should be more than “an observation or description.” It should not be aiming towards a summary of the literary text under analysis. When reading it, your reader should not shrug their shoulders and respond with “Well, isn’t it obvious?”

- Arguable

A thesis statement should not propose a claim that everyone accepts and agrees with. What counts in the field of literary studies is originality. For this reason, your thesis statement should offer an original interpretation of the analyzed literary text.

- Focused

Do not try to cover too many things. Focusing on too many aspects of the analyzed text will usually result in skimming across the surface. Your goal should be to explore an issue at least in some depth.

- Evidence-based

Your thesis statement must have support in textual evidence. It means that you must be able to prove your claim with specific examples from the analyzed text. (“The Thesis Statement”)

- Evidence-based

Your thesis statement must have support in textual evidence. It means that you must be able to prove your claim with specific examples from the analyzed text. (“The Thesis Statement”)

Effective research questions and thesis statements: examples

Research question 1:

How does literacy function as a symbol and instrument of power in Margaret Atwood’s novels *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*?

Thesis statement 1:

In the oppressive theocratic society of Gilead in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*, where women are denied the right to read and write, literacy becomes a means of resistance and empowerment. Through an analysis of the four protagonists, this thesis demonstrates how access to written language enables them to challenge their subjugation and assert both personal and social power within a patriarchal regime.

Research question 2:

How much power do the Aunts possess in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and how do they use this power to influence the patriarchal regime of Gilead?

Thesis statement 2:

This thesis argues that the Aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale* wield more power than any other female characters in Gilead, using their authority to uphold the patriarchal and totalitarian regime while remaining subordinate to male leaders.

(adapted from student theses)

Less effective thesis statements: examples

Thesis statement 1:

Tom Stoppard developed as a playwright, which can be demonstrated by analyzing his plays and identifying the differences and similarities between them. (student thesis)

Even the author admits in her introduction that we all change and develop as we grow older, so it is probably reasonable to expect that Tom Stoppard is no exception. The thesis thus states an obvious fact which is not likely to be objected to. It is, therefore, not very debatable. In addition, it seems to be unfocused. The author cannot cover all of Stoppard's plays in reasonable depth, not within the scope offered by a bachelor's or a master's thesis. Also, the thesis statement uses vague vocabulary to define its aim. What kind of differences and similarities is the author planning to focus on? Differences and similarities in style, themes, or characters? To make the thesis statement more effective, the author would have to answer the question "How did Tom Stoppard develop as a playwright?" and identify the element in which we can see the development.

Thesis statement 2:

Jane Austen was not only a writer of romance novels for women, but she was also a feminist, which can be seen mainly in her novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* as they feature the most progressive protagonists. (student thesis)

The thesis statement seems to revive the decades-long debate about Jane Austen's feminism. Since there seems to be a disagreement about whether she is a feminist or not, the statement is arguable. However, it is questionable if something new can be contributed to the debate, as Austen's works have been analyzed quite thoroughly and this topic has been revisited by many critics. There is a certain potential in the second part of the thesis statement, which claims that the protagonists of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* are more progressive than their counterparts in the writer's other novels; however, the thesis statement is not specific enough in defining what "progressive" means. For this reason, it lacks a particular

focus. To make it more effective, the author would have to specify the aspects she is going to consider in her analysis. Is she going to explore the protagonists' attitudes towards marriage, for example? Or their independent thinking? Or their presentation of equality? I would also omit "the most" from the revised version of the thesis statement, because I do not think it would be possible to prove that Elizabeth Bennet is more of a feminist than, let's say, Emma.

AI TIP

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT can be your sparring partners when it comes to finding a suitable research topic and formulating an effective research question. They can help you brainstorm ideas or refine your question so that it is well-defined and aligned with your research goals.

Your turn

- I Develop three research questions about your research topic and evaluate them based on the checklist below.

- II Choose the most effective of the three research questions and formulate a thesis statement that is an answer to the question. Will the thesis statement pass the SAFE test? Is it significant, arguable, focused, and evidence-based?

Is the question open-ended?	Does the question ask "how" or "why" rather than "who," "what," "which," or "where"? Does it allow for multiple potential answers or interpretations?	YES / NO
Is the question analytical in nature?	Does the question invite analysis and interpretation rather than simply looking for factual answers? Is the answer inferred from the interpretation of the text(s) rather than being obvious or factual?	YES / NO
Is the question debatable?	Is there a reasonable chance that someone else might provide a different answer? Is your answer to the question arguable and not a settled fact?	YES / NO

<p>Is the question interesting?</p>	<p>Is it relevant to the academic community? Does it fill a gap in the existing research literature on the topic?</p>	<p>YES / NO</p>
<p>Is the question feasible?</p>	<p>Do you have, or can you access, a sufficient amount of relevant source material to explore this question? Can your answer be supported by the resources available to you, such as texts, academic articles, or other data? Can you complete the research necessary for answering the question within the time available for your project?</p>	<p>YES / NO</p>
<p>Is the question clearly defined?</p>	<p>Is the question specific enough to provide a clear sense of direction for your research? Does it avoid being too broad or too vague?</p>	<p>YES / NO</p>

CHOOSING A SUPERVISOR

This chapter

- ⇒ **guides students in selecting a supervisor**
- ⇒ **clarifies the role and responsibilities of the thesis supervisor**
- ⇒ **offers practical tips for establishing an effective student-supervisor relationship**

Although a thesis is an independently researched and independently written project, you do not need to worry about being left on your own to figure out how things work. You will be guided through the whole process by a thesis supervisor, who is a more experienced and knowledgeable instructor from your department and whose responsibility is to offer advice and direction. Supervisors are often also referred to as thesis advisers, so I will use these two terms interchangeably in this book.

It is up to you to make the first contact with your potential thesis supervisor, usually sometime during the academic year preceding your thesis year. Practical experience shows that starting your search in May or June may be too late because most instructors may have run out of capacity by then. It is, therefore, advisable not to wait until the last moment to approach somebody who could potentially supervise your thesis project. Make the first contact in the first half of the summer semester – if not earlier. Be sure to check your institution's specific deadline. Instructors do not, as a rule, supervise more than five students. You should, therefore, hurry up if you are interested in working on your project with a particular faculty member.

Although students often approach supervisors who they have had previous contact with and who they find helpful and easy to communicate with, a good rapport with the person is not the only criterion to consider. You should approach someone whose research interests overlap with your own. Check the department's website for the academic profiles of the faculty members you are thinking about contacting to find the best match. If the instructor you approach decides they are not the best person to supervise your topic, or if their capacity for the next academic year is already full, they will usually suggest someone else from the department who could potentially be interested in supervising such a thesis project. While master's theses can be supervised only by Ph.D.-holding faculty members, for your bachelor's thesis project, you can choose to work under the supervision of a doctoral student, especially if their research focus is particularly well aligned with your chosen topic. If the topic you would like to research does not seem to fit into any of the research fields listed in the academic profiles of your department's faculty, do not despair. Simply get in touch with an instructor that you feel you could work successfully with or that you believe would be an appropriate supervisor for such a topic. Most instructors encourage novelty in thesis topics and are ready to accompany you down less-trodden paths.

For a student-supervisor partnership to work well, both parties should have their expectations clearly communicated and aligned. It is vital to be aware of a potential adviser's supervisory style and interpersonal skills. Just like students, supervisors vary in their approaches. Some have rigorous standards and set high expectations, closely monitoring your progress and providing detailed feedback at every stage. Others adopt a more hands-off approach, trusting that students will seek help when they need it. If you need strict oversight to avoid procrastination, you should not contact a supervisor who is known to grant students a high level of autonomy. Similarly, as Lorrie Blair writes, if you depend on positive feedback to stay motivated, you should not turn to a "highly critical" instructor to be your adviser (11). Only if you understand your needs and a potential supervisor's style of work can you make an informed decision about who would be the best supervisor for you.

The adviser's role is, unsurprisingly, to advise. Being more experienced, they are there to help you narrow down your topic, formulate your research questions, devise a methodology, find resources, read drafts, and offer constructive criticism. Their role is also to keep an eye on your time management. They suggest deadlines for the individual stages of the research process: e.g. when to complete your preliminary research, formulate your thesis statement, develop the structure of your paper, and complete individual chapters. They monitor your progress, give feedback, and help you plan your work. They should encourage you and make you think. Their job is to help you write the best thesis you have the skills to write (Romig 5).

Helping, however, does not mean doing the work for you. Do not expect the adviser to formulate the research questions or thesis statement or devise the structure of your writing. As Paul Gruba and Justin Zobel note, "A supervisor cannot step in and rescue students who have found that they are unable to complete the work themselves" (ch. 1). They are not your proofreaders or editors, either. After all, language skills are part of the assessment of your thesis project. Their role is not to initiate contact with you whenever you decide to "disappear" and break off communication with them. They cannot and will not force their help on you. They can help only if you want to be helped.

Make sure you keep in close and regular communication with your adviser even when you are snowed under with other coursework or if you are simply stuck and cannot move forward. As Andrew Romig points out, your adviser cannot help if they do not know you are facing an issue that needs attention. They cannot help if you do not talk to them. So even if you, like many other students, have the impulse to "clam up" when things are not going as wished, do not give in to such urges (Romig 5). It is actually far less embarrassing to request an extra two weeks to complete a chapter than it is to send to your adviser a cobbled-together draft of the thesis several days before the deadline for submission and ask for their comments. In such a case, you should not hold it against them if they decide not to respond to your email message, or if they read and assess your thesis as if they were your reviewer rather than your supervisor.

When an adviser agrees to cooperate with you on your thesis project, they agree to take on certain responsibilities towards you. It is only natural that they expect you to take efforts to perform your part of the agreement. It is your job to initiate consultations with them in line with the schedule the two of you have agreed upon or as needed. If they say they would like to get an update from you at least once a month, make sure you are prepared for the meeting and have something to report on. You may be asked to compile a preliminary bibliography for your project, write a thesis outline, or submit a draft of one of your chapters in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the awarding of the

credits for the Thesis Seminar. It is not your supervisor's intention to ruin your social life. They actually want you to have some social life even as the submission deadline draws nearer. Trust your adviser. You are probably not the first student whom they have supervised.

Irrespective of your adviser's supervisory style, there are a few pivotal moments in the process of thesis writing when you should consider scheduling a meeting with them:

- to discuss your initial idea for a research topic (since the initial idea is mostly too broad, narrowing it down will probably require a couple of meetings)
- to propose an outline for your thesis
- to discuss individual chapters in the process of writing
- whenever you find yourself struggling (e.g. you may have difficulty finding relevant secondary sources, or you may be struggling with writing an effective introduction)

At each of these stages, your supervisor might prove helpful in identifying problems and proposing solutions.

The relationship between you and your supervisor is key to a successful thesis project. It should be based on open and regular communication, mutual respect, and a clear understanding of each other's expectations. Your supervisor is there to provide guidance and feedback, but the responsibility for making progress, doing the work, and initiating contact lies with you.

Your turn

Review the academic profiles of the faculty at your department and decide whose research interests best align with yours.

4

DOING LITERARY RESEARCH

This chapter

- ⇒ **introduces the most common methods used in literary research**
- ⇒ **introduces the various types of sources used in literary research**
- ⇒ **explains how and where to locate them effectively**
- ⇒ **establishes criteria for evaluating their reliability and credibility**
- ⇒ **emphasizes the importance of the proper organization of research material**

Literary research always starts with a well-formulated research question. Once you have come up with that, you are ready to start doing your research. At this stage, as Mauer and Venecek note, it is important to consider how and where you can get the answer to your question. Will it be sufficient to do a close reading of the selected literary text? Will you need to review existing scholarship about the text? Will you have to conduct an interview to get the answer? Or go to the archives? Simply put, you must choose an appropriate research method.

4.1 RESEARCH METHODS

Since literary research usually seeks answers to questions related to “meaning, social conventions, representations of lived experience, and aesthetic effects,” its research methods are different from those in the hard sciences (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4). While the results of any research in sciences such as physics or chemistry must be reproducible – i.e. if another researcher undertakes the same experiment, following the methods and procedures described in a study, they must achieve the same results – this is not the case in literary research. The results presented by literary researchers, although still grounded in evidence, are inherently more subjective and open to debate.

Despite this, there are various rigorous methods that literary research relies on. As students and novice researchers, you will most probably use some of the following:

Search methods

Since writing a thesis in literary studies entails joining, to use Tison Pugh and Margaret E. Johnson’s words, “an ongoing conversation about the meanings, methods, and effects of poems, novels, plays, and other aesthetic texts” (263), any research in the field requires you to familiarize yourself with how others have interpreted and responded to them. In essence, it involves “studying literary texts, the scholarship that analyzes these texts, and additional relevant cultural documents” (Pugh and Johnson 263).

These can be located by search methods. These are defined as “way[s] of efficiently and effectively finding the information you need to answer your research question” (“Information Literacy Tutorial”). Since they are the most common methods of literary research at undergraduate and graduate levels, they will be described in the subchapter entitled “Finding and Organizing Sources.”

Textual analysis

Textual analysis is, as Gabrielle Griffin notes, “a staple of English studies research” (12). It is a qualitative research method that involves closely and critically examining a text to uncover its underlying themes, messages, and symbols. As Griffin explains, it relies on other research methods and critical approaches “to give focus to, support, and illuminate the reading one produces.” At the same time, it has to be aware of the context of the analyzed text and “the context of its production, its content, and its consumption” (Griffin 12).

Discourse analysis

Although discourse analysis originated in structural linguistics, it is now used to explore “the social production of knowledge in many areas, [such as] sociology, history, and anthropology” (Scheiding 204). It examines “the structures of texts,” taking into account “both their linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions in order to determine how meaning is constructed” (Scheiding 204). When applied to literary studies, discourse analysis, with its focus on patterns in language use and its awareness of language as a carrier of ideology and power, has the potential to uncover how a literary work constructs a specific view of the world (see Griffin 10) or how it reflects the values, norms, and beliefs of the era in which it was produced.

Some of the more advanced techniques include:

Archival research

Archival research can help you access a wealth of relevant information. Archives typically contain “rare printed books, unpublished material (handwritten drafts, manuscripts, correspondence, etc.), personal library collections, ephemera and unpublished scholarship (such as MA dissertations and PhD theses)” (Towheed 24). Such materials can significantly deepen your understanding of literary works, historical contexts, and authorial intentions. Their uniqueness can help you contribute original knowledge to your field, as these resources can lead to new interpretations of literary works – something expected particularly at the master’s level and beyond.

Of course, neither bachelor’s nor master’s students of anglophone literature in Slovakia are likely to undertake in-person archival research as part of their thesis projects since relevant material archives are typically located abroad, and there are few opportunities for funding research trips to the United Kingdom or other such destinations at this level. Students and supervisors should, therefore, frame their topics in a way that does not require any in-person archival research. Students can still engage in meaningful research as many archival materials are accessible online via digital archives, online databases, and virtual library collections. Also, local libraries and academic institutions may be able to offer access to valuable secondary literature and critical studies to support their work.

For a list of open-access digital collections related to the study of English and American literature, check out the NYU libraries' resource guide at <https://guides.nyu.edu/english-and-american-literature/open-access-digital>.

Computational methods

These methods involve the use of digital tools, algorithms, and quantitative techniques to analyze large bodies of text. Computational methods can be used to do things like detect patterns and trends in literature, identify recurring themes, determine the emotional tone of a text, and analyze an author's writing style to resolve debates about the authorship of disputed texts.

Visual methods

Visual methods can be used to study the visual aspects of literary texts, especially in works where illustrations and images play an important role in the construction of meaning. Some works of literature, e.g. children's books and graphic novels, rely on "a complex interplay of text and image" (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4) to convey their themes and narratives. Visual methods help us approach the illustrations that accompany such texts and enhance our understanding of them.

Ethnographic methods

Ethnographic methods may be useful when analyzing how different groups of people – such as fan networks, reading groups, and educational institutions – interact with literary works (Mauer and Venecek, ch. 4). As Griffin further mentions, they can also be used to study audiences at literary festivals and other places (11). As these examples indicate, ethnographic methods may require interviews and in-person visits to venues where literature is produced and consumed. They can help us understand what Rachel Alsop refers to as "literary behaviour" and its social context (121).

Interviewing

Some research projects may involve conducting an interview with a living author. As a research method, interviewing goes beyond simply conversing with someone. As Griffin notes, to conduct a successful interview, you need to have certain practical skills, understand "the different kinds of interview one might conduct and their underlying assumptions," and be familiar with ways of transcribing interviews and their influence on the interpretation of the collected data (12).

Further reading

Griffin, Gabriele, ed. *Research Methods for English Studies*. 2nd ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Wisker, Gina. "Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities." *The Postgraduate Research Handbook: Succeed with your MA, MPhil, EdD, and PhD*. 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 251–268.

4.2 FINDING AND ORGANIZING SOURCES

4.2.1 Types of sources

Research in literary studies relies on primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Understanding the distinctions between these categories is essential for evaluating their relevance for your thesis project.

Primary sources

Primary sources are original, uninterpreted sources of information relevant to your research topic. As they provide direct evidence or first-hand accounts, they should be regarded as the foundational materials from which you draw interpretations and analyses. Without them, you cannot contribute any unique perspectives to an academic conversation.

In literary studies, primary sources fall into two categories. The first comprises the literary works themselves – novels, short stories, plays, poems, etc. – regardless of whether they have been published or are just manuscripts. The second category includes works “written or published in a time contemporary to the author’s” (Brookbank and Christenberry 7). They were either penned by the author of the literary work you are analyzing (e.g. diaries, letters to friends or publishers, and memoirs) or they were produced by somebody else but were available during the author’s life and writing career. We are talking about newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, sound recordings, photographs, and videos; these are any artefacts that can contribute to our understanding of “the context of a literary work, because they create a picture of what was going on during the author’s time” (Brookbank and Christenberry 7). By mediating information about the author’s period and environment, they may help you better understand the themes reflected in the text you are studying.

