

Film and Screen Studies

MPhil by Thesis

Guidelines 2021–21

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This document, intended as a reference for both students and staff, provides guidance on the FSS *MPhil by Thesis*, involving assessment on the basis of a 30,000-word thesis.¹ The *MPhil by Thesis* is for students whose knowledge of the literatures and cultures covered by FSS is already substantial, and who already know the area they wish to research for their thesis.

Some elements of the following Guidelines for the *MPhil by Thesis* have the status of formal requirements and/or expectations either specified in the Regulations or agreed by the MMLL Faculty, and these are shown in boxes. The other text provides advice and interpretation. If there is any inconsistency between this document and the Regulations, the latter take precedence.

1. TRAINING AND ASSESSMENTS

1.1 The overall structure of the course

The *MPhil by Thesis* allows students who already have breadth and depth in their knowledge of literatures in modern or medieval languages to pursue research on a chosen topic with the kind of focus expected in doctoral research. Formal assessment is by the thesis submitted at the end of the year, but students also have to fulfil certain training requirements, and to submit work through the year so that the progress of their research can be monitored.

Michaelmas Term:

All *MPhil by Thesis* students must follow the FSS Core Course lectures and two mini-seminars. All MPhil by Thesis students must attend at least 8 sessions of either or both strands of the MT core course. They are also invited to follow any lectures, seminars, or advanced undergraduate papers outside of FSS that they find relevant. As a courtesy, students should email the convenor of such series in advance of attending the first one, to express their interest and inquire about space, but usually there are no difficulties.

The supervisor may also require attendance at taught courses relevant to the research topic.

Monitoring:

a detailed plan of the research to be carried out, including the research questions, proposed methodology, and outline plan of the thesis, must be submitted by Thursday of week 8

a document of 4,500–5,000 words (e.g. any chapter of the thesis, or the introduction) forming part of the thesis must be submitted by Thursday of week 1, Lent Full Term (i.e. just after the end of the Christmas vacation).

Please refer to the Key Dates 2020–21 document for exact dates. For lecture courses, please consult the FSS Michaelmas Term timetable and Lent Term timetable, as well as the University Lecture List.

¹ There is a separate set of Guidelines for the *FSS MPhil by Advanced Study*, which is a different course.

Lent Term:

The supervisor will advise students to attend at least two research forums, which might be PhD seminars, MPhil modules, or other appropriate research seminars or courses in MMLL or elsewhere in the university.

Monitoring:

Students give a 20-minute conference-style presentation and answer questions on their research progress at the end of Lent Term. This will be at a single event that all *by Thesis* students in both FSS and ELAC will attend. Supervisors will be invited, as will the FSS *by Advanced Study* students.

Easter Term:

Full-time research on the thesis.

Assessment: A thesis of no more than 30,000-words is submitted in early June.

Throughout the year, MPhil students following the *MPhil by Thesis* are as much full-time researchers as are PhD students, and primarily work on their thesis project. This requires the ability to plan, to set short- and long-term goals, to overcome obstacles, and, importantly, to allow for contingencies.

1.2 The thesis

The thesis requires original research on a topic of the student's choosing, demonstrating scholarship in one or more of the fields represented by FSS, and on a scale commensurate with a full eight-month period of focused research.

The main purposes of the thesis are:

- to develop and test the ability to plan and carry out, on a larger scale than in the *MPhil by Advanced Study*, independent research in the literatures and cultures of the modern or medieval languages
- to develop and test the ability to execute a substantial piece of academic research writing
- to make an original contribution to learning

There is no simple definition of originality. The thesis, self-evidently, has to be written by the candidate, and is therefore in a trivial sense original. However, there is a sense of originality which is more demanding than simply expressing the known in one's own words. This involves novelty of thought, and creativity in making connections, so that new intellectual ground is broken. It is these research skills which the FSS MPhil hopes to foster, and the *MPhil by Thesis* allows full scope for new intellectual discoveries, and for professional reporting of the research.

The thesis must conform to the criteria for all Cambridge MPhil theses prescribed by the University, which require that 'the thesis is clearly written, that it takes account of previously published work on the subject, and that it represents a contribution to learning'. The contribution to learning may consist in developing new angles on familiar material or in uncovering and analysing unknown or little known texts.

