



Master of Adult Education

Thesis Guide

July 14, 2026

Table of Contents

Master of Adult Education	1
Thesis Guide	1
Introduction	4
Thesis Description	4
Thesis Course Descriptions	5
Resources at StFX	6
Thesis Timeline	7
Roles And Responsibilities	9
Student's Role	10
Researcher Reflection and Plan	11
Faculty Roles	11
Thesis Proposal	12
Descriptive Title	13
Research Interest, Purpose, & Rationale	13
Context	13
Key Research Questions and Core Guiding Terms/Concepts	14
Positionality as a Practitioner-Researcher	14
Relevant Literature and Theoretical Orientation/Framework	15
Methodology and Rationale	15
Methods	15
Trustworthiness	15
Ethical Issues and Provisions	15
Educational Significance	16
References	16
Appendices	16
Research Ethics	16
StFX Research Ethics Board	16
Additional Research Ethics	17
Thesis Writing Overview	18
Thesis Guidelines	19
Confidentiality	19
Thesis Length and Appendices	19
APA Exceptions for the Thesis	19

Refining Your Writing	20
Thesis Outline Guide.....	20
Abstract	21
Table of Contents	21
Chapter 1: Introduction	21
Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework.....	24
Chapter 3: Methodology of the Study	25
Chapter 4: Findings	26
Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation.....	26
Chapter 6 Significance and Conclusions	27
Sample Title Page	28
Sample Table of Contents	29
Sample Layout for Table of Contents	30
Appendix A - Thesis Timeline Tracker.....	33

Introduction

This thesis guide is intended to clarify the expectations and process of the Master of Adult Education thesis for students and faculty.

Thesis Description

In the Master of Adult Education program, the thesis is both a written document and a research process. The written thesis is a formal scholarly written work based on original research completed by a student with the support of a faculty supervisor. The thesis process consists of the following five phases:

- (1) Intention
- (2) Proposal
- (3) Research Ethics (if applicable)
- (4) Research and Analysis
- (5) Thesis

Doing a thesis is an opportunity for students to engage in rigorous academic research to contribute original research and scholarship to the field of adult education and other intersecting relevant fields. The thesis becomes an electronic public document available to other researchers through the StFX and national library systems. Thus, your study becomes part of the knowledge base in the broader field of research on adult education.

Students who started their thesis in 2023-2025 are part-time thesis students. Students who start their thesis after January 2026 can do the thesis as a part-time thesis student or as a full-time thesis student. Further details below.

Thesis Course Descriptions

595 Thesis

In this thesis course, students complete a research project in adult education. The thesis generally follows a conventional, rigorous format that focuses on the research study begun in the ADED 560: Qualitative Research in Adult Education. The thesis usually involves original research with human subjects on a topic related to adult education. The thesis will require research ethics board approval, data collection and analysis, a narrative literature review, and an in-depth methodological discussion. The final thesis will be between 100-150 pages and will be subject to internal and external review prior to completion. Once completed, the thesis becomes part of the knowledge base in the broader field of research on adult education. Completion of the Tri-Council Policy Statement TCPS2 Tutorial: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) must be completed as part of this course. ADED 595 is graded as pass/fail. Credit will be granted for only one of ADED 595 and ADED 600. Twelve credits.

595A Thesis

In this first thesis course, students begin a research project building on the research study started in ADED 560. The thesis generally follows a conventional, rigorous format and often involves original research with human subjects on a topic related to adult education. For the course ADED 595A, students will complete the following initial thesis elements: a literature review chapter, a methodology chapter, and a research proposal.

595B Thesis

In this second thesis course, students complete the original research project started in ADED 560 and ADED 595A. The thesis generally follows a conventional, rigorous format, often with human subjects, on a topic related to adult education. For this course, students complete: REB application and approvals, data collection and analysis, completion, submission, and revision of a 100–150-page thesis

based on supervisor, internal, and external feedback. The final thesis becomes part of the adult education scholarship. Pass/fail.

