

MFA Thesis Assessment Rubric

- The Thesis Director should bring copies of the MFA Thesis Assessment Rubric to the Thesis Defense—make copies ahead of time!
- All MFA rubrics should be completed **AT THE THESIS DEFENSE**.
- All completed MFA rubrics should be placed in Anna Leahy’s mailbox within 3 business days of the defense.
- The Thesis Director is also required by the University to complete the library’s checklist, which can also be completed at the defense (or after the student makes changes based on the defense) and which serves as a more extensive rubric for SLO #1. **SUBMIT A COPY** of that completed checklist to Anna Leahy’s mailbox.

TITLE OF THESIS:

GENRE OF THESIS:

THESIS AUTHOR:

DATE OF THESIS DEFENSE:

This thesis defense date represents completion of the thesis (X in *one* circle):

- While enrolled in ENG 597: Thesis for the first time.
- While enrolled in ENG 508-A: Thesis (continuing enrollment) for the first time.
- While enrolled in ENG 508-A: Thesis for the second time.
- Other; please explain here:

SLO #1: Write a book-length project that is “of a piece” in conjunction with guidelines in the English Department’s Graduate Handbook, including deadlines, publishable length, and cohesiveness of the whole. Because assessment has shown that MFA students often neglect basic manuscript preparation requirements (with dire consequences in the real world of publishing and grant writing), it remains especially important to track this SLO.

Please **CIRCLE** your selection for each item.

1. The thesis adheres to one of the following page limits:

FICTION OR NONFICTION: 150- 250 pages

POETRY: 48- 80 pages

OTHER: please define:

YES NO

2. The thesis is paginated correctly.

YES NO

3. The thesis contains a correct Table of Contents.

YES NO

4. The thesis submitted in 12-pt. Times New Roman font.

YES NO

5. A Critical Statement of between 7 and 10 pages is included.

YES NO

If no, skip items #6 and #7.

6. The Critical Statement is professional in content, tone, and focus.

YES NO

If no, please explain here:

7. The Critical Statement assists in understanding the thinking, process, and/or aesthetics underpinning the thesis.

YES NO

If no, please explain here:

8. The thesis was successfully defended in front of a minimum of three (3) faculty members.

YES NO

SLO #2: Write using proficient sentence-level skills, including grammar, syntax, and vocabulary.

Please **CIRCLE** your selection for each item. If you want to add commentary, write that under “Note any significant problems...”

1. The thesis employs appropriate punctuation.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis contains punctuation errors, but only as they are appropriate to the style or voice.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis contains few (0-5) punctuation errors.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis contains several (5-10) punctuation errors or repeats the same type of error in several instances. (Note: Do not count, for instance, all comma errors as one type of error; Oxford comma inconsistency would be a different type of error than commas missing from a dialogue tag.)
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis contains many punctuation errors, not merely one error repeated in numerous instances.

Note any significant problems in punctuation here:

2. The thesis employs appropriate syntax (modification, parallel structure, complete sentences, etc.).

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis deviates from standard syntactic structures, but only as they are appropriate to the style or voice.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis employs standard syntactic structures.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis occasionally deviates from standard syntactic structures in ways that undermine the style or voice, confuse, or demonstrate amateurism.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis regularly deviates from standard syntactic structures in ways that undermine the style or voice, confuse, or demonstrate amateurism.

Note any significant problems in syntax here:

3. The thesis employs appropriate grammar usage (other than punctuation and syntax).

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis contains grammatical errors, but only as they are appropriate to the style or voice.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis contains 0-3 grammatical errors.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis contains 4-10 grammatical errors.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis contains more than 10 grammatical errors.

Note any significant problems in grammatical usage here:

4. The thesis employs effective idiom and formality.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis shifts idiom and formality, but only as appropriate to support the overall style, voice, or effect.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis uses effective idiom and formality.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis occasionally shifts idiom and formality, but not often enough to undermine the style, voice, or effect.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis regularly shifts idiom and level of formality in ways that undermine the style or voice, confuse, or demonstrate amateurism.

Note any significant problems in idiom and formality here:

5. The diction of the work is appropriate for the content and effect.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis misuses diction, but only as appropriate to support the overall style, voice, or effect.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis uses effective and innovative diction.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis uses diction effectively but not innovatively.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis occasionally misuses uses diction, but not often enough to undermine the style, voice, or effect.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis regularly misuses diction in ways that undermine the style or voice, confuse, or demonstrate amateurism.

Note any significant problems in diction here:

6. Overall, the thesis reflects a polished quality on the sentence-level; it flows appropriately.

- Yes, it demonstrates professional sentence-level quality throughout.
- Yes, overall, but it needs editing on the sentence level in some places.
- No, it needs significant revision on the sentence level.

SLO #3: Write demonstrating proficient use of genre elements, techniques, and basic genre conventions.

