Guidelines, Requirements, and Recommendations for:
Communication Portfolio Review
Senior Thesis in Communication
Senior Project in Journalism
and Poster Presentations
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INTRO TO THESIS MANUAL

Introduction to the Senior Manual
Welcome to your senior year in RIT’s School of Communication! The information contained in this manual will help you with some of your final requirements prior to graduation. Communication students have three major capstones during their senior year, portfolio review, Senior Thesis in Communication or Journalism Senior Project, and poster presentations. This manual provides guidance on each of these with links to more resources that may be helpful.

The manual is divided into four sections, with information about:

- portfolios
- requirements that all theses must meet, for Advertising & Public Relations and COMM majors
- senior projects, for Journalism majors
- poster presentations highlighting theses and projects

Senior Thesis
All Communication and Advertising & Public Relations majors must write a Senior Thesis in Communication. A thesis is a thorough, written presentation of original analysis or critical evaluation pertinent to the study of communication. Texts range widely in length, but average about 30 to 40 pages. Students enroll in Senior Thesis in Communication in the senior year. By this time, students are well prepared to tackle the thesis. The Theories of Communication class will have provided the foundations for the project; and research methods courses will have provided a range of options and research tools to answer the questions you posed. Many Communication majors successfully combine elements of what they learned in various other communication courses, as well as Professional Core classes, to develop, craft, and complete the research project for Senior Thesis in Communication. Students work with a thesis professor and one faculty second reader from within the Communication School in developing and completing their theses.

Graduating seniors are urged to browse examples of successful theses (http://www.rit.edu/cla/communication/students/resources) to get some sense of what past SOC students have accomplished.

PORTFOLIO REVIEW

All communication majors create a Communication Portfolio comprised of projects, papers and related professional materials. Compiled throughout your college career, the Portfolio functions as a showcase for your communication skills, academic excellence, and professional accomplishments. It may include (with examples):

- Academic Writing (term papers, thesis)
- Professional Writing (reports, manuals)
- Design Work (brochure, program)
- Publications (articles, stories)

Creating your Communication Portfolio is an exercise in gathering together work you’ve previously produced and then presenting it in a compelling and attractive fashion. Students keep their portfolios in a digital format as well as in hardcopy.

Graduating seniors must register for Communication Portfolio (COMM-497-01) either spring or fall term (0 Credits). The School hosts a Portfolio Review Day where students present their work in a public space for review and comment by faculty, staff and peers. Information regarding the review date and more specific requirements are sent mid-way through the enrolled term.
GETTING STARTED

The Senior Thesis in Communication demonstrates your ability to initiate, design, and conduct scholarly research. Students should have two potential thesis projects from which to choose from, developed as proposals in the two research methods courses. Developed thoroughly students can carry out the research proposed, report on the results of analysis/analyses, and discuss findings in relation to the topic in question. (Please see “So you don’t have a thesis topic” (Appendix B) if you have not yet developed a solid proposal or idea for your senior thesis.) Below is some advice offered by past APR and COMM students:

- Save your materials from Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods classes.
- Make back-up copies of everything.
- Set deadlines for yourself for each section.
- Read and use your instructor’s comments.
- Proofread, edit, and revise as you go along.
- Keep in close contact with your Senior Thesis instructor and second faculty reader - they are there to help you.
- Use old theses (located in the SOC office or online) as reference tools.
- Take some time away from your thesis (don’t spend hours and hours typing your thesis in one sitting).
- Stay calm and break up the work in chunks each week (don’t FREAK OUT and tell yourself you can’t possibly finish in time).
- Be ORGANIZED!
- The more work you put in at the beginning, the more time you’ll have to polish your thesis before it is due.