Although primary sources from the second category may be beneficial to most research projects, they are not always easy to access. For example, when researching a novel by Jack Kerouac, you may get access to a selection of his journals from the late 1940s and the early 1950s, as these were published in *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947–1954*, edited by Douglas B. Brinkley. But if you wanted to read the journals he wrote when he was, say, fifteen, you would probably have to travel to New York and visit the New York Public Library, which has the archival materials from the estate of Jack Kerouac. But do be aware that even your readiness to travel might not bear fruit; collections like this are often tightly controlled, and access to them may be restricted.

If you are lucky, the primary sources you are looking for might be available online. The prevalence of the internet has prompted many libraries to digitize their collections, and a few are making them available at no cost to users; however, more often than not, access to them costs something, and sometimes these collections are only available at their premises – which is the case with the materials from Kerouac’s estate.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources include any articles, papers, or books that offer another person's perspective on primary sources and other secondary sources. They are typically removed in time from what they analyze, critique, comment, or reflect on. Whereas Kerouac's novels would serve as primary sources for most research projects, George Dardess's 1974 study of his best-known novel "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's *On the Road*" would be classified as a secondary source.

While the distinction between primary and secondary sources is mostly clear, sometimes it depends on how you intend to use them. For example, a 1950s review of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* will be considered a secondary source if your aim is to analyze an aspect of the novel; however, if your research focuses on the critical reception of Kerouac's novel or the perception of the Beat Generation in the 1950s, this review will be a primary source.

Most research topics in literary studies require the use of both primary and secondary sources. It is virtually impossible to formulate an effective research question without studying relevant secondary literature. Familiarity with secondary sources is also essential for explaining the context surrounding the research question and its significance and outlining the existing debate about it. Finally, scholars are not very likely to provide a convincing answer to their research question without considering what secondary sources have to say.

Tertiary sources

Tertiary sources are built upon secondary sources. As the Crookston Library website of the University of Minnesota suggests, they "index, abstract, organize, compile, or digest" them ("Primary"). Rather than presenting novel data or interpretations, they provide a summary or overview of what is already known in a field, making the complex information presented in secondary sources more accessible to the general readership. Tertiary sources thus typically include reference works, encyclopaedias, almanacs, fact books, and textbooks as well as bibliographies, databases, and indexes. They are usually not attributable to a specific author, as they are often the result of the joint effort of editors, scholars, and experts. Quite often, the authorship of tertiary sources is assigned to organizations, institutions, and publishing houses (for example, the Slovak *Beliana* general encyclopedia is authored by the staff of the Encyclopaedic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences), and individual authors may be credited for specific sections within them.

Due to their synthesizing character, tertiary sources are good starting points for your research. They save you time by providing you with essential background information, all compiled in one place; however, they should not be the place where your research will end. In fact, some instructors will not consider tertiary sources as acceptable cited material in your research project ("4. Primary"). That is why they may pre-emptively discourage or forbid the use of Wikipedia. Although Wikipedia entries may be marked with all sorts of shortcomings (e.g. inaccuracy or a lack of documentation), the main problem with citing Wikipedia is that the information it presents is too removed from the original source ("4. Primary"). You should use Wikipedia only as a springboard to find more credible sources for your project, which are often directly referenced in the Wikipedia entries.

4.2.2 Locating sources

As engaging with a variety of sources is a prerequisite for being able to produce a successful research paper, it is essential to know how and where to locate them effectively.

To start a search for relevant information, you need to have identified the research topic you would like to explore and, ideally, also formulated the main research question(s). These are important for establishing a search strategy and determining what types of information sources might be useful for the project and how they can be accessed. For some research projects, it may be sufficient to search the internet as it is now home to a variety of scholarly articles, books (both primary and secondary), and reference works. However, some research projects may also require you to visit a local library. For example, a visit to a library may be indispensable if you are studying the reception of a particular literary text or author in the Slovak context. The reason is that not all literary journals and magazines in Slovakia are in possession of searchable online archives and not all literary reviews are located online.

4.2.2.1 Searching the internet

Today's research is unthinkable without the use of the internet. The options it provides are almost limitless. It is a multimedia resource which, besides textual material, also offers images, videos, audio clips, and other material. The amount of information it has access to is staggering. As a result, it has revolutionized the way we gather knowledge and conduct research.

The abundance of material available online, however, presents challenges. Sifting through information available on different websites is time-consuming. Also, its accuracy and reliability are questionable, as the content is hardly ever reviewed. In addition, the speed at which new material is added to the web makes it difficult, if not impossible, to stay updated on the latest developments in one's field.

Using Google

Some scholars, such as Pugh and Johnson, the authors of *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide*, do not recommend starting research with Google. The main reason is that "Google opens up the entire contents of the web at one's fingertips" (Pugh and Johnson 263). This means that it does not filter out untrustworthy content or rank websites according to quality. Google's ranking algorithm takes into account factors such as the website's popularity, the number of inbound links, and the amount of money website owners are ready to pay for an improvement in its visibility. None of these factors provides a guarantee of accuracy and reliability.

Despite that, using Google for initial research is useful. It has become, as Shafquat Towheed emphasizes, "an indispensable research tool" (9). It can be used quite productively to find basic biographical data on authors, the summaries of texts, and some rudimentary literary analyses. It may also be helpful for identifying material of a more scholarly character if one has the skills to leverage the power of the search engine.

Since Google is a very powerful and effective search engine, any query that a person makes tends to return tens of thousands of results. A fleeting glance instantly reveals that many of the top-

ranking results may be irrelevant. On the other hand, the most relevant information may stay hidden within the search results and be difficult to find.

Fortunately, there are ways to increase the relevance of the retrieved material. As Towheed points out, Google allows you to use a variety of search limiters: “language, domain, national territory, date-range, type of material and file format” (13). You can also make your Google search more precise by using advanced search functions and placing the specific phrase you are searching for within quotation marks (“...”), entering a tilde mark (~) before your search term to make sure that your search results also cover its synonyms, or using a plus (+) and a minus (-) to include or exclude a specific term from your search (Towheed 13). We can use any combination of these search limiters to refine searches for more precise results.

Google Scholar

A standard Google search rarely results in locating serious scholarship. For that purpose, you may want to try using Google Scholar, a search engine for scholarly information, which limits its search to peer-reviewed papers, theses, and books from academic publishers, professional societies, repositories, and universities.

It is important to note that it is not perfect. As a Charles Sturt University library guide points out, not all the search results list academic sources (“Literature Review”). In addition, they do not include all the academic sources available online. The search results cover only the sources that Google Scholar’s robots locate or that “an author, university repository, or journal publisher have chosen to list” (“Literature Review”).

Despite these limitations, a Google Scholar search is likely to retrieve more academically relevant content than its general counterpart. The ranking of search results in Google Scholar is not completely accidental. As Towheed suggests, it may be partly influenced by how often the entries are cited in other scholarly publications, which may reflect their “relative importance” (14). As a result, the probability that the top-ranking results will be of no use for your research project is lesser than on Google.

Finding information about a publication through Google Scholar does not always mean that you can access this publication directly from there. It only provides full-text links to open-access sources. Most scholarly publications are available on the so-called proprietary web, whose content is provided on a subscription basis. If you are working on a computer connected to the university network or from home using your university’s academic library’s remote access, Google Scholar should provide links for full-text papers available through the library. They should be labelled as Get it @ SFX CVTI.

Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in "Jane Eyre"

M Lamonaca - *Studies in the Novel*, 2002 - JSTOR

St. John is unmarried: he never will marry now. Himself has hitherto sufficed to the toil; and the toil draws near its close: his glorious sun hastens to its setting.... And why weep for this? No fear of death will darken St. John's last hour: his mind will be unclouded; his heart will be ...

☆ 77 Citované 72-krát Súvisiace články Všetky verzie 3

[PDF] wssd.org

Full View

Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and Jane Eyre

E Griesinger - *Christianity & Literature*, 2008 - journals.sagepub.com

Modern literary criticism has long recognized Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) as a pivotal text for **feminists**. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's ground-breaking study *The Madwoman in the Attic* locates the enduring appeal of this novel in its emancipatory ...

☆ 77 Citované 39-krát Súvisiace články Všetky verzie 3

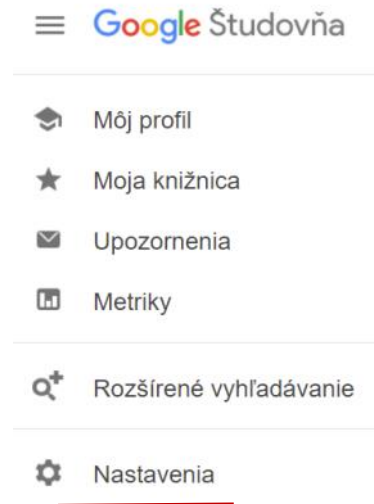
Get it @ SFX CVTI

If you do not have remote access, you can still link Google Scholar with the university's library to see if it can provide you with access to the text that you are interested in:

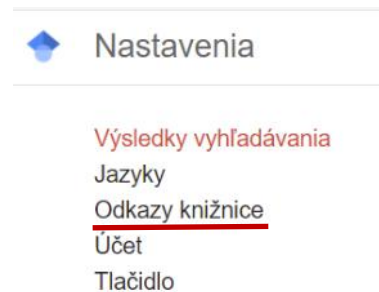
- 1 Click the hamburger menu at the top left of Google Scholar's homepage.



- 2 Click "Settings."



- 3 Click "Library links" in the left-hand menu.



- 4 Search, for example, for "Univerzita Komenského" and select it. Save your settings. "Úplný text cez AK UK" links will appear next to the items available through the university's academic library.

[PDF] Reflection on **Feminism in Jane Eyre**.

H Gao - Theory & Practice in Language Studies, 2013 - Citeseer

Jane Eyre is a famous work written by Charlotte Bronte on the basis of her own experiences. In this novel, the author shapes a tough and independent woman who pursues true love and equality. **Jane Eyre** is different from any other women at that time. She strives for her life and ...

☆ 📄 Citované 23-krát Súvisiace články Všetky verzie 8 📄

[PDF] psu.edu

Úplný text cez AK UK

The Sultan and the Slave: **Feminist** Orientalism and the Structure of "Jane Eyre"

J Zonana - Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1993 - journals.uchicago.edu
Rochester, **Jane** finds herself "obliged" to go with him to a silk warehouse at Millcote, where she is "ordered to choose half a dozen dresses." Although she makes it clear that she "hated the business," **Jane** cannot free herself from it. All she can manage, "by dint of entreaties ...

☆ 📄 Citované 264-krát Súvisiace články Všetky verzie 3

Úplný text cez AK UK

Google Scholar will thus provide information if the source can be accessed from a computer terminal in your academic library and determine the next steps in your search strategy.

Google Books

Another online tool that has become indispensable to researchers is Google Books. It is a constantly growing library of digitized resources, which “has helped to make more than 40 million books discoverable, in more than 400 languages” (“Google Books History”). It allows you to search the full text of many books and journals published in different corners of the world. However, it only provides full-text access to older, public-domain books, magazines, and journals, which are often downloadable. As Shafquat Towheed points out, it is particularly helpful when you are looking for “difficult to acquire, pre-1900 primary sources” (14). On the other hand, access to copyrighted sources is limited to several pages or excerpts.

Despite these limitations, Google Books may still be helpful for identifying relevant passages in copyrighted sources and for locating specific phrases or keywords that may tell you if a source is worth consulting in more detail. You can then try to find the source in your library or in the academic databases your library subscribes to, or you can purchase it if necessary. The platform can also help you with referencing as it provides useful citation information.

Academia.edu and ResearchGate

Although Academia.edu and ResearchGate seem to be repositories of open-access papers, they are, in fact, social networking platforms similar to Facebook or LinkedIn. Their defining feature is that their target audience comprises scholars and scientists rather than the general public. As Katie Fortney and Justin Gonder put it, their primary goal is “to connect researchers with common interests.”

Like Facebook, both Academia.edu and ResearchGate suffer from issues related to commerciality, legality, and privacy (see “Understanding Academia.edu”), but these are not that relevant for students gathering material for their theses. Nonetheless, one thing that must be mentioned is that although both sites allow you to access a broad range of papers, either directly or by requesting them from the authors, not all papers that are available via the platforms are peer-reviewed. It is your task as a researcher to critically assess the quality of the work you find there.

4.2.2.2 Libraries

Some research projects, such as those that examine the reception of literary translations in Slovakia, may require a visit to a library. Importantly, libraries often house materials that are not available online (e.g. older publications, newspapers, magazines, journals, and rare books) which can be essential for your thesis project. The library at your home institution should always be your first point of reference, but your project may also require access to other libraries (e.g. the Slovak National Library in Martin). The good news is that most libraries offer online catalogues on their websites, allowing you to search their collections prior to your visit and filter results by author, title, subject, and publication date.

Searching library catalogues

Although the search box of a library catalogue looks very similar to a search engine, searching the catalogue, as Brookbank and Christenberry point out, entails some specifics one needs to be aware of. A library catalogue does not search the full text of publications it lists, because these texts are not accessible. Instead, it matches your chosen keywords with more general metadata such as the book's title, author, table of contents, and summary found on the back cover (Brookbank and Christenberry 24). A library catalogue is also less intuitive than Google; it typically looks for the precise terms you entered into the search field, "not what you meant to search" (Brookbank and Christenberry 25). As a result, Brookbank and Christenberry recommend you should pay more attention to the spelling of your keywords and exclude common words such as "the," "what," and "an" from your search (25). Google may produce relevant results even when you ask it a question like "What's the symbolism used in *The Great Gatsby*?" but you should only use "symbolism" and "*The Great Gatsby*" (enclosing the title in quotation marks) when searching a library catalogue. Keep these limitations in mind when planning your search strategy.

Identifying keywords

Before the beginning of any search, you should identify strategic keywords about your research topic. The reason is that, as Mauer and Venecek write, databases do not handle long queries as well as popular search engines do; indeed, "they are designed around subject terms and keywords" (103).

Strategic keywords can be derived from your research question(s) if they are appropriately formulated. As this example shows, a research question can be broken down into keywords relatively easily:

Research question: How did Jack Kerouac's relationship with his brother Gerard
influence his life and writing?

It is also important to consider synonyms for the keywords or alternate terms:

Keyword A: Jack Kerouac

Keyword B: Gerard Kerouac/brother Gerard

Keyword C: influence/impact/effect

Keyword D: life/biography

Keyword E: writing/novels/fiction

Once you have compiled a list of possible keywords, your search can begin.

Search techniques

To make your search as precise and thorough as possible, you may need to use a variety of techniques: e.g. phrase searching, a Boolean search, or truncation. Since these techniques may not be supported by every database, and every database may use them differently, it is advisable to check if and how they are used in the database that you are currently searching.

Phrase searching

One useful technique for narrowing your search – and producing more precise and targeted search results – is phrase searching. This is available in most databases. It involves enclosing the search terms in quotation marks, which allows you to search for words combined in a specific phrase and in the exact order you specify.

SEARCH TERMS	DISCUSSION
“Jack Kerouac” “brother Gerard”	This search will retrieve material which includes both of these phrases. It may help you find information about Jack Kerouac and his brother Gerard, their mutual relationship, or Gerard’s influence on Jack Kerouac’s life and work.

Boolean search

A Boolean search relies on the use of the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT, which either narrow or broaden your search.

SEARCH TERMS	DISCUSSION
“Jack Kerouac” AND “brother Gerard”	Using the AND operator in your search will limit the search results to material that covers both phrases. Not using it might produce results related to one of the search terms but not the other.
“Jack Kerouac” OR “Jack Louis Kerouac”	Using the OR operator will broaden your search on Jack Kerouac by including matches on both variations of Jack Kerouac’s name. It is useful when searching for synonyms and related concepts.
“Gerard Kerouac” NOT “Jack Kerouac’s brother”	The NOT operator is useful when you want to exclude certain terms from the search results due to their irrelevance. Hypothetically, if you were looking for a Gerard Kerouac who is not Jack Kerouac’s brother, using the NOT operator could narrow your search on Gerard Kerouac by excluding any material mentioning Jack Kerouac’s brother Gerard.

The Boolean operators may also be combined in more complex nested searches.

SEARCH TERMS	DISCUSSION
("Jack Kerouac" OR "Jack Louis Kerouac") AND ("brother Gerard" OR "Gerard Kerouac" OR "Gerard Leo Kerouac")	This query covers variations of the names of both Jack and Gerard Kerouac to ensure the search results capture all relevant materials about these two figures.
"Jack Kerouac" AND {novels NOT ("Visions of Gerard" OR "Maggie Cassidy")} AND ("brother Gerard" OR "Gerard Kerouac")	This will potentially retrieve material on Jack Kerouac's novels where his brother Gerard appears, except for the novels <i>Visions of Gerard</i> and <i>Maggie Cassidy</i> . You may want to exclude these because you have already found material about them.

Truncation

Using this technique may be beneficial when you want your search results to cover both the singular and plural forms of words or terms that share a common stem. Truncation involves entering the root of a word and putting the truncation symbol – often an asterisk (*), a dollar sign (\$), or a plus sign (+) – at the end. The search will yield results that include any endings of the root word (for more, see "Truncation").

SEARCH TERMS	DISCUSSION
child*	This query would retrieve "child's," "children," "children's," and "childless."

Wildcard

A wildcard allows replacing one or more letters within a word with a character, usually a question mark (?) or an asterisk (*). This is useful with words that have spelling variants.