Please **CHOOSE** the appropriate section (either fiction or poetry), then **CIRCLE** your selection for each item in that section. Creative nonfiction and mixed-genre thesis projects will not be assessed for SLO #3 at this time; skip SLO #3 only for thesis projects that clearly cannot be assessed as fiction or poetry.

FICTION

1. The work of fiction is a focused story rather than mere narrative.

- **ADVANCED:** The piece effectively tells a finished story – is a complete dramatic action.
- **ADVANCED:** The piece is successfully experimental. It might not tell a conventional story, but it successfully conveys the sense of a story in some fashion. The story works.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The piece is partly successful: it attempts to tell a story but falls short because of inadequate use of fictional elements/techniques.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The piece is mere narration, or the writer failed to tell the story coherently or effectively due to an inadequate grasp of fictional elements/techniques.

Note any significant problems here:

2. The piece employs a consistent point of view that is appropriate to the plot or purpose.

- **ADVANCED:** The point of view of the piece is sensibly chosen, is consistent, and is effective in telling the story.
- **ADVANCED:** The point of view of the piece is unconventional/experimental, but is consistently employed and effective: the piece works despite or because of the unconventional point of view.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The point of view of the piece is fairly consistent, but is inadequate to tell the story effectively: it seems haphazardly chosen, leads to awkward tricks to convey information (information dump in dialogue, for instance) and/or is marred by narrator intrusion or small lapses in viewpoint.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The point of view in the piece is inconsistent, haphazard, needlessly awkward, or in some other fashion a detriment to the piece.

Note any significant problems in point of view here:

3. The piece employs a useful/appropriate mix of scene and synopsis.

- **ADVANCED:** The piece employs developed scenes, detailed synopsis, and brief synopsis to tell its story.
- **ADVANCED:** The piece makes unconventional or experimental use of scene and synopsis, or conveys information via interior monologue, or perhaps is unconventional in defining what constitutes “information.” The piece works despite or because of experimentation or unconventionality.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Although the piece tells the story it sets out to tell, it is weakened by revealing too much in synopsis, by underwriting or overwriting scenes, or by attempting to convey too much in dialogue.

- UNSATISFACTORY: The piece is ineffective because of poor use or mix of scene and synopsis: excessive synopsis, badly underdeveloped scenes, exposition dumped into dialogue, etc.

Note any significant problems in scene and synopsis here:

4. The piece employs sufficient and effective use of description of setting and character.

- ADVANCED: The piece contains enough description to provide verisimilitude and to make the writing visual and otherwise sensory. The writer has clearly pictured the scenes and has conveyed those pictures through detailed, sensory language. The writer has put in the details that matter.
- ADVANCED: The piece is unconventional in its use of description – in the abundance of description or in the manner in which it’s conveyed, but the unconventionality of the presentation is right for the particular story that’s being told. The piece works.
- SATISFACTORY: The piece wants more descriptive detail. Although the writer tells the story, the reader is sometimes disengaged because of weak specificity.
- UNSATISFACTORY: The piece fails to engage the reader because of a lack of descriptive detail. The story lacks verisimilitude because of a want of description. The writer has failed to put in the details that matter.

Note any significant problems in description here:

5. The piece contains well-developed primary characters and sufficiently developed secondary characters.

- ADVANCED: The characters in the piece are round: lifelike, authentic, and engaging.
- ADVANCED: The piece employs an unconventional use of character in some useful way, perhaps purposely flattening characters, making characters out of the ordinary or inhuman, or employing experimental methods of characterization. The piece works despite or because of unconventional characterization.
- SATISFACTORY: The piece tells a story but is in some way ineffective because of weak or indifferent characterization.
- UNSATISFACTORY: The piece misses the mark because characters are flat, inauthentic, implausible, or in some other way ill-drawn.

Note any significant problems in characterization here:

6. The piece contains well-written, useful, to-the-point dialogue when dialogue is required.

- ADVANCED: The piece employs dialogue that works – that is appropriate to the characters, that is essential to the telling of the story, and that is sensibly formatted and attributed.
- ADVANCED: The piece employs unconventional dialogue techniques in phrasing or formatting in order to achieve an experimental artistic effect. The piece works because of or despite its unconventionality.

- **SATISFACTORY:** Dialogue is marred by occasional lapses: content that's not relevant to the story, efforts at dialect or slang that don't quite work, insufficient dialogue attribution, too much or too little dialogue, etc., but these faults weaken rather than ruin the piece.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The piece is in some sense ruined by the inadequate employment of dialogue. Dialogue contains random or useless information, speechifying, badly rendered dialect, or is obviously employed to dump information that would better be revealed in scenes and synopsis.