By 'scholarly research', we mean that the work should show detailed knowledge and careful analysis of primary texts. Primary texts could be films, websites, installations or other audio-visual or artistic artifacts, or they might also be theoretical texts (books, articles), works of film and media criticism, etc. Research also requires awareness of the relevant secondary literature (critical monographs, scholarly articles, works of film-media history, surveys of the field, etc.), and an ability to assess, assimilate and master such material. It is not good practice

either to rely heavily on paraphrased accounts of only one or two critics, or to 'drop' the names of dozens who are only engaged superficially. The ability to engage critically and substantially not only the primary texts but the secondary literature is a crucial dimension of the thesis. Proper acknowledgement should be given when drawing on other scholars' work.

By 'critical analysis', we mean that the work should develop an argument (as indeed the term 'thesis' itself suggests). This may be more or less polemical, but should in any case be a lucid, coherent and carefully substantiated exposition of a critical viewpoint in its own right. It is not acceptable to produce an unstructured meditation, an unmotivated appreciation or an unexplained critique, nor even to string together a series of divergent comments, however apt these might be if taken separately.

A thesis is subject to all such normal requirements of publishable academic writing as to relevance, clarity, and correctness.

Writing must be in clear, grammatically correct, continuous prose, and must function as a single, comprehensible, persuasive, cumulative demonstration, not as a series of disconnected insights. The quality of the argument and the debate are at least as important to the examiners as the flash of insight that inspired the piece of work in the first place. The organisation of the argument of the thesis, and its prose style, are of crucial importance in giving cogency and credibility to your research and critical position.

1.3 Supervision

Prior to application, students following the *MPhil by Thesis* should have discussed their proposed research in advance with a staff member in FSS specialising in the relevant subject area, and this person will normally be appointed as supervisor throughout the year. For equity, there are norms for the amount of supervision each student can expect to receive. It is expected that a student will be capable of largely independent work.

The following supervision is provided:

- Seven hours of supervision throughout the course

Supervision for the thesis can be taken in half-hour units, as appropriate and as agreed with the supervisor.

To make best use of supervisions, students should prepare carefully, for instance by making an outline plan of their thesis which can be discussed, or a list of questions on matters where the supervisor's advice is needed.

1.4 Outline schedule

Please remember that **Cambridge teaching weeks start on a Thursday. So, Thursday of week 1 of Michaelmas Term is the first day of lectures.**

Michaelmas Term

Thursday, week 8: Detailed plan of research and outline of thesis

Lent Term

Thursday, week 1: Submission of 4,500-5,000 section of thesis

Thursday, week 5: Submission of the provisional title and 200 word summary of the thesis.

Thursday, week 5: Submission of the title of the oral presentation.

Thursday, week 9: Oral presentation.

Easter Term

Early June: Submission of the thesis.

Vivas take place in mid-late June.

Submission deadlines are at midday.

Exact dates are given in the Key Dates document for 2020-21 (available on Moodle).

1.5 Word limit and deadline

The 30,000 word limit for the thesis is a **maximum** and must be adhered to. It includes footnotes but excludes figures, tables, appendices, abstract, contents page(s), and bibliography.

The word count must be stated clearly (see section 1.7). The word count (which must include footnotes) of the electronic copy will be checked. The examiners can and do deduct marks for even minor infractions.

Where passages are cited in a foreign language, only the passages themselves will be taken into account for the purposes of the word limit: any associated glosses and/or translations will be exempt. In cases where this results in a total which exceeds the word limit, the total number of words (including the exempt material) should still be declared, together with the number of words comprised by the exempt material.

There is no minimum word count, and it is not necessary to write up to the limit. However, students should keep in mind that the quality of a piece of work that is severely under the limit may well suffer adversely when compared to work that is nearer the word limit. Such a thesis may fail to address an important question, to take account of relevant material, or to develop a complex and satisfying argument.

