

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
HONOURS THESIS GUIDELINES**

Introduction:

Completing an honours thesis is a very exciting and challenging task. You will acquire many new skills, overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, gain an in-depth understanding of what it takes to undertake research and learn new things about yourself. It is important to manage your time and resources well. It is acknowledged that each student's honours experience is different; therefore these guidelines have been set out as a starting point for you to frame your HT project.

Framing your HT project

The GE3240 module provides a basis for developing a viable HT project. Guidance will be given in class concerning framing research questions, appropriate methodologies and writing. A useful starting point is to look at recently completed honours theses that are located in the map library and Central Library. Reading these will give you a good idea of what the thesis should look like and how the various sections of a thesis are constituted—for example, aims, arguments, conclusions and so on. There are also useful guides available on the web that address such topics as conducting a literature review, writing a thesis plan, structuring your thesis and so on. In addition, the library has books available on completing a thesis that can give many useful hints. Guidelines for HT preparation are provided in a document on the Department of geography website (http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/geog/programmes/und_honprog.html).

The Advisory Process

In a general sense, the primary responsibility of your HT advisor is the oversight of your work. There are two key aspects to this: first, to offer advice on the planning and execution of your honours project; second, to offer advice to you when you encounter difficulties. However, the advisor is not the project director. It is your project and you have the responsibility for developing the idea and executing it. There are, of course, expectations of what constitutes good supervision—both from your point of view as the student and from the advisor's point of view. Here are some frequently asked questions that will help to clarify those expectations.

- How many times will my advisor check work? What will they read? What is a reasonable time for my advisor to provide feedback?
- What should I do when I cannot meet an agreed target for completing a task or handing in written work?
- How are advisory arrangements made?
- What should I do when I encounter a problem in my research?
- What do I do if I am unhappy with the advisory process?
- Can I claim HT expenses?
- Is there support for overseas research and/or data analysis?
- Can I consult faculty members beyond my advisor?
- What should I do if my research requires lots of equipment or infrastructure support?
- Can I audio/video record meetings with my advisor?

Here we provide *outline* answers. The important thing is to discuss any problems that arise during your honours thesis with your advisor as soon as possible.

How many times will my advisor check work? What will they read? What about the timing of feedback?

Your advisor will read and provide written comments on just one draft chapter. When you give your advisor the draft should be as complete and correct as you can make it (though don't labour over it again and again before getting comments). By eliminating minor errors such as spelling and grammar, you free up your advisor to concentrate on the academic, technical and finer stylistic aspects of your work and therefore make the most of the time that they will spend giving comments on your draft. For some students the literature review may be the most useful chapter to have checked by an advisor, for others it may be the methodology section or the empirical chapters. This can be negotiated, but the advisor is NOT allowed to provide detailed feedback on more than one chapter. Usually, at least five days is required for the advisor to comment on draft material. You should submit the chapter to your advisor at least 5 days before your 6th and final meeting so that you can receive feedback from your advisor. **Please note it is unreasonable to expect advisors to respond within 24 hours.**

What should I do when I cannot meet an agreed target for completing a task or handing in written work?

This one is easy—let your advisor know as soon as possible and renegotiate a new deadline for the task or the submission of the draft chapter. **The final deadline for HT submission is NOT EXTENDABLE and penalties for late submission apply.**

How are supervision arrangements made?

The amount of time that you spend with your advisor will vary over the semester—some aspects of the thesis a more intensive than others, but it is important to realize that the advisor's time is limited. At the beginning of the honours project, you advisor may hold group meetings with all of their HT students together to talk about general guidelines and the development of research proposals. As your projects develop, you will meet individually with your advisor. You should have 6 meetings each of about 1 hour (see the HT timetable) but most advisors are okay about extra short meetings for checking up on things. Plus advisors will communicate to you via email. The best way to maximise the value of these meetings is to come along with a clear idea of exactly what you want to discuss—that way you can make sure you are able to cover everything you need to talk about in the time you have. It is good practice to inform the advisor of any issues you wish to discuss in advance of the meeting and to arrive for meetings on schedule.

What do I do when I encounter a problem in my research?

Let your advisor know what's happening and talk through possible solutions with them. There is a good chance they may have had similar experiences in their own research

career, and therefore can offer good advice. Some students are reluctant to bring problems to their advisor because they feel that they should be able to find a solution themselves, or that they really want their advisor to think they are a good student and fear that this may change in light of problems encountered or “silly questions”. Don't forget that your advisor likely did honours once too, and chances are they may have even encountered the same problems, or even asked similar questions! Your advisor's role is as an academic mentor and guide for your honours project—they are there to help you. **The sooner they know you need help the earlier problems can be solved.**

What do I do if I am unhappy with the advisory process?

The first thing to do is discuss the problem with your advisor. If this does not resolve the problem you may approach either the honours coordinators or the head of department.

Can I claim HT expenses?

As of AY 2015-2016 the department has ceased to provide reimbursement for HT related expenses.

Is there funding for overseas research?

The university does not provide funding for overseas research. There are, however, some foundations interested in funding honours thesis research. If you are interested in doing overseas research, consult with a faculty member to find out more about applying for funding from funding bodies outside of the university.

Can I consult faculty members beyond my advisor?

Generally, the student should seek advice from the advisor but there are occasions when it is helpful to approach another member of staff. There are two things to keep in mind if you plan to do this. First, it is a good idea to let your advisor know beforehand that you are consulting others. Second, it is important to be respectful of the time that faculty members other than your advisor give to you: remember that they are making time in their busy schedules to see you voluntarily and most of them will also be advising their own HT students.

What should I do if my research requires lots of equipment or infrastructure support?

While it will normally not be possible for the Department to purchase specific equipment for honours projects, your advisor may be able to help you access equipment within the university. Specific equipment and infrastructure needs should be discussed on an individual basis with faculty members. It is important that you plan the use of equipment early on in case it is required by more than one project. We now have several instruments available in the GEOLAB that can be used for your HT project. To use them you must first pass all relevant safety training courses.

Can I audio/video record my meetings with my advisor?

No, not without their explicit permission. It is unethical to record a conversation of any sort without the full acknowledgment of all parties. If you are interested in recording your

meetings with your advisor you must ask them if they will allow it before you record. If they say “no”, then you are not allowed to record the meeting.

Revised by Tracey Skelton
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