

THESIS

MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING
MOUNT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Why does your
thesis matter?



- ▶ At one time I thought the most important thing was talent. I think now that — the young man or the young woman must possess or teach himself, train himself, in **infinite patience**, which is to try and to try and to try until it comes right. He must train himself in **ruthless intolerance**. That is, to throw away anything that is false no matter how much he might love that page or that paragraph. The most important thing is insight, that is ... curiosity to wonder, to mull, and to muse why it is that man does what he does. And if you have that, then I don't think the talent makes much difference, whether you've got that or not.

▶ —William Faulkner

It's not just about toiling in solitude. Or
developing an unprecedented work ethic.



All work and no play makes Jack a dull
All work and no play makes Jack a dull
All work and no play makes Jack a dull
v All work and no Play makes Jack a dull
All work and no play makes Jack a dull

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy



It's a **culmination**
of your time in the
MFA program.

THE PRODUCT OR TAKEAWAY, IF YOU WILL.

What Constitutes a Thesis?

Prose

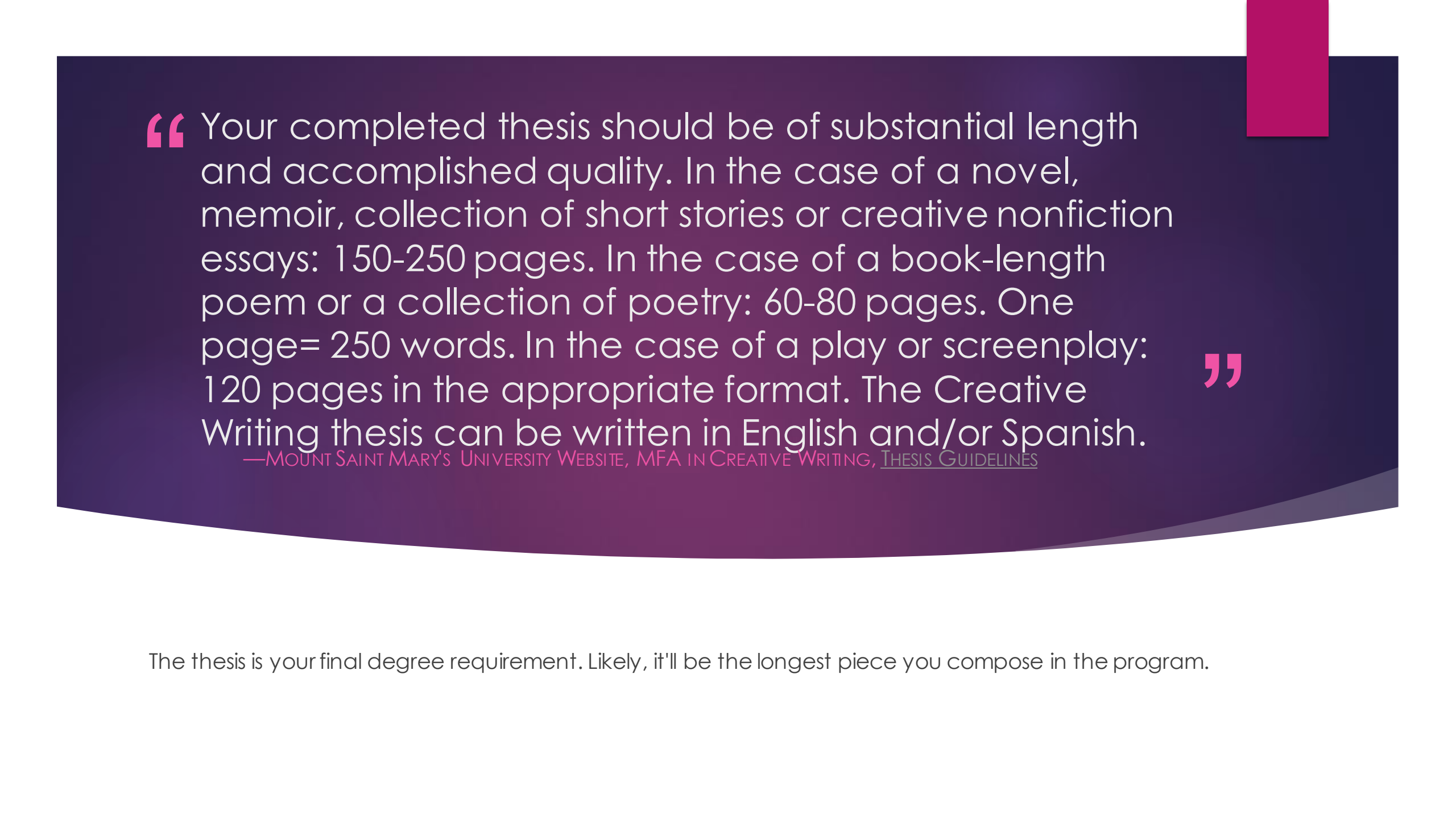
- Novels
- Short story collections
- Novellas
- Memoirs
- Essay collections

