



School of Communication Sciences and
Disorders

Thesis Guidelines – 2021-2022

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1.1 Objectives and Benefits

Students who undertake the thesis option are expected to formulate an original question related to the field of communication sciences and disorders with guidance from a faculty supervisor and implement a plan to answer the question under the direction of a faculty supervisor and other members of a thesis supervisory committee. The objective is to provide the student with an opportunity to develop independence in conceptualizing and conducting meaningful research in our disciplines.

The thesis option is appropriate for those students who have a strong interest in research, including those who may be considering undertaking doctoral study sometime in the future. A thesis is larger in scope than a research project and requires the student to work more independently.

Students who are in the thesis stream are eligible for scholarships from provincial and federal research funding agencies that are not available to students in the project stream. Interested students should discuss funding opportunities with their faculty supervisor and investigate relevant funding sources.

1.2 Admission to the Thesis Stream

A grade point average of 3.7 is required for a student to be admitted into the thesis stream. Normally up to five students are admitted each year; the actual number varies with supervisor availability and student interest. When applying for admission to the program, students are asked to indicate their interest in undertaking a thesis. It is highly recommended that students contact professor(s) regarding possible topics when considering the thesis option during admission.

If thesis stream positions are still available in the fall term of Year I, interested first year students can apply for admittance to the Committee on Studies (COS) or the COS will invite applications. In such cases, the student must secure agreement from a qualified member of the Faculty to supervise their thesis before applying. No applications will be considered after the fall term of Year I.

All applications must include:

- A statement of interest describing reasons for pursuing a thesis, relevant preparation, and research interests. If an undergraduate honors thesis was not completed, an explanation should be provided.
- Two recommendation letters from undergraduate or graduate professors including a thesis supervisor if applicable. These can be taken from the student's admission file if they are applying after entrance to the School.
- Students who apply in the Fall of the first year for admittance must also solicit a supporting letter from the professor who has agreed to supervise the thesis.

1.3 Thesis Committee Membership

1.3.1 Supervisory Committee

- The committee must have at least two members from the SCSD, one of whom is the supervisor/co-supervisor.
- The supervisor must be a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) and must have at least a Master's degree or equivalent.
- At least two additional members of the committee must also be members of FGS.
- Individuals who are not members of FGS may be appointed to the supervisory committee when they have appropriate professional and academic qualifications (i.e., at least a Master's for MSc thesis) and expertise to assess a graduate thesis.
- If the supervisor is from outside the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders (SCSD), there must be a co-supervisor who is a member of the SCSD faculty.
- The minimum size is three members.

1.3.2 Examining Committee

- The committee is typically made up of the supervisory committee plus an external examiner. The inclusion of an external examiner on this committee is not a requirement.
- The external examiner cannot have been involved in the supervision or direction of the research and is preferably from outside the SCSD. The supervisor should contact potential external examiners.
- Full and adjunct members of Dalhousie University FGS are eligible for the committee membership. Members of a graduate faculty of another university are also eligible.
- As with the supervisory committee, individuals who are not members of FGS may be appointed to the examining committee when they have appropriate professional and academic qualifications and expertise to assess a graduate thesis.

1.4 Funding

There may be additional costs associated with completing a thesis (e.g., costs related to data collection and analysis, possible travel costs, costs involved in thesis copying and binding and publication charges). However, these costs may be offset by funding available for students in the thesis stream. Thesis-stream students are eligible to be nominated for a Killam Scholarship from Dalhousie University or a Nova Scotia Scholarship. They can also apply for funding from one of three federal agencies—Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), or the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)—and the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation (NSHRF). Further information on external funding can be found on the Faculty of Graduate Studies website at <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/gradstudies/funding.html> or on the government websites for each funding agency.