- Students who began their thesis 2023-2025 are registered in ADED 595 (12 credits) as part-time students.
- Students who begin their thesis in 2026 and after can do their thesis as a full-time student registered in ADED 595 (12 credits) in 12 months, or as a part-time thesis student in two consecutive thesis courses: ADED 595A (6 credits, 9 months) and ADED 595B (6 credits, 9 months).

Resources at StFX

Academic Success Centre provides various academic and writing supports for students including asynchronous workshops and virtual one-on-one writing support. Students are strongly encouraged to use these resources during their thesis journey. StFX Academic Success Centre services can be accessed via their website:

<https://www.stfx.ca/student-services/academic-services/academic-success-centre>

StFX Libraries provide access to electronic and hard copy scholarship (books, ebooks, academic articles, etc.) significant to graduate student research. A Liaison Librarian is assigned to work with the Department of Adult Education and can provide student support and tips for searching for literature, such as refining one's search. The Adult Education Subject Guide on the library website can be a helpful focused resource. Library services can be accessed on the library websites:

<https://stfx.libguides.com/adulted> (Adult Education Subject Guide)

<https://www.stfx.ca/library>

Thesis Timeline

	Task
Phase 1 Intention & Thesis Application	Students submit their <i>Declaration to do Research</i> (Thesis) form to the Adult Education Department office (aesecret@stfx.ca) near the beginning of their second year in the program. Students who start in September must submit their <i>Declaration to do Research</i> (Thesis) form by September 15 of their second year in the program. Students who start in January must submit their <i>Declaration to do Research</i> (Thesis) form by December 15 of their first year in the program. Students who submit a <i>Declaration to do Research</i> (Thesis) form are encouraged to focus academic analytical assignments on their research interest area in the courses preceding the thesis phase.
	Students submit their thesis application including their draft thesis proposal, writing sample, and Researcher Reflection and Plan at the end of ADED 560: Qualitative Research in Adult Education The <i>Thesis Application Adjudication Committee</i> will meet to discuss the thesis applications and make recommendations on students to move forward to do a thesis. <u>Final approval for admission to the thesis route resides with the Chair and the Dean of Education.</u>
Phase 2 Proposal Development & Approval	Once the student has been invited to do a thesis, they will be assigned a thesis supervisor. Together they will discuss the thesis expectations, elements, and process including timeline as part-time or full-time thesis students.
	In collaboration with their thesis supervisor, the student develops their thesis activities timeline, proposal development, and submits a first draft of their thesis proposal.

	Students expand literature review and methodology sections of initial proposal into draft chapters of each for their thesis.
	Student revises and resubmits subsequent proposal drafts to their supervisor to develop the draft that will go for single-blind departmental review.
	The thesis supervisor sends out the proposal for a single-blind department review.
	Supervisor and student discuss feedback from review. Student incorporates feedback into their final thesis proposal.
Students who start their thesis after January 2026 and are doing it part-time complete ADED 595A Thesis here and continue Phases 3, 4, and 5 in ADED 595B Thesis	
Phase 3 Research Ethics Application	When the final proposal is complete, the student completes the REB application and shares the first draft of this application with their supervisor. Student revises their application as per review with their supervisor. The student completes and submits their Research Ethics application. For the REB application, the student must include their certificate of completion from the TCPS 2: CORE-2022 (Course on Research Ethics).
	Note that depending on the thesis topic and nature and location of the research, students may be required to submit to additional institutional Research Ethics Boards. (i.e., health boards, school boards etc.). Check REB website for monthly deadlines and ROME link. Note that the REB does not meet in July and August https://www.stfx.ca/research/research-ethics-board
	Make requested revisions to the Research Ethics application and resubmit, if required. Once all required revisions are made, the Research Ethics Board will grant approval.
	Apply for additional REB approval(s) as required.

