



# POSTGRADUATE STUDY IN CLASSICS AT VICTORIA

## An In-house Guide for Students



Studying Classics at the postgraduate level is one of the most rewarding -- and fun -- things you can do at university. Such study also brings challenges, and so it is worth thinking through a few things first. As a guide to the potentially perplexed, the following paragraphs cover supervision, writing tips, opportunities and help available to postgraduates, and, last, but not least, rules and other hard facts.

*NB: Much of the following advice is specific to the MA, but it is also applicable to Honours and, especially, to the PhD.*

# SUPERVISION



The supervisor-postgraduate relationship is a special one, and is best approached with deliberation and openness. You and your supervisor should have a frank conversation early on about how you plan to work together. These discussions may result in a written, and even signed, memorandum of expectations. If so, keep a copy on the wall near your workspace and keep it in mind as you write your thesis.

Expectations which supervisors have of thesis students typically include the following:

- Regular meetings. This may be fortnightly, weekly, or monthly, depending on your needs and the nature of your research.
- Regular submission of written work well in advance of meetings. (That is: do not hand something in on Thursday and then ask for a Friday meeting. Your writing is important, and you should give your supervisor time to devote him- or herself to reading it properly.) Commensurately, you can expect your supervisor to return your work in a timely fashion.
- Regular communication. This includes letting your supervisor know if you are going to be out of town, or need to take time off, or are planning to submit an abstract for a conference. Your supervisor will also let you know if he or she will be away or unavailable for an extended period of time.
- Dotting your 'I's and crossing your 'T's. That is, follow *all* instructions on formatting; keep to *every* deadline unless you have arranged in advance to extend it; be ruthlessly organised in your record-keeping and management of electronic drafts; and fix things your supervisor has asked you to fix before giving them your work again.
- Thinking carefully before rejecting advice. Your supervisor is trying to help you.

Strictly speaking, you have one calendar year from the date of enrolment to complete an MA thesis. Remember, however, that your supervisor must review the full final draft, *before* you submit, in order to support your application for examination. Therefore, aim to submit your thesis *to your supervisor*, at least three weeks before the official due date. This should be a polished and clean *final* draft, i.e., front matter, text, notes, and bibliography have been completed, spell-checked, proofed, and all references have been checked. This gives your supervisor sufficient time for reading, checking, and commenting, and gives you time to make changes in response. In sum, it is best to treat the MA thesis as an *eleven-month* project. (If you are writing a PhD thesis, give your supervisor more time at the end, as your thesis will be longer.)

# WRITING YOUR THESIS



Writing a successful thesis takes canny, hard-working dedication, and when much of the research is done, it is time to write. Most importantly, you need to find out what works for you, and quickly: one of the worst traps a thesis student can fall into is procrastination from writing. Remember: a thesis is a piece of written work. Without sufficient research, a thesis cannot convince, but without writing, it cannot exist.

So: before you even start, *think hard* about the process of writing, and about how, where, and when *you* write best. Reading blogs dedicated to the writing process and asking around (that is, asking your friends, your supervisor, other lecturers) can help. Then, instead of avoiding putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, find a way, any way, to start writing. Only then have you really begun your thesis. Remember, too, that ideas will come to you as you write.