1.5 Faculty of Graduate Studies Regulations

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with all Graduate School thesis related regulations and deadlines. See Faculty of Graduate Studies Regulations: <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/gradstudies/currentstudents/thesesanddefenses.html>

1.6 Overview of Events and General Timelines

Thesis students are required to meet with their committees at least once per year. Written feedback must be provided by the supervisory committee to the student following each meeting. Additional regular meetings with the supervisor are highly recommended and meetings with other committee members should be scheduled as needed. Annual Progress Reports must be completed by the student and supervisor in the Graduate Studies Information System (GSIS) on DalOnline and submitted for review and approval no later than April 30th of each academic year.

Under the supervision of the thesis supervisory committee, the student develops a research prospectus. The student will present their prospectus to the committee at a Prospectus Meeting. In most circumstances, the prospectus meeting will take place by the end of Year I.

After the prospectus meeting has been successfully completed, studies that involve human subjects' participation will require ethics approval from the Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board (REB) and, in some cases, other review boards (e.g., schools, hospitals), before data collection can begin. Studies that involve the use of animals, must submit an animal use protocol to the University Committee on Laboratory Animals (UCLA) for ethics review and approval.

Following ethics approval, the student completes the proposed research work, writes up their findings, and defends their work to their examining committee in an oral defense meeting. Students typically complete their thesis during Year III of study.

In the thesis stream, students have the option of delaying their final practicum to facilitate completion of their thesis. A request to delay must be made to the Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education when practicum placement requests are made in the middle of September. In order to graduate in May, the practicum must be started by the first week in February.

The final date for submission of a final manuscript to FGS is mid-March for the Spring Convocation and mid-August for the Fall Convocation. Final manuscripts (i.e., post defense with all corrections made) must be submitted to the FGS no later than early April for the Spring Convocation or mid-late August for the Fall Convocation. See Graduate Calendar for further details and exact dates - http://www.dal.ca/academics/academic_calendars/Graduate_Calendar_2014_2015/Academic_Dates_2014_2015.html.

1.7 Prospectus Meeting

Before a student submits his/her proposal for ethical approval or starts the research work, he/she must receive scientific approval from the thesis supervisory committee. Approval is given via a prospectus meeting. The student circulates a proposal document (see [Appendix A](#)) to all committee members typically two weeks prior to the meeting. In the meeting, the student first presents the proposal and a discussion follows. The committee comes to consensus regarding necessary changes to the proposal document and the nature of the proposed work. The agreement reached in the proposal meeting serves, in effect, as a contract between the student and the committee. If major changes to the research plan are made after the proposal meeting, it is necessary to seek approval for those changes from the committee members. The Prospectus Meeting Form (see [Appendix B](#)) should be completed at the end of the meeting and placed in the student's departmental file.

1.8 Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants

The research proposal must not be submitted to a research ethics board until it has been approved by the thesis supervisory committee (see Section 1.7).

All research that is conducted using human participants must be submitted for review to a Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board (REB). Students will submit to either the Dalhousie Health Sciences REB or the Social Sciences REB, depending upon the nature of their study. Supervisors will help students make the appropriate choice. Thesis projects that propose to involve participants obtained through schools, hospitals, or other institutions generally will have to obtain approval from those institutions' REBs as well. The Dalhousie REB will accept ethics approval from some hospitals but not all. Students should seek the advice of their faculty supervisor on this matter

The Ethics Submission is a separate document, distinct from the research proposal written for the thesis supervisory committee. The ethics submission is written for a different group of readers – the Dalhousie University REB members. Therefore, it must be condensed and succinct, written for reviewers outside the disciplines of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences.

Students should go to the Research Services website (http://researchservices.dal.ca/research_1482.html) to obtain guidelines for ethics submission, required forms, and submission deadlines.

Students should be aware that the ethical review process may take several months, particularly if approval from more than one review board is required. Even after approval is obtained from all relevant REBs, major changes to the work must receive additional approval.

1.9 Ethical Review of Research Involving Animals

All animal research must be completed in certified lab space. Appropriate training is needed before a student performs any manipulation on animals. Such training will be provided either by the project supervisor or personnel in an animal care facility of Dalhousie University.