Phase 4 Data Collection & Analysis	In consultation with your thesis supervisor, conduct your data collection.
	Analyze research data.
Phase 5 Thesis	Begin writing the thesis, start with an outline to share with your supervisor for discussion.
	Submit first draft of your thesis to your supervisor. The first draft should follow the writing guidelines in this document and in the latest APA manual.
	Revise and resubmit your thesis to your supervisor as required. This may take several rounds of revisions.
	Supervisor submits your thesis to the second (departmental) reviewer for review.
	Revise your thesis as per the feedback from the second (departmental) reviewer and resubmit to supervisor.
	Supervisor submits thesis to the external examiner.
	Revise thesis as per the feedback from the external examiner and resubmit thesis to your supervisor.
	After all revisions, submit a final electronic copy of the thesis to the Angus L. MacDonald Library via the StFX Scholar Graduate Thesis or Dissertation Deposit and complete the webform and non-exclusive licensing form. The committee completes the Graduate Thesis Approval Form. https://stfx.libguides.com/theses/depositinggradtheses

Roles And Responsibilities

Students and faculty have important roles and responsibilities in the thesis process. The following sections describe these roles in general. Each student and their thesis

supervisor will discuss how they will work together to best meet the needs of the student with the thesis expectations in mind.

Student's Role

Students interested in doing a thesis must ensure they meet the program requirements to do a thesis and submit a *Declaration to do Research* (Thesis) form to the Department of Adult Education at the beginning of their second year in the program. Students who start in **September** must submit their *Declaration to do Research* (Thesis) form by **September 15** of their second year in the program. Students who start in **January** must submit their *Declaration to do Research* (Thesis) form by **December 15** of their first year in the program. These dates align with the scheduling of the two required research courses for each cohort. Students who submit the Declaration to do Research (Thesis) form are encouraged to focus course work in the research courses, ADED 565 and ADED 560, on their thesis research interest.

Throughout the ADED 560: **Qualitative Research in Adult Education** course, students develop a draft thesis proposal to be submitted as part of their thesis application. The thesis application, including the (1) thesis proposal, (2) researcher reflection and plan and (3) a sample of academic writing from a course in the program, is submitted at the end of the course ADED 560. Thesis applications are sent to aesecret@stfx.ca by the due date aligned with ADED 560 and determined by the department chair.

While students must maintain an 85% average in the program to be eligible to do a thesis, this average grade alone does not guarantee that a student will be invited to complete a thesis. The recommendation for a student to move forward to do a thesis lies with the *Thesis Application Adjudication Committee*. Final approval for admission to the thesis route resides with the Chair and the Dean of Education. If a student is not invited to complete a thesis, then they will continue in the course-based program.

Researcher Reflection and Plan

This reflection and plan should be 1 page single-spaced, with one paragraph devoted to each section. This document is submitted with the draft research proposal and an academic writing sample, as part of your application to do a thesis.

In the first section, situate yourself as a novice researcher. You can use the following questions to help guide your reflection. Why do you want to conduct research in adult education? What excites you about the prospect of conducting research? How self-directed are you? What challenges do you anticipate facing, and how will you overcome these? What resources do you require from your supervisor?

In the second section, create a plan with goals and resources for program completion, including a timeline. When do you anticipate completing the REB application? Will your project require more than one REB application? When do you anticipate completing the literature review? When do you need to complete the field work? When do you anticipate graduating?

Faculty Roles

The Chair of the Department of Adult Education and one faculty member from the department make up the Thesis Proposal Review Committee.

For students invited to move forward with a thesis, the department chair will assign each student a thesis supervisor, in consultation with department faculty members. You may state a preference for an advisor. The Chair of the Department of Adult Education, in consultation with the Dean of the Faculty of Education, makes the final decision based on the faculty member's workload.

The supervisor contacts their thesis student(s) soon after the appointment is made.

