



## Harvard Extension School, ALM Program Prewrite Guidelines for Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial

*Sustainability thesis-tracks candidates should not refer to the prework instructions below, but to the form: [ENVR 496 Thesis Prewrite Form](#).*

**Who takes the CTP tutorial and when?** The tutorial is mandatory for all ALM thesis-track candidates who have completed at least eight graduate degree courses (32 credits), including research methods/stats (if required for your field), and are fully prepared to begin the thesis process—moving straight from the CTP tutorial to thesis registration with no breaks. Consider your life, work, and academic schedule. Also consider your five-year deadline.

**What is the CTP tutorial?** The tutorial helps you develop an academically strong thesis proposal. During the semester, you'll map critical issues of project design such as scope, background, methodology, and expected outcomes. The tutorial is not a course in the traditional sense. It is structured one-on-one advising with your research advisor. You'll participate in individual appointments (by phone, video-conference, or in-person), ordinarily between 9-5 to discuss your topic, proposal design, and writing progress. In addition, you'll submit multiple thesis proposal drafts. Please note that potential thesis directors usually request further edits to the proposal prior to acceptance.

**Prewrite is required to demonstrate your readiness to register for the CTP tutorial.** You will not be able to register for the CTP tutorial until your prework is received and approved by your research advisor (RA). You may schedule an advising appointment with your RA via the "Degree Candidate Portal."

### **CTP PREWORK SUBMISSION DEADLINES:**

- April 1 - June 1 for fall CTP registration
- September 1 - November 1 for spring CTP registration

Prewrite is submitted to [thesis\\_prewrite@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prewrite@extension.harvard.edu) by the above deadlines. Be sure to put the specific tutorial in the subject line, for example, "**BIOS 497 CTP prework**" and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID in the document.

If you have prework approved, but do not end up registering for the specific term CTP, you'll need to submit prework again for the next submission period.

**Thesis Timetable.** There are many variables to thesis completion, including the time and effort that you put toward thesis proposal creation as well as thesis director availability. You should be prepared for the entire process, from CTP registration to submission of the final draft of your thesis, to take 15-18 months – six to nine months for proposal writing and director assignment, then nine months to write the thesis.

### **Specifically, you need to register for the 8-credit Master's Thesis (or Master's Thesis 2) no later than:**

- December 1 to be a November graduate (final draft of thesis due September 1)
- April 1 to be a March graduate (final draft of thesis due January 1)
- June 1 to be a May graduate (final draft of thesis due March 1)

**Advising tip:** If you want to graduate in May, you need to register for the fall CTP. There is simply not enough time between CTP completion at the end of May, and thesis director assignment by June 1, to finish the entire thesis.

**Locate your specific CTP tutorial in the pages below to find your prework instructions.**

# ANTH E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) in Anthropology

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Richard Martin

## ANTH E-497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

Please put together a 3-5-page document addressing the following five items to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e. June 1 or November 1). Be sure to put "ANTH 497 CTP prework" in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

### 1. A potential thesis topic.

Provide a brief general description of your topic. Be as specific as you can. When considering a topic, it is important to be mindful that you need to work with a thesis director who is a Harvard faculty member and has expertise in the area; therefore, not all topics of interest can be supported. It would be helpful to review faculty members' areas of expertise in the relevant Harvard department(s) as you consider topic possibilities. (Please do not contact possible thesis directors as the official selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility.)

### 2. A list of research questions and, if applicable, hypotheses.

What are you trying to figure out? These questions should be authentic ones in the sense that they are ones that you (and other scholars) do not know the answer to already but would like to find out. Research is based on genuine curiosity.

### 3. A preliminary review of scholarly literature on your proposed research topic, including a working bibliography with fifteen to twenty references.

Examining what is already known in your proposed topic area is critical. You need to be aware of the published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research, as it is not possible to make an original contribution the scholarship until you know what has been said by previous thinkers.

- What have scholars learned about this topic already?
- Which aspects of this topic remain unexplored or unresolved?
- Do any questionable or erroneous assumptions characterize the previous writings on this topic? What are the gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations of previous scholarship?
- Is there a particular method or approach to this topic that might shed new light on it?

### 4. A description of the types of evidence you will use to answer your research question(s) and, if applicable, to test your hypotheses [discuss only as applicable].