For all research that is conducted using animals, an animal use protocol must be submitted to the University Committee on Laboratory Animals (UCLA) for ethics review and approval. If the research project is not funded, a research proposal must also be submitted for academic peer review. Students should refer to the Research Services website: http://researchservices.dal.ca/research_1483.html for appropriate guidelines and procedures for protocol submissions. **The whole process can take two to three months.**

1.10 Recruitment of Participants from NSHSC

After the supervisory committee approves the student's proposal and approval has been obtained from the Dalhousie REB, the student may wish to recruit participants from the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres (NSHSC).

For Audiology Participants. The student will submit two copies of the Request for Participants from NSHSC Audiology Patients form (see [Appendix C](#)) to her/his supervisor who will then forward the request to the Director of Audiology, NSHSC.

For Speech-Language Pathology Participants. The supervisor will contact the Clinical Director of SLP (Barb Stoesz) for direction about recruiting the target group.

The Centres will approach potential participants who meet inclusion criteria and will provide names and contact information of those who agree to be contacted. The student must then follow the protocol scripted in [Appendix D](#) to contact these individuals and seek their agreement to participate.

1.11 Equipment and Test Materials Access

Students may use any piece of equipment belonging to the SCSD to conduct their research. All equipment and test materials must be reserved and signed out from the reception desk. See [Appendix E](#) – Regulations for Borrowing Equipment and Test Materials.

1.12 Oral Defense

Examination of the master's thesis is conducted by means of an oral defense. The examining committee for the oral defense will consist of the thesis supervisor(s) and members of the thesis supervisory committee. The examining committee may also include an external examiner with a research background, usually chosen from a university department outside of the SCSD (e.g., from Psychology, Otolaryngology, etc.). A representative of the School not directly associated with the student's research, usually the Graduate Coordinator/Director or a designate chosen by the Graduate Coordinator/Director, will serve as Chair.

The student will present his/her thesis research and field questions from the external examiner (if present), the committee, their supervisor(s), and other attendees. Following the defense, the committee will meet and decide whether the student has passed, and if so, what changes must be made to the document before it is submitted to FGS.

1.12.1 Defense Procedures

- The defense is chaired by the Graduate Coordinator/Director or his/her designate.

- The supervisor will take responsibility for determining the date of the defense so that the candidate does not have contact with the external examiner before the defense. The date should be set at least two months before the defense.
- The names of the examining committee members and the date of the defense should be given to the Graduate Coordinator when the committee and date have been set.
- The written thesis should be delivered to the examining committee members at least two weeks before the defense. However, a committee member may request additional time for review and this must be accommodated.
- The candidate and her/his supervisor are responsible for submitting the student's name, the research title, and the defense date to the receptionist/department secretary at least two weeks before the defense. The receptionist will print and post a notice and notify the SCSD faculty and students by email of the defense.
- During the defense, the candidate makes a presentation of approximately 20 minutes. The examining committee asks questions, starting with the external examiner (if present). After the committee members have asked their questions, the audience members are invited to ask questions. Then the candidate and the audience leave the room and the committee deliberates. The committee's decision is recorded on SCSD's 'Final Report of the Examining Committee' form. There are four possible outcomes:
 - Approved as submitted
 - Approved upon specific corrections being made
 - Rejected with permission to revise and resubmit for a re-examination
 - Rejected outright. In this case, all members of the examining committee must submit written examination reports, signed and dated, which are put in the candidate's file.

The completed form signed by all committee members should be given to the COS secretary who will place a copy in the student's School file.
- It is recommended that the candidate bring a copy of the FGS 'Master's Thesis Approval Form' to the defense and obtain the committee members' signatures, when appropriate. The student must ensure that it is appropriately formatted according to FGS formatting standards.
- The supervisor should ensure that the student is aware of the formatting standards for the final document set by FGS.