Alternatively, a thesis may come in well under the word limit because a student has developed a project that is insufficiently ambitious. More frequently, however, the opposite problem occurs: students wish to undertake a project that cannot fit into the 30,000-word limit. Students are advised to consult with their supervisors as soon as possible if they come to believe that they are likely to significantly overshoot or undershoot the wordcount. Projects can be focused or expanded if enough time is allowed for this kind of work.

The deadline for submission of the thesis is **not flexible**.

There are few pieces of written work that would not benefit from a few more hours or days of perfectionism. Therefore, in a spirit of equity, we do not allow a given student flexibility over deadlines. This means planning for the unexpected (the printer breaking, the network crashing, and so on) to allow a safety margin.

1.6 Requests for exemptions

There are legitimate reasons for exemptions from the letter of the requirements, but exemptions are not routine.

Requests for exemptions must be made to the Director of the MPhil, directly or via their Tutor, and supported by the supervisor, *before* work is due.

In the case of work submitted for monitoring in the first week of Lent Term, the length requirement is not a maximum, and longer work can be submitted if the supervisor agrees.

An extension to the thesis **deadline** is justified in cases of non-routine illness that may significantly hinder the student's progress, or adverse personal circumstances such as bereavement or serious illness in close family. All such cases will be treated sympathetically. The situation should be discussed with the MPhil Director and the supervisor **immediately if it is suspected an extension may be needed**, even if at that stage it is not clear how the situation will develop. If appropriate, a request for an extension can then be made once the situation is clear (as long as this is ahead of the deadline). A request on medical grounds will need to be supported by a doctor's note, and other requests need the support of the student's Postgraduate Tutor in college.

The University makes special arrangements for students with a disability, including those with a long-term ongoing condition. If this affects you, you should speak to your College Tutor, and where appropriate with the Disability Resource Centre, in order to establish what appropriate adjustments should be made to your MPhil studies.

1.7 Submission of written work

Electronic (pdf) submission is required, as detailed below.

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 4.5-5k thesis sample | 1 pdf file (by email) |
| Thesis | 1 pdf file (by email) |

You are advised to carefully check your thesis for typing errors, spelling mistakes and poor grammar or written expression. The thesis, apart from quotations, must be written in English.

As part of your thesis document there must be:

- a title page containing:
 - the thesis title
 - your name as it appears on your passport

- your College
- the Date
- a Declaration stating: **This thesis is submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy.**
- a declaration page in the Preface stating: **This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.**
- a Statement of Length giving the total word count of main text and footnotes and, if relevant, the word count of any translations or glosses that are exempt from the length requirement.

There is no requirement for a final hard bound copy for deposit in the University Library.

2. DETAILS OF ASSESSMENT

2.1 The basis of the assessment

The *MPhil by Thesis* is assessed on the basis of the 30,000-word thesis and a *viva voce* examination on its contents.

2.2 Criteria for the award of the MPhil by Thesis

The 30k thesis and the oral performance in the viva are judged against expectations for what can be achieved in eight months of full-time research. The MPhil by Thesis is assessed on principles analogous to those applying to other research degrees such as the PhD. No numerical mark is awarded to the thesis, and as a result the course outcome is pass/fail. The examiners' reports specify whether the thesis demonstrates readiness for doctoral research (see also [Section 3](#) on the conduct of examinations). Candidates wanting to proceed to a PhD at Cambridge are required to demonstrate such readiness as a condition of acceptance.

The subject of a candidate's research is approved by the Degree Committee in the light of what it is reasonable to expect a candidate to complete within the minimum requirement of terms for the degree. The limitations are intended to apply to the scale and scope of work presented for examination, rather than its quality.

The MPhil by Thesis degree is awarded to those who have demonstrated all of the criteria below:

1. provides evidence of a useful contribution to the field of study;
2. understanding of the material studied and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in the field of study;
3. includes critical evaluation of current methodologies and wider research in the area of study;
4. argument is clear and well developed, with appropriate exemplification;
5. submission of work of a quality and quantity expected for 8 months of full-time postgraduate research and study.