Thesis Supervisor. The thesis supervisor works closely with the student, in a mutually negotiated way, through all four stages of the thesis process: the proposal, research ethics application (if applicable), research fieldwork and analysis, and thesis writing. The supervisor clarifies the process and provides ongoing support and feedback on thesis documents and drafts. The thesis supervisor arranges the second departmental reader and external reviewer.

Second (departmental) Reader. The second reader is a faculty member in the Department of Adult Education who reviews and provides feedback and suggestions for improvements on the completed draft thesis.

External Examiner. The external examiner is a person with a doctorate in adult education or equivalent, who is external to the Department of Adult Education at StFX and typically external to St. Francis Xavier University and has expertise in the subject matter/area of study of the thesis. The external examiner sends a summary of their comments to the thesis supervisor. The external examiner has at least one month to read and respond to the thesis before recommending that the thesis is accepted with no changes, accepted with revisions, or rejected.

Thesis Proposal

The thesis research proposal is a concisely written research study description and design that answers the “who, what, when, where, why, how long, and how” of the project. The proposal demonstrates that significant rigorous thought has been given to the research project, familiarity with relevant and current academic scholarship, and consideration of researcher positionality and research methodology, methods, ethics, and trustworthiness. The proposal should indicate the opportunity or gap in existing scholarship that the proposed research will address, and how this study will contribute to original research in the adult education field. The approximately 20-page (plus reference list and appendices) thesis proposal should be clearly and succinctly written so the supervisor can see exactly what the student intends to do.

The thesis proposal builds on the draft proposal completed in ADED 560: Qualitative Research in Adult Education and submitted as part of the thesis application. In consultation with their thesis supervisor, students will refine/expand their draft research proposal to create their final research proposal. Revisions at this stage might include integrating additional scholarship to support their literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and data collection and analysis methods sections.

The research proposal typically is comprised of the following elements.

Descriptive Title

The title should clearly specify the topic and setting so it is immediately clear **WHAT** and **WHO** will be studied. Typically, titles reference the research methodology (narrative inquiry, autoethnography, etc.)

Research Interest, Purpose, & Rationale

- What issues/gaps/problems brought you to that interest(s)? (share that story)
- What's the purpose of your study?
- What gaps in the published research (knowledge) provide a rationale for this study
- The specific question/problem/issue I want to work on is ...
- I will study this using this methodology...
- I expect to collect information (data) using some of the following methods...
- When it is finished, I will be able to see that my project has made a difference, added something new to what is known in this area, or did something of what I had hoped, because ...

Context

The setting for the research study should be described and some pertinent background

offered on the topic and setting.

- What's the broader context of your research?
- What background information about this setting is vital to explaining the research topic?

Key Research Questions and Core Guiding Terms/Concepts

- What are 1-2 core over-arching research questions guiding your curiosity in the research you wish to explore?
- **How is adult learning a focus in the overarching question?**
- What are the 2-3 sub-questions that focus your research? For example:
Overarching question: What is the learning experience of older women in community-based fitness programs?

Examples of Sub-questions:

- What influences shape women's views about their participation in community-based fitness programs over time (socio-cultural-political)?
- Have women's views about participation in community-based fitness programs changed over time and has this learning been transformative in some way, and if so, how?
- What key terms/concepts might you need to define and contextualize?

Positionality as a Practitioner-Researcher

Describe who you are in relation to the social and political context of the research study.

What is your relation to this community, organization, or group?

- Who are you in this research, and how do you conceptualize your positionality as a researcher? (share that story)
- In what ways might your positionality inform your research and research relationships (e.g., with participants, community, colleagues as applicable)?
- How might you attend to those considerations ethically and transparently?

Relevant Literature and Theoretical Orientation/Framework

The literature review should be an extensive and comprehensive literature review that summarizes pertinent points from the literature reviewed thus far and provides a rationale for why this research is needed. Out of this literature, you need to describe the theoretical framework framing the study and how the literature will be used to analyze the data.

