

## General remarks on the MA thesis at San Francisco State

It is good to think of the thesis as consisting of three thematically connected chapters of roughly 12 pages, plus a short introduction and a short conclusion (perhaps a couple of pages each). The thesis need not take this form, but it is a good ideal to aim for.

The focus of each chapter should be one particular claim or issue or problem and you should advance a thesis regarding it and support your thesis with a sustained argument, where you consider objections both to your thesis and to your argument for the thesis. The thesis advanced need not be “big” or ambitious; it can concern an interpretation of text, an objection to a thinker’s view or argument, or exposition of unclarity of a particular discourse, as well as be a positive thesis regarding a particular issue. The main thing is that each chapter need have a “point” that you are making, which goes beyond simply getting clear on some issues.

### Tips when writing

**Focus:** In choosing three issues to discuss in your thesis, ask yourself why you are choosing to discuss the ones that you do. Are they the most important ones? Most interesting? Require most clarificatory work? Be sure to convey to your reader why you have chosen these three issues. Ideally the reader should feel that of course these are the most important/interesting issues in the vicinity.

**Pitch:** Clarity is of the utmost importance. You are not only trying to get clear on some issues, but also presenting them to your reader. Always keep your reader in mind. Write in plain English, devoid of jargon and convoluted sentences. Do not assume that the reader knows about your subject matter. The thesis should be self-contained, such that the reader could pick it up and read it and understand it without being a specialist in the field. This means that you need to explain any technical term or distinction that you need to make your points. It is good to think of your reader as another MA student in philosophy who is writing a thesis in a very different subfield of philosophy.

**Engagement:** The main aim of the thesis is for you to engage critically with ideas that you find interesting. Such engagement requires that you be a charitable reader and interpreter of other people’s views. The focus shouldn’t so much be on what the authors actually say, although that is important, but on what they could say: what resources do they have at their disposal? Is there a way to develop their view that avoids the objections you raise?

**Fun:** Don’t forget that now you get a chance to delve deeper into these interesting issues, which has the potential to make your writing and research experience more satisfying than it has been in the past. Above all, enjoy it!