

Good Thesis Writing in Thirty Seconds or Less

Melissa Tufts (mtufts@uga.edu) 706-542-8292

The purpose and importance of the thesis:

- Culmination of graduate program and skills learned
- Sharing of knowledge (posterity) and role of the Owens Library at CED
- Professional uses

What is a thesis? A traditional thesis is a paper that puts forth the proposal of a truth or stance that is then proven or disproven through primary and secondary research, literature review, statistical/logistical analysis, etc. A design-based thesis is very similar but it uses a particular site or design problem and shows actual application of knowledge and skills necessary to address needs and challenges.

A “thesis” (as in the *paper* you write), is a presentation of your research, analysis of that research, and conclusions you may be able to draw based on your exploration of the topic. In general, the writing in a long paper like a “thesis” typically flows from GENERAL observations and discussions to SPECIFIC facts and findings, to analysis of those findings, and then back out to GENERAL conclusions or recommendations.

Here at CED, our thesis papers tend to fall into two general categories: One is the conventional research paper and the other is a design-based thesis, where an actual site is analyzed and recommendations are made based on a set of defined variables.

IRB (Institutional Review Board): UGA has an IRB office that must approve any research you plan to do with regards to human subjects. This is to avoid activity that might be unlawful, unfair, or be in violation of human and civil rights. Be sure to confirm with your major professor whether you need to make an application to the IRB office. For more information, see: <https://research.uga.edu/hrpp/irb/>

Writing pointers:

GENERAL>SPECIFIC>GENERAL example:

1. Horses have long been a part of human experience. (GENERAL STATEMENT)
2. Horses have been domesticated for over 5,000 years. (SPECIFIC STATEMENT)
3. Horses and humans have had a long-term working relationship. (GENERAL STATEMENT)

There are sentences that guide the reader between ideas and facts within a paragraph just as there are sentences that guide the reader through from one chapter to the next. In both instances, these should FLOW, not jump around or jar the reader into wondering how to make the leap.

This is a jarring sequence:

Horses have been domesticated for over 5,000 years. People like horses. Horses depend on people. Horses and people are interdependent. This relationship changes over time.

This is a more flowing, informative sequence conveying the same information that guides the reader along:

Horses and people have interacted for thousands of years, creating an interdependent relationship that continues to evolve.

When you make arguments or posit ideas in the thesis, make sure you FOLLOW THROUGH on your explication. Don't leave the reader wondering how horses and people are interdependent (in this case): **show** your reader how they are.

A Thesis Example:

Title —Tells the reader what the paper is about:

Therapeutic Horseback Riding for Paraplegics: How Equestrian Skills Build Confidence, Physical Strength and a Sense of Well-being

Abstract—Three to five sentences that tell the reader what the paper is about and how the author went about his/her work and briefly what was discovered. The **ABSTRACT** is where your **CENTRAL QUESTION** is presented first to your reader. It should be *engaging, concise, and informational* with keywords essential to the paper's identity.

Can horseback riding and the interactions between horses and people improve the lives of paraplegics, and how can we design programs to support that if they do? *Riding horses for pleasure has long been a source of recreation, pleasure, challenge, and compassionate relationships between animals and humans. In the late twentieth century, after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, attention was given to ways that paraplegics could experience the physical world from a different perspective and gain skills in balance and movement, while increasing upper body strength. This paper examines three facilities that were established to train instructors in safe equestrian practices and evaluates the impact of this new physical education initiative in three case studies. Based on this research and analysis, it appears that therapeutic riding does indeed improve life experiences of people with disabilities.*

In this example the **CENTRAL QUESTION** is "Can horseback riding and the interactions between horses and people improve the lives of paraplegics, and how can we design programs to support that if they do?"

Key words—These are the words that are seminal to your discussion. They will help readers find your research once your thesis is published.

Example: *Horses, American Disabilities Act, equestrians, therapeutic riding.*

Sample Working Outline—This may change as you write your paper, but it can be a road map and help you stay on point.

- I. Introduction: *What the author intends to do in the paper (thesis)...an overview including the CENTRAL QUESTION and how it is grappled with*
- II. Basics of horseback riding
 - a. Brief discussion of human/equine interaction
 - b. Skills that come with exposure to horses and riding them
- III. Overview of the physical and emotional needs of paraplegics and how horses might support them
 - a. Create a matrix that shows graphically the advantages of horseback riding for various degrees of disability.
- IV. Three case studies (Note: A **case study** is different from a simple **example**.)
 - a. St. Andrews College equestrian program
 - b. University of Michigan equestrian program
 - c. North Carolina State University equestrian program
- V. Analysis: *What this study found in terms of results*
 - a. Positive outcomes
 - b. Negative outcomes
- VI. Literature Review
 - a. Books and articles on horse and human relationship
 - b. Books and articles on needs of paraplegics for outdoor exercise
 - c. Books and articles on design of riding programs
 - d. Website sources for current trends in equestrian programs
- VII. Conclusion
 - a. Go over main points of the study
 - b. Brief discussion of what else needs doing (or avoiding) in this field—discuss limitations of your effort
 - c. Discuss things you discovered that were unexpected (briefly)
- VIII. Bibliography/Resources
- IX. Appendices

A bit of wisdom: *If your thesis (the paper) is over 75 pages, chances are you have not distilled your research and made your arguments succinctly. Keep on topic; don't just give your committee pages and pages of reflections or musings on your research. Tell them something they don't already know in an interesting way using scholarly methods and sound research. Be cogent: Not every sentence we write deserves a place in history.*

Writing pitfalls to avoid:

- Run-on sentences
- Misplaced modifiers

- Too much use of the passive voice
- Remember to use the "Oxford Comma" (comma before "and" in a series)
- Misspellings
- Non-sequiturs
 - Paragraphs that don't flow
 - Ideas not finished before moving on
- Inconsistent verb tenses
- Use of the first person throughout the paper
- Unnecessarily obscure words and jargon