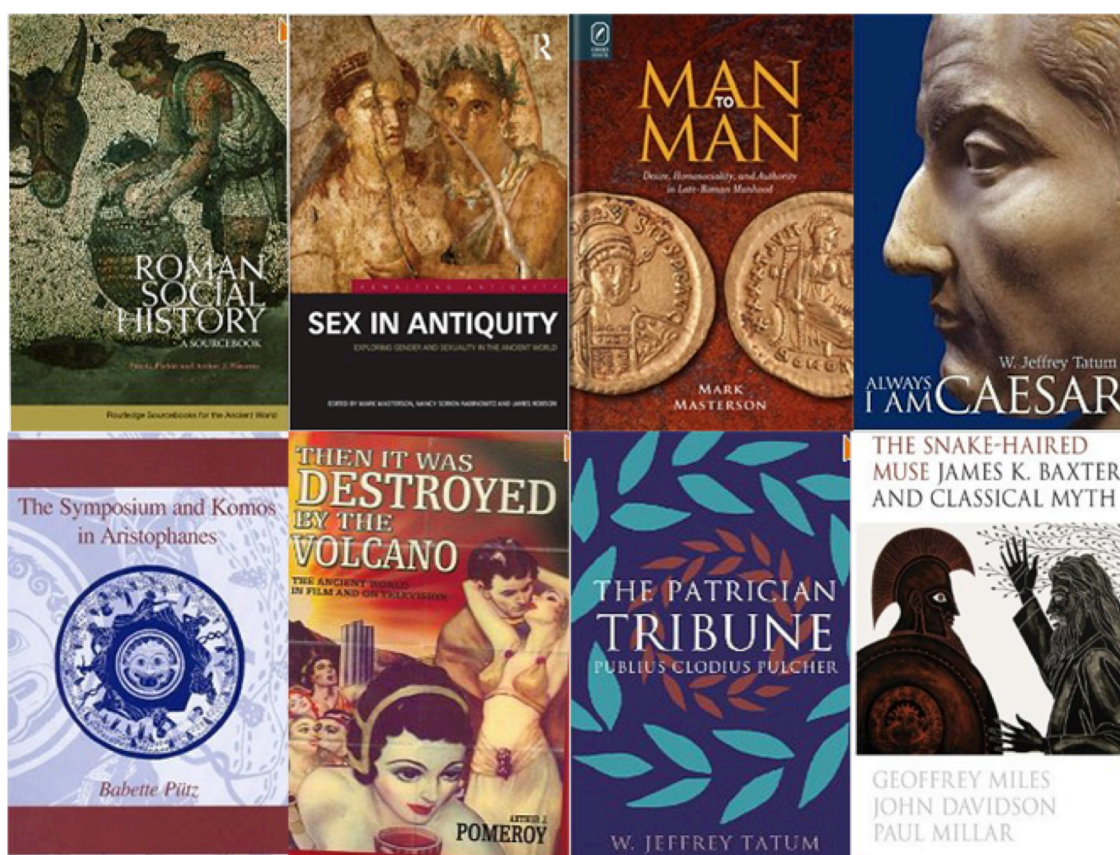
## A few tips:

- When writing, beware of perfectionism. Your initial drafts will not be perfect, and this shouldn't concern you – at least not yet. Beware, too, of editing small sections of your text again and again while great stretches of your thesis remain unwritten.
- Take careful notes, including bibliographical information and page numbers of anything you consult, and keep all your library books out until you have submitted your thesis for examination.
- Learn how to use online archiving facilities such as Dropbox, and save multiple copies of successive drafts as you go. This practice will help you to sleep better at night, and will save you from disaster if your favourite computer decides to betray you. Make sure, though, that your drafts are clearly labelled, so you know which one is the current one.
- Take care with the details of formatting, referencing, spelling, grammar, and so on. When you are writing a text aimed at persuading someone of something, the little things really do count. As in the 'real world', messily presented texts are less effective rhetorically than texts which are (nearly) perfect. It is a good strategy to demonstrate how much you value your thesis by crafting it with care down to the smallest detail.

**Remember!** It is good to think of your Classics thesis as an *argument*. That is, your thesis will make claims, supported by evidence, that a reader is expected to consider and, ideally, accept. The thesis should 'hang together' as a coherent text and its argument should unfold in a logical progression of steps, clearly marked by signpost language, e.g., 'However', 'Nevertheless', "In sum", and so on. The more your argument flows, the easier it is to read and the more persuasive it is.

Also remember: you will write your thesis, in the first instance, *for a specific audience*. That is, for an internal examiner (not your supervisor but another Victoria University academic, often from your own department) and an external examiner (an internationally recognised expert on the subject of your thesis from outside Victoria University). It is worth keeping in mind, then, that you are not writing your thesis just for your supervisor: the examiners, certainly the external examiner, will not know you or love you and so will not take into account anything about your personal situation, such as health issues, relationship troubles, work commitments or the like. He or she will simply judge the thesis on its own terms and according to international standards.