- What key theories or assumptions will inform the research, data analysis, and conclusions? The theoretical orientation/frameworks or worldviews that guide research may be explicitly stated (e.g., “this research is informed by antiracism theory” or “this research draws on transformative learning theory”), or implicitly articulated through a researcher’s choices regarding their research questions, methods, design, data collection, analysis, etc.

Methodology and Rationale

Explain the methodology you have chosen and the rationale (using relevant research methodology literature) for why it is the most appropriate methodology for the research study.

Methods

Here you describe the site being accessed as well as processes for seeking site access, participant selection criteria and process, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

Trustworthiness

Describe your provisions for ensuring the trustworthiness of your findings.

Ethical Issues and Provisions

All the provisions that will ensure ethical issues are being anticipated and responded to must be described. See below for details.

Educational Significance

In this section, describe how the findings will be disseminated and address how this study might:

- build on, add to, or challenge existing adult education literature and research.
- improve your practice and/or work situation.
- provide you with an opportunity for personal and/or professional growth.

References

In this section, provide all the references for the work cited using APA (7th ed.) format.

Appendices

You must attach all your ethics forms including invitations to participate, consent forms, letters requesting site access, interview questions, draft communication scripts, TCP tutorial completion certificate, etc.

Research Ethics

StFX Research Ethics Board

Once their research proposal is finalized, students work with their supervisor to determine if and when they need to submit the ethics application to the StFX Research Ethics Board (REB).

StFX REB Website: <https://www.stfx.ca/research/research-ethics-board>

StFX ROMEO Website: <https://www.stfx.ca/research/research-services-group/romeo-researcher-portal>

Students must create an account in the StFX ROMEO Research Portal. Here students click on Apply New and start a Research Ethics Board Application. Follow all research

application instructions closely and use the templates (Invitation to Participate, Consent Form, etc.) provided. St. Francis Xavier University requires all students to fully inform their research participants what the research project involves and to gain participants' verbal or written consent to participate, per Tri-Council policies. As the board is multidisciplinary, all applications should use lay language as much as possible.

Once complete, including all attachments, students share their REB application to their supervisor for review before submitting to the REB for feedback. In ROMEo students can download a Word or PDF copy of their application to share with their supervisor. Students are required to add their thesis supervisor to their REB application in Romeo.

The REB submission monthly deadlines are posted on the StFX REB website. The REB committee meets monthly to review applications. They do not meet in July and August.

Students will usually be advised of the decision of the REB within a few weeks, but this timeline will vary depending on the time of year. The REB will communicate its decision to students directly. It is quite common for the REB to request changes, which students carry out and resubmit to the REB, before the research study may commence. Minor changes are reviewed by the REB chair, while major changes are reviewed by the entire REB.

Once students have REB approval they can move forward with their project activities requiring REB approval, such as recruitment and interviews with research participants.

Additional Research Ethics

Depending on research participants, communities, and the context/setting of their research, students may need to apply for additional research ethics. This will be determined in consultation with their supervisor.

Students intending to do research with Indigenous communities must check with the Indigenous community for their research protocols and follow them as well.

Once students have received StFX REB approval, and additional research ethics approvals as required, they can move forward with their research.

Thesis Writing Overview

While there are generally accepted conventions for compiling and writing a thesis, these conventions are not a recipe or a rulebook. The guidelines below are one way of organizing a master thesis. Students, in consultation with their supervisor, must still determine what is best for them as it relates to the nature of their study. Successful completion of a thesis requires a serious commitment of time and energy. It is the role of the faculty supervisor to help students write theses that meet high academic standards in readiness for the review by the Second (departmental) Reader and External Examiner and that also satisfies each student's learning and research goals. This usually requires very short and firm deadlines to work on revisions before the next stage of submission. Most theses go through four or five drafts. Some take fewer drafts; many require more. Final approval rests on the clarity of writing, content, theoretical depth of material, methodological rigour, demonstration of significant impact, and the writer's ability to weave it all together. The supervisor inevitably will require changes before the thesis can be presented first to the Second (departmental) Reader, again requiring changes. Then, the thesis is sent to an External Examiner, who has one month to review the thesis and provide a review. This review process ensures that the thesis meets scholarly standards and adheres to generally accepted criteria for quality research. The three examiners have the responsibility to request changes if they feel that the thesis does not fully adhere to these criteria. Finally, to the StFX Committee on Graduate Studies (CGS) for approval.

