

East Tennessee State University
Department of Art and Design
Master of Fine Arts / Thesis Description and Expectation

In the graduate student's last semester they will take **ARTA 5960 Graduate Thesis** with their Advisor / Graduate Committee Chair. This course consists of the preparation and execution of their MFA Thesis.

The M.F.A. Thesis includes:

- The creation of an original body of artwork
- The presentation of that body of artwork in a public solo thesis exhibition
- An academic paper that supports the thesis artwork (Thesis Support Paper)
- An oral defense of the thesis artwork in the exhibition (Thesis Oral Defense)

The MFA Exhibition must meet the following expectations in a professional manner:

The student will create for their exhibition:

- An **exhibition title** and **artist statement**, to be displayed in the gallery.
- Appropriate **lighting, layout, labels** (title, medium, date), and **signage**.
- A **public reception** to be held during the dates the exhibition is open to the public.
- Promotional **postcards** to be printed and distributed no later than two weeks before the beginning of the exhibition.
- A time and date for the Thesis Oral Presentation, respective of the Graduate Committee members' individual schedules.

Deadlines

Dates subject to change each year <https://www.etsu.edu/etsu/academicdates.aspx>
It is the responsibility of the graduate student to be aware of and adhere to these dates.

Jan. 31 Last day for graduate students to file intent to graduate, committee form, form for candidacy, and finalized programs of study for May graduation.

Mar. 12 Last day to schedule oral defense of thesis or dissertation with the School of Graduate Studies for May graduation.

Mar. 26 Last day to complete oral defense of thesis for May graduation.

April 2 Last day to upload committee-approved thesis, turn in the Manuscript Review form, and send in the full Turnitin report to the School of Graduate Studies for May graduation.

April 30 Last day to pay microfilming fees for theses in the Bursar's Office and present the receipt to the School of Graduate Studies (Dossett, 309), or pay HERE.

Thesis Support Paper

The Thesis Support Paper MFA students write is an academic paper **that supports the MFA Thesis Exhibition**. ETSU's MFA degree requires written (and verbal) evidence of intelligent, creative decision-making, and an awareness of the historical and contemporary contexts of the artwork.

The Thesis Support Paper should be clearly written, focused and completed to coincide with the Thesis Exhibition. It should state the form (medium/format) of the student's thesis project, as well as the main ideas they have explored. This document will serve as a supporting explanation of the concepts, influences, processes, and results of the artwork exhibited in the MFA Thesis Exhibition.

The Thesis Support Paper should locate and describe the artwork within historical and cultural contexts and state the reasons, personal and/or social, for addressing these concerns. It is expected that the thesis project will make a contribution to the culture it addresses; therefore, students should attempt to place the MFA thesis work within that larger culture, and the student's personal concerns should be articulated with an awareness of their work's historical position.

The Thesis Support Paper should be in clear, concise English and edited for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It should be written using:

- MLA citation format <http://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/mla-format/>
- Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) Standard Format <https://www.etsu.edu/gradstud/etd/guides.php>
- Thesis and Dissertation Guide. <https://www.etsu.edu/gradstud/etd/guides.php>

The Thesis Support Paper should describe and explain the studio research conducted in creating the artwork for the MFA Thesis Exhibition. This paper should be organized by chapters and topics considered appropriate by the student and as advised by the student's graduate committee.

The length of the paper (content) should be between 15-20 pages in length and should include:

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- The written body of the paper
- Images of artistic influences
- Images of the student's work, including documentation of their MFA Thesis Exhibit
- Works Cited page
- Curriculum vitae

The student must be smart and responsible in fulfilling their obligations. If their writing skills are not strong, they should take advantage of free writing assistance from the ETSU's **Center for Academic Achievement** (423-439-7111). They should NOT rely on their committee for this. The role of the committee is to respond to the content issues of their thesis, not grammatical corrections. The student should solicit a professional proof-reader to read their paper for grammatical errors and corrections prior to submitting their final draft paper to the committee.

MFA candidates should be prepared to write at least 2- 3 drafts before reaching their final draft. The student's graduate committee should be expected to read the thesis support paper two times: the first read through of the final draft to contribute comments for improvement, and the second read through after the student has made corrections.

Note that the MFA thesis support paper must have majority approval from the committee in order to meet degree requirements and be submitted to the graduate school for review. The student's graduate committee should receive and have read the rough draft of the thesis before the Thesis Exhibit Oral Defense. It will serve as a guideline to understanding and interpreting the MFA Exhibition. Documentation images of the student's artwork (**in particular the MFA Exhibition**) must be included in the final finished paper.

Deadlines

Fall Semester Work with Graduate Committee Chair to establish a timeline (with deadlines) to work on and complete the rough draft.

Jan. 15 Submit a completed rough draft of the Thesis Support Paper to the Graduate Committee Chair.

Feb. 15 Submit a final draft Thesis Support Paper (based on your chair's feedback) to Graduate Committee.

Mar. 15 Submit a final revised Thesis Support Paper (based on committee feedback) to Graduate Committee for approval.

April 2 Last day to upload committee-approved thesis, turn in the Manuscript Review form and submit the full Turnitin report to the School of Graduate Studies for May graduation.

If the student misses the deadline for submitting their committee approved Thesis Support Paper, they may not officially graduate and receive their degree in that semester. If this happens, a student must maintain continuous enrollment (paying tuition out of pocket) for each additional semester required until the student's Graduate Committee approves and signs off on the Thesis Support Paper.

NOTE:

If the student does not provide evidence of satisfactory progress towards finishing their thesis, that student's Graduate Committee may recommend the student's dismissal from the MFA program.

Thesis Oral Defense

MFA candidates are required to present an oral defense of their MFA exhibition in a closed session before their Graduate Committee and one graduate faculty observer from outside the department. As stated previously, the Thesis Support Paper must be given to the committee prior to the oral presentation so that the committee can approach the work with an awareness of the student's ideas and stated intent. The student must also submit a **Notification of Oral Examination for Thesis form** at least two weeks before the scheduled oral presentation. This form also notifies the graduate school to arrange for a Graduate Faculty Representative, who sits in on the oral presentation as an outside observer. <https://www.etsu.edu/gradstud/documents/forms/oral-exam.pdf>

Students are allowed two opportunities to pass their Oral defense. If the student is asked to present their oral defense a second time and does not pass, they will be dismissed from the program without an MFA from ETSU.