1.13 Dissemination

Thesis students should discuss options for disseminating their thesis work with their supervisor(s) and committee members early in the research process. Scholarly presentations (e.g., SAC, ASHA, CAA, SRCLD, etc.) and publications are strongly encouraged. Funding may be available through FGS for students who present their work at a scholarly conference. Guidelines for assigning authorship are provided in Appendix F.

Third year students in the thesis stream will be expected to present at the SCSD Student Research Day at the end of the Fall term of Year 3. If data collection and analysis for the thesis are not complete, the student can present preliminary findings or the background and development of the research proposal.

1.14 Data Storage

All original data and consent forms must be stored for five years following completion of the research. In most cases, these materials should be stored at the SCSD.

1.15 Changing to Project Stream

If adequate progress is not made, the student may be asked to change from a thesis to a project stream. The supervisor(s) should discuss their concerns regarding the candidate's performance in the thesis stream as soon as possible. If the student's performance continues to be unsatisfactory, the supervisor will inform the candidate that he/she must switch to the project stream. The supervisor will also notify the COS secretary who will complete the necessary paperwork. A student may also request that they switch from

thesis to project stream. The appropriateness of the request will be discussed with the supervisor and graduate coordinator. If a funded student switches out of a thesis stream, they may forfeit unpaid funds and need to repay funds already received.

Appendix A

School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Thesis Proposal Guidelines

The thesis proposal must comprise the five elements listed below and be followed by a reference list. It should follow current APA guidelines.

Statement of Topic and Questions

This statement should indicate precisely what the student wants the research to answer or address. As succinctly as possible, it should provide the topic, the experimental question or the point of focus of the thesis or project. It should be no longer than a paragraph. This may serve eventually as the foundation of the abstract of the final document.

Rationale: A succinct statement of topic and question at the onset of a proposal document would serve to provide committee members with a time-saving means of grasping the central premise of the project before they read through the proposal. Most importantly, the degree to which a student can bring precision to a statement of the topic and question relate directly to the establishment of the conditions necessary to facilitate efficient development of the thesis or project. Furthermore, this section of the proposal may serve as the foundation for the abstract in the final thesis or project document.

Review of Relevant Research

For the proposal, this review must be abbreviated, containing only key work. It should “refer particularly to any study or group of studies which are most parallel to the intended project, or to a study which might serve as a model for the present investigation. If related literature is particularly scarce this point should be explained in the prospectus since it represents a consideration to be discussed in the planning sessions.” (Shearer, 1982, p.202)

Rationale: The student should demonstrate that the research topic and question are cogently related to a collection of research studies and that s/he has a basic understanding of the key work within it (Tawny & Gast, 1984).

Justification of the Study

It is in this section that the student should convince their supervisor and the members of the committee that s/he has a firm grasp of the significance of the study and the rationale for its implementation. The student should demonstrate that the endeavour is worthwhile and that s/he has an understanding of what its results might contribute. It is here that an explicit statement is made of the link between the relevant research, reviewed in the previous section, and the need for this study.

Rationale: The degree to which a student can bring synthesis and cohesion to a thesis or project relates not only to precise articulation of topic and question, but also to an underlying concept of its aim.

Method

Fundamentally, the methodology section requires the student to demonstrate to his or her supervisor and members of the committee that s/he knows what s/he is doing. As Shearer (1982) explains, the “Methods” section serves as a blueprint that describes the procedures and measures that will yield the type of data needed to answer fully the research questions. This section also delineates the resources necessary to follow the blueprint. It must, then, include a discussion of the availability of any of the following relevant requirements:

1. Participants
2. Procedures and Measures
3. Apparatus and Instrumentation
4. Data Analysis

Rationale: The supervisor and committee members must have information that enables them to judge the student’s ability to complete the study within the time period allowed, using the resources available (Shearer, 1982).