- Will you be analyzing artistic works (literature, music, film, television, drama, visual art, etc.) as primary source evidence? If so, what work(s) will you analyze, and what is the rationale for that selection?
- Will you be collecting primary data, whether through observations, interviews, surveys, or experiments? How will collecting and analyzing this data enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- Will you be using secondary data as primary source evidence, such as official documents, memoirs, diaries, newspapers, statistical compilations, historical accounts, reinterpreting existing datasets, and so forth? Are these sources in a language you can read? Are these sources published? If unpublished, will you have access to them? How will these sources enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- Will you be analyzing cultural artifacts? If so, will you have access to them? How will these artifacts enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- **Please note that research involving human subjects will require IRB approval before data collection may begin.**

### 5. A rationale for the proposed research.

You should answer the "So what?" question by explaining why your research question is worth asking and answering. You can think of undertaking thesis research as being a way of solving an academic puzzle. Your rationale for your proposed thesis work should explain why solving that puzzle is meaningful in an academic sense.

## BIOS E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in Biology and Biotechnology

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. James Morris

Scientific research depends on laboratory space, project funding, and access to databases; therefore, the thesis proposal is crafted *after* a lab and thesis director are identified, but *before* you begin work on the thesis.

The first step in the thesis process is to identify, with the help of Dr. Morris, a lab where you will do the research and thesis director (ordinarily, the scientist/researcher affiliated with the lab). **This step needs to be done well before the June 1 or November 1 deadlines.** Schedule a meeting with Dr. Morris via the “Degree Candidate Portal” to discuss possible research projects, lab locations and thesis directors.

### BIOS E-497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

After the lab and thesis director are identified and approved, send a brief one- to three-page document with the name, title, and contact information of the thesis director, and a description of the proposed research project to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1). Be sure to put “**BIOS 497 CTP prework**” in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID in the document.

### LAB PLACEMENT POLICY:

- If you are a Harvard lab employee who is currently working in a Harvard laboratory and want to do your thesis research there, the faculty member of the lab can serve as your thesis director.
- If you are a lab employee who is currently working in a non-Harvard laboratory and want to do your thesis research there, the non-lab member who holds a PhD can serve as your thesis director if he or she meets our qualifications.
- If you need the thesis to fulfill the Harvard Instructor (HI) requirement, you will need a Harvard faculty member to serve as a co-thesis director. The non-Harvard lab member can serve as one co-thesis director, and Dr. Morris will help you identify a Harvard faculty member who can serve as the other co-thesis director.

# BIOT 497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in Biotechnology or Bioengineering & Nanotechnology

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Steven Denkin

Scientific research depends on laboratory space, project funding, and access to databases; therefore, the thesis proposal is crafted *after* a lab and thesis director are identified, but *before* you begin work on the thesis.

The first step in the thesis process is to identify, with the help of Dr. Denkin, a lab where you will do the research and thesis director (ordinarily, the scientist/researcher affiliated with the lab). **This step needs to be done well before the June 1 or November 1 deadlines.** Schedule a meeting with Dr. Denkin via the “Degree Candidate Portal” to discuss possible research projects, lab locations and thesis directors.

## BIOT 497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

After the lab and thesis director are identified and approved, send a brief one- to three-page document with the name, title, and contact information of the thesis director, and a description of the proposed research project to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1). Be sure to put “**BIOT 497 CTP prework**” in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID in the document.

## LAB PLACEMENT POLICY:

- If you are a Harvard lab employee who is currently working in a Harvard laboratory and want to do your thesis research there, the faculty member of the lab can serve as your thesis director.
- If you are a lab employee who is currently working in a non-Harvard laboratory and want to do your thesis research there, the non-Harvard lab member who holds a PhD could serve as your director if he or she meets our qualifications.

