

Writing an Honors Thesis in Linguistics

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What is an honors thesis in Linguistics?

- An honors thesis represents a student's **original** contribution to the field of linguistics. The scope of the project must be **substantially** larger than that of a term paper.
- A typical linguistics thesis will ask a specific question about some set of language data and answer that question as thoroughly as possible, considering also the broader implications of the question and its answer for some aspect of linguistic theory.
- Your thesis advisor can help you determine an appropriate scope for your project. There is no specified number of pages for an honors thesis but a typical thesis is between 30 and 50 pages in length.

Am I eligible to write an honors thesis?

You are eligible to write an honors thesis in Linguistics if:

- you are a Linguistics major or double-major
- you have a cumulative gpa of at least 3.3
- you have a within-major gpa of at least 3.5

Membership in the UNC Honors Program is not required.

What are the requirements for the thesis?

Junior Year

- The first step is to come up with an idea for your thesis. Approach a faculty member in the linguistics department or the Honors Advisor in Linguistics and propose your idea. Finding a faculty member willing to serve as your thesis advisor is essential.
- By the end of your **junior year** you should complete a **Thesis Contract** (Form A) and have your thesis advisor and the department honors advisor sign the contract. The contract will be filed with the **Department Honors Advisor** (currently Katya Pertsova, pertsova@email.unc.edu, 308 Smith Building) by the end of the second semester of junior year.
- You are encouraged to spend part of the summer before senior year reading up on the relevant literature and/or collecting data for your project.

First Semester Senior Year

- You will have to enroll in Ling 691H with your thesis advisor as the instructor of record. Before you can do that, fill out an independent study learning contract through the online contract manager system found here: <https://curricula.unc.edu/faculty/online-learning-contract-manager-olcm/>. Once your contract is approved, you will be registered for 691H (note that the deadline to register is usually the Friday of the second week of classes).
- Select your other committee members. You must have a committee of at least 3 faculty (including your thesis advisor), and at least 2 of them must be from within the Linguistics Department. (N.B. faculty listed at the bottom of our faculty webpage who are associated with our departments are not actually IN our department and therefore don't count as within-linguistics committee members.)
- By the end of the **second week** of classes fill out a **Detailed Workplan** (Form B) in consultation with your advisor, and turn it in to the department honors advisor.
- You should plan to devote **as much time** to your honors project each week as you would to any regular 3-credit class. Overenrolling during this time is **strongly discouraged**.
- Meet with your thesis advisor on a regular basis (the interval is determined by the advisor, but typically it is weekly), and meet with your other committee members at least once in your first semester (and as often as you determine would be helpful).
- At the end of this semester your thesis advisor will inform the department honors advisor of your progress and whether you should continue with your thesis project.

Second Semester Senior Year

- Enroll in Ling 692H (same procedure as 691H) and continue working according to your Detailed Workplan, in regular consultation with your thesis advisor.
- You are also strongly encouraged to keep in contact with your other committee members and incorporate their suggestions into your work. They may contact you and request meetings at their discretion.

Thesis Defense

- **Completing an honors thesis project does not automatically mean you will be awarded honors.** This determination is made at your thesis defense.
- In early March start to contact your committee members about scheduling your defense. Your defense must take place at least **one week** before the honors deadline (see below), and you must distribute your defense draft of your thesis to your whole committee at least **one week** before your defense. Your thesis advisor must approve your thesis draft before it can be distributed to other committee members.
- When you have completed your thesis, you will defend it before your honors committee. For the defense, you will prepare a 10- to 15-minute presentation that summarizes the main points of your project. The presentation will be followed by a question and discussion period that gives the committee members an opportunity to talk with you about your project. Committee members may also suggest revisions to be made before the final version of the thesis is submitted.
- At the time of the defense, the committee will confer (privately) and decide whether Honors, Highest Honors, or no honors will be awarded. If the committee is not able to make a unanimous decision, the majority opinion will prevail. In cases of an even split, another faculty member chosen by the honors advisor will be asked to read the thesis and help the committee reach a consensus.
- If no honors is awarded, the two honors courses you took this year will still count towards your graduation credits (as independent studies courses would).

Turning in the Thesis

- You will submit the final version of your thesis electronically to be filed via the Carolina Digital Repository (CDR). Submissions are due by the last day of class in the semester in which students complete their thesis. The University Library will catalog electronic theses and make them available to the public (students may request a one- or two-year delayed release of their work via the CDR). Students should follow these steps to submit their thesis:
- Students who complete honors projects are strongly encouraged to present their research at the annual “Celebration of Undergraduate Research,” held in late April. Contact the Office of Undergraduate Research (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/our>) for more information.

Dates and Deadlines

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

Be sure to find out the official Honors deadline for the semester you plan to graduate by consulting the Honors website (<https://honorscarolina.unc.edu/>). It is usually:

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

Remember that your defense must take place at least **one week** before the honors deadline, and you must turn in your defense draft of your thesis to your whole committee at least **one week** before your defense. This means that you should aim to be **finished** with your thesis by around the end of March for May graduation, or end of October for December graduation.

Recognition

The Honors Carolina office provides cords for students who successfully defended an Honors thesis to wear with their commencement gowns. If you would like to receive an Honors cord for the graduation, you must defend before the deadline and let your Honors Advisor know that you would like to get the cords.

For more information

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