SEARCH TERMS	DISCUSSION
wom?n	This query would retrieve both "woman" and "women."
colo*r	This would retrieve both "color" and "colour."

Snowball method

Another method that you may consider when looking for relevant sources for your research project is the snowball method. As the TUS Library's Information Literacy Tutorial on search methods explains, this approach starts with a key document on your topic, which serves as a springboard for your further research. Once you locate one relevant study on your topic, you can inspect its bibliography to find other relevant sources. Afterwards, you can check the bibliographies of these newly found documents to identify yet more relevant texts, and so on. This method may be beneficial

because it allows you to identify a lot of sources about your research topic within a relatively short time span. Its potential drawback is that it does not help you find more recent sources than your initial key document as it only allows you to work retrospectively (“Information Literacy Tutorial”).

Citation searching

The disadvantage of the snowball method – its retrospective nature – can be addressed through citation searching, a method which can help you discover more recent literature. By finding out who has cited one of your key sources, you can identify newer sources that reference or build on the original work. The Google Scholar search engine and databases such as Web of Science and Scopus may be useful for finding the citing documents.

Recommended library catalogues

Slovenská knižnica

The Slovenská knižnica portal (www.kis3g.sk) is a valuable search tool which provides access to bibliographical information about a variety of resources from the collections of numerous Slovak libraries, including the Slovak National Library in Martin, the University Library in Bratislava, the State Research Library in Banská Bystrica, the State Research Library in Prešov, and the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. An advantage is that the database allows you to search for a specific type of document, be it a book, a book series, journal articles, electronic resources, maps, music, microfilms, and other material.

The Union Catalogue of Periodicals

The Union Catalogue of Periodicals (chamo-skp.kis3g.sk/search/query?theme=skp), managed by the University Library in Bratislava, may also prove useful. It lists a wide range of journals, magazines, conference proceedings, and other periodical publications held in the collections of Slovak libraries and various other institutions.

The Digital Library of the Slovak National Library (DIKDA)

DIKDA (dikda.snk.sk) provides access to “digital copies of books, newspapers, magazines, scientific proceedings, [and] articles which were published from the invention of printing until the beginning of the 21st century” within the territory of Slovakia (“Information”). As the DIKDA website explains, the library is the outcome of the “Digital Library and Digital Archive” national project, which ran from 2012 to 2015 and focused on the digitization of library collections. Thanks to this major initiative, the largest project to digitize written cultural heritage in Slovakia, the Slovak National Library in Martin has so far scanned and processed more than 1.25 million Slovak-related materials (“Information”). While a lot of the digital content is accessible remotely after registration, some materials can only be accessed at the library in person.

The Library of Congress

The Library of Congress (www.loc.gov) is the largest library in the world. Its collections include millions of catalogued books in over 400 languages, millions of manuscripts, and “the world’s largest collection of legal materials, films, maps, sheet music and sound recordings” (“General Information”).

The library’s online catalogue (catalog.loc.gov) is a great place to gain orientation and find out what has been written to date about your research subject. It is the most developed searchable catalogue that produces the most comprehensive search results, especially for book titles. This is thanks to the fact that the Library of Congress receives a copy of all new books published anywhere.

WorldCat

WorldCat (www.worldcat.org) is the world’s largest collection of information about materials in libraries which allows you to find out which library near you has a copy of the book you are looking for.

Other library services

In addition to searchable catalogues and traditional book lending, academic libraries offer a wide range of services that can enhance your research experience:

Access to paid scholarly online full-text databases (JSTOR, EBSCO, and Proquest)

If you have not found suitable sources via Google search, or if the book you would love to check out is not available on the open web, you can try your luck and search one of the online scholarly databases Slovak academic libraries subscribe to. They can be found via your university library’s site, and they offer full-text access to a wealth of journal articles and academic book publications. Most academic libraries also enable remote access to these databases upon request.

The databases that are the most relevant for the field of literary studies are JSTOR, EBSCO, and Proquest. Although multidisciplinary, they include a reasonable amount of material that might be of interest to literary scholars. It is important to note, however, that not everything on JSTOR can be readily accessed. The package of services your library subscribes to may not include the book or the journal article you would like to read. Additionally, some databases might not include the most up-to-date content; for instance, academic articles can take up to three years after publication to appear on JSTOR.

Research services

Research services can assist you in compiling a list of resources on your research topic by searching library catalogues and full-text databases. They are usually available free of charge, but waiting times can sometimes exceed a month. You can always do your own search. The Slovak National Library in Martin has prepared a detailed video manual on how to effectively search their catalogue using Boolean operators: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dah4m3NqYVE.

Interlibrary loans

If a publication is not available locally, you may want to use interlibrary loan services. This service makes it possible to borrow materials from other libraries in Slovakia or even from abroad. The fees

for this service can be typically found in a library's price list. It is also important to be aware that processing times can vary; indeed, sometimes waiting for a document to arrive may take several weeks. As a result, you should plan and request materials in advance to ensure they are available when you need them for your project.

Library consultants

If you are new to academic libraries, it is always a good idea to take a tour of their websites before your visit or to seek assistance from a library consultant upon your arrival. Being knowledgeable about the tools and resources available, library consultants can give you guidance, help you take full advantage of catalogues and databases, and advise you on how to conduct research effectively. Simply put, they can help you make the most of the library's offerings; therefore, do not hesitate to contact them when you feel lost.

AI TIP

Search for sources: Generative AI tools like ChatGPT should not be used for searching for sources, because they often give you sources that do not exist. They may give you the name of a real researcher who usually writes about your research topic, but the other details, like the title of the paper, will probably be made up (see Walters and Wilder). The reason is that ChatGPT cannot search the web. Your chances of finding legitimate sources are higher with Bing's Copilot. However, the list of publications it produces is usually not representative and comprehensive enough.

Search strategies: Based on your research question, ChatGPT can help you identify keywords or generate Boolean search strings to use for searching scholarly databases.

4.3 EVALUATING SOURCES

As I have already mentioned, writing a research paper requires drawing on the work and insights of other scholars, published in print or online. Since the credibility of your work depends on the validity of the evidence that you use, it is essential to critically assess the quality and reliability of each source before incorporating it into your work.

The credibility of a source can be evaluated based on these criteria: authority, purpose, publication and format, objectivity, accuracy, currency, and documentation.¹

¹ Most of these criteria come from a guide on "Evaluating Resources" compiled by the University of California Berkeley Library.

Authority

Simply put, check the author's credentials to find out if they can be trusted to know what they are writing about. Does the subject of the text fall within their expertise? Have they written anything else on the subject? Do they have a formal role within a recognized institution? To learn about an author's education and professional experience, as Brenda Spatt suggests, you may want to read the parts of a book that typically contain biographical information (a preface or a blurb on the jacket cover), check the author's bio note accompanying a journal article, search the author's name on the web using Google, or read reviews of their book available online (340–341). If you find out that the author of an article you have found is an undergraduate student or similar, you should try to look elsewhere.

Purpose

The purpose of a source influences how it presents information and the potential biases of the author. A text whose purpose is to inform and educate is usually regarded as reliable because it is expected to be factually accurate and objective. In contrast, texts intended to persuade or sell – such as opinion pieces, advertisements, and similar genres – tend to prioritize influence over evidence. That is the reason why their approach to information may be selective or biased. To determine whether a source offers a balanced, well-researched perspective, you need to understand the author's intent.

Publication and format

Another important aspect to consider when evaluating the credibility of a source is the medium in which it was published and its format. Is the source an article in an academic journal, a YouTube video, a blog post, or an article from a print magazine? Each medium has different expectations for credibility. Academic journal articles are typically subject to a peer-review process, which means that they are evaluated by experts in the field prior to their publication. Encountering some obstacles on their way to publication makes them more trustworthy sources of information. On the other hand, sources like blog posts or self-published content are not checked prior to publication and could present unverified or even false information.

The identity of the publisher should not be underestimated. Their reputation and editorial policies should play a role in your decision on whether or not you include a source produced by them. Academic publishers like Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press are reputed to have high editorial standards and a thorough peer-review process; therefore, if you would like to use a book published by either of them in your thesis, you can rely on the source having been checked for quality and academic integrity prior to its publication. On the other hand, if you find a book on a self-publishing platform like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing, where anybody can publish anything, you cannot be so confident that the material is credible and accurate.

Peer-reviewed, indexed, and high-impact journals

As a scholar, you should give preference to peer-reviewed and scholarly publications which generally offer a more rigorous analysis and are usually subjected to higher standards of review than non-scholarly formats like blogs or opinion pieces. They are published by an established academic publisher in a book or in an academic journal, usually following a peer-review process in which the quali-

ty of the manuscript is evaluated prior to its publication. In practice, the assessment is performed by at least two independent, objective scholars who have some expertise in the research area. They review the manuscript the publisher has received for originality, validity, and significance, and they recommend it for publication, revision, or rejection. Sometimes they may require the author to improve some aspects of the submitted text before it is published. As Thomas H. P. Gould argues, “academic peer review acts as a barrier to poor scholarship” (3). With peer-reviewed publications, you thus have a degree of certainty that the work you are reading is of sound quality.

Another factor that contributes to a publication’s reputation for quality is its inclusion in a journal index, which is a list of journals categorized based on discipline, subject, region, or other relevant criteria. It is a bibliographic database created by an organization, such as a public body (e.g. PubMed, maintained by the United States National Library of Medicine), an analytical company (e.g. Web of Science, maintained by Clarivate Analytics), or a publisher (e.g. Scopus, owned by Elsevier) (“What is a Journal Index”). To be included in an index, a journal has to meet certain criteria: the regularity of publication, the existence of a peer-review process and a code of ethics, a distinct scope and editorial content, the geographical diversity of authors and editors, and a good reputation (Marotti de Mello and de Sandes-Guimarães); therefore, indexed journals are considered to be of higher quality than their non-indexed counterparts.

A publication’s reputation for quality is further determined by its impact factor. This is a bibliometric tool used for grading the relative importance of academic journals within a field. It is a numerical value which shows the annual number of citations of articles published in a journal in the previous two years. The higher the impact factor is, the higher the number of citations a journal receives per year and the higher prestige it has in its field.

Although journal indexes and impact factors as proxies for quality have been subject to a lot of criticism lately, they are widely accepted and commonly used in academic evaluations and career assessments. You can, therefore, use them as general indicators of the reliability of sources. While they do not guarantee the absolute quality or relevance of every article, journals with high impact factors and respected indexing more often than not publish peer-reviewed work that meets rigorous academic standards.

A note on predatory journals

Unfortunately, even reputable indexes such as Scopus have been infiltrated by predatory journals (often also called deceptive, fraudulent, and pseudo-journals) in recent years (Macháček and Srholec). The problem is that they seem to be almost indistinguishable from legitimate journals. They may carry “lofty titles” (Beall) that mimic the names of well-known, legitimate journals, and their editorial boards may look impressive at first sight. Sometimes they claim to be indexed in key journal indexes. Upon closer examination, however, a lot of the information and claims on their websites are often proven false. They are not listed in journal indexes, and the people on their editorial boards may not even exist or know they were listed as members. The peer-review process of predatory journals is non-existent or superficial. They frequently accept articles within several days of submission, and they publish them suspiciously quickly without providing editing services. As a result, as Susan A. Elmore and Eleanor H. Weston point out, articles in predatory journals may be “low quality, unrelated to the topic of the journal, or nonsensical.” Due to little or no copyediting, they may have

typos and grammar mistakes. Their only aim is profit. Indeed, these journals will publish almost anything “as long as the author is willing to pay the [publication] fee” (Beall).

For these reasons, it is best to exclude articles published in them. Luckily, there are lists of predatory publishers and journals available, e.g. <https://predatoryjournals.org/the-list>.

Accuracy

Double-check the information a source presents. Is the information correct? Can the facts be verified in other publications on the same or a similar topic? If you check details from a source against other scholarly publications, you know that you are working with reliable data and not spreading misinformation.

Currency

Since research papers are expected to reflect the latest developments and discussions in a field, your research should focus on current publications as much as possible; however, this does not mean that you ignore older publications. In literary studies, some may still hold relevance especially if they present some foundational theories or generally accepted interpretations of a literary work.

To give an example, let’s say you are writing a thesis about William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. While it makes sense to read recent publications which are likely to reflect current global concerns – e.g. analysing *Hamlet* through the lens of postcolonial theory – you might also find older publications of value for your project. A. C. Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy* is a good example to discuss. Although it was published in 1904, it is still considered a seminal work of Shakespearean criticism whose relevance is attested to by the existence of its contemporary editions. The author’s views on the tragic hero archetype in his most famous tragedies are still frequently referenced in modern discussions of the tragic aspects of Shakespeare’s plays; therefore, you should not ignore such an influential source only because it appeared over a hundred years ago.

Documentation

Impeccable documentation can serve as a strong indicator of a source’s reliability. When authors cite their sources, they allow readers to verify the information presented. If citations are absent, it becomes more challenging to assess the credibility of the claims made. The quality and relevance of the sources that authors cite are also important: are they citing respected scholars in the field or relying on less credible material? Pay attention to how the author engages with their sources: do they clearly differentiate between their own ideas and those of others? And do they accurately represent the arguments they reference? When authors handle and document their sources properly, it indicates a level of scholarly rigour that strengthens the credibility and reliability of their work.

4.4 ORGANIZING SOURCES

Effectively organizing the material you have found is just as important as locating it. Without keeping track of your references and annotating your sources, you may find it difficult to revisit important information when drafting your paper. Taking proper notes and organizing them saves time and reduces frustration and is also key to ensuring a smooth writing process and avoiding plagiarism.

4.4.1 Taking notes

If you think you have found enough relevant sources for your thesis, you can start taking notes. According to Spatt, taking notes involves “read[ing] through a text ... deciding as you go which information you will probably want to use in your [paper] and recording it as summary, paraphrase, and quotation” (390). You can take notes either by hand or on a computer.

Although taking notes by hand on index cards or lined pads may seem old-fashioned, it has some advantages. For example, handwritten notes can be, as Spatt suggests, easily “organized into a sequence that would become the outline of a [paper]” (390). According to researchers, the main benefit is that taking notes by hand entails more cognitive engagement with the studied material than taking notes on a computer. Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer found that students who prefer handwriting typically have a deeper understanding of the material because they process and reframe the information in their own words. On the other hand, students who take notes on a computer tend to record information verbatim; as a result, their absorption of the material is shallower. Spatt also warns that computer note-taking may lead to a “cut-and-paste method of writing,” which does not involve any genuine writing, and disappointment on the part of your instructor (391).

If you choose to use a computer, Spatt recommends opening a file only for notes which is distinct from your thesis file (391). Notes for a source should start with complete bibliographical information; you can then include a summary of the source, a short explanation of the relevance of the source, and your own version of the information you find relevant for your thesis, while recording all page numbers for quotations and paraphrases. Always prefer summarizing and paraphrasing to using quotations because, as Spatt explains, relying too much on the author’s wording can hinder your own ability to find your own voice. You do not want your paper to read like “an anthology of cannibalized quotations” (Spatt 392). Finally, always make sure you clearly distinguish between your own ideas and the source’s ideas.

AI TIP

Summarizing: You can use AI tools to summarize a longer text. However, this does not mean that you can decide not to read the text. You must always check the information AI tools produce for accuracy.

Explaining a source: If you have difficulty understanding a specific passage in an article or in a book because it uses a lot of academic jargon, you can try asking ChatGPT to explain it to you in plain language. It will paraphrase it to help you make sense of it.

4.4.2 Reference management tools

The process of collecting, organizing, citing, and sharing sources can be made more efficient by reference management tools like Zotero and EndNote. Some of the tools are available free of charge; some must be purchased. They allow you to collect sources directly from databases, websites, or PDFs and automatically capture bibliographical information for them. If the information cannot be retrieved from a database or the internet, you can always enter it manually. The reference management sources also let you organize your sources into folders or categorize them with tags to make them easier to find when needed. Additionally, they enable you to generate citations and bibliographies in various citation styles, such as MLA, APA, and Chicago. This saves you time and eliminates concerns about accuracy. Many of these tools also offer options to annotate your sources, add notes, and even collaborate with others by sharing your reference library.

For students, Brookbank and Christenberry recommend several reference management tools that are either free of charge or available at a low cost; they are accessible online and are intuitive to use:

- Zotero (zotero.org)
- Mendeley (mendeley.com)
- RefWorks (refworks.com)
- EndNote (endnote.com)
- EasyBib (easybib.com)
- NoodleTools (noodletools.com) (108–109)

Your turn

- I Go back to the research question you formulated in Chapter 2 and decide which of the research methods described in this chapter can help you answer it.
- II Identify key terms relevant to your topic. Brainstorm and list as many synonyms as possible for each keyword.
- III Using the keywords you have identified, explore the university's databases to find as many relevant sources as possible. Apply some of the search strategies described in this chapter to either broaden or narrow down your search results. Which combination of keywords has produced the most relevant results?
- IV Compile a preliminary bibliography for your thesis following the citation style you have chosen (see Chapter 5).
- V Annotate your bibliography by offering a short summary of each source and explaining its relevance to your research. Note down any passages that may be useful for your thesis. When taking notes, give preference to paraphrasing and summarizing.

This chapter

- ⇒ **introduces techniques of integrating sources into one's own writing**
- ⇒ **defines and introduces instances of plagiarism**
- ⇒ **explains when to document sources**
- ⇒ **shows how to document sources**
- ⇒ **introduces citation styles commonly used in literary studies**

Finding relevant and reliable sources for your thesis is important, but it is even more important to acquire the skills necessary for using them effectively and ethically in your own writing. It is crucial to understand how to integrate them into your own text, but also when and how to document them.