Selecting a Second Faculty Reader
The instructor of the senior thesis course will be the main advisor to help students. Students will also ask another member of the School of Communication faculty to serve as a second faculty reader or second advisor. This person should have a level of interest and expertise in your topic and be able to assist you in the process the better. Advisors can help you narrow your research question, point to pertinent research, help establish a realistic time table for work, and guide students to a successful completion of the thesis. The course professor will provide students with a form to be signed by the second faculty reader indicating that he or she has agreed to work with you.

While students are expected to bring a proposal into the senior thesis class, many of these proposals will need additional work and polish. You should work with your thesis professor and second reader to decide how to phrase the project’s research questions, create a justification for the research project, review previously published scholarly research on the subject, determine the best method to answer your questions, and implement the project.

Institutional Review Board
If your research involves the use of human subjects, including interviews, telephone surveys, oral histories, questionnaires, or other personal information (as opposed to textual analysis or meta-analysis), you must get clearance from RIT’s Institutional Review Board (http://www.rit.edu/research/hsr). You cannot administer surveys, perform experiments or conduct interviews until your protocols are reviewed and authorized. This process can take weeks, so plan ahead.

Formulating Research Questions or Thesis Statements
You may find the following steps useful in refining your thesis statement(s) and/or research question(s):

1. Consider questions that have yet to be answered by past research on the topic.
2. Formulate objectives and goals your research would achieve with respect to the questions raised in Step 1.
3. Make sure the objectives can be achieved by assessing the work involved, the time available to complete the project, the financial resources at your disposal, and your (and your thesis professor and second faculty reader’s) expertise in the area.
4. Double check that you’re really interested in the study, that you agree with the objectives, that you have adequate resources (e.g., time, money, etc.), that you have the technical expertise to undertake the study.

Regardless of whether you will be conducting quantitative, qualitative or critical research, a good research question is focused and interesting, and realistically lends itself to a semester-long project. In addition, here are some questions that might be appropriate to ask yourself when trying to clarify what contribution to scholarship you hope to achieve with your thesis:

- Why the research topic is a worthwhile one. How is it important and to whom? Avoid your personal reasons, rather point to scholarly sources or debates that imply the topic is worthy of investigation?
- Is it a critical analysis of the treatment given a single theme by several different authors or commentators?
- Is it testing a hypothesis, formula or procedure with an idea of adapting it, correcting it, improving it, refuting it, showing its inaccuracies or defending it?
- Is it a meta-analysis of previously antagonistic methods, ideas, techniques, hypotheses and critical stances?
- Is it an explanation of a particular effect by analyzing and discovering its cause?
- Is it projecting a future effect based on knowledge of key principles involved?
- Is it a comparison and contrast of several different commentators, authors or critics used to argue for some unifying principle?
- Is it determining whether a hypothesis is correct by testing it with experimental or observational evidence?
- Is it refuting an argument by supplying contradictory data?
WRITING THE THESIS

Writing a thesis is hard work. Like any other worthwhile endeavor, it takes diligence and commitment. Remember, you are engaged in learning, and learning is a process. Students completing a Senior Thesis should seek out advice from their thesis professor and second faculty reader and use their suggestions as a guide, not a personal criticism. Use the following descriptions of the various sections of a thesis outlined below as a guide.

Title Page: title, the researcher's name, the date the thesis is being submitted.

Abstract: A concise statement, between 150-250 words, describing the purpose, method, and conclusions of the study.

Introduction: This section should make clear why the study is of value in the extension or clarification of theory, method or practice. More than that, it should make clear how the study or project departs from, or adds to, the present state of knowledge. The introduction should also distinguish between any previous research already conducted and any points remaining to be investigated. This section should leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to what you wish to achieve (i.e., your objectives) and why these goals are important.

The objectives should be stated explicitly, appear achievable, and be formulated in such a way as to permit evaluation. Objectives stated in global terms reflect a lack of specificity or a poorly defined work program. This statement should answer the question - "After completing this project, what may we be able to know or how may we be able to change our current methods and practices?" Finally in the Introduction, provide an overview of the entire thesis.