Poetry

- Collections of poetry
- Book-length poems
- Novels in verse
- Memoirs in verse

Drama

- Plays
- Screenplays



“ Your completed thesis should be of substantial length and accomplished quality. In the case of a novel, memoir, collection of short stories or creative nonfiction essays: 150-250 pages. In the case of a book-length poem or a collection of poetry: 60-80 pages. One page= 250 words. In the case of a play or screenplay: 120 pages in the appropriate format. The Creative Writing thesis can be written in English and/or Spanish. ”

—MOUNT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY WEBSITE, MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING, THESIS GUIDELINES

The thesis is your final degree requirement. Likely, it'll be the longest piece you compose in the program.

THESIS: A COURSE

CRW 296

Timeline Overview

SEMESTER ONE

- ▶ Thesis project should be conceived of before enrolling in CRW 296
- ▶ CRW 296 is taken in penultimate semester of graduate study
- ▶ Prior to enrolling in CRW 296, student must ask faculty to serve as thesis advisor (in writing)
- ▶ Expect to consult with thesis director every three weeks
- ▶ Write, read, and revise project

Timeline Overview

SEMESTER 2

- ▶ Continuation of the work begun in previous term
- ▶ Taken in final semester of graduate study
- ▶ Continue frequent consultations with thesis director
- ▶ Revise and refine project
- ▶ Schedule defense
- ▶ Write preface
- ▶ Two weeks before defense, submit manuscript, along with preface, to thesis advisor and second reader

Course Expectations

- ▶ You're writing—a lot
- ▶ You're communicating with your advisor at least on a set schedule
- ▶ You're reading or viewing texts your advisor suggests
- ▶ You're staying on track
- ▶ You're not ghosting your thesis advisor
- ▶ You're not passing off old work—if you're developing a project that's already begun, reconceive of it as wholly as possible
- ▶ You're not expecting your thesis advisor to write your thesis for you—CRW 296 involve mentorship, NOT co-authoring

Thesis in Screenwriting

Sample Thesis Advisor Guidance

- ▶ What I'm looking for is an understanding of *genre specificity*, a clear *premise*, a strong application of the *Three Act Structure*, and a clear *character arch of the protagonist*.
- ▶ A complete thesis will fall between 110 and 120 pages. I will meet once a month with students, but I will always be reachable via email.
- ▶ Before first meeting students must send me a *log-line*, *synopsis*, *protagonist bio*, and *beat-sheet* of their films. (I will send out materials that will aid students in drafting their log-lines, synopsis, etc.)

“

What about the ... **DEFENSE?**

”

—SAID EVERY MFA CANDIDATE EVER



It's a professional conversation ...

of roughly ninety minutes, consisting of you, your thesis advisor, and a second reader in a very lovely conference room with your thesis manuscript sitting on the table and, whether you've invited them or not, all the nerves in the world swimming through your blood even as you try to savor your last moments—and they're very prepared moments because you've worked really, really, REALLY hard—on the campus of Mount Saint Mary's University, at some agreed-upon point toward the end of your last semester in the program.