5.1 HOW TO INTEGRATE SOURCES

There are three techniques for incorporating sources: direct quotations, paraphrasing, and summarizing. To be able to use them well, you need to understand when and how to use each of these appropriately.

5.1.1 Direct quotations

Quoting a source means using the source verbatim; that means using the exact wording from the source without any changes. It is a technique that should be used sparingly because using too many quotes might suppress your own voice in writing. Also, quoting does not necessarily mean that you have mentally processed the information presented. For these reasons, Tara Horkoff recommends that directly quoted material should constitute a maximum of 10 to 15 percent of a research paper (ch. 9.1). According to Brenda Spatt, it should be reserved for only some situations:

- 1 To support a point or appeal to authority

(You use another person's original words because you consider them either important or experts in the field, and you want to make sure their ideas are reproduced with accuracy and full impact.)

- 2 To preserve vivid or technical language

(You use the exact wording of the source because putting it in your own words might entail losing or changing the point.)

- 3 To comment on the quotation

(You use another author's exact words to comment on the language they used.)

4 To distance yourself from the quotation

(You use another person's original words to express disagreement with them or to signal that the phrases they used are not right. Sometimes you may want to gain distance from your own wording if you are using a word which is obsolete, slang, or similar.) (Spatt 107–109)

Technically, to mark a quotation, we use quotation marks (“ ”) around the exact words taken from the source. In the MLA style (see below), if the quotation is longer than four lines, it is formatted as a block quote, which is indented by 2.5 cm and does not require the use of quotation marks. In addition to this, there must be an in-text citation (appropriately formatted according to the citation style you are using in your thesis) to attribute the quotation to its original source.

How to punctuate quotations

◆ introducing the quoted material

- The comma is the most frequently used punctuation mark used to introduce a quotation:

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, his dead self once said, “Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all those who live without love” (Rowling 722).

- The colon is used when the sentence introducing the quotation can stand on its own:

Despite also losing her official identity, she considers it an advantage: “I don’t have an identity now. So I’m invisible” (Atwood 101).

- No punctuation is used when the quoted material flows directly from your introductory text:

Offred is described as “desperately greedy for the intellectual stimulation of words” (Johns 180).

At the end of her speech, she tells the little governess that “it sounds rather hard but we’ve got to be women of the world, haven’t we?” (Mansfield 240).

◆ closing the quoted material

- Commas and periods always precede the final quotation marks no matter if they belong to the quoted sentence or your own:

Danita J. Dodson maintains that Atwood’s goal is to “give people ideas,” to make them think about issues that are and have been important for a long time now (96).

According to Theo Finigan, this makes them “completely pliable subjects, mere receptacles for totalitarian ideology.”

- Question marks and exclamation marks are placed inside the quotation marks if they belong to the quoted material (a) and outside if they belong to your own sentence (b):

(a) After she moves to Italy, she starts to regret the life she could have had with Arthur: “Years of breakfasts, inept, forsaken, never to be recovered. ... Years of murdered breakfasts, why had I done it?” (Atwood, *Lady* 11).

(b) What does Staels mean when she says that the Republic of Gilead is a society which “functionalizes language to the extreme” (457)?

◆ **interrupting quotations**

“However, very few spotted that Dumbledore was gay,” Emma Flint elaborated, “nobody expected him to vomit rainbows and sashay around Hogwarts, but normally there's a vibe that resonates through the pages. There's a kindredness between character and reader.”

◆ **quoting inside a quotation**

Single quotation marks are used for the quotation inside your quotation:

Additionally, Harris and Shields Dobson claim that recently, “‘choice’ has become the central organizing concept for the constitution of modern identity” (148).

◆ **incorporating an extended quotation**

If you use a quotation that is more than four lines long, you must indent the whole passage 2.5 cm from the left margin. The indentation alone indicates the passage is a quotation, so there is no need for quotation marks at the beginning or at the end of the quoted material.

Right from the start, it is clear that the mother has an unfavourable opinion of Isabella:

She used to go up to the old castle – there is no roof – with just about anyone. Soldiers, musicians, cripples, foreigners, old men and boys. She was reasonably pretty, in a sly sort of way. Oh, but there was the devil in her eyes. Light eyes, too light for hereabouts. Black hair, light eyes – Isabella was always a strange one. Pretty enough, you know, but strange. (Bird 26)

How to tailor quotations

◆ **use an ellipsis to delete words**

Instead of concentrating on the situation around her, Offred tries to limit the number of thoughts dedicated to the suffering and oppression: “I try not to think too much. ... There’s a lot that doesn’t bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances and I intend to last” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 17).

◆ **use square brackets to insert words**

Offred maintains she could “spend minutes, tens of minutes, running [her] eyes over the print: FAITH” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 67).

“[her]” replaces “my” from the original quotation. The square brackets are thus used to adjust the quotation to fit the author’s own writing. As Spatt writes, square brackets are also used “to explain a vague word, to replace a confusing phrase, to suggest an antecedent, to correct an error in a quotation” (123).

5.1.2 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is (and should be) more frequently used than quoting. It involves putting ideas from a source in your own words. A paraphrase must have more or less the same length and the same meaning as the original text; you must include all its main ideas without adding ideas of your own. In addition, the language in which the ideas are conveyed must be different enough from the original to be considered your own text. Just like a quotation, a paraphrase must be attributed.

To paraphrase adequately, it is not enough to replace some words in the original text with their synonyms. You must restructure sentences, change the order of information, and use different phrases or expressions to convey the same meaning:

Original text

... Offred strategically manipulates the reader, omits some displeasing truths and offers several possible versions of events. (Labudova 101)

Paraphrase

Labudova maintains that Offred deliberately influences the reader by selectively withholding unpleasant details and presenting more than one possible interpretation of events (101).

We paraphrase when what a source says is more important than its wording. As a result, we paraphrase when we want to simplify or clarify some material presented in the source or when we want to change the order of ideas in the source material for the purpose of emphasis (“Decide”).

When paraphrasing more than one sentence, it is important to clearly signal the beginning and the end of the paraphrase in your own text. The most elegant approach is to start the paraphrase with a direct mention of the author within your text and to close it with an in-text citation.

5.1.3 Summarizing

When summarizing, you include only the most essential information from a source using your own words. Just like with quotations and paraphrases, you must refer to the author and their work (without pagination) and present their ideas accurately and objectively.

Tara J. Johnson’s paper argues that [the] actual power [of the Aunts] is equal or possibly even greater than that held by the Commanders because they have dominance over the entire female sphere and they are in possession of possibly incriminating information they can use to manipulate powerful men.

Again, we summarize when the wording of a source is less important than its ideas, typically when we want to condense or simplify the material (“Decide”).

No matter how you decide to present a source’s ideas, if you are going to quote, paraphrase, or summarize them (most often, you combine the techniques), make sure you use relevant materi-

al and always explain its relevance. Remember, a source should never speak for you. It does not have significance on its own. You are the one who must give it meaning; therefore, do not forget to “comment on how it helps prove your point” (“Decide”) as in the example that follows.

How to integrate sources: an example

One of the patterns which can be observed both in Victor and Nathan is their desire to play God. Though they may initially seem like distinctly different characters – particularly with Nathan’s self-centredness and cockiness – they both possess an intense urge to rival God in their creative power. In his article “Scientific Prometheanism and the Boundaries of Knowledge: Whither Goes AI?,” Tianhu Hao notes the undeniable similarities between these two creators, observing that “[t]hey think they are God-like, but actually they are slaves to their excessive passion, or madness...” (340). This “madness” manifests in their willingness to push ethical and natural boundaries. Both of them have their moral compasses distorted by ambition. Victor, especially at the start of his scientific journey, is entirely captivated by his research and the breakthrough of creating human life from lifeless matter. His sense of entitlement and power is evident in the way he describes his ambitions:

Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could ever claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. (Shelley 33)

Victor’s language here is not only ambitious but distinctly godlike – he positions himself as a creator to be worshipped. As Cynthia Pon observes, his ambition reflects “science for the scientist’s sake, an ego-trip” (36–37), emphasizing that Victor’s motivations are self-serving. Similarly, Nathan’s scientific endeavours in *Ex Machina* reveal a comparable egotism. He creates Ava not for the betterment of humanity, but to satisfy his own intellectual desires and prove to himself that he is indeed superior to all as he believes. Both Victor and Nathan thus display godly hubris. Like Prometheus, they defy the natural order and strive to animate lifeless matter, believing their creations will immortalize them. However, their creations ultimately become the source of their suffering, a testament to the tragic consequences of overreaching ambition.

(student thesis, revised and edited)

Note how smoothly this author integrates the material from both her primary and secondary sources, how the material reinforces the theme of ambition and godlike hubris, and how she always explains its relevance for her argument.

5.2 PLAGIARISM

Integrating sources into your own writing effectively is essential for building a strong argument. However, as you incorporate the ideas of others, it is equally important to do so ethically. Ethical use of sources involves accurately representing the ideas of others and giving them proper credit. Without this, your readers, who may be authors themselves, cannot trace the origins of your ideas or verify your claims, which can undermine the credibility of your work. In addition, properly acknowledging the works of others reflects your respect for their intellectual property and guards against the risk of plagiarism.

To understand why avoiding plagiarism is so important, we must first define what it is. Brenda Spatt provides a helpful definition:

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's work, in the form of original ideas, strategies, and research, or another person's writing, in the form of sentences, phrases, and innovative terminology. (429)

As is evident from this, plagiarism is a practice which involves more than just copying someone else's words. Using another person's unique ideas or findings without giving them credit is just as wrong, both from a legal and moral point of view. This means that even if you present the ideas of others in your own words, you can still commit plagiarism if you do not acknowledge them properly.

Plagiarism: examples

Source: Javorčíková, Jana. *Contemporary Literature in English – Selected Historical, Social and Cultural Contexts*. 2nd ed., Gaudeamus, 2014, p. 12.

Original text

In the 20th and 21st centuries, however, many of the literary traditions were outmoded or deliberately broken. Postmodernism, for example, ruined many of the thousand-year existing literary conventions regarding the genre, form and style of fiction. Literary genres started to overlap, and thus it ceased to be possible to discuss genre according to the original Aristotelian categories. Authors such as Alan Sillitoe or Kingsley Amis who clearly followed the specific artistic stream of social criticism publicly repudiated the label 'Angry Young Men.' Poets such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes also proudly called themselves 'misfits' and refused to belong to any established movement or trend. Therefore, any attempt to set periods of modern British literature is doomed to objections and suspected of being inconcise and excluding certain authors while misplacing others. Being aware of this danger, we would like to introduce three of many methodological approaches to the periodization of modern English literature that are recognized by academic researchers.

Stealing ideas

During the 20th and 21st centuries, many traditional approaches to literature became outdated or were intentionally disregarded. For instance, postmodernism disrupted and overturned numerous established conventions related to fiction's genre, structure, and stylistic elements. As a consequence, literary genres began intersecting, making it increasingly difficult to apply the classic Aristotelian genre classifications. Writers such as Alan Sillitoe and Kingsley Amis, although they were associated with socially critical literary movements, rejected being labelled as 'Angry Young Men.' In the same way, poets like Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes embraced their roles as 'misfits' and chose not to affiliate themselves with any particular literary school. Therefore, any attempt to create a clear periodization of modern British literature tends to be incomplete or inaccurate.

This passage is problematic because although it expresses the ideas of the original in the author's own words, it fails to acknowledge that they were in fact taken from another author's text.

Stealing words

According to Jana Javorčíková, in the 20th and 21st centuries, many of the literary traditions were outmoded or deliberately broken. Postmodernism, for example, ruined many of the thousand-year existing literary conventions regarding genre, form, and style. As a result, literary genres started to overlap, and it ceased to be possible to discuss genre according to the original Aristotelian categories. Even authors like Alan Sillitoe or Kingsley Amis, who clearly followed the specific artistic stream of social criticism, repudiated the label 'Angry Young Men'. Similarly, poets like Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes proudly called themselves 'misfits' and refused to belong to any established movement or trend (Javorčíková 12).

Although this passage gives credit to the author of the original text, it fails to acknowledge its indebtedness to her wording. Many sentences or phrases are borrowed directly from the original, without using quotation marks to indicate this. This is also a case of plagiarism.

The most common instances of plagiarism include:

- submitting a text that was written by somebody else (including AI-generated texts);
- paraphrasing a source inadequately, i.e. using words and phrases that are too similar to the original source or changing just a few words in the original text without changing the sentence structure, word classes, etc.;
- omitting an in-text citation;
- using directly quoted material without quotation marks;
- copying elements of different sources to create a new text ("patchwork plagiarism"); and
- translating a text from a foreign language and presenting it as one's own.

Nowadays, there are many applications that can identify plagiarized text. Upon submission, your thesis is checked by the AntiPlag system in the Central Register of Theses and Dissertations, which compares it to other theses and dissertations already in the system. As Kačmárová notes, the system does not have access to published scholarly monographs or journals, and a zero result from its plagiarism check does not guarantee that you will not be accused of plagiarism (Kačmárová 8). Here, the expertise of your supervisor and reviewer should not be underestimated. They know you, they are aware of your level of skill, and they are familiar with your style of writing. If your writing does not sound like you, it may raise suspicions, which will lead to a more thorough review of your thesis. This closer check usually uncovers whether the text, or parts of it, were genuinely produced by you.

If plagiarism is detected, the consequences can be unpleasant. At a minimum, your thesis may be rejected, and you may be required to rewrite it. More serious cases of plagiarism may lead to disciplinary actions, with expulsion from your studies being the most severe outcome. In addition, charges of plagiarism can damage your academic reputation, which may be a problem if you plan to continue in your studies. Going forward, your work is likely to be closely scrutinized. It is, therefore, always better to properly cite your sources than face these repercussions.

5.3 WHEN TO DOCUMENT SOURCES

It may now seem that to avoid charges of plagiarism, you must document every single sentence, but that is not the case. Documentation is not needed for your own original ideas and common knowledge. Common knowledge refers to established facts, information widely accepted by the general public, and ideas that can be found in multiple sources; for example, the information that Jack Kerouac was born as the youngest of three children of French-Canadian immigrants does not need documentation, because it can be found in most reference works on Kerouac. On the other hand, the findings of Miriam Kleiman, an archives specialist who investigated Kerouac's military personnel file, must be referenced because they represent her original research.

Sometimes the difference between common and specific knowledge may be less straightforward. In such cases, you must rely on your common sense. It is generally recommended to document everything you did not know before conducting your research (Spatt 431). This means that you should cite a source even for general yet unfamiliar facts that you had to look up in a reference source. The golden rule is that overdocumentation is always better than facing accusations of plagiarism.

AI TIP

According to Internal Regulation 2/2024, AI tools must be documented when used to generate content, just like any other source; however, if they are used solely for formal text editing – such as proofreading – documentation is not required (Comenius University).

5.4 HOW TO DOCUMENT SOURCES

Documenting a paper requires much more than adding a list of URL links from which you drew ideas at the end of your text, as is often mistakenly done. It requires you to meticulously distinguish your ideas from those of your sources by using quotation marks and in-text citations and providing your reader with detailed information (author, title, publisher, date of publication, etc.) about all your sources so that they can be easily located when needed.

Below I will describe two systems of documentation – the Modern Language Association (MLA) style and the Chicago Manual of Style – that are commonly used in publications in the field of literary studies in English. I will also look at ISO 690, which is the system of documentation recommended for theses at Slovak universities.

There are several reasons why I discuss the MLA style and the Chicago style before ISO 690 – and it is not only my personal preference for the former two. Firstly, both MLA and Chicago are specifically tailored for the humanities, whereas ISO 690 is more general and used across various fields. As a result, both the MLA style and the Chicago style have clearer guidelines on how to cite sources relevant to literary studies. The second reason is their international recognition. ISO 690 is mainly used in Europe, whereas global audiences are more familiar with MLA and Chicago. Both styles are widely used at universities and in academic publications worldwide, which makes them more practical, especially for those who are considering an academic career after graduation. Thirdly, both MLA and Chicago come with comprehensive handbooks and free online resources, which are easy to use and frequently updated to address recent developments, such as the use of AI tools. In contrast, ISO 690 lacks the same level of support. Its Slovak version, STN ISO 690, is not freely available; indeed, it is challenging to even find up-to-date academic guides for the 2022 edition. Fourthly, common reference management tools cannot produce bibliographical data in accordance with ISO 690 but are programmed to do so according to MLA and Chicago.

5.4.1 The MLA Style

The MLA style is a widely used system of documentation which employs the author's name and pagination for in-text citations, being placed in parentheses and linked to an alphabetized bibliography at the end of the paper. It is the style you would most probably use for your essays if you were studying or publishing in the humanities overseas, particularly in literary studies.

Using the MLA style offers several advantages. As it only requires the author's last name and page number for in-text citations, it is easy to use. Readers can access the source information without having to turn to a separate page at the back of the publication, which ensures that the flow of the text remains uninterrupted. The MLA has one of the most elaborate and comprehensive style guides, including templates for citing a wide range of source types, and even less common ones such as sculptures, paintings, and email messages.

The style's main disadvantage is that it is not very suitable for multiple sources by the same author. Since MLA in-text citations do not include publication dates, differentiating between multiple works by the same author is a bit challenging. MLA recommends using a shortened title of the source, which makes the in-text citations slightly cumbersome.

MLA style: an example

An excerpt from Katarína Labudová, “Paradise Redesigned: Post-Apocalyptic Visions of Urban and Rural Spaces in Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam Trilogy*,” *Eger Journal of English Studies*, vol. XIII, 2013, p. 28.

