

Guidelines for History Majors intending to Write an Honours Thesis (HT) or Independent Study Course (ISC) in AY2026-27

The Department of History encourages fourth-year students to participate in a semester-long research project. It is during these projects that you will consolidate and develop your historical research and writing skills. Should you decide not to proceed with an HT, we encourage you to consider taking an ISC, which represents a smaller scale but sustained research project.

Honours Thesis

In many respects, the ability to conduct research and write an in-depth study of a topic is what separates a fourth-year student from an “Honours Student”. Topics are not limited to Singapore and each academic year our Department sees a wide range of HTs in terms of region, era and approaches (the ancient world, social and oral histories, gender studies, for example). To write a good HT requires the consideration of a variety of approaches and sources. The key point is to pursue a topic in which you truly have an interest.

There are several steps that you can take to make this process more enjoyable (and easier):

- To have a clear idea of what doing an HT entails, please look carefully through the **HT Essay Style-sheet AY2026-27**. You can also browse through past History HTs to have an even better idea of topics, scale and scope of work, as well as the required style (check LINC and the Central Library).
- When considering an HT topic, think of several topics that interest you, then narrow it down. Remember, you will be spending a considerable amount of time and energy on your topic. If you are bored with it now, imagine the topic in six months. We encourage you to pursue topics that you have come across in the History courses or new ideas that you find fascinating and would like to explore further.
- Read up on the topic. Conduct an initial literature review by reading the most relevant books and articles. Is there anything in the ‘traditional narrative’ that you believe needs further research? Why should anyone care? Has anyone studied this topic before? If so, how have they approached it? Will you consider it in the same manner, or use the same approach?
- Conduct some preliminary research. What sources are available? Have you uncovered a good range of primary and secondary materials, or will you need further research to unpack your topic? Are sources accessible? Do you need to plan ahead to seek permissions for archival sources? (We host a talk from the National Archives each year to help answer questions about sources and research).
- With your topic in mind, approach/email the faculty member/lecturer that you would like most to work with as your advisor. Your potential advisor should preferably have expertise (research or teaching) in the field that you intend to research on.

Share with the lecturer your ideas and ask for his/her views as to the viability of your topic and areas which you might consider developing further.

HY4401 – 8 units – for Cohort 2021 onwards.

Proceed to draft an HT proposal, incorporating the following information:

- Why you are interested in this topic.
- A brief literature review on the topic and how you hope to contribute to the existing scholarship; include conceptual frameworks of analysis, if any come to mind.
- The kind of sources and methodology that you intend to use.
- A bibliography of approximately the 10 most relevant works on the topic.
- The faculty member who has agreed to be your advisor.

The proposal does not have to be long or very detailed: two to four pages will do. Show it to the faculty member and ask if it is fine and whether he/she would be agreeable to be your advisor. Once he/she agrees, you will be almost assured of being assigned to that advisor.

If you are passionate about a topic, but are having difficulty finding an Honours advisor, please contact me and I will try to find a solution.

- Submit a softcopy of your HT proposal to hishelp@nus.edu.sg -
 - writing your thesis in the first Semester – **by Friday, Week 6 of Sem 2 of last AY – 20 February 2026**
 - writing your thesis in the second Semester – **by Friday, Week 6 of Sem 1 – 18 September 2026**

Please include this information in your proposal. - **Student Name / Matric No / Advisor/ HT Title.**

- Serious research and writing will be expected immediately after the end of your final examinations; use your vacation time then for HT work.
- In Week 3 and/or 4 (tentative – week may change) of the next semester you will need to present your HT topic to a gathering of interested professors and students. Presentations are 10 minutes, with another 5 for Q&A.
- Should you be interested in writing an HT, I strongly encourage you to explore, research, and work out your HT proposal before the semester begins. When the new semester begins, you will be very busy with your other courses. If you submit a proposal for a HT and later decide not to do it, that is fine.

If you have further questions or wish to see me, please let me know. I may conduct a brief meeting for students who wish to see me.

Independent Study Course

An Independent Study Course (ISC) is usually done as an alternative to an HT. You **cannot** do both. An ISC consists of a 5000-word research paper, which you research and write on your own. It is worth 4 units or 5 units (or one course).

If you are interested in an ISC, you will need to follow a series of steps. The first step is to identify a research topic that you would like to work on. You should then write up a summary (1-2 pages) of the topic and why they would like to explore it, as well as a preliminary bibliography. You should then approach a supervisor. This should be done **before the end of the first week of the semester.**

Once the supervisor approves the topic – they may ask for revisions in the approach or subject – you should fill out the **ISC form** and submit it to Ms Kamariah in the main office of the Department of History. While this task must be done by -

Friday, Week 1 of Semester 1 - 14 August 2026, 4.00pm or

Friday, Week 1 of Semester 2 – 15 January 2027, 4.00pm

(depending on which Semester you are writing your ISC in) it is a good idea to start early so that you can conduct the research and reading for your ISC.

Once everything is approved, the “independent” in the course title comes into force. While most ISC supervisors will require updates, the research, development and writing of the paper are up to you. The 5000-word paper is due by the end of the semester, and the supervisor will mark it.

Dr Kelvin Lawrence
History Honours Coordinator