

MFA Program in Creative Writing, Editing, and Publishing
Sam Houston State University
Some Advice for the Thesis

1. From the moment you begin the program, you should be thinking about your thesis. This does not necessarily mean that you need to start writing the thesis, but the earlier you begin, the better. The project will, in almost every instance, take longer and require more of you than you can anticipate as a first-semester student.
2. Take advantage of your workshop opportunities. The workshops offer you the chance to develop stories or chapters or poems and to bring them before a critical audience. Often, ideas for the thesis emerge organically from work submitted to the workshop and which demonstrates promise as a larger work.
3. After you've become familiar with the MFA faculty, think about whom you would like to ask to serve as your director. And do ask! Don't assume that just because you want someone to direct your thesis that they will say yes. (They may say no for a variety of reasons, including a full slate of thesis commitments.) Also, don't wait until the last minute to ask.
4. Even though you will be formally enrolled in Thesis I and then Thesis II, bear in mind that university deadlines do not permit you the full calendar of time for Thesis II. To meet university deadlines, the process must be completed much closer to the middle of the final semester than to its end. It's not hard for those Thesis II deadlines to come up quickly, regardless of whether the thesis defense is scheduled for the fall or spring semester. In any case, pay close attention to the thesis deadlines on the university's academic calendar.
5. As with the creative work itself, the critical introduction is something you work out with your director. The requirements are relatively broad—you must place your work in some historical or theoretical context. In the world outside academia, writers are never required to talk of their work this way (though the publisher and your publicist may want you to do so), but within the context of an academic program, we do believe you should be able to write and talk intelligently about the project in which you're engaged, and the ways in which it contributes to the field, however that "field" is to be defined. You might think of the stars in the sky as constituting all the works and authors in history, and your responsibility in your critical introduction is to place your work in one of those constellations and to help the reader to understand why that's the constellation in which you'd place your work.
6. It is vital that you understand that our MFA faculty do not conduct thesis defenses in the summer. Our faculty spend their summers traveling and doing their own creative work.
7. Students who successfully complete Thesis I receive the grade of CR (credit); students who fail to successfully complete Thesis I receive of grade of NC (no credit). Students who successfully complete Thesis II receive the grade of CR (credit), while students who have not yet successfully completed Thesis II receive a grade of IP (in progress).
8. Anticipate that the process will take longer and be more difficult than you expect.
9. It will also be tremendously rewarding.