Expected Outcomes

A brief discussion should be provided regarding what the student expects the data will show. This expectation usually rests heavily on what the relevant literature or prevailing models suggest or predict. This discussion should include a brief description of how the data will be treated or evaluated in order to permit support for the research question. Treatment of the data may be generally discussed in terms of planned tables or graphs or statistical analysis.

Rationale: Comprehension and synthesis of the research project is enhanced when a student is asked to begin with the research question and the rationale on which it is based, move to a discussion of procedures designed to answer that question, and come full circle to return once again to consider what the data are expected to show relative to supporting a hypothesis or to providing clarity regarding the answer to the research questions.

References

- Hegde, M.N. (1987). Clinical research in communicative disorders: Principles and strategies. Boston: College-Hill Press.
- Shearer, W. M. (1982). Research procedures in speech, language, and hearing. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins.
- Tawney, J. W. & Gast, D. L. (1984). Single subject research in special education. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Appendix B

Prospectus Meeting Form

This form is to be completed and filed in the student's department file after the Research Prospectus Meeting.

Student's Name

Date of Prospectus Meeting

Signature of Supervisor

Committee Members:

Pass Fail Pass with Changes

Changes Recommended:

Who is responsible to oversee changes?

Appendix C

Request for Participants from NSHSC Audiology Patients

Student's Name: _____

Project Supervisor: _____
(SCSD faculty)

Title of Project: _____

Type of Study: _____

Indirect Participant Contact (e.g., mail survey, chart audit, patient data base) _____

Direct Participant Contact (including phone survey) _____

Number of Participants: _____

Clinical Population: _____

(PLEASE RETURN TO STUDENT MAILBOX)

Student's Name: _____

The following clinicians may be contacted regarding participants: _____

Appendix D

School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Student Project/Thesis Telephone Contact Potential Research Participants

Hello may I speak with Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

My name is _____. I am calling from the Dalhousie University School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, which is affiliated with the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres. You indicated on the patient consent form when you registered with the Centres that you could be contacted about participating in research. Thank you for allowing us to contact you regarding our research project.

Please be aware that your participation in a study will not in any way affect your eligibility for services through the Centres. Any information used in a study will remain strictly confidential.

The purpose of this study is:

As a participant you would be asked to:

Would you be willing to participate in this project?

Yes No

(At this point, student can make arrangements to conduct the study: i.e., set-up appointment, begin telephone survey, etc.)

Appendix E

Regulations for Borrowing Equipment and Test Materials

Equipment Sign-Out

A variety of audio-visual equipment is available for short-term use by students for academic/ clinical purposes. The items available include:

- Tape Recorders (microphones also available)
- Digital Recorders
- Video Cameras (tripods also available)
- Headsets (with built-in microphones)
- External Speakers
- Stopwatches
- Otoscopes
- Audiometers
- VHS Tape Adaptors
- iPads (Tablets)
- iPods
- Kindles (e-Readers)

To reserve or sign out equipment, students must go to the reception desk. Equipment will be signed out as availability permits and all equipment is signed out for a maximum period of **24 hours**. *However, at times during any of the terms, there may be some flexibility due to the nature of the assignments.*

Students who sign out equipment are responsible for its proper care and maintenance. All students are responsible for any damage that occurs to the School's equipment. All equipment should be returned to the reception desk in the exact condition they were signed out. **All cords must be wrapped neatly and inventory checked before items are returned.**

If a piece of equipment malfunctions, report this immediately to the administrative staff.

Students are not to pass or lend any equipment to other students. The items must be returned to the reception desk and signed out by other students as necessary.

Test Material Sign-Out

For a complete list of the tests available for sign-out please see one of three grey duo-tangs in the Student Lounge. These duo-tangs must remain in this room at all times. All tests are available for sign-out from the reception desk and can be signed out for a maximum period of **24 hours**. *However, at times during any of the terms, there may be some flexibility due to the nature of the assignments.*

Students who sign out test materials are responsible for their proper care. All students are responsible for any damage that occurs to the School's test material. **All items of each test should be returned to the reception desk in the exact condition they were signed out. Inventory must be checked before items are returned.**

Students are not to pass or lend any test materials to other students. The tests must be returned to the reception desk and signed out by other students as necessary.