Atwood hybridizes utopia and dystopia, and presents them as “two sides of the same coin” (154) (5), to use Sicher’s phrase, rather than distinct poles, thereby challenging the traditional reading of utopia and dystopia as distinct genres and exposing the impossibility of such purist categorization. Tom Moylan identifies this kind of genre as “utopian dystopia” (154) (2) and also “critical utopia” as the new “space for a new form of political opposition, one fundamentally based in difference and multiplicity” (Moylan 190). (1) As an example of a “utopiandystopian” genre, Atwood’s *Maddaddam* trilogy can be read as a dynamic and demanding text, which “requires consistent thought but also mental leaps that stretch the mind beyond the habitual or the accepted” (4) (Moylan xvii). Atwood’s postmodern novel mixes (f)actual and fictional, urban and rural spaces, individualized narrative voices as well as corporate propaganda to create a polyphony of opposing voices and perspectives to express her environmental concerns and satirize “our contemporary corporation-controlled and technologically driven world” (3) (Stein 320). Nevertheless, she suggests that we may change and re-think our greedy behavior and, hopefully, restore, however imperfectly, a version of quasi-utopian Paradise.

Works Cited²

- Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. Methuen, 1986.
- Sicher, Efraim. “A World Neither Brave Nor New: Reading Dystopian Fiction after 9/11.” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, pp. 151–76. *Project Muse*, doi: 10.1353/pan.0.0057. Accessed 3 Oct 2013.
- Stein, Karen. “Surviving the Waterless Flood: Feminism and Ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of the Flood*.” *Critical Insights: Margaret Atwood*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, Salem Press, 2013.

The example incorporates several of the basic rules for using MLA:

- 1 The parenthetical note is always included in the sentence to which it applies. As a result, terminal punctuation follows the parenthetical note.
- 2 If the parenthetical note applies to only part of the sentence, put it directly after the borrowed material.
- 3 The parenthetical note is never part of the quotation it follows. For this reason, the quotation must be closed before you open the parentheses.
- 4 There is always a space before the parenthetical note.
- 5 If the author’s name is mentioned in the text, the parenthetical note only includes the page number.

² I edited the original entries, formatted according to MLA style (8th edition), to correspond with MLA style (9th edition).

In-text citations

The format of in-text citations following MLA style depends on several factors, such as the availability of information, the number of authors, the number of volumes in a work, and the number of works being cited.

1 Basic format

The parenthetical note should include the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the information was taken, with no punctuation between them:

Gilead tries to avert the potentially catastrophic crisis by establishing absolute control over the lives of the citizens, while claiming that "the demographic problem resulted from too much individual freedom, free love, homosexual relationships, birth control and women having careers" (Kuznetski 289).

If you mention the author's name directly in the text, there is no need to mention it twice. The parenthetical note will thus only include the page number:

Similarly, Danita J. Dodson maintains that Atwood's goal is to "give people ideas", to make them think about issues that are and have been important for a long time now (96) ...

2 No page number available

If the source does not have page numbers – e.g. a website – you only include the author's last name:

[Margaret Atwood was] declared the most popular Canadian author among readers from the same country in 2017 (Watson).

3 Two or more authors

For two authors, include the last names of both of them, separated by "and":

Savita Kulkarni and Neeraj Hatekar maintain that this "'scientific' approach" was only adopted after explanations rooted in religious beliefs had started to seem less and less credible (113).

If the authors were not mentioned in the text, the parenthetical note would be (Kulkarni and Hatekar 113).

For three or more authors, include only the first author's last name followed by "et al.":

Tomaž Onič and his colleagues highlight another aspect of Atwood's use of language in her poetry, one that is also applicable in her fiction: its obliquity.

The parenthetical note would be (Onič et al.).

4 Corporate author

When the author is a corporation or organization, use the name of the organization in the parenthetical note:

However, UNESCO's final report encourages the right to learn, read and write, and therefore the right to literacy, as soon as 1985, coincidentally the same year in which *The Handmaid's Tale* was published.

The parenthetical note would be (UNESCO).

5 No author

If there is no author, use the title of the work (shortened if necessary) in quotation marks for articles or italicize it for book-length publications:

Heteronormativity is defined as "the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behavior" ("Heteronormativity").

6 Multiple works by the same author

When the list of works cited includes more than one work by the same author, add the title in shortened form to your parenthetical note.

Stromquist refers to studies confirming that more educated women tend to get married older and have fewer children ("Women and Illiteracy" 97).

The parenthetical note would be (Stromquist, "Women and Literacy" 97).

7 Indirect sources

If referring to a source that is cited within another source, use "qtd. in" (for "quoted in") before the indirect source:

According to Leslie J. Limage, "literacy has never been formally enshrined as a basic human right" (qtd. in Rockhill 158).

It is generally good practice to include the name of the author from whom the quotation is taken directly in the text itself. The parenthetical note (Limage, qtd. in Rockhill 158) might be confusing for the reader.

8 Citing entire works

When referring to an entire work rather than a specific part, mention the author's name in the text or provide it in the parenthetical note.

Tom Moylan explores the relationship between science fiction and utopian imagination throughout his book *Demand the Impossible*.

9 Multiple sources for the same point

If you have more than one source to document the same point, separate the sources with a semicolon:

Women often belong into these groups, as evidenced by the fact that they generally have lower literacy rates than men and the gap reaches more than 20% in many developing countries (Dodson 101; Stromquist, “Women and Illiteracy” 95).

10 Literary work

When referencing a literary work, consider including details that will allow readers to locate the passage you are citing in any edition of the work. Include the page number of the edition you are using followed by a semicolon. Add a part number or chapter number for novels, e.g. (Fitzgerald 60; ch. III), (Morrison 99; “Spring”); line numbers or part and line numbers for poems, e.g. (Whitman, “Sleepers” 94; 1.5–6); and act, scene, and line numbers for plays, e.g. (*Othello* 25; 1.1).

11 Long quotation

Place the parenthetical note at the end of the quotation, after the terminal punctuation, with a space before the parentheses.

[Offred] tries to come to terms with the situation by considering numerous synonyms usually used to describe sexual intimacy and explaining why most of them are not applicable:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he’s doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven’t signed up for. There wasn’t a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 104–5)

Works Cited

The list of works cited is found at the end of the paper. Individual entries are ordered alphabetically either by the authors’ last names or by the title of the source (ignoring articles) if the author’s information is not available. Every entry uses a hanging indent, where the first line is flush with the left margin, and any subsequent lines are indented by 1.27 cm.

Entries are created according to a template of core elements (see below). As the *MLA Handbook*, 9th ed., explains, the core elements are “facts common to most sources, like author, title, and publication date” (ch. 5.1). As Brookbank and Christenberry note, the individual items on the template “stand in for a range of publication details.” For example, the label “Publisher” may refer to “the com-

pany that produced a book or the arts organization that staged a play.” The “Title of Source” field may be filled with the source’s published title or “a title of an untitled work (like a letter).” Brookbank and Christenberry admit that it is common for some of the core elements not to be available for each source you are citing. In such cases, it is acceptable to omit them. The only exception is the title, which must always be included (Brookbank and Christenberry 106).

MLA template of core elements:

Author. Title of source. Title of container, contributor, version, number, publisher, publication date, location.

The example below shows the formatting for a variety of sources, following the MLA template. The type of the source is included in the parentheses at the end of the entry.

Works Cited

- Blake, Jason. *Canadian Hockey Literature: A Thematic Study*. University of Toronto Press, 2010. (Print book)
- “Bury Your Gays.” *TV Tropes*, tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays. Accessed 16 Feb. 2024. (Webpage)
- Dante, Cathy Melesky, et al. “Power Literacy in Abuse Prevention Education: Lessons from the Field in the Catholic Safeguarding Response.” *Journal of Moral Theology*, vol. 13, no. 1, Jan. 2024, pp. 130–55. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAI FZK240325000416&lang=sk&site=ehost-live&scope=site. (Journal article with three or more authors)
- “Describe the symbolism of the rocking horse in D. H. Lawrence’s short story ‘The Rocking-Horse Winner’” prompt. *ChatGPT 4o*, OpenAI, 24 Oct. 2024, chat.openai.com/chat.
- Hughes, Bettany. “Why Tell Stories? With Bettany Hughes and Margaret Atwood.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Google Arts & Culture, 19 Mar. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdSW-YoY6x0. Accessed 1 Dec. 2021. (Online video)
- Oppenheim, Maya. “Margaret Atwood: Feminism is not about believing women are always right.” *The Independent*, 18 July 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-au-thor-feminism-women-not-always-right-a7847316.html. Accessed 5 June 2022. (Online newspaper)
- Staines, David. “Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context.” *The Cambridge Companion: Margaret Atwood*, edited by Coral Ann Howells, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 14–31. (Book chapter)

Summerfield, Giovanna, and Lisa Downward. *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uniba-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1748461>. (E-book with two authors)

Further reading

MLA Handbook. 9th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021.
 “MLA Formatting and Style Guide.” The Purdue OWL, Purdue U Writing Lab.

5.4.2 The Chicago Manual of Style

The Chicago Manual of Style, usually shortened to Chicago style, is a widely used citation system developed by the University of Chicago Press, which offers two distinct citation formats: notes and bibliography (also known as Turabian) and author-date and bibliography. The latter is similar to ISO 690 and MLA style but is more commonly used in the natural sciences and social sciences than in the humanities. Journals focused on literary research give preference to the notes and bibliography system, which uses footnotes or endnotes for references along with a corresponding bibliography at the end.

Chicago style: an example

An excerpt from David Livingstone, In Our Own Image: Fictional Representations of Shakespeare, Palacký University Olomouc, 2019, p. 103.

At times, however, we are not sure who is speaking: Shakespeare, Burgess, both. Near the end, in section vi of the Epilogue, this question is actually directly addressed: “Questions? You wish to know how ventriloquial all this is, who is really speaking?”²²⁰

The author takes sips of his drink occasionally in the novel, blurring the line between AB and WS, which is further complicated by the novel taking diary form in the first person in certain sections:

“Mr Burgess’s farewell lecture to his special students...who complained that Shakespeare had nothing to give to the East. (Thanks for the farewell gift of three bottles of samsu. I will take a swig now. Delicious. [sic]”²²¹ The reference here is to his former students in Malaysia where Burgess taught for a number of years.

220 Anthony Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun* (London: Allison & Busby, 2012), 316.

221 Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, 6.

Bibliography

Burgess, Anthony. *Nothing Like the Sun*. London: Allison & Busby, 2012.

As the example demonstrates, in Chicago style you insert a superscript number at the end of the sentence in which you quote, paraphrase, or summarize a source to signal you have used someone else's words or ideas. In a correspondingly numbered note, you provide information about the source (author, title, publication details) and relevant page numbers. You only give the full citation details the first time a source is cited; for subsequent references, you use shortened versions. The notes can take the form of footnotes placed at the bottom of the page or the form of endnotes collected at the end of your paper or at the end of each chapter; however, their format is the same (Turabian, ch. 16).

The main advantage of Chicago style is that the notes keep your paper clean and readable without lengthy parenthetical citations disrupting its flow. Furthermore, the reader does not have to turn to the back of your paper to see detailed information about a source; the information is readily available on the same page as the reference. Last but not least, the notes offer space for additional commentary and clarifications that do not fit within the main body of your paper; this may be especially useful in literary analysis for discussing historical context, critical reception, or variations between editions of a text.

Compared to ISO 690 and MLA style, Chicago style has one disadvantage. Formatting the notes is usually more time-consuming than formatting the parenthetical citations. You need to check if you have already cited the source and included its full publication details, which often involves scrolling back to the beginning of your paper. If you have a lot of sources, this may be quite tiresome. I would therefore recommend ISO 690's and MLA's more straightforward format for your thesis, especially if it does not require very complex citations.

Formatting notes and bibliography entries

Below are some examples of notes (N) and bibliographies (B) for common types of sources. They show what information to include and in what order; they also illustrate the style's rules about capitalization, punctuation, and the use of italics and quotation marks.

Books

N: # Jason Blake, *Canadian Hockey Literature: A Thematic Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 48.

B: Blake, Jason. *Canadian Hockey Literature: A Thematic Study*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

E-book with two authors

N: # Giovanna Summerfield and Lisa Downward, *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 15, ProQuest Ebook Central.

B: Summerfield, Giovanna, and Downward, Lisa. *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Book chapter

N: # David Staines, “Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context,” in *The Cambridge Companion: Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

B: Staines, David. “Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context.” In *The Cambridge Companion: Margaret Atwood*, edited by Coral Ann Howells, 14–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Journal article with more than three authors

N: # Cathy Melesky Dante et al., “Power Literacy in Abuse Prevention Education: Lessons from the Field in the Catholic Safeguarding Response,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, no. 1, (Jan. 2024): 145, EBSCOhost.

B: Dante, Cathy Melesky, et al. “Power Literacy in Abuse Prevention Education: Lessons from the Field in the Catholic Safeguarding Response.” *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, no. 1, (Jan. 2024): 130–155. EBSCOhost.

Online newspaper article

N: # Maya Oppenheim, “Margaret Atwood: Feminism is not about believing women are always right,” *The Independent*, July 18, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-au-thor-feminism-women-not-always-right-a7847316.html>.

B: Oppenheim, Maya. “Margaret Atwood: Feminism is not about believing women are always right.” *The Independent*, July 18, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-au-thor-feminism-women-not-always-right-a7847316.html>.

Online video

N: Bettany Hughes, “Why Tell Stories? With Bettany Hughes and Margaret Atwood,” YouTube video, 06:04, posted by “Google Arts & Culture,” March 19, 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdSW-YoY6x0.

B: Hughes, Bettany. “Why Tell Stories? With Bettany Hughes and Margaret Atwood.” YouTube video, 06:04. Posted by “Google Arts & Culture,” March 19, 2021. www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdSW-YoY6x0.

Webpage

N: “Bury Your Gays,” *TV Tropes*, accessed February 16, 2024, tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays.

B: “Bury Your Gays.” *TV Tropes*. Accessed February 16, 2024. tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays.

ChatGPT

N: ChatGPT, response to “Describe the Symbolism of the Rocking Horse in D. H. Lawrence’s Short Story ‘The Rocking-Horse Winner’”, October 24, 2024, OpenAI, <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

B: No Bibliography entry

Further reading

The Chicago Manual of Style: Online. 18th ed., The University of Chicago 2024.
<https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>.

5.4.3 ISO 690

ISO 690, or its Slovak version STN ISO 690: 2022, is an international standard which provides guidelines for citing information resources in academic and professional writing. It is used across disciplines in many European countries and is recommended by all Slovak universities for a consistent and professional-looking presentation of references in theses and dissertations.

ISO 690 recommends three types of citation techniques,³ which are equal but should not be combined within one document:

- 1 Name-date system
- 2 Numeric system
- 3 Running notes system

Slovak universities do not have a clear preference for any one of these techniques, although Comenius University in Bratislava does recommend the name-date system (Lichnerová 22). If your supervisor does not specify otherwise, it is at your discretion to choose the most suitable citation technique for your thesis.

³ According to Lichnerová and Bellérová, the latest ISO 690 (from 2021) introduces two more citation techniques: the named tag system and the connected (implied) system (20–21). However, since these are very rarely used, I do not believe it is necessary to deal with them here.

Name-date system

The name-date system is similar to MLA style. It uses parenthetical citations inserted directly in the text, which include either the author's last name or the first words of the source's title (if the author is anonymous) along with the year of publication. If the author or the title is mentioned directly in the text, the parenthetical note only includes the year of publication. For quotations, it should also include the page number where the referenced text can be found. When citing several sources by the same author published in the same year, distinguish them by adding small letters after the year of publication: e.g. (Hawthorne 1978a). The bibliography at the end of the document is organized alphabetically by the authors' last names or the first words of the titles followed by the year of publication.

ISO 690 Name-date system: an example

An excerpt from Ivan Lacko, "The Loss of 'Self' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fiction," Slovak Studies in English III: Identity in Intercultural Communication, edited by Ada Bohmerová, Univerzita Komenského, 2011, p. 175.⁴

For Hawthorne's characters, the line between personal perception and dependence on social standards appears to be too thin to accept their role in society as anything but predetermined. The trait which Hawthorne repeatedly criticizes in his characters is the tendency to promote a legitimate and defensible idea to the category of an absolute truth (Stibitz 1962, p. 182). For example, Reverend Hooper in *The Minister's Black Veil* suffers from "so painful a degree of self-distrust, that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime" (Hawthorne 1987, p. 150). As Thomas F. Walsh argues, Hooper's doubt and disbelief in his ability to discriminate between "indifferent action" and "crime" makes him "eventually consider all his actions crimes and himself intrinsically evil, and then, by extension [sic], all mankind" (1959, pp. 404–405).

Bibliography

- HAWTHORNE, N., 1987. *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- STIBITZ, E.E., 1962. Ironic Unity in Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil." *American Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 182–190.
- WALSH, T. F., 1959. Mr Hooper's "Affable Weakness." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, no. 5, pp. 404–406.

⁴ Since it is difficult to find an English-language text from the field of literary studies that uses the ISO 690 standard, I decided to adapt this excerpt, with the author's permission, to illustrate the various ISO 690 citation techniques.

Numeric system

This system cites sources in the text by assigning a number, either in superscript (e.g., 1) or in round or square brackets (e.g., (1) or [1]), corresponding to the order in which they first appear in the document. If you cite the same source multiple times, all subsequent references will use the same number as the original citation. The bibliography in the numeric system lists sources at the end of the document in the order of appearance, rather than alphabetically.

ISO 690 Numeric system: an example

An excerpt from Ivan Lacko, "The Loss of 'Self' in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fiction," Slovak Studies in English III: Identity in Intercultural Communication, edited by Ada Bohmerová, Univerzita Komenského, 2011, p. 175.