The Literature Review: The Literature Review provides a summary of what has already been published about the research topic. This section may discuss prior studies in the same area, an exemplary field-situation to which the study relates, or the new conceptual framework out of which the research outlined in the thesis arises. If you have chosen a topic that is interesting to you, the literature review should be the fun part. This is where you develop expertise in your subject. Take several days immersing in communication research. While the databases are great, they are only the tip of the iceberg for finding all the sources you will need for a thorough literature review. Below are some helpful tips about conducting your literature review:

1. Broaden your search. Communication is a general field that overlaps into many disciplines. Be sure to include History, Literature, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and even market research in your searches:
   - The School of Communication has experts on staff. Our faculty is well published, and conducts a great deal of research on their own time. Ask around; they may be able to guide you to new bodies of research.
   - Think about trends in the research. Do you see any common themes? How far back can you trace research on your topic? What are the limitations of this research? These are all important issues to address to ensure a first-rate review.
   - Trace research on your topic? What are the limitations of this research? These are all important issues to address to ensure a first-rate review.

2. Within, or at the end, of the literature review (for quantitative and qualitative work) you will explicitly state your research questions and/or hypotheses. The information derived within the literature review should be leading the reader to the research questions/hypotheses. This means the literature review should include definitions of terms and concepts involved in the questions. Full discussion of theories driving the research should be here as well. It is important to remember that the literature review is NOT an annotated bibliography. It is your interpretation of the previous research conducted, utilizing such as evidence to support your claims in leading the reader to fully understand your topic and problems/questions. This is your chance to show off your expertise in the subject matter.

The Methods: This section should explain exactly how the study was approached and executed. It is necessary to define specific concepts and propositions in operational terms (i.e., how they will be measured). The methods part of the thesis should be very specific.

The methods section has two purposes. The first is to give the readers an indication of what was done so they can better understand the results. The second is to provide enough details about what was done so that a researcher who wants to replicate the study will be able to do so. In short, what we are looking for in a method section is analogous to what we find in a cookbook. Nothing should be left to the imagination. The reader should not have to guess what was done at a particular point in the study.

Different projects may require different types of methods. The following is a breakdown of the methods section for quantitative, qualitative and critical work.

Quantitative and Qualitative Theses: This methods section stipulates how the questions that have been asked were answered by evidence in the form of data. So, before writing your methods section, be sure to visit your original hypothesis or research question. Check these questions to ensure they will be answered by the method you’ve chosen. As you write, refer back to them often to keep yourself on track. Also, be sure to attach a well-planned instrument. It should be properly formatted and useful in answering your research questions and/or hypotheses.

Quantitative should specifically include:

1. Sample size. The researchers should state the number of subjects or units of study and explain how these entities were selected.
2. Variables used in the analysis. This includes a description of both independent and dependent variables, along with their operational definitions and measurement(s) employed. Explain how the variables were selected for the study, and how extraneous variables were controlled. Each variable also requires some justification for its use—variables cannot be added without reason.
Methodology. Every research report requires a description of the methods used to collect and analyze data. The methodological description should be detailed. Describe the pertinent features of the study design, stimulus materials and the apparatus. Discuss the procedures—if I were to serve as a participant, what would I experience during each stage of the study? Be sure to mention the instructions.

Qualitative research should specifically include:

People, event, or artifacts. Qualitative researchers make observations and gather data about people (interviews, focus groups, naturalistic observations, diaries), provide detailed description of events (ethnography), and analyze artifacts such as images, architecture, and other forms of artistic expression (visual analysis). Depending on the research topic, the researcher should articulate how, when, and where data will be gathered.

Methodology. Depending on the research question, a particular qualitative method will be used. Each method has unique concerns and the thesis should clearly articulate them. As with quantitative methods, the questions asked and answered as well as specific information for each section should be fully discussed within the research methods courses.