## CREA E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) in Creative Writing & Literature (or Literature & Creative Writing)

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Talaya Delaney

### CREA 497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

1. Brief – 1-2 page – summary of the proposed creative writing project.
2. List of 3-4 creative works that have influenced your thesis project or that might serve as models for your thesis project in some way. Write 1-2 paragraphs about each work and how it has influenced your own project.
3. List a few Harvard Extension School or Harvard Summer School creative writing instructors you think could be possible thesis directors. Would any of your current or past course instructors be a good fit? This is an essential question to ask yourself. The odds of a faculty member accepting a potential thesis student increase greatly when the student in question is already known to them from previous coursework. Please do not contact possible thesis directors as selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility.
4. Submit to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e. June 1 or November 1), and be sure to put "**CREA 497 CTP prework**" in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

# CSCI-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in Software Engineering and Digital Media Design

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Hongming Wang

## CSCI 497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

Please put together a 2-3 page document addressing the following questions to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1), and be sure to put “CSCI 497 CTP prework” in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

### 1. What is the thesis topic/project area you have in mind?

Provide a brief and detailed description of your topic. Be as specific as you can. When considering a topic, it is important to be mindful that you need to work with a thesis director who is ordinarily a Harvard SEAS/GSAS faculty member or Harvard Extension School (HES) instructor who has expertise and interest in the area; therefore, not all topics of interest can be supported. Would any of your current or past course instructors be a good fit? This is an essential question to ask yourself. The odds of a faculty member accepting a potential thesis student increase greatly when the student in question is already known to them from previous coursework. You should also review the course catalogs of the FAS/SEAS, as well as other Harvard graduate schools, for a list of computer science courses offered by Harvard faculty ([my.harvard.edu](http://my.harvard.edu)). Finally, you may choose a director from industry or from another college or university if you have connections to specific individuals. An industry expert or non-Harvard instructor can serve as the thesis director if he or she has a PhD (a master's degree may suffice, if the degree required a thesis) and expertise in the area of research.

### 2. What are your research questions? (What are you trying to answer?)

The question or questions should be authentic in the sense that they are ones that you (and others) do not know the answer to already but would like to find out. Research is based on genuine curiosity, not advocacy or confirmation of what you already know.

### 3. Give some background information about your proposed research topic, including a bibliography with at least three references.

Examining what is already known in your proposed topic area is critical. You need to be aware of the published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research. When you are doing a review of your topic, you are looking for a balance of prior research. You need to choose a topic where there is enough prior work to support, frame, and ground your research, but not so much that there is very little left to say that is new and interesting.

### 4. Provide the rationale for the proposed research.

Answer the “So what?” question by explaining why your research questions are worth asking. Your purpose in doing the research is to solve a puzzle. Explain what puzzle you are trying to solve and why solving that puzzle is meaningful to the academic field.

### 5. In your document, include answers to the following (one paragraph per question):

- What have scholars learned about this topic already?
- Which aspects of this topic remain unexplored or unresolved?
- Do any questionable or erroneous assumptions characterize the previous writings on this topic?
- Is there a particular method or approach to this topic that might shed new light on it?

### 6. List a few Harvard instructors (or instructors from other schools or industry professionals), along with their relevant courses and/or publications, who you think could be possible thesis directors.

Please do not contact possible thesis directors as selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility.

# HUMA E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) in Dramatic Arts, English, and Religion

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Richard Martin

## HUMA E-497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:

Please put together a 3-5-page document addressing the following five items to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1). Be sure to put "HUMA 497 CTP prework" in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

### 1. A potential thesis topic.

Provide a brief general description of your topic. Be as specific as you can. When considering a topic, it is important to be mindful that you need to work with a thesis director who is a Harvard faculty member and has expertise in the area; therefore, not all topics of interest can be supported. It would be helpful to review faculty members' areas of expertise in the relevant Harvard department(s) as you consider topic possibilities. (Please do not contact possible thesis directors as the official selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility.)

### 2. A list of research questions and, if applicable, hypotheses.

What are you trying to figure out? These questions should be authentic ones in the sense that they are ones that you (and other scholars) do not know the answer to already but would like to find out. Research is based on genuine curiosity.

### 3. A preliminary review of scholarly literature on your proposed research topic, including a working bibliography with fifteen to twenty references.

Examining what is already known in your proposed topic area is critical. You need to be aware of the published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research, as it is not possible to make an original contribution the scholarship until you know what has been said by previous thinkers.

- What have scholars learned about this topic already?
- Which aspects of this topic remain unexplored or unresolved?
- Do any questionable or erroneous assumptions characterize the previous writings on this topic? What are the gaps, inconsistencies, or limitations of previous scholarship?
- Is there a particular method or approach to this topic that might shed new light on it?

### 4. A description of the types of evidence you will use to answer your research question(s) and, if applicable, to test your hypotheses [discuss only as applicable].

