

**UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
HONOURS PROGRAM**

Guidelines for the Honours Essay

All Honours students are required to submit a graduating essay (English 499) in their final term. English 499 may be done in the Fall, Spring, or Summer term, and may cover topics in literature, critical theory, cultural studies and/or digital humanities. With the exception of critical theory texts, the majority of works studied for each course should be written in English (not translated from another language).

Preparing for the Honours Essay

Preparation for ENGL 499 should serve to provide a broad context of primary and secondary readings for the Honours essay. Students are advised to develop, with their prospective supervisor or someone in the field of study, a course of study (normally ENGL 490) that will introduce them to advanced research methodologies and train them in locating and handling secondary materials. A student writing a graduating essay on *The Tempest*, for example, might devote the directed reading to a study of Shakespeare's late romances; non-Shakespearean romances, dramatic and non-dramatic; Renaissance magic; the Jacobean masque; and relevant criticism. The aim, in short, is to provide the student with an opportunity to study material that opens up new perspectives on the proposed essay topic; the student's preparation should not duplicate existing courses or serve merely as a trial run for the graduating essay itself. To avoid the latter possibility, the assignments should either be a series of short essays (on aspects of the author or period) or a term paper on a work other than that which the student has chosen for 499.

It is strongly recommended that students prepare for the Honours Essay (ENGL 499) by doing one of the following in the semester prior to registering for 499. (Each of these options counts as an elective toward the 24 upper-level units required for Honours.)

1. Take a directed reading course (ENGL 490) with a faculty member whose research project or teaching expertise can accommodate the student's project. (See below for further information.)
 - Permission of the Honours Adviser and the approval of the Chair of the Department is required.

2. Take an undergraduate or a graduate course offered in the field (normally by the prospective supervisor) that will provide solid groundwork for the Honours essay. If the student wishes to register this course as ENGL 490, the student and the instructor will provide a research plan tailored to the individual student (for example, a focus on an individual author or topic) following the 490 guidelines below. The 499 proposal should emerge from the coursework.
 - Permission of the Honours Adviser and the approval of the Chair of the Department is required if the undergraduate course is registered as 490;
 - Permission of the instructor, the Graduate Adviser and the Faculty of Graduate Studies is required if the student opts to take a graduate course. The student is also advised to discuss the plan with the Honours Adviser in advance.

English 490 (Directed Study and Research Methods):

How to Apply:

During the first week of term, students and their 490 supervisors must prepare a *pro forma* (available from the Honours Secretary) and a syllabus specifying the title of the Directed Reading, listing by week the required readings and the nature and weight of assignments. The Honours Adviser and the Chair will approve the *pro forma* and the syllabus, both of which are to be signed by the supervisor and the student. Please submit the completed forms to the Honours Secretary.

Supervision:

Supervisors should meet with students for approximately one hour per week in the 490 term and should work with the student to narrow down and formulate a 499 proposal. Supervisors are responsible for introducing English 490 students to the major research tools appropriate to their area of specialization.

English 499 (Graduating Essay)

The Project:

The graduating essay should develop a topic limited in range yet rich in potential. The project should be scholarly (as opposed to a creative writing project); it need not be "original," but its argument should demonstrate the writer's critical ability and independence of judgment. The 499 essay should also demonstrate the student's awareness of scholarship, criticism and theoretical approaches relevant to the chosen topic.

The Proposal:

The 499 proposal (due Monday of the last week in the previous term) should include the following:

- Title
- Description of the project, including:
 1. the **text(s)** you will study and **why** you have chosen them
 2. the **question** you are addressing and **why this question matters** to our understanding of these texts
 3. a **thesis statement** ("I will argue that . . .")
 4. the **critical approach** you will use and **why** you have chosen it
 5. how your study fits with **previous studies** of this topic.
- Bibliography of up to five primary works and five secondary works which the student expects to consult. To be approved by the Honours Committee this must be in MLA format.
- Word count of the proposal (not to exceed 250 words).