For Hawthorne's characters, the line between personal perception and dependence on social standards appears to be too thin to accept their role in society as anything but predetermined. The trait which Hawthorne repeatedly criticizes in his characters is the tendency to promote a legitimate and defensible idea to the category of an absolute truth [1]. For example, Reverend Hooper in *The Minister's Black Veil* suffers from "so painful a degree of self-distrust, that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime" [2 p. 150]. As Thomas F. Walsh argues, Hooper's doubt and disbelief in his ability to discriminate between "indifferent action" and "crime" makes him "eventually consider all his actions crimes and himself intrinsically evil, and then, by extension [sic], all mankind" [3 pp. 404–405].

Bibliography

- 1 STIBITZ, E.E., 1962. Ironic Unity in Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil." *American Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 182–190.
- 2 HAWTHORNE, N., 1987. *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 3 WALSH, T. F., 1959. Mr Hooper's "Affable Weakness." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, no. 5, pp. 404–406.

Running notes system

The running notes system is similar to Chicago style. It uses superscript numbers within the text to mark citations, which are then either linked to footnotes placed at the bottom of the page or to end-notes at the end of the document. These notes include complete bibliographical information about the source. Unlike Chicago style, the bibliographical data in the notes are formatted the same as in the list of references. To avoid repeating the full bibliographical details for subsequent mentions of the same source, Lichnerová explains that you can shorten it to "LAST NAME, ref. (note number with

full details)” plus the page number separated by a comma for direct quotations. Since the notes provide complete bibliographical information, it is not strictly necessary to include a full bibliography at the end of the document; however, most publishers and university regulations still require one (Lichnerová 29).

ISO 690 Running notes system: an example

An excerpt from Ivan Lacko, “The Loss of ‘Self’ in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fiction,” Slovak Studies in English III: Identity in Intercultural Communication, edited by Ada Bohmerová, Univerzita Komenského, 2011, pp. 173–181.

For Hawthorne’s characters, the line between personal perception and dependence on social standards appears to be too thin to accept their role in society as anything but predetermined. The trait which Hawthorne repeatedly criticizes in his characters is the tendency to promote a legitimate and defensible idea to the category of an absolute truth.¹ For example, Reverend Hooper in *The Minister’s Black Veil* suffers from “so painful a degree of self-distrust, that even the mildest censure would lead him to consider an indifferent action as a crime.”² As Thomas F. Walsh argues, Hooper’s doubt and disbelief in his ability to discriminate between “indifferent action” and “crime” makes him “eventually consider all his actions crimes and himself intrinsically evil, and then, by extension [sic], all mankind.”³

1 STIBITZ, E.E., 1962. Ironic Unity in Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil”. *American Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2.

2 HAWTHORNE, N., 1987. *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 150.

3 WALSH, T. F., 1959. Mr Hooper’s “Affable Weakness”. *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, no. 5, pp. 404–405.

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- HAWTHORNE, N., 1987. *Young Goodman Brown and Other Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- STIBITZ, E.E., 1962. Ironic Unity in Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil.” *American Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 182–190.
- WALSH, T. F., 1959. Mr Hooper’s “Affable Weakness.” *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, no. 5, pp. 404–406.

Bibliography

As I have mentioned, both the name-date system and the numeric system require including a bibliography at the end of the document. In the former system, the bibliography is organized alphabetically; in the latter, sources are listed in the order in which they appear in the paper.

Bibliography entries in ISO 690 include very similar information to those in MLA and Chicago Style. One detail which is often included in ISO 690 but rarely used in other styles is the publication's ISBN or ISSN. Although these numbers are not required, they frequently feature in Slovak bibliographies.

As Lichnerová points out, the compilation of bibliography in accordance with ISO 690 follows certain rules:

- 1 The author's own publications are listed before all other referenced materials.
- 2 Bibliographical entries where a person is the sole author are placed before entries where the author is a co-author.
- 3 Sources by the same author are listed chronologically from the oldest to the most recent (Lichnerová 24).

Bibliography

BLAKE, Jason, 2010. *Canadian Hockey Literature: A Thematic Study*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (Print book)

Bury Your Gays. Online. Available at: tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BuryYourGays. [accessed 2024-02-16]. (Webpage)

DANTE, Cathy Melesky; Mark A. LEVAND, and Karen ROSS. *Power Literacy in Abuse Prevention Education: Lessons from the Field in the Catholic Safeguarding Response*. *Journal of Moral Theology*. Online. vol. 13 (2024), no. 1, pp. 130–155. Available at: search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAI FZK240325000416&lang=sk&site=ehost-live&scope=site. [accessed 2024-04-05]. (Journal article with three authors)

HUGHES, Bettany. *Why Tell Stories? With Bettany Hughes and Margaret Atwood*. Interview; online. YouTube, 2021-03-19. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdSW-YoY6x0. [accessed 2021-12-01]. (Online video)

OPPENHEIM, Maya. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism is not about believing women are always right*. *The Independent*. Online. 2017-07-18. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-au-thor-feminism-women-not-always-right-a7847316.html>. [accessed 2022-06-05]. (Online newspaper)

STAINES, David. Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context. In: Coral Ann HOWELLS (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion: Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 14–31. (Book chapter)

SUMMERFIELD, Giovanna, and Lisa DOWNWARD. *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*. Online. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uniba-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1748461>. [accessed 2024-10-04] (E-book with two authors)

Further reading

Lichnerová, Lucia. Písanie a obhajoba záverečných prác. Stimul, 2016. https://fphil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/fif/studium/student/bakalar_magister/Pisanie_a_obhajoba_zaverecnych_prac.pdf

Lichnerová, Lucia, and Beáta Bellérová. “Nové pravidlá citovania podľa ISO 690 z roku 2021.” *Informačné technológie a knižnice*, no. 3/4, 2023, pp. 10–22, <http://doi.org/10.52036/1335793X.2023.3-4.10-22>.

AI TIP

I would not recommend using AI tools like ChatGPT for formatting your Works Cited entries. Reference managers are much more suitable and reliable for this purpose; however, if you do decide to use ChatGPT, you will need to check it did not introduce errors in the process.

Your turn

If you have already written a portion of your thesis, return to it and evaluate how well you have integrated the material from other sources. Use the following questions to guide your review:

- Does each source contribute directly to your argument/analysis?
- Have you included only the most relevant points from each source? Are there any details that could be omitted?
- Have you clearly indicated when you are using material from a source?

- Are all direct quotations enclosed in quotation marks or indented as block quotes?
- Have you provided clear citations for paraphrased or summarized material? Is it clear where the paraphrase begins and ends?
- Have you rephrased the source material adequately?
- Is there a balance between your analysis and the voice of your sources?
- Is it always clear why the source is included and how it supports your point(s)?
- Have you integrated the sources smoothly into your writing? Do they read like natural parts of your text?
- Is every source cited consistently according to the selected citation style?
- Is there an entry for each of your in-text citations in your Works Cited list?
- Have you used a source for everything that is not your own or common knowledge?

6

WRITING THE THESIS

This chapter

- ⇒ **outlines the structure of a typical thesis**
- ⇒ **defines and describes required and optional sections in a thesis**
- ⇒ **provides guidance on how to write the individual sections**

Now that you have formulated your topic and developed a preliminary thesis statement based on the reading you have done, it is time to start writing your thesis. It is recommended that you begin earlier rather than later. I agree with W. R. Owens that it is not a good idea to spend weeks reading and only taking notes. As he points out, “writing drafts is scarcely ever a distraction from research” (194). Therefore, start writing in time and continue with your research while doing so.

Theses in literary studies at departments of English are typically written in English. Although university regulations usually posit that writing a thesis in a language other than the official language requires the dean’s approval (see Comenius University, IR 22/2023), writing in English at departments of English is taken as a given and mostly does not require any paperwork on the student’s part.

It is ultimately at the student’s discretion whether they will write their thesis in English or in Slovak. It is perfectly okay to write a thesis in Slovak, but you should be aware of the pitfalls this entails, such as problems with the translatability of some terms in English and a lack of sources in the language of the thesis. However, Slovak as the language of the thesis may make perfect sense if you are exploring the reception of a literary text or an author in Slovakia. When deciding which language to use for your thesis, consider the language of the sources related to your topic, the existence of terminology to talk about your topic, the intended audience, and your level of language proficiency, particularly your ability to produce a comprehensible and coherent written text in that language.

6.1 OUTLINE

Before you get down to the writing, make sure you draw an outline of your thesis. This is a detailed description of the major parts of your thesis from the introduction right through to the literature review, body chapters, and the conclusion. Each of the planned sections should have its own mini-outline, which will detail the main points you are planning to make. Ideally, it could also list the details you have found to support your main points. You can even allocate an approximate word count for each section and sub-section in your outline. A general rule of thumb is that the more detailed your outline is, the easier it should be to write your thesis.

However, the minimum you should do, even if you are not a fan of outlines, is to come up with a preliminary table of contents:

Outline: an example

Title: Love in Shakespeare’s Tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*

Introduction

1. Love and gender in Shakespeare’s age
2. Love in *Romeo and Juliet*
 - 2.1 Contradictory constructions of love due to gender, generation, and class
 - 2.2 Love and dramatic conflicts
 - 2.2.1 The comedy of love
 - 2.2.2 The tragedy of love
 - 2.2.2.1 Fate or chance
 - 2.2.2.2 Love and death

Conclusion

Works Cited / Bibliography

(borrowed and adapted from “Writing a Research Paper”)

The outline is proof that you have identified the main elements of your argument and established relationships between them. It gives your thesis structure and helps guide your research. Your supervisor may require you to submit it before you start writing to check if you are going in the right direction and if you are working in an organized, logical manner.

AI TIP

Based on your research question, you can use AI tools like ChatGPT to help you generate a potential outline for your paper; however, it is important to adapt it to meet your real needs.

6.2 FRONT MATTER

6.2.1 Cover page

The cover page of your thesis (see Fig. 1) should contain all the essential information about the document. In the past, when theses were submitted in hard copy, it used to be hard in nature. According to most university regulations, it should include the following:

- the name of the university
- the name of the faculty

- the title of the thesis
- the subtitle of the thesis (if any used)
- the type of thesis (a bachelor's thesis, a diploma thesis, a dissertation)
- the full name of the author and their academic degrees
- the year of submission (see Comenius University, IR 32/2023 6)

This information should be provided primarily in the official language. If you are writing your thesis in English, it is therefore a good idea to include both the Slovak and the English versions of your title. Also, make sure that the title is identical to the one in your thesis assignment and that it is consistent throughout the document.

6.2.2 Title page

The title page (see Fig. 2) is the page that follows the cover page. Its function is very similar to that of the cover page – it introduces your thesis to the reader. It is slightly more detailed in the information it provides; typically, it includes the following:

- the name of the university
- the name of the faculty
- the title and the subtitle of the thesis (if the subtitle is used)
- the type of the thesis (a bachelor's thesis, a diploma thesis, a dissertation)
- the full name and the academic degrees of the author
- the study programme
- the study field
- the full name and the academic degrees of the supervisor
- the full name and the academic degrees of the consultant (if there is one)
- the supervising department
- the place and the year of the submission (see Comenius University, IR 32/2023 6)

6.2.3 Thesis assignment

The thesis assignment is a document that must be prepared by your supervisor (both in English and in Slovak if your thesis is going to be written in English) and approved by the person responsible for the study programme by the beginning of the academic year in which you are planning to submit your thesis. It is the part of the thesis that requires the least work on your part. It can be understood as a description of the work that your supervisor expects you to do in your thesis. As a result, it contains the title you have agreed upon and possibly also the aims of your thesis project. These details are binding and can be changed only with the express consent of everybody involved: you, your supervisor, and the person responsible for the study programme.

The thesis assignment is an integral part of your thesis. As such, it must be inserted in the final draft of your thesis immediately after the title page. For this purpose, you can usually download it from your university's information system.

Cover page: an example

UNIVERZITA KOMENSKÉHO V BRATISLAVE
FAKULTA XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Evidenčné číslo:

TITLE IN SLOVAK
SUBTITLE IN SLOVAK

Bakalárska/diplomová práca

Year of submission
Author's name and surname (including academic titles)

Fig. 1 Cover page template

Title page: an example

UNIVERZITA KOMENSKÉHO V BRATISLAVE
 FAKULTA XXXXXXXXXXXXX

TITLE IN SLOVAK
 SUBTITLE IN SLOVAK

Bakalárska/diplomová práca

Študijný program: name of the study programme in Slovak
 Študijný odbor: name of the study field in Slovak
 Školiace pracovisko: name of the department in Slovak
 Školiteľ: supervisor's name and surname (incl. academic titles)
 Konzultant: (optional) consultant's name and surname (incl. academic titles)

Place and year of submission

Author's name and surname (including academic titles)

Fig. 2 Title page template

6.2.4 Acknowledgements

The acknowledgements section is optional. It should not be more than one page in length, and it may be included before the abstract if you would like to express your gratitude to those who have helped and supported you during the thesis writing process.

This section should start with professional acknowledgements; personal ones can be included afterwards. You should rank those you would like to thank according to the order of importance. Those who deserve major thanks because they have made a direct contribution to your thesis should come first, and those who have offered moral encouragement and support will be included towards the end. A typical thanking order would be supervisors, other advisers, other academics, editors, proofreaders, librarians, research assistants, study participants, family, and friends (George). In some cases, you may feel your supervisor has not been very helpful, but you should still include them. Make sure you use full names with titles for professional acknowledgements.

If you decide to include the acknowledgements section, try to vary your phrasing to avoid repetition. Tegan George lists common sentence starters that may help you compose a text that will run smoothly:

Major thanks	Big thanks	Minor thanks
I am deeply indebted to I would like to express my deepest appreciation to I would like to express my deepest gratitude to I'm extremely grateful to This endeavour would not have been possible without I could not have undertaken this journey without Words cannot express my gratitude to	Many thanks to Special thanks to I am also thankful to/for I am also grateful to/for Thanks should also go to I would like to extend my sincere thanks to	I would like to acknowledge Lastly, I would like to mention I would like to recognize I had the pleasure of working with/ collaborating with I would be remiss in not mentioning

6.2.5 Abstract

The abstract is a short but accurate summary of the key points of your thesis. A good abstract, as Alena Kačmárová suggests, should provide information about the research area, the research problem, the content, the methods used, the key findings, and their implications (6). While this recommendation applies to most disciplines, and might also be applicable to your research project, it might not be the most suitable for all abstracts in literary studies. The template that the Academic Center for Excellence at Germanna Community College recommends for humanities abstracts seems to be generally more fitting. According to their guide on writing abstracts, you should introduce the topic of your thesis in the first sentence, state your thesis in the second sentence, and then summarize the key points of your thesis in the same order as they are addressed in your thesis (see the example below). In each case, the abstract should be concluded by three to five keywords. It should be written in the form of a paragraph and should not be longer than one page; the recommended length is

100 to 500 words (Comenius University, IR 32/2023 6). If you are writing your thesis in English, the abstract should be available both in English and in Slovak (on separate pages).

Abstracts are usually written in haste as students leave their writing until the very last minute; however, there is a good reason why you should give it proper attention. It is the part of your text that potential readers will read first to find out what your research project is about and then if they will read the entire thesis. It is one of the most frequently read parts of your thesis, so make sure you reserve enough time for writing it properly.

Abstract: an example

The first sentence provides an overview of the topic of the paper.

This paper examines two largely overlooked characters in Tennessee Williams' plays: Gutman from *Camino Real* and Boss Finley from *Sweet Bird of Youth*. **This paper argues that Gutman is ultimately the more sinister and powerful authority figure because Williams created him during the height of the anti-communist movement, which threatened Williams personally.** While both characters share several similarities, such as maintaining their power through the division of those beneath them, Gutman and Boss Finley have striking differences. Boss Finley depends on his image to sustain his authority, which makes his power fragile, but Gutman maintains his authority through brute force, making a nearly omnipotent authority figure. This paper also examines the endings of both plays and the historical context during which Williams wrote them, which suggests why Gutman is more sinister than Boss Finley. Williams did not have personal investment in the Civil Rights Movement, which was ongoing as he wrote *Sweet Bird of Youth*, causing him to construct Boss Finley as an authority figure with fragile power. However, anti-communism affected Williams directly as he wrote *Camino Real*, causing him to construct Gutman as having almost unlimited power.

The second sentence states the thesis of the paper.

The remaining sentences summarize the main points of the paper, following its organization.

Note: Notice the use of "This paper...". An abstract should be written in the third person, present tense.

The keywords are typed on the next line after the abstract, with "Keywords" italicized.

Keywords: Gutman, Boss Finley, Tennessee Williams, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth, power, authority figures, communism, Civil Rights

("How to Write an Abstract" 3)

6.2.6 Preface

The preface is a short introductory essay penned by the author which comes before the contents page and the introduction. Its obligatory use is slightly forced because, as Tucker Max, a best-selling author, writes in his blog post, “most books don’t need a preface.” However, according to Internal Regulation No. 32/2023 at Comenius University in Bratislava, the preface is a required component of the thesis which contains general information and describes its main characteristics and the circumstances of its writing. The author provides the rationale for the choice of the topic, explains its aims and significance, contextualizes it, mentions the intended audience and the methods used, and briefly characterizes their approach and point of view (Comenius University, IR 32/2023 6).

This definition is a bit confusing because most of these things can also be found in introductions, so you might be left wondering what makes the preface different from the introduction. The preface tends to be more personal; therefore, it is written from the author’s point of view, using the “I” pronoun more often than in other parts of the thesis. Authors often use it as an opportunity to introduce themselves to their readers and explain what makes them qualified to write about the subject. They might explain their interest in the topic and why they decided to write about it. Since it is found at the beginning of your thesis, the preface is a chance to spark the reader’s curiosity about your content, so take advantage of it.