- Will you be analyzing artistic works (literature, music, film, television, drama, visual art, etc.) as primary source evidence? If so, what work(s) will you analyze, and what is the rationale for that selection?
- Will you be collecting primary data, whether through observations, interviews, surveys, or experiments? How will collecting and analyzing this data enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- Will you be using secondary data as primary source evidence, such as official documents, memoirs, diaries, newspapers, statistical compilations, historical accounts, reinterpreting existing datasets, and so forth? Are these sources in a language you can read? Are these sources published? If unpublished, will you have access to them? How will these sources enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- Will you be analyzing cultural artifacts? If so, will you have access to them? How will these artifacts enable you to answer your research question or test your hypothesis?
- **Please note that research involving human subjects will require IRB approval before data collection may begin.**

### 5. A rationale for the proposed research.

You should answer the "So what?" question by explaining why your research question is worth asking and answering. You can think of undertaking thesis research as being a way of solving an academic puzzle. Your rationale for your proposed thesis work should explain why solving that puzzle is meaningful in an academic sense.

## MATH E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in Math for Teaching

Research Advisor (RA): Dr. Carolyn Gardner-Thomas

Dr. Gardner-Thomas would like to meet with each tutorial candidate. Plan on doing this as early as possible, well before the June 1 or November 1 due dates. You may schedule an advising appointment with Dr. Gardner-Thomas via the Degree Candidate Portal.

### **MATH 497 CTP PREWORK REQUIREMENTS:**

Please put together a 2-3 page document addressing the following questions to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1), and sure to put **"MATH 497 CTP prework"** in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

**1. What is the thesis topic/project area you have in mind?**

Provide a brief general description of your topic – it doesn't have to be very detailed at this point, but should indicate that you have thought about possible work you could do for a thesis project.

**2. What are your research questions? (What are you trying to answer?)**

Your question or questions should be original in the sense that they are ones that you (and others) do not know the answer to already but would like to find out. Research is based on genuine curiosity, not advocacy.

**3. Give some background information about your proposed research topic, including a bibliography with at least three references.**

Examining what is already known in your proposed topic area is critical. You need to be aware of the published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research. When you are doing a review of your topic, you are looking for a balance of prior research. You need to choose a topic where there is enough prior work to support, frame, and ground your research, but not so much that there is very little left to say that is new and interesting. If you have any questions about what is expected for the bibliography, contact Dr. Gardner-Thomas early on.

**4. Provide the rationale for the proposed research.**

Answer the "So what?" question by explaining why your research questions are worth asking. Your purpose in doing the research is to solve a puzzle. Explain what puzzle you are trying to solve and why solving that puzzle is meaningful to the academic field.

# PSYC E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in Psychology

Research Advisors (RAs): Dr. Dante Spetter and Dr. Adrienne Tierney

## PSYC 497 CTP PREWORK SUBMISSION:

Please put together a 2-3 page document addressing the following questions, to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1), and be sure to put “PSYC 497 CTP prework” in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

### 1. What is the thesis topic you have in mind?

Provide a brief general description of your topic. Be as specific as you can. When considering a topic, it is important to be mindful that you need to work with a thesis director who is a Harvard faculty member and has expertise and interest in the area; therefore, not all topics of interest can be supported. Would any of your current or past course instructors be a good fit? This is an essential question to ask yourself. The odds of a faculty member accepting a potential thesis student increase greatly when the student in question is already known to them from previous coursework. You should also review the course catalogs of FAS/GSAS and Harvard Graduate School of Education, as well as the course catalogs of other graduate schools, for a list of psychology-related courses offered by Harvard faculty ([my.harvard.edu](http://my.harvard.edu)). We also suggest that you go to FAS/GSAS and other Harvard departments or program websites (for example, the HGSE's Human Development and Education program website), which ordinarily include both general research topics and lists of publications for each faculty member. Through these web searches, you'll learn much about instructors' areas of expertise.

### 2. What is/are your research question(s)? (What do you seek to answer?)

Your question or questions should be original in the sense that they are ones that you (and others) do not know the answer to already but would like to find out. The ALM thesis is a research thesis with the emphasis on “research”, which is based on genuine curiosity, not advocacy. Note that a psychology thesis needs to be empirical and verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory. A proposal for a purely descriptive or literature review project will not be approved. Your thesis work is expected to raise a specific question, and then evaluate some sort of evidence regarding the answer to that question.