Critical research should specifically include:

Pose a research question or a thesis statement. Critical researchers raise a question or make an affirmative or negative assertion. This need only be one sentence. Critical researchers often have just one research question for their study.

Compose an “Analysis” section. Critical researchers analyze an artifact (for example, a series of advertisements). They write in a manner that shares how they studied that artifact with the reader of their research, explaining how a communication artifact acts or functions.

Evaluate your artifact. Critical researchers, after thoroughly analyzing their artifact, make a judgment about the artifact. Is it moral or immoral, just or unjust, effective or ineffective? The evaluation is one of the key elements that differentiates critical research from quantitative and some forms of qualitative research.

You will come across several articles in your search that utilize similar methods to the ones in your study. Use the best articles as models or blueprints in developing your own methods section.

Results: In developing this section, you should make certain that the outcomes are not expressed in global dimensions. These outcomes should be derived from the statement of the problem, the objectives, and the method. Specifically, the results must be related to the hypotheses and/or the research questions the research set out to test and/or answer. This section often includes a presentation of descriptive statistics, tests of significance, effect sizes, and a description of any interaction effects.

Discussion and Conclusion: The discussion section should summarize and highlight the major findings of the research and should relate those findings to the research questions, hypotheses, and past research presented in the problem statement and literature review. In addition, this section should provide potential explanations for the findings as well as any limitations or weaknesses of the research (e.g., choice of sampling or research design, threats to reliability and/or validity, etc.). Finally, this section should offer suggestions for future research based upon the results of the thesis. This can include topics for further study, questions raised by the findings of the thesis research, or questions still unanswered due to ambiguous results.

Sources Cited/References: A complete listing, presented alphabetically, of all research cited in the thesis. Adhere to APA guidelines when citing your sources, both parenthetically in-text and in your reference page(s).
APA GUIDELINES

All SOC theses must follow the most current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association) for general reference in composing the manuscript, formatting tables and figures, and citing sources, as well as for use of symbols, numbers, and abbreviations. The APA manual can be found at Wallace Library, or ordered through the Bookstore or online. There are also several reputable sources of APA style guidelines and tips available such as Purdue Owl.

Font Choice and Size
Use only one font type – APA recommends Times New Roman font, 12-point typeface (other clear fonts are acceptable as well but should be 12-point) in the text of the thesis. This restriction need not apply to tables, charts, and figures.

Print and Paper Quality
The paper must not contain specialized watermarks. Each copy must be clear, legible, and free of typographical, grammatical, or syntactical errors. Accurate and thorough proofreading is a must, as changes to the manuscript may not be made after submission.

Spacing
Double-space throughout the text. Quotations 40 words or more should be set off and double-spaced. Keep the text continuous, that is, do not begin a new section on a new page. This does not apply, however, to the Signature Page, Dedication (optional), Table of Contents, Abstract, References, Appendices, Tables, Figures, and Biographical Sketch (optional) each of which begins on a new page, as does the first page of the body of the thesis.

Margins
Observe the following minimum margins: top, bottom, left and right margins - one inch.

Pagination
The text including preliminary pages - Signature Page, Dedication (optional), Table of Contents, and Abstract - are numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals (i.e., 1, 2, 3), beginning with “1” on the title page of text.

Headings
Use of headings should follow the approved levels as presented in the APA manual.
The following checklist may be used to ensure that all required materials are submitted at the designated times. For additional information, please contact your advisor (professor).

1. APR and COMM students: one final, corrected copy of the thesis in paper form must be turned in to the School of Communication Staff Assistant by the end of the term.

2. An email with the thesis attached as an electronic file in MS Word or .pdf format must be turned in to the School of Communication Staff Assistant.

3. A title page is required. The title page must be submitted for the final copy of the thesis (see Figure 1).

4. A signature page is required. The signature page must have original signatures for the final copy of the thesis. Be sure the committee signs the correct paper (see Figure 2).