Preface: an example

During my academic journey, I have had the opportunity to explore the mastery of language in Margaret Atwood’s fiction. My bachelor’s thesis delved into the topic of the power of literacy and language in the lives of four characters from her well-known dystopian novels *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* within the theocratic setting of the fictional Republic of Gilead. In this highly controlled environment, access to literacy is strictly forbidden for women, allowing them to experience the subversive, liberating and empowering potential of language when they find ways to acquire it.

Building upon this foundation, the focus of my current thesis was selected to satisfy my curiosity about whether a similar phenomenon might occur in literary contexts where the full use of language and literacy is not completely denied. Under more relaxed conditions, the importance of language might be present but not as evident and obvious due to the lack of extremes. No outright prohibition might result in the reader’s overlooking of the role of language and literacy.

I have deliberately chosen three distinct novels by Atwood which differ significantly in their setting – one being historical fiction, one a contemporary narrative, and one a part of a dystopian series – to be able to analyse as wide a spectrum of circumstances as possible. I aimed to ascertain whether it is Atwood’s fiction in gen-

eral that consistently presents language as a potent element in creating agency and personal power. As I had hoped, all the novels contain instances that underscore the crucial role that language plays in shaping the protagonists' lives. Certain forms of enfranchisement through language are even similar to one another or to those outlined in my bachelor's thesis.

As Atwood's literary genius is an undisputed matter, it comes as no surprise that a significant amount of scholarly research has been dedicated to the analyses of her novels. Not even the topic of the significance of language and literacy has been left unexplored. However, this thesis's concern with their relevance and connection to female agency and empowerment across three separate novels provides a somewhat unique angle and reveals a universal theme across diverse settings that seems to resonate deeply throughout Atwood's oeuvre. For future academic exploration, it might be intriguing to attempt to compare and contrast these findings with the rest of Atwood's novels.

(student thesis)

This is a well-written preface. The author links her current work to her bachelor's thesis, showing how her previous research ignited her curiosity about Atwood's portrayal of language and literacy in other fiction of hers. This is a great move and shows the author's academic growth and progress. At the same time, the preface gives the reader a good sense of what to expect in the author's thesis and explains well her reasoning behind her choice of three distinct Atwood novels. I also appreciate the author's acknowledgement of existing scholarly research on language and literacy in Atwood's fiction; however, she could have been more specific about what is unique about her contribution. It is not clear now if she means the comparison across different genres or the link between language and female agency.

6.2.7 Contents

The contents page offers an overview of the structure and hierarchy of the sections of your thesis, both numbered and unnumbered. Numbering is optional. If you choose to number the sections of your thesis, the front matter and the back matter are left unnumbered, and numbers are typically used only for the main parts. While English style conventions recommend numbering all the sections of the main text, including the introduction and the conclusion, Internal Regulation 32/2023 states that introductions and conclusions are not numbered (Comenius University 7–8).

The table of contents can be generated automatically by Microsoft Word if your document is formatted properly. The headings of your chapters, sections, and subsections should be assigned the correct heading style from the "Style" box on the "Home" tab. Normally we use "Heading 1" for chapter titles, "Heading 2" for section titles, and so on down the hierarchy. Of course, you do not need to accept Microsoft Word's pre-set styles; you can modify the default text formatting by right-clicking on the desired style and selecting "Modify."

6.2.8 List of figures and tables

A list of figures and tables is not a required part of the thesis. If you are writing a thesis in literature, you are not likely to need one. They are more commonly found in technical and scientific reports. Nonetheless, you may decide to use such a list if it has the potential to contribute to the quick navigability and the overall clarity of organization of your thesis (Comenius University, IR 32/2023 7).

The list compiles all the figures and tables you have used in the body of your thesis together with the corresponding pagination (see the example below). For such a list to be produced, your figures and tables must be all numbered and captioned. Remember that captions for tables appear above whereas captions for figures go below. It is recommended that you use the Microsoft Word caption tool for all the captions appearing in the body of your thesis so that the word processor can then automatically generate these lists for you.

List of figures: an example

Figure 1: Title of the First Caption	1
Figure 2: Title of the Second Caption	5
Figure 3: Title of the Third Caption	9
Figure 4: ...	

6.2.9 List of abbreviations

As is the case with the list of figures and tables, a list of abbreviations is not required. However, if you use several abbreviations in your thesis, it might be a good idea to include one for the reader’s assistance. The list of abbreviations compiles all the abbreviations and acronyms that you have used in your thesis in alphabetical order alongside their definitions (see the example below). It is recommended not to overload your list with terms that are generally understood (“List of Abbreviations”).

Even if your thesis is equipped with a list of abbreviations, you should still follow the general rules for using abbreviations and acronyms in a text: write out the full term or phrase on the first use and enclose the abbreviation or the acronym in parentheses. The reader should only refer to your list of abbreviations if they forget the meaning of an abbreviation or an acronym.

List of abbreviations: an example

AL	American Literature
AQ	American Quarterly
ES	English Studies
MLR	Modern Language Review
TLS	Times Literary Supplement

6.3 THE PRINCIPAL TEXT**6.3.1 Introduction**

An introduction is placed after the table of contents. As it provides “the first complex information about your thesis, its aim, content and structure” (Comenius University, IR 32/2023 7), it is of strategic importance. It introduces the topic and demonstrates its relevance, but it should also capture the reader’s interest. Max calls it “your sales pitch,” i.e. the thing which determines if the reader is going to continue reading your thesis or not; you should therefore pay exceptional attention to its writing. If there is a part of your thesis that needs to be perfectly written, it is the introduction.

There are three things that your reader should get from reading your introduction: the topic of your thesis, what part of the general topic you are going to explore and why, and your thesis statement (see Chapter 2). These roughly correspond to the three moves in the “Create a Research Space” (CARS) model proposed by John Swales, which is often quoted as “one of the most influential models” (Staroňová 19) for writing research paper introductions. Swales arrived at this model when studying the structure of dozens of introductions found in scientific articles. Despite this, research has shown that it is also (at least partially) applicable to introductions in the humanities (Miller). According to the CARS model, if you hope to produce an efficient, succinct, and clear introduction outlining your research, you should start by establishing the background and context for your topic. This move entails explaining why the research area is relevant – demonstrating that it is either socially topical or hotly debated in the academic community – and outlining previous research on the topic (Swales 12–13). Since a literature review is often provided in a separate chapter in a thesis, you should only briefly mention the most important names within the research area. In the second move, you should identify a niche in the existing research. As Katarína Staroňová suggests, you might focus on deficiencies, weaknesses, problems, or missing pieces in previous research, or you might avoid using negative language to suggest what can be added to the ongoing research and how it can be extended or applied (Staroňová 23). In the third move, you should then turn “the niche established in Move 2 into the research space that [you] will fill” (Swales 14). This means that you should propose a solution to the problem identified in the previous move. This final part of the introduction should thus indicate “the main purpose(s)” of your thesis, formulate the

research questions, and suggest “the main conclusions” of your research; in other words, it should state your thesis (Swales 14). It may also briefly outline the methodology used and the structure of the thesis. Although Swales makes this optional (14), Staroňová considers this a necessity in theses. In her opinion, describing how a thesis is organized helps the reader navigate the text more easily (Staroňová 26).

Although it may seem that introductions are information-packed, your key objective should be focus and brevity. It is recommended that the introduction to the thesis should not exceed 10 per cent of the total word count (Ridley 88). A lengthy and rambling introduction may weary your reader and leave a bad impression. As the resources on academic writing in Open House at the University of Warwick suggest, you should “avoid wasting words by ‘stating the obvious’ and writing a series of over-generalized statements” (“Writing an Introduction”).

A good introduction to a thesis should meet these criteria:

- open with an “eye-catching” sentence that will capture the reader’s interest
- not be too detailed, leave something interesting for later
- be directly related to the rest of the thesis
- make no promises that cannot be fulfilled, or which the author has no intention of fulfilling (“Writing an Introduction”)

Introduction: an example

For anyone who was alive and over the age of 12 during the late 2000s, the word “Twilight” likely brings to mind something other than a time of day. Most, if not all, people have encountered the phrase “still a better love story than Twilight” in comment sections on the internet at some point. Stephenie Meyer’s young adult romance series has become ingrained in pop culture, similarly to Harry Potter and Star Wars – though many might strongly dispute that comparison. The truth is that simply mentioning the franchise’s name elicits a range of reactions, with the majority leaning towards disdain and ridicule. Whether the person reacting was a hardcore fan – a “Twihard” – or a dedicated hater, they likely had a Twilight phase. Yes, even those who intensely hated and complained about the series were emotionally invested and committed.

There are countless articles critiquing the author, the books, the film adaptations, the characters, the actors, and almost everything related to the saga. Part of this discourse includes hundreds of academic publications, many of which focus on analyzing different aspects of the series. However, these studies remain largely unread by the general public and saw a decline in number after the final film left theatres – along with most fans and haters. Recently, the series experienced a revival due to new additions to the book series and the tenth anniversary of the first film’s release. This “Twilight Renaissance,” primarily driven by those who were part of the fandom a decade ago, returned to the franchise with renewed appreciation – and, more importantly, a new set of critical eyes.

The Twilight Saga has always been controversial, mainly due to its content. Criticisms include, but are not limited to, the portrayal of the main female character as a damsel-in-distress, manipulative and abusive romantic relationships, and the religious undertones. Less serious critiques focus on the use of purple prose, silly plotlines, and sparkly vampires. However, little attention has been given to the portrayal of race, specifically the characters of Quileute descent, and how they are represented throughout the series.

This thesis seeks to examine the portrayal of “the Indian” in American literature and how this concept resonates in *The Twilight Saga*. The issue has seen limited representation in academic literature. Natalie Wilson, a professor of literature and women’s studies specializing in contemporary cultural analysis, is one of the few scholars who has focused on this topic, and her work serves as an inspiration for this study. Similarly, within the “Twilight Renaissance,” the author has observed growing interest and concern regarding this issue. . . .

(student thesis, revised and edited)

This introduction is not flawless, but it follows the general structure of the CARS model quite well. In Move 1, the author demonstrates the importance of her research topic by pointing to its relevance to a broader audience. She introduces *Twilight* as a wider cultural phenomenon which is currently undergoing a “Renaissance” phase. This suggests there is a renewed fan and academic interest in the saga and underlines the relevance of the author’s research. In Move 2, the author writes that *Twilight* has received vast amounts of criticism but takes notice of the lack of attention given to race, especially the portrayal of Quileute characters. This clearly identifies a gap in academic research; however, the author could have pointed out the importance of this issue in the context of American literature. In Move 3, she then explains how she is planning to fill the gap. She states that her aim is “to examine the portrayal of ‘the Indian’ in American literature and how this concept resonates in *The Twilight Saga*.” She also acknowledges Natalie Wilson’s work on the subject as an inspiration. This shows that her work will contribute to an ongoing discussion, which makes the thesis relevant. The author could have emphasized more explicitly, though, what new perspectives or insights her thesis will offer compared to previous academic publications.

6.3.2 Body chapters

The introduction is usually followed by several body chapters. Their exact number depends on the depth and scope of the specific research project undertaken, yet a common range would be three to five body chapters.

The body chapters are building blocks that contribute to the development of your paper’s thesis statement. Although, in terms of their internal organization and content, they are discrete units of text (“Chapter Writing”), they are all interconnected and collectively reinforce the central argument of your thesis. Each body chapter should address a specific aspect of your research topic, providing in-depth analysis and evidence in support of the thesis statement. It is important to keep

this in mind if you would like to produce a persuasive and cohesive thesis.

Since the body chapters should be self-contained, each should consist of its own introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction should highlight the chapter's key message and explain how it answers or contributes to the overall thesis statement. The body section should present the evidence, analysis, or discussion relevant to the chapter's focus. The conclusion should summarize the key points discussed, explaining clearly how they support the main thesis. Ideally, the conclusion should also offer a transition to the next chapter, helping the reader see the larger picture and how each part contributes to the overall argument.

Background/theoretical chapters

Each thesis should include at least one background chapter that students and teachers often refer to as a “theoretical” or “theoretical framework chapter.” As the name suggests, this chapter is expected to address the historical, cultural, social, and other relevant contexts that underpin your thesis. It is also supposed to introduce and define the key concepts and outline the key theories and relevant academic debates that inform your research. It situates your thesis within a broader scholarly conversation, helping to clarify the theoretical framework from which your analysis emerges. By presenting relevant literature and theories, the theoretical chapter not only demonstrates your understanding of the field but also justifies the approach and methodology you will use in the subsequent analysis. In essence, it helps to establish the academic context for your research and ensures that your thesis is grounded in a well-defined scholarly debate.

The length of this part varies from project to project. Kačmárová suggests that the background/theoretical chapters should constitute at least 30 percent of a master's thesis and between 30–50 percent of a bachelor's thesis (14). Unless stated otherwise, I would approach this as a reasonable recommendation rather than as a rule carved in stone. Every project is different and has different requirements. It is better to have a shorter background and theoretical section than to exhaust your reader by introducing contexts and theories whose relevance to the analysis is questionable.

Literature review

The theoretical chapter usually includes a section called a literature review. In a longer paper, the literature review can constitute an independent chapter. In some cases, a literature review is just another name for a theoretical chapter.

As Chris M. Anson and Robert A. Schwegler explain, a literature review is a synthesis of existing scholarship on your research topic “describing the content, similarities, and disagreements among research efforts.” Its role is to provide background for your analysis or a rationale for your research (Anson and Schwegler 208). Although some literature reviews are also evaluative, you will most likely produce only an informative one which aims to summarize existing knowledge about the research topic. Since the literature review forms a bridge between what we know and the problem we are looking into, the information in the literature review should move, as Halyna M. Kornuta and Ron W. Germaine suggest, “from the general to the specific and from older perspectives of the topic to more recent perspectives” (35).

When writing the literature review, make sure it does not read like “a collection of quotations from other writers” (Kornuta and Germaine 35). You should cognitively process the findings and perspectives of others in order to show a profound understanding of the material. Paraphrase, compare, and contrast the ideas as often as possible (Kornuta and Germaine 35), highlighting where they overlap or diverge, while always giving credit to the individual scholars. Do not forget to summarize the findings accurately, without misrepresenting the ideas. And remember that all of this should point to why your study is necessary.

Literature review: an excerpt

In her 2023 essay, “The Functions of Female Rage,” Megan Nolan examines society's tendency to fetishize female pain, suffering, and anger. She mentions various women she has encountered, whether on social media or in public, who express their frustration through statements like “Rude bitches change the world” or who declare on TikTok the start of their “bitch era.” A notable example is model Emily Ratajkowski, who presented a “dichotomy of fetishizable pain and un-fetishizable anger” (Nolan). This distinction raised an important point about the commodification of female experiences. While pain is often considered a natural part of a woman's condition, “women's role in society more generally as peacemakers and caregivers means we don't associate femininity with anger” (Blair). This disconnect makes female anger harder to sexualize, and, therefore, less acceptable. However, Nolan argues, “female anger is [no] harder to fetishize and commodify than our sadness,” explaining that “when performed by a beautiful woman, [anger] is just as fetishizable as docility or sadness.” In a patriarchal society, outward attractiveness is always sexualized, regardless of the emotion behind it.

A prime example of this is the *femme fatale* trope, a widely popular figure in literature and film. She is the perfect embodiment of an evil, unhinged woman who is still palatable to the male gaze. The sole purpose for her existence is male pleasure and the damnation of the female character. As Draycott explains, she is “self-sufficient, strong, seductive. Most importantly, she is dangerous.” Her power comes from her attractiveness, which she uses to manipulate the men around her. However, this aligns perfectly with patriarchal ideals. As “a hypersexualized product of the male gaze” (Draycott), the *femme fatale* is designed to seduce and possibly destroy men, but since she is sexually objectified, she does little to challenge the patriarchal stereotype of the seductress. Instead, she reinforces the age-old demonization of a sinful woman.

This is why certain expressions of female rage remain acceptable within a patriarchal framework, particularly when that anger is not directed at men, but at other women – women “who desperately want a boyfriend, a cluster of women competing for the approval of one man, or women competing for validation of their beauty” (Liu).

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(student thesis, revised and edited)

This is a well-written, insightful excerpt from a literature review. The author offers an effective synthesis of ideas from different sources, comparing Nolan's view on the commodification of female anger with the widely used historical trope of the femme fatale. The author's text shows how she is critically engaging with existing literature rather than simply summarizing it. One can easily trace her train of thought in the text.

Analytical body chapters

The analytical chapters follow the theoretical chapter(s). It is where you develop your arguments and interpretations. Each should be focused on a specific question, theme, or idea linked to your thesis statement, and each should contribute to supporting it. To check if this is the case, you can ask yourself how the argument you make in each chapter answers your overall research question.

When writing the analytical chapters, it is important to keep several things in mind. Firstly, rely on the text you are analyzing to support your argumentation. Quote and analyze key passages, breaking them down word by word if necessary. Focus not only on what the passage says but also on how and why. Remember that literary techniques are the subject of your analysis as well. Secondly, engage with the interpretations of other scholars that you have referenced in your literature review. Show how your reading of the text supports, complements, or contradicts what they have said. Thirdly, if you have defined a theoretical framework in your theoretical chapter(s), apply it directly to the text to demonstrate how it illuminates certain aspects of the text. Only if you apply these steps will you produce an analysis that will be persuasive and to the point.

6.3.3 Conclusion

A conclusion constitutes the final section of your thesis. It is expected to reiterate your thesis statement and summarize the main points of your thesis, pointing to their significance. It may also indicate possible further research as your paper might have left some questions unanswered.