### 3. Give some background information about your proposed research topic, including an annotated bibliography with at least ten references.

Examining what is already known in your proposed topic area is critical. You need to be aware of the published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research. When you are doing a review of your topic, you are looking for a balance of prior research. You need to choose a topic where there is enough prior work to support, frame, and ground your research, but not so much that there is very little left to say that is new and interesting.

### 4. Provide the rationale for the proposed research.

Answer the “So what?” question by explaining why your research questions are worth asking. Your purpose in doing the research is to solve a puzzle. Explain what puzzle you are trying to solve and why solving that puzzle is meaningful to the academic field.

### 5. From your [my.harvard.edu](http://my.harvard.edu) and Harvard department website searches, list a few Harvard faculty members (along with their relevant courses and/or publications) that you think could be possible thesis directors.

### 6. Please do not contact possible thesis directors as selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility.

## SSCI E-497 Crafting the Thesis Proposal (CTP) Tutorial in the Social Sciences

(For students in the fields of Government, History, and International Relations)

Research Advisors (RAs): Dr. Doug Bond, Dr. Mike Miner, and Dr. Ariane Liazos

The Research Advisors would like to meet with each tutorial candidate. Plan on doing this as early as possible, well before the June 1 or Nov. 1 due dates. You may make an appointment with your RA via the Degree Candidate Portal.

### SSCI 497 CTP PREWORK DEADLINES AND SUBMISSION:

Please put together a *3-5 page document* addressing the following seven items to be sent to [thesis\\_prework@extension.harvard.edu](mailto:thesis_prework@extension.harvard.edu) by the required CTP prework submission deadlines (i.e., June 1 or November 1). Be sure to put "**SSCI 497 CTP prework**" in the subject line and include your full name, along with your Harvard ID, in the document.

- 1. The topic or problem you plan to address.** Use clear language and describe its scope.
- 2. An overview of current scholarship, including a brief literature review with five to ten sources referenced within.** Examining what is already known about your proposed topic is critical. Be aware of published research on your topic as you propose potential thesis research. Choose a topic where there is enough prior work to support, frame, and ground your research but not so much that there is very little left to say that is new and interesting. Identify what is known and missing from, or inadequately answered by, the current literature. If scholars have already written about your proposed topic, explain your rationale for revisiting it. Are there gaps, puzzles, or deficiencies in existing studies? Have you identified new evidence or research methodologies? If no or few scholars have written about your specific topic, explain the potential significance of your research in relation to some wider scholarly conversation.
- 3. A research question.** Your goal is to develop a scholarly interpretation or resolution to the problem you have articulated. Ask a question, then supply a new answer. This question should be authentic. You do not begin work with a predetermined outcome. The thesis should be grounded in research that can support or refute your hypothesis.
- 4. A hypothesis for your research.** Offer a premise or conjecture that answers your question and can be tested via research. During your research, it is possible that data or answers will differ from ones you might have expected. Remember that you can change your hypothesis as you gather more evidence. Remain flexible as your research proceeds so your argument will align new discoveries.
- 5. Provide a rationale for your research.** What is the significance of the problem? Answer the "So what?" question by explaining why your research question is worth asking. Your purpose in doing the research is to solve a puzzle. Explain what puzzle you are trying to solve by testing your hypothesis and why solving that puzzle is meaningful to an academic field.
- 6. Describe the types of evidence and possible methods you will use to test your hypothesis.** How do you propose to test, in a transparent and replicable manner, your suggested response, and what evidence will you use? Official documents, memoirs, diaries, newspapers, statistical compilations, personal interviews, films, and so forth? Are the written sources published? Do you have access to them? Are they in a language you can read? Will you have access to the unpublished and/or non-written material when it comes time to conduct your thesis work? Your responses should offer an initial statement about what will become the methods section of your proposal.
- 7. A provisional list of one or more Harvard faculty members who might potentially serve as your thesis director.** When considering a topic, it is important to be mindful that you need to work with a thesis director who is a Harvard faculty member with expertise and interest in the area. Would any of your current or past Harvard instructors be a good fit? Are there any members of the faculty who have published on your topic? While we wait until you have a full proposal to begin formally contacting thesis directors, we find it is often helpful to begin thinking in advance about who will read your proposal. (Please do not contact possible thesis directors as the official selection of the thesis director is solely your RA's decision and responsibility)