The theses are assessed on a Pass or Fail basis.

Thesis Guidelines

Confidentiality

The master thesis is a public document. Following the Research Ethics guidelines and to avoid potential problems, students are advised to avoid identifying institutions, businesses, and people by name. If geographical information will compromise confidentiality, students should also avoid identifying this. Use fictitious names and then identify this fact in parentheses in the thesis the first time that this occurs (e.g., “Fictitious names for people and organizations are used throughout to protect identities.”).

Thesis Length and Appendices

The main text of the thesis is generally about 100-150 pages long, double-spaced. It should incorporate 40–60 reference citations. The Reference List and Appendices follow the main text. Appendices should comprise only material that cannot be usefully or easily accommodated within the main text, such as interview schedules, interview guides, curriculum outlines, invitations to participate, and REB approval. Use original text and not photocopies in your appendices. Generally, appendices should constitute no more than 10% of the total number of pages, although there may be exceptions.

APA Exceptions for the Thesis

APA style (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th ed.), must be adhered to closely. Our exceptions to APA include, but may not be limited to the following:

- No running headers are required.
- Page numbering starts *after* the title page.
- Reference lists should be single-spaced, with double-spacing between citations.

Students who wish to print and bind their thesis should set the page margins to one inch for the top, bottom, and right sides, and 1.5 inches on the left side, for binding purposes. This is not required for submitting the thesis to StFX Scholar.

Refining Your Writing

The process can be long and demanding and requires students to be strong academic writers. Do not hesitate to use the support of the StFX Academic Success Centre, an editor, or a colleague to proofread and critique your work. This does not include the usage of an AI editor. Even the best and most famous writers regularly use editors. An editor improves the flow and readability by recommending changes in style and structure. Ask that person to look for such things as the logic of content, presentation of ideas (e.g., smoothness, transition, precision, and clarity), grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Remember, the entire thesis should read as a whole, not as a compilation of sections.

Thesis Outline Guide

This outline is intended to be *suggestive only*. Not all the suggested categories are necessary or appropriate for all studies, and the order of items within chapters (or the number of chapters) may vary somewhat. Please consult recent theses completed in this department which can serve as a guide. Students can access student theses through the StFX Library. Please note that current referencing rules, editing styles, and formatting may have changed from when the thesis was prepared. Also, students are encouraged to consult with their supervisor on current guidelines. A sample title page and Table of Contents are provided at the end of this document as a guide for content, layout, and typeface.

The thesis is usually written in this order: Table of Contents (headings); Chapters 1, 3, 2, 4 and 5. The abstract is written after the whole thesis is complete but appears before the Table of Contents.

Abstract

This should be a summary or condensation of the thesis and should state the problem or focus of the inquiry, the literature, the methods, the most important findings, and implications or recommendations. The abstract is 250 words maximum.

Table of Contents

This must list all the main divisions of the thesis as well as the subdivisions, references, appendices, and of course, introductory sections (Table of Contents, List of Tables, and List of Figures). Page numbers must be inserted in a continuous manner throughout the entire document. A template for the Table of Contents is provided after this outline.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This may be entitled **The Problem** or **The Focus of the Inquiry**, or some other appropriate, descriptive, and succinct academic title. Chapter 1 should deal with the following kinds of topics, in the order that is most intelligible to the reader, and most appropriate for your study. The recommended length of this chapter is approximately 15 pages, double-spaced.