5. A final corrected copy of the abstract needs to be turned in for the final copy of the thesis (see Figure 3).

The oral presentation of the Senior Thesis is an opportunity to display the knowledge and skills acquired just prior to receiving the bachelor’s degree. Students must have approval from the course instructor before scheduling a defense.

It is expected that your presentation be professional in nature; it should be thoroughly prepared and rehearsed. The audience for your presentation may include RIT faculty and administrators, staff, fellow students, and/or invited guests (friends and family members).

Your responsibilities include:

- delivering a 10 - 15 minute presentation of your thesis with a short question and answer session;
- incorporating appropriate visual aids of charts, graphs, images, and other relevant materials;
- preparing and distributing outlines of your presentation to the audience including:
  - abstract of research project;
  - major segments of presentation in outline form;
  - important terms, operational definitions, theories, etc.;
  - appropriate charts and tables;
  - a full reference list of sources cited in thesis.
The senior project course, the capstone class for journalism majors, provides students with the opportunity to integrate, synthesize and apply prior learning to a project similar to one they would encounter in their professional careers. The specific outcome of this course fulfills RIT’s general learning outcome of career education that is responsive to the dynamics of emerging technologies and the global economy, as well as prepare students for careers in journalism.

The senior project course has students produce a long-form piece of journalism, a Web site and a digital portfolio of select works. The course brings together each participant’s work in journalism and the Professional Core, providing them an opportunity to publish their works professionally.

In the fall and spring semesters Communication students (often in partnership with other Departments and during week 15 or 16) present their final projects/theses at a poster presentation. What follows are the guidelines distributed for the event. It is highly recommended that you follow the guidelines presented so that you may best display the work you have been completing over the course of the 15 weeks. Further instructions will also be provided by your course instructor (Senior thesis for COMM and APR students and Senior Project for Journalism students).

Please consult with your senior project advisor as you complete your poster!

General Aim and Format
- A poster is a graphically based approach to presenting research. In presenting your research with a poster, you should use “visually” (figures, graphs, tables, photographs, drawings) to tell your “story.”
- A poster should NOT look the same as your paper (long continuous blocks of text).
- Use bullet points or short paragraphs. Keep in mind that somebody should be able to take in your project by looking over your poster for 5 - 10 minutes.

Content
- You should include your name and poster title and affiliation (School of Communication).
- You may include your senior project advisor's name.
- You may include your abstract.
- You should include some background information on your research topic, as well as the specific hypotheses you tested.
- You should include a description of your method, including participants, materials, and the procedure. (Graphics are helpful!)
- You should include your results (rely mainly on figures and tables to tell the story of your results).
- You should include a discussion of the implications of your results. What take home message do you want readers to gain while standing at your poster?
- You may include references (only the ones you cite within the poster) and acknowledgements.

Lettering
- In general, type all text and print it out on white paper.
- Text should be readable from 5 feet away. Use a minimum font size of 18 points for poster text. Use large font (about 70 point) for the title.
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POSTER PRESENTATION

Visuals
- You should include a title for each figure or table or graphic in your poster. (Example – Figure 1. Stimuli for Condition A.) Make sure that the axes are labeled on your graphs!
- Make sure text and visuals are integrated. Figures should be numbered consecutively according to the order in which they are mentioned in the text of your poster.

Design and Layout Suggestions
- You do not need to print out an expensive large format poster (everything on one page). But if you do, make sure you get a page proof before printing the final poster. A 2 x 3 poster is about $50. A 3 x 4 poster is about $80. YOU MUST PAY FOR YOUR OWN POSTER.
- Low cost option: You may print out your text and figures on plain white paper and mount them on construction paper, and then onto poster board.
- Your poster title and name should appear at the top-center of the board. These should be in large font (about 70 point) so they can be read from across the hallway.
- Make it obvious to the viewer how to progressively view the poster. The poster should generally read from left to right and top to bottom. You may number the panels or connect them with arrows. Or you can simply label each panel with subtitles like “Introduction,” “Method,” “Results,” “Conclusions.”
- Below are some suggested layouts. Use a layout that makes sense for your project. Consult with your advisor.