Perhaps you are wondering about the practice of sending a thesis to an external examiner? It is the best practice of the best universities because it ensures that their academic standards remain at an internationally approved level. This is one of the reasons a thesis from Victoria University enjoys international standing.





## OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLASSICS POSTGRADUATES

The Classics Programme provides thesis students with office space with 24-hour access, a workstation, and your own computer with email, internet access, and printing, as well as access to the staff kitchen.

The Research Committee of our faculty (FHSS) has dedicated funds available for research-related travel for postgraduates (MA and PhD only). Talk to your supervisor if you think you may have need of such funding: we certainly want you to apply for it if it will help your research. *These funds are limited and contestable* and must be applied for through the proper channels: see [www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/about/committees-boards/faculty-research-committee](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/about/committees-boards/faculty-research-committee). Funds are also available for conference attendance, although this is a lower priority for the faculty than, say, field work or other activities closely connected to your research.

Thesis students often have the opportunity to tutor for Classics courses. If you are interested, keep your eyes peeled for announcements about courses needing tutors, and also make yourself known to the Programme Administrator in the office. You may also raise this issue with your supervisor.

Thesis students present a solo seminar to the programme as part of its annual research seminar series. This is obligatory, but you should think of it as an *opportunity* to share your work, receive feedback, and gain valuable experience in public speaking. Thesis students typically present once during the year, on their thesis topic, though nothing precludes you offering an additional seminar.

You may want to consider giving a paper at a conference. Some conferences are exclusively for postgraduates, most involve both postgraduates and university lecturers. Some conferences take place in Australasia, others further afield. You should think about venues of all kinds, but you should discuss the matter with your supervisor first.

The university maintains a database of scholarships available to postgraduates while at Victoria University and afterwards. Go here: [www.victoria.ac.nz/students/money/scholarships](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/money/scholarships).

## HELP!

The Classics Programme Administrator, should be your first stop, and often your one-stop-shop, for help with office supplies, computer issues, tutoring, and so on.

For help with writing (and *everybody* should reflect on and can improve their writing, postgraduate student or not), the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) runs regular workshops: [www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/academic-development](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/learning-teaching/academic-development). For more individualised help, see Student Learning Support Services (SLSS): [www.victoria.ac.nz/st\\_services/slss](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss).

Also, do not be afraid to ask your supervisor for help. He or she wants you to prosper.

If you run into problems with your supervision, talk to the MA/PhD coordinator, in the first instance.

Become intimately familiar with the Classics subject guide page on the library website: <http://victoria.ac.nz.libguides.com/classics>. There is much good material here that will help you discover relevant research, and help, too, with such things as referencing styles.

Finally, for when you finish, here are two good local options for binding your thesis: Wakefields Digital (Wellington): [www.thesisbinder.co.nz](http://www.thesisbinder.co.nz); Book Binding Etc: 166 Cuba St, upstairs, 10:00am–5:00pm weekdays, 04 384 3119.

## RULES AND OTHER STUFF

As soon as you have decided to enrol for a thesis, download the relevant guidelines from the FHSS website for MA ([www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/study/postgraduate/postgraduate-resources-and-links](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fhss/study/postgraduate/postgraduate-resources-and-links)) and the FGR website for PhD ([www.victoria.ac.nz/fgr/current-phd/thesis-guidelines](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fgr/current-phd/thesis-guidelines)).

Some further notes:

- PhD theses are graded on a pass/fail basis. MA theses receive a grade and an additional designation: A+/A = Distinction; A-/B+ = Merit; B-/C+/C/C- = Awarded.
- The word limit for an MA thesis is 40,000 words *including bibliography, footnotes or endnotes and essential appendices*. The limit for a PhD is 100,000 words (again *including bibliography, footnotes or endnotes and essential appendices*). These are limits, not targets.
- Your final deadline is just that: a final deadline. Plan to submit *everything* required to the correct Faculty Office: hard copies, electronic copy, all forms filled in correctly, and so on. Please, do not leave it until the last day to spell-check, print, and bind your thesis. Your thesis will show signs of this scramble.