2.3 Good Practice in Research and academic misconduct

The University of Cambridge's guidelines on Good Research Practice have been developed to emphasise the importance of integrity and rigour in all research carried out at, and in

partnership with, the University. The policy covers openness, supervision, training, intellectual property, the use of data and equipment, publications of research results and ethical practice. The University's policy on Good Practice in Research can be found at: <https://www.research-integrity.admin.cam.ac.uk/research-integrity/good-research-practice>.

Academic misconduct

Substantive duplication of work in different assignments will be penalised, as will any form of academic misconduct. See <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/definition> for information on what constitutes academic misconduct. Students must read the full information on this webpage and click on each of the links on the left hand-side of the page for more detail.

Students who use proofreading services should ensure they are aware of the University guidelines on this: <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-plagiarism/collusion>

Serious cases of academic misconduct may result in a student being withdrawn from the University and the degree sought.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a type of academic misconduct: using someone else's ideas, words, data, or other material produced by them without acknowledgement. Therefore copying out someone else's work without due indication and acknowledgement (quotation marks and source:page citation) is plagiarism. So is rewording someone else's work in order to present it as original without acknowledging the intellectual debt. Candidates must avoid (the appearance of) plagiarism by carefully acknowledging sources.

[Plagiarism](#) is unethical and corrodes the principles of scholarship. It is not tolerated at any level in the University. Further information on plagiarism can be found at <https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

Collaboration

Collaborative preparation of assessed work is not permitted.

Occasionally, it may be appropriate to make use of something done by another student, such as a conference presentation, but this must be acknowledged as the work of that person. **If in doubt, consult your supervisor.**

Notwithstanding the need for assessed work to be the product of individual endeavour, we warmly encourage interaction between MPhil students: discussion, brainstorming, problem solving, mutual morale boosting, and general social interaction. Students may form groups to read and critique each other's work ('writing groups'), so long as this never involves one student rewriting the work of another. Ideas raised by a student other than the author must be credited individually (through a footnote; the standard formula is 'personal communication' followed by the date).

3. CONDUCT OF THE EXAMINATIONS

Thesis Examination is normally carried out by one staff member in FSS or elsewhere within the University and one external examiner.

The research presented in the 30,000 word thesis is evaluated independently by two examiners, at least one of whom is external to the University, on the basis of the written thesis and a *viva voce* examination. The thesis supervisor cannot examine the thesis.

After reading the thesis, each examiner submits an independent signed report normally including a specific recommendation as to whether or not the thesis meets the requirements of the MPhil (cf. [Guide for Examiners for the Degree of PhD, EdD, MSc, MLitt and MPhil by Thesis](#)). The report should provide the Degree Committee with full information about the scope and content of the thesis and its strengths and weaknesses, and indication as to whether the thesis shows readiness for doctoral research.

On the basis of the thesis and the candidate's performance in the viva, the examiners complete a joint report. If the examiners differed appreciably in their independent reports, then the examiners should make their joint report appropriately explicit. The joint report will specify a recommendation of the result (see 3.3).

3.2 Viva

The viva (oral examination) is held for all MPhil By Thesis students. The viva (oral examination) is attended by the two thesis examiners and the student. In the unlikely scenario where both examiners are external to the University, the viva is chaired by an independent Chair. The Chair does not normally ask questions during the examination. In addition to chairing the meeting, his/her role is to ensure that the examination process conforms to the regulations. The viva is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes. The purpose of the examination is to allow:

- the candidate to defend his or her thesis and clarify any matters raised by the Examiners;
- the Examiners to probe the candidate's knowledge in the general field;
- the Examiners to assure themselves that the work presented is the candidate's own and to clarify matters of any collaboration; and
- the Examiners to come to a definite conclusion about the outcome of the examination.

Special arrangements:

Upon request, special arrangements can be made in particular cases for candidates on the grounds of disability. These may include rest breaks or candidates bringing food and drink into the examination room. Examiners will be informed of any such arrangements.