Based on this, the conclusion may seem easy to write. However, if you just approach it as a summary, you may very easily produce what Liz Gloyd refers to as “a laundry list summarizing your chapters.” And, believe it or not, most conclusions read just like that – a dull compilation of the final paragraphs of each of the body chapters.

The reasons why conclusions often constitute the weakest links in theses are twofold. The first is exhaustion. By the time students get around to writing the conclusion to their thesis, they are usually tired from the work and tired of the research topic; they find it difficult to find something interesting to say in the conclusion. In addition, they often work against the clock to meet the deadline for thesis submission, so they write their conclusions in a rush. The second reason is that they may not understand the importance of the conclusion. They expect their readers to become so exhausted from reading their thesis that they will simply skip the conclusion. However, if you would like your readers to “linger on [your] ideas,” your conclusion should be just as powerful as your introduction (Sackstein).

A good conclusion is a mirror image of the introduction. If an introduction should start broad with context and then gradually narrow down to your aim and objective, the conclusion should move from the specific to the broad context again but “take it one step farther” (Sackstein). Drawing on Swales and Feak, Staroňová speaks of the hourglass shape of an academic paper (92). If your introduction was concluded with a thesis statement and an indication of the main points that you were going to make in the thesis to prove it, your conclusion should start with a synthesis of the main points and a reiteration of the thesis statement (in other words) and then, as Learn HQ at Monash University recommends, try to establish connections between your argument and other research, explain the significance and implications of your findings, and possibly indicate the direction of future research (“Introduction”).

Just like in your introduction, you should aim at brevity here. A conclusion should not make up more than 10 percent of the total word count. According to the resources in Open House at the University of Warwick, the conclusion should not be regarded as “an opportunity to engage in an over-generalized and unfocussed ‘rant’.” You may give your opinion in the conclusion, but you should not sound “too pompous or authoritarian” (“Writing a Conclusion”).

When writing your conclusion, you should also be careful with tenses and phrasing. Use the present perfect or the past simple and avoid using transitions like “in conclusion,” “as you can see,” or “in summation.” The reader is reading a chapter entitled “Conclusion,” so there is no need to remind them about it again and again.

Conclusion: an example

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to explore the parallels between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* through a close analysis of the three main character archetypes found in both works.

Despite being based on the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus, Shelley's *Frankenstein* became its own myth over time and left behind a legacy that has inspired numerous film adaptations and literary works. The thesis focused on three recurrent character archetypes which may be found in literature from ancient Greece to the present day: the creator, the orphan, and the hero. Even though writers may not be aware of them, these archetypes often appear in literature, and they are evident in both *Frankenstein* and *Ex Machina*.

Each chapter of the thesis analyzed one of these archetypes, showing the striking similarities between the characters of Victor and Nathan, Adam and Ava, and Walton and Caleb. Victor and Nathan are both creators and destroyers, acting as failed father figures who are driven by their scientific ambitions to challenge the divine. In a similar way, Adam and Ava, the orphaned creations, experience physical and emotional suffering due to the neglect of their creators, which leads them to become manipulative and determined to achieve their freedom, even if it means destroying their creators. Lastly, Walton and Caleb serve as the heroes of the stories, mediating between the creators and their creations, and ultimately choosing to abandon the ambition that led to the creators' downfalls.

By identifying these similarities, this thesis has shown how these common archetypes establish a similarity between *Frankenstein* and *Ex Machina* and how Shelley's novel continues to influence contemporary works. It also highlights how timeless these character types are and how relevant they are to contemporary debates about ethics, technology, and human ambition.

(student thesis, revised and edited)

This conclusion effectively restates the main aim of the thesis, which is the analysis of similarities between *Frankenstein* and *Ex Machina* through three character archetypes. It provides a comprehensive summary of the main findings of the thesis by concisely summarizing the comparisons made in each chapter. The last sentence attempts to highlight the larger significance of the author's analysis. I can imagine the author expanding a bit more on why the parallels between the works matter and how the author's findings contribute to a larger scholarly conversation, but maybe this is too much to ask for in a bachelor's thesis.

6.4 BACK MATTER

The back matter of a thesis might consist of a list of references, appendices, index, and a biographical sketch. While a list of references is required in any thesis, the other parts are optional. Since indexes and biographical sketches are more commonly found in book publications than in students' theses, they are not going to be treated in special sections.

6.4.1 Works cited

Each scholarly work must be concluded with a list of Works Cited, also called References or Bibliography (depending on the citation style that you decide to follow). It lists all the sources you have used in writing your thesis. Using a source means referring to it explicitly in the body of your text to support your argument. It means citing, paraphrasing, or summarizing it and including a citation each time you do so. The sources you consulted in the process of collecting information for your thesis but which you did not mention in your text are not included. Some authors, such as Staroňová and Stephen Bailey, distinguish between Works Cited/References and Bibliography, explaining that Bibliography includes those sources related to the topic that you consulted in the course of your research but which you did not specifically refer to (Staroňová 95; Bailey 275). I would rather list these sources under a section called Further Reading to avoid confusion because the Chicago Style Manual, for instance, uses the term “Bibliography” for the sources cited in the text. Anyway, a list of works consulted is not required in a thesis, but a list of references is a must.

A list of Works Cited is found at the end of your thesis. It starts on a new page and is arranged alphabetically by the authors' last names or the titles of the sources. (The entries are not numbered!)⁵ Sometimes authors may decide to structure their lists by listing the sources according to their type: primary sources and secondary sources; books, articles, websites, etc. However, this is not common practice. Each entry must include all the information necessary to identify the publication, typically the author's name, the title of the source, the date of its publication, the page numbers, and the volume and issue numbers for periodicals. The entries must be formatted according to a chosen citation style.

Most Slovak universities have a clear preference for the use of ISO 690. Article 6, Section 3 of Comenius University's Internal Regulation 32/2023 recommends using it if there is not a specific citation style used in your field of study (9). Most publications in English literature follow either the citation protocol established by the Modern Language Association, popularly referred to as “MLA style,” or a citation protocol established by the University of Chicago, generally known as “Chicago style” (for more detailed information on them, see Chapter 5). Students should always check what citation style their institution recommends or requires. When there is no particular guidance, they should consider the field they are working in when choosing which citation style to use. For theses in literary studies, I would recommend deciding between MLA style, Chicago style, or ISO 690. Whatever one you choose to use, always follow its conventions closely, using appropriate punctuation and typefaces. This might seem like nonsensical drudgery when you are doing it for the first time; howev-

⁵ The only exception is the ISO 690 numeric system.

er, doing it right will signal to your readers that you have taken due care in composing your text.

The extent of due care is also evident in the length and diversity of your list of works cited. A comprehensive list indicates that you have investigated your topic thoroughly and engaged with several perspectives to produce a nuanced, well-supported argument. Of course, the length depends on the topic being researched. Some are relatively well-explored, offering a wealth of sources, while others are, as Kačmárová says, “terra incognita” (14), which means that they have not been as extensively studied. As a result, the number of relevant sources for such topics may be limited. In general, it is recommended that a bachelor’s thesis draw on at least fifteen sources and a master’s thesis on a minimum of twenty (Kačmárová 14). A lower number is acceptable only with pioneering research topics. You should include all key articles and monographs relevant to your topic in your list of works cited to demonstrate you have taken the time to acknowledge the contributions of other scholars to your field.

6.4.2 Appendices

Appendices contain information that supplements or amplifies the content of your thesis. They are not very common in theses in literary studies, because all essential information can usually be worked into the main text. Appendices should be added only if the material included is helpful for the reader’s understanding of your text and if its placement in the main text would disrupt the flow of ideas. Some examples of material that is often included in appendices are interview transcripts and data collection tools, such as questionnaires.

If you decide to include appendices, make sure you refer to each of them at least once in the main body of your thesis. As Keith S. Taber points out in his article, if you cannot identify a “suitable point in the main narrative” of your thesis to direct your reader’s attention to an appendix, then its presence in your thesis is redundant (7).

If you have more than one appendix, they should be assigned a letter: the first appendix should be named Appendix A, the second Appendix B, and so on. The order of appendices is given by the order in which they are referred to in the main text. A reader should always encounter “see Appendix A” before “see Appendix B” in the text. This, however, does not mean that the author cannot refer to Appendix A again in the subsequent parts of the text. Besides letters, appendices should also – ideally – be given illustrative names (e.g. Appendix A: Interview with Yann Martel). Each appendix should start on a new page and be included in the table of contents.

AI TIP

In the process of writing your thesis, you can use ChatGPT to receive feedback. In your prompt, you can specify what you want it to focus on. Would you like it to check the tone of your paper? Or the clarity of your writing? Check the grammar? Would you like it to check if your introduction adheres to Swales’s CARS model? It might give you some sensible recommendations for how to improve your paper.

I would resist the temptation to have it do substantive language editing for my paper. The reason is that it will remove your own voice from your writing and replace it with its own, which is usually formulaic, long-winded, and annoyingly repetitive. Sometimes it will even edit the material quoted from outside sources, which may result in an inaccurate presentation of the sources. If you decide to use it for language editing, make sure you ask it to list the changes it has made to your original text and carefully consider each of them.

Your turn

- I Prepare an outline of your thesis. Make it as detailed as possible. What do you need to include to answer your research question? Consult the outline with your supervisor. Do any of the areas need more emphasis? Could certain sections be better arranged?
- II Write the first draft of your thesis introduction, following the CARS model. Introduce the general topic of your research and highlight its importance. Identify gaps in the existing literature or unresolved issues. State your research question and thesis statement and briefly outline your approach.
- III Draft a conclusion that summarizes your main points and reflects on the implications of your findings. How does your research contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field? How does it challenge, refine, or confirm existing theories? How might it inspire further research?

This chapter

- ⇒ **describes a typical thesis defence**
- ⇒ **explains how to prepare for a thesis defence**
- ⇒ **guides students on how to respond to the readers' reports**
- ⇒ **illuminates the value of writing a thesis**

A thesis defence concludes the thesis writing process; it can be regarded as its culmination. It refers to the event when a student is asked to appear before a state examination committee, present their thesis, and answer questions about it in as cohesive a manner as possible. As this description suggests, the defence requires knowledge and skills on the part of the student if it is to be completed successfully.

For most bachelor's students, this is their first examination in front of a committee, and so the thesis defence might be a source of anxiety. I would agree with Lorrie Blair that even the word alone is "unfortunate . . . as it suggests defensiveness" (127), as if students should protect themselves from attack. It is true that some of their findings might be challenged at the defence, but if they prepare adequately and answer the examiners' questions with confidence, they should have no reason to worry. After all, the examination is taken in front of people they have already met during their studies.

According to Article 62 of the Higher Education Act, the state examination committee is comprised of at least four faculty members who must have the official appointment to be examiners. One of them, being an associate professor or a full professor, serves as the chair (National Council). The committee is considered quorate if the chair and at least two other members, typically the supervisor and the other faculty member who has read and commented on your thesis, are present (Comenius University, IR 22/2023 16). If they do not have this official appointment, they are not included in the quorum; however, they are invited to the defence and can have a say in the final assessment of the thesis (Comenius University, IR 22/2023 15).

To prepare well, you should carefully read the official reviews of your thesis. The reviews ought to expressly state if the reader recommends your thesis for defence or not, and it propose a grade to be awarded for the thesis. The reviews must be available to you several days before the date of your defence – at Comenius University in Bratislava it is at least three working days in advance (Comenius University, IR 22/2023 17). One review is written by your supervisor and the other by another faculty member, typically an instructor from your department who has been asked to read your thesis and offer an independent opinion on its quality. As Blair suggests, the criteria that examiners use for the assessment of theses vary from person to person, and every examiner focuses on different aspects of the submitted texts (128). However, most of them comment on the overall structure, methodology, theoretical grounding, persuasiveness and coherence of the analysis, work with

sources, and linguistic accuracy. While reading their reports, you should pay close attention to any objections and questions they have raised. They may be incorporated directly in the body or listed at the end of the report. Your task is to respond to them.

Planning is key to a successful thesis defence. The main reason is that due to the number of students writing theses at the department and the amount of time reserved for thesis defences, you might only have a set time limit to defend your thesis. Within that slot, you will have to introduce your thesis and respond to the readers' comments and questions, and possibly to any questions raised during the defence. As a result, you need to focus only on what is relevant and important.

Your thesis introduction should not exceed five minutes if you want to have enough time for your response to the readers' reports and if you would like to leave some space for discussion. As five minutes is a very short time, do not try to retell the contents of your entire thesis. Focus on the essentials: the topic of your thesis, the problems solved, the methods used, and the results obtained. It is not a bad idea to rehearse this part of your thesis defence presentation to adjust its length by deleting everything unnecessary and leaving only what is of the highest importance.

When done, proceed to respond to your readers' comments and questions. Identify them and list them in the order of importance. Do not waste time on trifles. Focus on the things that, if left unanswered or unclarified, can thwart your success. It makes sense to start with the independent reader's report. Your supervisor tends to be on your side and is more familiar with your thesis and your topic as a result of all the discussions that the two of you have had; it is primarily their colleague who needs to be persuaded of the relevance and importance of your thesis. When responding, avoid vague and general statements. Make your answers and comments concrete and specific by referring to examples and data. Doing this and citing your sources will leave a good impression on your committee. They will see that you have done your homework and that you have mastered the basics of academic work.

Responding to your readers' questions and comments does not mean that you are automatically expected to agree with whatever they have to say. It is a myth to believe that the state examination committee members are the "real" experts on your topic. They might be erudite and knowledgeable, but they hardly ever know more about the topic than you do. Feel free to show your disagreement or correct their wrong assumptions; however, never forget to show respect for your examiners. Be confident but not arrogant.

The discussion part of the defence is the most difficult to prepare for as it is impossible for you to anticipate all the possible questions the committee members may ask. Despite that, you can prepare for most of the questions that will be asked. According to Blair, there is a good chance that they will "pertain to motivation, researcher position, theory, the literature review, methodology, and generalizability, or applicability" (131). It is recommended that you re-read your full thesis before its defence to recall the details of what you have written. You do not want the committee to doubt for a second that you really are the author of your thesis.

Although most of the questions are predictable, sometimes a question may still take you by surprise. Remember there is no shame in honestly admitting that you cannot answer a question, especially if the question is removed from the subject of your thesis. However, James Hayton advises in his blog post that you try something like "I don't know, but I would think that [...] because of x and y, but you would need to do [...] in order to find out." In his opinion, an answer like this will

show the committee that you have “the ability to think like an academic.” Just as it is alright to sometimes say “I don’t know,” it is not a shame to ask for clarification if you are not sure that you understand the question. Anyway, when asked a question, do not keep silent or answer at random. Take time to think about it and try to give as competent an answer as possible (Hayton).

As can be seen, the thesis defence may not be so daunting if you prepare for it adequately, and if you plan and rehearse all that you can. It is a good idea to deliver your presentation in front of friends or family members and get some feedback before you go before the committee. You may also consider attending a few defences before your own. This will demystify the process for you: you will see how the defence is structured; what kind of questions are asked; and what the atmosphere is like, which may help you prepare better for your own defence.

Good preparation may also help alleviate the stress that students often experience on occasions like this. It probably will not eliminate it completely, though. It is natural to feel nervous, and your examiners will not be surprised to see you tense or giving nervous laughs. They have experienced it many times before, so they will be helpful and may even repeat questions if necessary. Remember they want you to succeed, so they will do their best to guide you through the examination.

This does not mean that the thesis defence is just a formality. You should take it seriously as it contributes a great deal, typically one third, to your final grade. The other two thirds are constituted by the grades your supervisor and the independent reader have proposed in their assessments of your thesis. It can tilt the scales in your favour, especially if one of your assessors has proposed a failing grade for your thesis, but it can be a game changer even if you find the proposed grades lower than desired.

While the thesis defence itself is public and can be attended by a student’s classmates, family members, or any other visitors, the final grade is determined in a closed session of the state examination committee. This means that after there are no more questions, the chair asks the student and the visitors to leave the room, and the committee members take a vote on whether the student has passed the defence and they decide what final grade will be awarded. The student is usually informed of the result immediately after the decision has been reached.

It is important to realize that a successful thesis defence does not always result in elated feelings and a sense of accomplishment. As Blair warns, some students may find themselves feeling sad. She compares the experience to “a post-partum depression” or “the break-up of a close relationship.” Although they could not wait to finish the thesis and be free again, they may now feel a void. This may be due to the fact that a successful thesis defence often means that they are no longer students. It may cause them to experience “a loss of identity” and “a loss of purpose” (Blair 132). Students should know that these feelings are perfectly natural, and, as Blair writes, “they will pass” (Blair 133).

Besides feelings of sadness, the thesis defence can also produce doubts about the value of one’s work. Students may be wondering what it was all for, and what contribution to knowledge they have made by spending the past year researching and writing about a literary text. While it is true that their thesis is not likely to create change in the world at large, the skills needed to research and write a thesis will stay with them and can be transferred to other aspects of their life. The ability to find and evaluate information by using critical analysis, the ability to logically organize ideas and communicate them clearly, and the ability to work independently are all valuable skills necessary for their

future career. Thesis writing also boosts your self-motivation and perseverance, so it develops your personality as well. All in all, writing and defending a thesis is a worthy learning experience that you can truly benefit from.

Your turn

Prepare a five-minute oral summary of your thesis:

- Introduce yourself, your topic, and your research question.
- Briefly describe the background and the gap in the literature.
- Give a quick overview of your research method or approach.
- Spend most of your time on your findings, highlighting the most important ones.
- Wrap up with the significance of your work and its implications for your field.

Rehearse your summary several times. Make sure you sound engaging and professional.

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