Sample Proposal

This paper is a critical introduction to Stella Benson's novel *I Pose* (1915). Although Benson (1892-1933) was a popular novelist, poet, short story and travel writer in the early 20th century, her literary contributions to the Modernist movement have been overlooked. Despite being awarded the *Femina Vie Heureuse* prize in 1932 for her novel *Tobit Transplanted* (1931), succeeding E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, and being published in prevalent journals (*Fortnightly Review*, *The Spectator*, and others), Benson's novels have not yet received scholarly treatment. Her publications include eight novels, four collections of poetry, five short story collections, and two travelogues. Benson, herself a Suffragette, worked as a social worker, advocating for causes such as the safety of prostitutes in

England, and fighting against child-prostitution in Hong Kong. She served as a secretary, gardener, and farm laborer during WWI. Her travels were extensive for a young woman during this period, including to Jamaica, India, the U.S., and China; her trip to Mandeville, Jamaica, informed the setting in *I Pose*. I will situate Benson among female Modernist writers as a satirist and fantasy-fiction writer, who experimented with narrative style, and emphasized early Modern feminist themes. *I Pose* uses authorial intrusion and a cyclical plot structure to scrutinize gender and class discrimination in the context of British colonialism. Her social network consisted of acclaimed Modernist writers, including Winifred Holtby, Vita Sackville-West, and Virginia Woolf. I will make a case for her inclusion in the Modernist canon.

Paper Length:

The paper should have a computer word count of between 5,500 and 7,000 words, excluding notes and bibliography. Students must include the word count on the title page of the paper.

Paper Format:

The format should follow the MLA Style Guide. Please use the attached sample title page.

Supervision:

At the beginning of the 499 term, the student and supervisor should determine a mutually agreed-upon schedule for the preparation of the essay. The supervisor's role involves the following:

- advising the student on any changes to the 499 proposal required by the Honours committee;
- meeting with the student early in the 499 term to plan the project and to set up a schedule for completion;
- being available for consultation on research methods, essay planning, and early drafts;
- providing timely feedback on student drafts;
- being available for consultation on revision;
- helping the student to prepare for the final interview.

Any problems in supervision which cannot be resolved easily should be reported to the Honours Adviser.

The Examining Committee:

The examining committee consists of the student's supervisor and second reader in addition to a chair, who is normally the Honours Adviser. The second reader receives and comments upon a draft of the essay; the Honours Adviser receives only the final draft.

Deadlines:

Deadlines will be set each semester by the Department according to the following guidelines:

Recommended:

[Seventh week of classes]: First draft to Supervisor.

Mandatory:

[four weeks before end of classes]: Revised draft to Supervisor.

[three weeks before end of classes]: Draft to second reader.

[one week before end of classes, 12:00 pm]: Final **5 copies** to the Honours Secretary. Except in circumstances recognized by the Honours Adviser as extraordinary, a student who does not submit his or her essay to the Department by the final due date will be disqualified from the oral and 499.

Note that a 499 taken in Summer Session will normally be in Term 1 (May–August). As during the Winter session, Summer submission deadlines are firm and no extensions will be permitted without a Request for Academic Concession.

The Oral Examination:

During the exam period there will be a scheduled interview with the examining committee at which the student will be asked questions regarding the essay, including issues arising from the essay and/or background reading. The student will be invited by the chair to give a brief introduction to the essay, after which questions will be asked by the second reader and supervisor, in that order. If time permits, another round of questions may be asked. The time scheduled for each oral examination is 1 1/2 hours.

To achieve an Honours degree with distinction, a student must earn a GPA in the top 20% of graduating English students. (This cohort includes Honours, Majors, and General students, but not Minors.) An Honours degree requires a grade of B- or above in 499 with a graduating GPA of at least 3.5. It is not possible for an Honours candidate to achieve an Honours degree with a grade of C+ or lower in 499.

Students should know that the oral examination cannot negatively affect their 499 grade. Members of the committee meet immediately prior to the interview, and indicate to one another (though not to the student) what grade they feel the essay merits. This grade will be recorded by the chair and as a consequence of the interview the grade may rise, but not fall. It may also stay the same. Immediately following the interview the student will be asked to withdraw from the room while the student's supervisory committee and the chair determine the final grade. The student will be informed of the final grade by the Honours Adviser immediately after the oral. The grade is not official until the final version for the Department file is received. This must be no later than the last work day of April.

[April 2022]

Sample Title Page:

Title

by

Author

B.A., University of Victoria, 20**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS, HONOURS

in the Department of English

Word Count: _____ words

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