3.3 Outcome of the examination

The following outcomes are available: approval, revision, or failure. Each outcome may have one or more options, as detailed below:

Approval

1. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree **without correction**.
2. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree sought subject to **minor or straightforward corrections**. Such corrections would be factual, typographic, limited in extent, and could be completed immediately or shortly after the oral examination. Candidates have a maximum of **three weeks** in which to complete corrections and submit a corrected and approved version of their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.
3. The thesis is satisfactory for the award of the Degree sought subject to **more substantial, or less straightforward, corrections**. Such corrections may be extensive but should not require major reworking or reinterpretation of the intellectual

content of the thesis. Candidates have a maximum of **six weeks** in which to complete corrections and submit a corrected and approved version of their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.

Revision

The thesis requires revision such that the Degree Committee are unable to recommend the awarding of the degree without a fresh examination of a revised thesis. Candidates have a maximum of **10 weeks to revise and resubmit** their thesis. These deadlines run from the date the student receives their viva report and list of corrections.

Failure

The candidate's work is irremediable for the degree – outright failure.

3.4 Managing corrections, approval of the Examination Results and timeline for graduation

If corrections or revision is to be carried out after the oral examination, your examiner will indicate what is required and append a list to your joint report. The joint recommendation should also specify which examiner, or whether both examiners, will check that the corrections/revisions have been completed satisfactorily. You will be asked to supply the corrected thesis in an electronic format with any corrections highlighted on it.

If corrections are straightforward and relatively few in number, it may be possible for these to be completed at or immediately after the oral examination.

In most cases, Examiners' recommendations should be released informally so that students may immediately start working on corrections/revisions, but students should note that outcomes are subject to final approval at the final Degree Committee meeting.

At the Degree Committee meeting towards the end of June, final outcomes are approved as follows:

- Where no corrections are required, the Postgraduate Office will then make the necessary administrative arrangements for the Degree Committee approval for the award of the MPhil degree.
- Where corrections/revisions are required: once the corrections/revisions have been completed, no further documentation needs to be approved by the Degree Committee. The Examiners should simply confirm to the Postgraduate Office that corrections/revisions have been completed to their satisfaction, and following this, the Postgraduate Office make the necessary administrative arrangements for the Degree Committee approval for the award of the MPhil degree.

Candidates with no corrections, and those with minor corrections (3 weeks) will *normally* be eligible to apply for the graduation ceremony to be held in mid-July (although there may be exceptional circumstances in which the examining process may not be completed in time). All other successful candidates will be able to apply to attend a graduation ceremony at a later date. Dates of graduation ceremonies are available [here](#).

4. TIPS ON PREPARING THE THESIS

4.1 Sections, table of contents, and abstract

Labelled sections may make the reader's task easier and may help the writer stick to the point. However, avoid excessive subdivision – your advisor will give guidance. **Make sure that all pages are numbered.**

It is now standard for academic articles in most areas to have an abstract at the start: 250 words or so summarising the content. It may help you focus on what is important, and certainly aid a potential reader to decide whether your thesis is of relevance.

A 'table of contents' adds an air of professionalism to the thesis. If you've cracked automatic sectioning (worth doing), it's easy to insert one (it will need, in Word at least, a nudge from you to update itself if you change the sections, but when nudged it recomputes the page references).

An abstract and contents page(s) are deemed **not** to count towards the word limit.

4.2 Style and relevance

Simplicity of style is a virtue, and in an era of information overload there is no merit in obfuscation or prolixity. Get to the point and stick to it – then move on to the next one.

The quality and comprehensibility of English will be taken into account by assessors. If you are not a native English speaker you should pay particular attention to this and perhaps ask a non-specialist friend to read through your work before submission. Your Supervisor will be concentrating on content and will not have time to correct all grammatical and stylistic mistakes.

For further guidance on stylistic questions, please see the Faculty's 'Long Essay Guidelines.'

4.3 When to refer to the work of others

Citing others' work appropriately is an essential part of academic writing. It is usual to cite the originator of a theoretical device, generalization, or source of information on first mention. If you do not cite appropriately, this can be construed as either (1) you do not know the scholarship well enough or (2) you are trying to claim credit for someone else's work.

Be careful about sources found on the web. Make sure the source is authoritative: e.g. that a paper is peer-reviewed. If you really need to cite a source that is not authoritative, then note that fact in the text. Web references should give the full address, and the date on which you last accessed it. If there is a doi (Digital Object Identifier number), some journals like you to cite it, so it may be a habit worth acquiring.