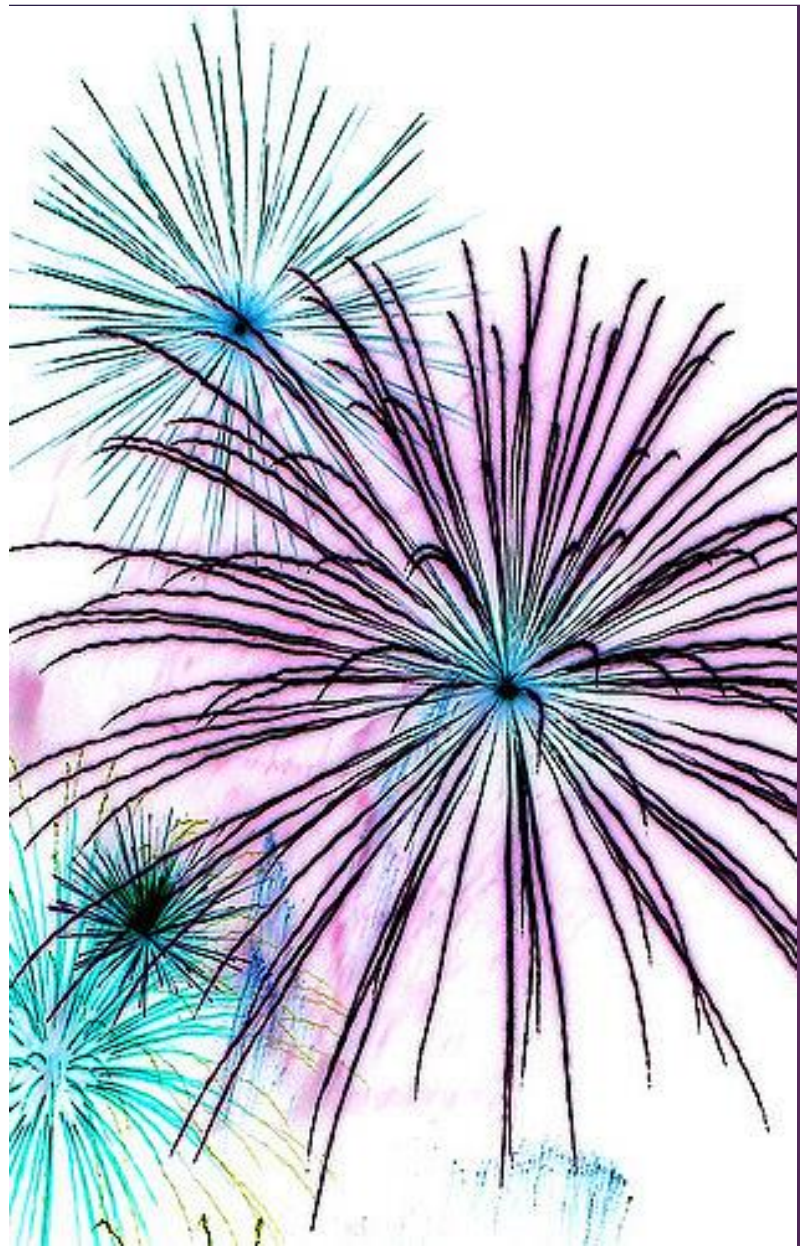
During the Thesis Defense

A chance
to ask
questions

Remarks from
thesis advisor
and second
reader

Discussion of project's
origination and
current successes

Conversation
about
revision and
project's
post-
MFA future



Congratulations!

(THAT WASN'T SO BAD.)

Final Steps

- AFTER DEFENSE, YOU HAVE THIRTY DAYS TO REVISE THESIS
- SUBMIT A PDF TO PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND A BOUND COPY TO LIBRARY, PER DISTRIBUTED GUIDELINES
- KEEP US POSTED ABOUT YOUR PROJECT'S POST-MFA SUCCESS



Questions for professors or an alum?