Appendix F

School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Guidelines for Determining Authorship in Research Activities Involving Students and Faculty

The purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate the process of determining authorship credit and order in research activities involving students and faculty. Because of variation in the degree of independent work required for the thesis and other types of research activity, separate guidelines will be discussed for each category. Further clarification of these guidelines may be obtained from the School's Committee on Studies.

I Thesis

A student selecting the thesis option is expected to assume considerable independence in developing and executing a study leading to a thesis document. If that document is subsequently submitted in part or whole for publication, the student will be listed as first author. The faculty supervisor as well as other individuals making substantial scholarly contributions should also be given authorship credit. Under exceptional circumstances, a student may not be listed as first author of a manuscript derived from the thesis. Such circumstance may include times when additional collection and/or reinterpretation of data along with the major revision of the manuscript was completed by someone other than the student.

II Research Projects and Other Research Activity

A. *Research Projects*

A student selecting the research project option will engage in research activities where a faculty supervisor has primary responsibility for the conceptual aspects of the study. The student will implement all or part of the study under close supervision, and will be provided with the opportunity to participate in the conceptualization process. The faculty supervisor, student, and other individuals making substantial scholarly contributions may expect to receive authorship credit of a manuscript for publication that is derived from the project study. Authorship order will be determined by degree of participation in the conceptualization process and scholarly contribution leading to the final product. Consideration will be given to the following activities: developing and refining research ideas, conducting a literature search, creating the research methodology, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting results, and drafting manuscripts. Authorship order should be expected to vary from situation to situation. When a student research project has publication potential, it is recommended that authorship order be discussed early in the process. It should be understood that order may need to be revised based on actual rather than expected contributions.

B. *Other Research Activity (e.g., research assistantships)*

For nonprofessional contributions such as data input and scheduling participants, students may expect to receive acknowledgement rather than authorship credit.

Appendix G

SCSD Thesis Student Tentative Timeline

| Actions | Timeline |
|----------------|-----------------|
|----------------|-----------------|

Year Prior to beginning studies

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact potential supervisor (recommended)• Apply for funding (optional) [see links on SCSD website - Research/Student research] | Pre-admission Deadlines vary as early as December |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
-

First Year

Fall Term

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend Thesis Orientation | Late August/Early September |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm supervisor | September/October |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with supervisor<ul style="list-style-type: none">▫ Set regular meeting times▫ Review timeline▫ Discuss expectations | October |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apply for CIHR/NSERC/SSHRC funding | Early December |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin literature review and methods | |

Winter Term

- Select supervisory committee
- Begin preparing proposal for prospectus meeting

Summer Term

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare FGS Progress Report | Deadline: April 30 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete proposal and prepare for prospectus meeting | August |
-

Second Year

Fall Term

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prospectus meeting | October/November |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize study design and methods | November |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit to Research Ethics Board(s) | November/December |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin data collection | Following REB approval, if required |

Winter Term

- Select examining committee/locate external examiner with supervisor

Summer Term

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete data collection | August |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|

Third Year

(to graduate in Spring Convocation)

Fall Term

- Analyze data and write thesis September/October
- Submit completed thesis to examining committee (min. two weeks prior to defense) mid-November
- Defend thesis December

Winter Term

- Revise and submit final thesis manuscript to FGS First week of April

Third Year

(to graduate in Fall Convocation)

Fall Term

- Data collection September to December

Winter Term

- Analyze data and write thesis January to April
- Submit completed thesis to examining committee (min. two weeks prior to defense)

Summer Term

- Defend thesis June
- Revise and submit final thesis manuscript to FGS mid-August