

# MMPH ESSAY GUIDELINES

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## OVERVIEW

The essay requirement is designed to provide you with an opportunity to integrate the major components of the SPH experience and to apply the principles of public health to analyze a specific topic area. You are also expected to demonstrate verbal and technical proficiency in expository writing. Essays are typically 20-30 pages long, double-spaced, and formatted using the University approved template. We strongly urge you to begin your paper in the ETD format. SPH has policies regarding the essay process that can be found here:

<https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/academics/forms-handbook/academic-handbook/graduation-information/detailed-essay-thesis-and>

<https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/academics/forms-handbook/academic-handbook/graduation-information/masters-essay-checklist>

<https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/academics/forms-handbook/academic-handbook/graduation-information>

The topic must be one of public health significance, which is explicitly stated in the essay abstract. The master's essay is a scholarly work that reflects the student's acquisition of knowledge, ability to synthesize information into a well-organized, coherent document, and development as a professional.

## Types of Projects

- Original research
- Critical research synthesis (goes beyond a literature review to demonstrate analysis, evaluation, and integration of the information)
- Position (advocacy) paper
- Policy analysis
- Quality management, patient safety, or process improvement project
- Case study (single or comparative)
- Grant proposal (standard NIH format)

## GENERAL STYLE

Essays and theses should be written in clear, concise prose and should not include an activist stance. If you need guidance, consult Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, William Strunk and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style*, *The APA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition Style Manual*, or another agreed-upon substitute as a final arbiter of style. You are permitted, and are indeed encouraged, to have someone, including a professional editor, edit your paper for writing style and clarity.

Variations in the internal design of the paper are expected, but all manuscripts must address an issue of public health significance, and most will include the following elements:

1. Introduction: the purpose of the study or research, description of the agency or environment of data collection (if relevant), public health significance, and scope or focus of the study or research, including, where appropriate, the hypothesis to be tested; chapter by chapter summary of the paper.
2. Literature review: major relevant findings from journal articles, books, and other sources and gaps in knowledge that the study may attempt to fill.
3. Methods: how information was collected, analyzed, and limitations or problems; definition of terms and statement of assumptions.
4. Findings: results of the data collection or research.
5. Discussion: implications of results, synthesis of major trends, analysis of the data and literature review.
6. Conclusions: summary of major findings, application, limitations of the study, recommendations for future steps.
7. Bibliography.

## PROCESS

### Step 1

The first step in the process is to identify readers or form a committee. For reader/committee eligibility, students should consult <https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/academics/forms-handbook/academic-handbook/research-practice-and-exam-requirements/milestone>.

Students are required to form their committee readers for Fall graduation no later than the end of summer term, for Spring graduation no later than the end of fall term, and for Summer graduation no later than the end of spring term.

### *Master's Essay Committee Rules*

- The committee must consist of at least two University of Pittsburgh faculty members.
- Members must have primary appointments in different University departments (at least two departments represented).

- At least one member must be on the [core list](#) of one Pitt Public Health department.
- If thesis work includes internship/practica experience, including data and policies, from the Allegheny County Health Department, the committee must include a preceptor from the Allegheny County Health Department. If the preceptor is an adjunct faculty member, they count as a faculty member. If they do not hold an adjunct appointment, they must be added in addition to all faculty on the committee.

## Step 2

The next step is to prepare a proposal. You will complete the [MMPH Integrated Learning Experience \(ILE\) form](#) and attach a narrative proposal. The proposal should address the following issues: the overall purpose of the study, the specific questions to be considered, the experimental and conceptual background the student brings to the topic, the research methodology, and the scheduling and timing of tasks.

Your proposal and ILE form must be approved by your advisor and submitted to Renee Valenti ([rmn4@pitt.edu](mailto:rmn4@pitt.edu)).

## Step 3

Meet with your committee/readers: You need to meet at least once, in person or by teleconference, in the semester BEFORE you graduate. This meeting is intended to set expectations, discuss plans, agree to a timeline, and set you up for success.

If the essay or thesis schedule is not adhered to, faculty are under no obligation to ensure that students graduate in the desired term, meaning that students will have to register for an additional credit in a later term and reapply for graduation.

## Step 4

Finish your essay and submit final copies to your committee by the agreed-upon date. Complete and submit the [MMPH Essay Final Assessment \(ILE\) form](#).

## Step 5

Essays are submitted electronically. A tutorial is available that outlines the submission requirements: <https://etd.pitt.edu>.

The University offers an ETD workshop on electronic submission several times a semester. We strongly encourage you to attend. Using graphs, figures, or charts from original resources requires proper citation and may require permission from the holder of the copyright.

## IRB

When research for a practicum, paper, or thesis involves human subjects, the project must obtain clearance from the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB). Guidelines for applying for IRB approval are available online at [www.irb.pitt.edu](http://www.irb.pitt.edu). Students

must also complete the human subjects research modules, available online through the IRB website; and their research proposals must undergo prior scientific review (approval of the Department Chair).

## IMPORTANT DUE DATES

	<b>December Graduation</b>	<b>April Graduation</b>	<b>June Graduation</b>	<b>August Graduation</b>
<b>Select committee readers and submit to Renee Valenti for approval</b>	Due end of Summer Term	Due end of Fall Term	Due end of Spring Term	Due end of Spring Term
<b>Submit proposal to advisor</b>	Due September 15	Due February 15	Due April 15	Due June 15
<b>Submit first draft to readers</b>	Time frames and number of drafts determined by student and readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by student and readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by student and readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by student and readers
<b>Final draft submission and reader sign-off</b>	Two weeks prior to the school-wide deadline to upload final ETD draft	Two weeks prior to the school-wide deadline to upload final ETD draft	Two weeks prior to the school-wide deadline to upload final ETD draft	Two weeks prior to the school-wide deadline to upload final ETD draft
<b>Upload final ETD draft</b>	Determined by school. See <a href="#">graduation page</a> for term-specific deadline	Determined by school. See <a href="#">graduation page</a> for term-specific deadline	Determined by school. See <a href="#">graduation page</a> for term-specific deadline	Determined by school. See <a href="#">graduation page</a> for term-specific deadline