Note any significant problems in dialogue here:

POETRY

1. The collection shows coherence across poems in terms of form, content, theme, or voice.

- **ADVANCED:** The collection is artfully coherent without being redundant.
- **ADVANCED:** The collection works against coherence as part of its experimental approach, but may be coherent in its experimentation.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The collection's coherence may be somewhat obvious or somewhat oblique but is emerging.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The collection lacks coherence and suggests an arbitrary selection and ordering of poems.

Note any significant problems here:

2. Individual poems employ useful/appropriate formal or structural elements, such as lineation.

- **ADVANCED:** Formal or structural elements are sophisticated, showing both coherence and variety.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Formal or structural elements are competently written, demonstrating appropriate but not especially original or artful use.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Formal or structural elements are unsophisticated, seemingly lacking in purpose, or too inconsistent to demonstrate competence.

Check all that apply. The collection employs poems that are:

- Free verse
- Fixed form
- Prose poem
- Experimental in visual form

Note any significant problems in point of view here:

3. The collection employs useful/appropriate metaphor and other complex figures of speech.

- **ADVANCED:** Metaphor, simile, and other complex figures of speech are employed appropriately and artfully.

- **ADVANCED:** Metaphor, simile, and other complex figures of speech are avoided as part of the experimental mode.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Metaphor, simile, and other complex figures of speech are used but embody uneven artfulness or sometimes lack context.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Metaphor, simile, and other complex figures of speech are not used or are used arbitrarily.

Note any significant problems in scene and synopsis here:

4. The collection employs useful/appropriate sound devices such as repetition, rhyme (end and/or internal), onomatopoeia, rhythm, or contrast.

- **ADVANCED:** Sound devices such as repetition, rhyme, or contrast are employed appropriately and artfully.
- **ADVANCED:** Sound devices such as repetition, rhyme, or contrast, perhaps in favor of spoken conversation or other modes, are avoided as part of the experimental mode.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Sound devices such as repetition, rhyme, or contrast are used but embody uneven artfulness or sometimes lack effect.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Sound devices such as repetition, rhyme, or contrast are not used or are used arbitrarily.

Note any significant problems in description here:

5. The collection employs concentrated language.

- **ADVANCED:** Concentrated language is achieved appropriately and artfully.
- **ADVANCED:** Concentrated language is avoided as part of experimental mode.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Concentrated language is somewhat uneven within a poem or from poem to poem.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Concentrated language is not achieved; overwriting, perhaps as exposition, is prevalent.

Note any significant problems in characterization here:

6. The collection employs vivid, appropriate sensory imagery.

- **ADVANCED:** Sensory imagery is used appropriately and artfully.
- **ADVANCED:** Sensory imagery is avoided as part of the experimental mode.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Sensory imagery is somewhat uneven within a poem or from poem to poem.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Sensory imagery is not used, is cliché, is not artful, or is inappropriate to context and effect.

Note any significant problems in dialogue here:

SLO #4: Invent a distinct personal voice or style appropriate for content and effect in the given piece.

Please **CIRCLE** your selection for each item.

1. Diction and syntax convey a distinctive manifestation of the writer's, character's, or speaker's perspective and sensibility.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis demonstrates control of diction and syntax to convey a distinct perspective or style.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis is successfully experimental in diction and syntax, perhaps containing contradictions or tensions through which a distinctive style emerges.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis is partly successful; it employs clear choices in diction and syntax to convey a perspective or style but is not always consistent or distinctive.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis has fails to employ diction and syntax in a way that conveys a distinctive perspective or style.

2. Point of view is carefully and consistently employed to manifest the writer's, character's, or speaker's perspective and sensibility.

- **ADVANCED:** Choice and application of point of view demonstrates a control of craft to convey a distinctive perspective or style.
- **ADVANCED:** Choices in point of view are experimental, challenging convention, but also clearly purposeful and controlled in conveying a distinctive perspective or style.
- **SATISFACTORY:** Choice and application of point of view may not always be consistent, demonstrating a developing control of craft that produces a wavering or bland style.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Choice in point of view is inconsistent and struggles to convey a distinctive perspective or style.

3. The structure of the piece(s) is intimately connected to the perspective or style of the piece.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis demonstrates control of structure that complements and constructs a distinctive perspective, sensibility, or style.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis is successfully experimental; it challenges the reader's expectations of structural conventions and uses its structure toward a distinctive perspective, sensibility, or style.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis demonstrates a developing control of structure, inconsistent at times, or relying on generic structures that lead to lack of distinctiveness.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis is ineffective in its control of structure.

4. The details—including and omitted—and level of detail of the piece(s) creates a distinctive perspective or style.

- **ADVANCED:** The thesis demonstrates control of detail in relation to style.
- **ADVANCED:** The thesis is successfully experimental; it challenges the reader's expectations of detail to create a distinctive style and works because of unconventionality.
- **SATISFACTORY:** The thesis demonstrates a developing control of detail that, at times, may come across as banal or commonplace.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** The thesis is ineffective in its control of detail