4.4 Quotations in the text

For the MPhil in European, Latin American, and Comparative Literatures and Cultures, quotation in the original language will be expected to be the norm.

4.5 The form of citations in the text

For the form of citations in the text, please refer to the Faculty's 'Long Essay Guidelines.'

4.6 Appendices

Permission to attach an appendix must be sought from the Course Director. An appendix submitted with a thesis, for which permission has not been given, will be deemed to be part of

the wordcount.

4.7 Images

Including images in coursework, if desired, is permitted. However, each image should be justifiable because it exemplifies some point of the argument or is the object of analysis in your text. Please be aware that the analysis of the visual arts or film are a disciplines with their own norms, and if you wish to engage in this kind of work, it is incumbent upon you to learn how it is done. Do not add images simply to make your document look more appealing.

4.8 List of references

An alphabetically organized section headed 'References', at the end of your document should give **full** details of all works cited in the text. Bear this in mind when you consult a work—doing so may save you a frantic trip back to the library on deadline day to find some vital detail missing from your notes. **Only works cited in the text should be listed.**

For the format of this list, please refer to the Faculty's 'Long Essay Guidelines.' Entries in this list must be consistently and correctly formatted according to one of the methods described there..

If you intend to continue with academic work, it is worth getting an automatic reference system, such as EndNote (not to be confused with endnotes, which are to be avoided at all cost, see Section 4.6).

4.9 Footnotes

Footnotes should be used sparingly or not at all, depending on the nature of the project. Usually, if something is worth saying, it is worth saying in the text. However, on some occasions putting information in a footnote may be advisable in order not to obscure the flow of an argument.

Do NOT use endnotes – these exasperate the reader. Remember that (foot/end)notes are counted for the purpose of word limits.

4.10 Independence of work and plagiarism

Copying out someone else's work without due indication and acknowledgement (quotation marks and source:page citation) is plagiarism. So is rewording someone else's work in order to present it as your own without acknowledging your intellectual debt. Avoid (the appearance of) plagiarism by carefully acknowledging your sources. See Section 2.3 for this and for the need to be explicit about any collaborative work included in submissions.

4.11 Miscellaneous research-related matters

4.11.1 Insurance

If a student's research for the MPhil requires travel abroad, it may be possible to obtain travel cover under the University's insurance policy; see <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/insurance/travel/>

In order to qualify for travel insurance, ALL trips outside the UK must be risk assessed, and Risk Assessment Forms can be found on Moodle. For trips of 2 weeks or more, students must apply via their CamSiS Self-Service for permission to 'Work Away from Cambridge': <https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduate-study/your-student-status/work-away-cambridge>. For trips of less than 2 weeks, the Risk Assessment form should

be sent to your Supervisor for approval and emailed to the Postgraduate Office on graduatestudies@mml.cam.ac.uk

4.11.2 Risk

The notion of risk is worth considering when embarking on an MPhil project.

Very occasionally, the nature of MPhil research may indicate engagement in areas of potential danger, whether outside or indeed within the UK. Students are responsible for evaluating any risks to themselves, seeking appropriate advice, and giving personal safety due priority.

More commonly in the MPhil the notion of risk is relevant in the academic domain. Part of planning research consists in trying to foresee what could go wrong. A historical manuscript or a corpus could become unexpectedly unavailable, a corpus of literature could fail to yield the interesting things you had hoped, and so on. If such a risk has more than a negligible probability, it is wise to think of a 'plan B' for completing the work.

The commonest risks, however, subsist in the emotions and temperament of our technological infrastructure. We cannot rely on our computers, disk drives, and printers having the same cool, logical, and robust approach to life we humans have. They are especially prone to crises at times of stress, even if treated with sympathy and understanding. Always, therefore, anticipate such crises, which, because predictable, are not grounds for a deadline extension. In particular:

Always keep complete and up-to-date backups of your work.

**Set yourself your own deadline a week before the official deadline.
This will give you leeway in case there is a last-minute problem.**

Good luck and enjoy the course!

Dr John David Rhodes
Director of the MPhil in Film and Screen Studies
October 2020