Layout Examples

Other Tips and Suggestions
- Simplicity is the key. Stick to your main point. Present sufficient data to support your conclusions. USE MOSTLY PICTURES TO TELL YOUR STORY!
- When you begin to make your poster, first create a list of visuals (figures/tables/photos) that you want to use on your poster. Write the text after you have assembled the visuals.
- View faculty and student posters in the School of Psychology to get ideas.
- Before the poster session, practice a 5 minute summary of your project. Many viewers will want a quick “tour” of your research. Explain each figure and give your main conclusions.

CAUTION:
These posters will be tacked to bulletin boards. Please make sure your completed poster can be hung using tacks (don’t use really thick poster board or a three-sided board). The maximum size your poster can be is 4 feet high by 4 feet wide. It is perfectly fine to have a smaller poster (e.g., 2 feet high by 3 feet wide).
APPENDIX A

Figure 1: Title Page

Running Head: THIS IS MY THESIS TITLE

This is a Sample Title Page:
Following APA Guidelines
Richie Tiger
Rochester Institute of Technology

A Paper submitted
In partial fulfillment of the
Bachelor of Science degree
in Communication/
Advertising & Public Relations

Degree Awarded:
__________ Semester, Year

Figure 2: Signature Page

(2 inches from the top)

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of student’s name presented on
date presented.

_______________________________
Typed Name
Professor Directing Thesis

_______________________________
Typed Name
Second Faculty Reader

_______________________________
Typed Name
School Director
Abstract
The abstract must be a concise statement of 150-250 words, describing the purpose, method, and conclusions of the study. The abstract should appear on its own page and use the same font and typeface as the rest of the thesis. Many abstract examples utilize Latin phrases to fill the space and show how long the word count might look. Rather than doing that, this example will contain clues for successfully completing your thesis. First, use a proposal from a methods class. Second, turn in every draft required of your thesis professor. Third, read and think about the feedback that is provided. Finally, meet with your thesis professor and second faculty reader frequently to go over your progress. The most successful students are ones that keep in touch with their professor and second faculty reader throughout this process and continually seek feedback from both. The least successful students disappear for 10 weeks then try and scramble to complete a thesis. Look, this is what 167 words look like.

Keywords: list, the keywords, here
So don’t have a thesis topic
Many of you may have a general area of communication research in mind. Some of you may have a specific research topic already formulated. For those of you, however, who have not yet thought of your topic or who are having difficulties choosing your topic, this section of the manual is designed to help you develop your thesis topic, formulate your research question(s), and write your proposal.

Developing a Thesis Topic
There are many different ways to develop a thesis topic. You should begin by assessing your own interests in communication. Is there a particular medium you are especially interested in studying? Are there certain topics in communication that are of special interest to you (e.g., legal regulations, viewer habits, gender issues, digital media)? Is there a theory you have studied in one of your classes that is of special interest to you? In any case, it should be a communication topic that you enjoy since you will be spending a lot of time with it. Remember that you will have to provide an argument as to why your topic and investigation is important to scholarly research about communication.

A crucial stem in getting started is to narrow your topic. Work closely with your thesis professor and second faculty reader to limit your topic to that which you can realistically complete in fewer than 15 weeks. Some criteria to consider include assessing the work involved, the time available to complete the project, the financial resources at your disposal and your expertise in the area. Remember the goal of a thesis is to contribute in some original way to the academic scholarship about a very specific aspect of communication. To help you finalize your topic make a concerted effort to use the literature as a way to crystallize your topic. Conduct a literature search to help narrow your topic. What is already known about this subject? What has not yet been researched? What line of research do you find in the literature that most appeals to you?