Untitled Introductory Paragraph(s)

This is a brief statement in one or a few paragraph(s) to introduce the thesis topic, the practitioner focus, and to orient the reader toward better understanding the rest of the thesis. Usually, this paragraph describes what the research is all about and why the topic is significant to the field of adult education.

Background to the Study

This provides a setting that enables the student to state the focus of their inquiry in a way that is meaningful to a reader assumed not to be familiar with the area. It should not be a

full-fledged discussion of definitions or a review of the entire literature around the stated problem but may well cite especially illuminating expositions or conceptions of the problem (e.g., educational trends related to the problem, unresolved issues, social or organizational concerns). It should also situate the student's study within the geographic and/or work setting.

The Problem or the Focus of Inquiry

Provide a concise statement of the problem situation (such as basic difficulty, area of concern, learners' or organization's felt needs), perhaps in general terms first, and then more specifically. It may be stated in a form such as, *"The main issue I seek to address in this study is how to facilitate transfer of learning for health care employees."* It may also be phrased as a question or a series of questions, for example, *"In this study, I focus on the following questions: ..."* However, in stating the problem, the student should not get too specific until they have taken the reader to the point where it is clear why they claim that specific questions need answering or specific interests need investigating. In this section, the student should focus on the problem, not on solutions or the study's purpose.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose provides a goal-oriented statement of the study's intended outcomes. It should emphasize practical outcomes or products. Begin with a general interest statement or question, then, be specific. Be concrete and clear, making sure the researcher's interests and issue(s) are clearly stated and of a manageable scope, for example, *"The purpose of my study is to improve my professional development practice of facilitation."* What is it that the researcher wants to tell others about their work? Remember, the thesis will be a public document. The purpose should provide a statement of how the researcher intends to pursue a solution or provide further illumination to the goal statement. The overarching research question can be shared here, along with the sub-questions.

Scope of the Study (optional)

This section emphasizes the main focus and explains the breadth of the thesis. The scope answers questions such as how many people were involved, for how long, and in how many different settings.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study (in place of Scope)

Delimitations outline how the study was narrowed, and *limitations* outline potential weaknesses of the study, for example, reduced generalizability or other potential interpretations. Often these limitations are expanded on in the last chapter. For delimitations, the student can discuss if they arbitrarily narrowed the scope of their study. Did they focus only on selected facets of the problem, certain participants, certain areas of interest, a limited range of subjects, and a certain level of sophistication? Provide a statement of restrictions (e.g., it is conducted with female nurses only, in a small rural area, and is restricted to non-urban facilities; it emphasizes individual transfer of learning but not impact for the whole organization). Clearly describe the kinds of people and the special conditions that make this study unique.

Positionality and Assumptions

Researchers need to recognize their entry points and locations concerning their area of study. Some researchers find it pertinent to discuss their class, social or professional position, race or ethnicity, and gender in relation to the research topic. The student may also choose to discuss what assumptions have they made about the nature of the project, about the conditions under which the project occurs, about their methods and measurements, about their personal values, or about the persons and situations involved. For example, *“I assumed that focus groups and interviews were an effective means of determining whether teaching and learning styles were well matched,”* or, *“I assumed that participants would trust the educational process.”*

Definition of Terms

Explain any key terms or concepts used in the thesis. List and define the principal terms you used, particularly if the terms have different meanings within the field. Reference to a technical definition is often helpful, along with a quotation from the literature. Be sure that you define terms in the precise sense in which they are used in the study.

Research Methodology

Explain to the reader what research methodology and specific methods of data collection and analysis were used. It is important to justify why this methodology and these methods and techniques were selected for this study.

Overview

Tell the reader how and in what order the text of the thesis is developed. In a sentence or two tell what each chapter and major section essentially says to the reader. For the first chapter, just say, *“Following this introduction, in Chapter 1 I provide the ...”* Do not merely list topics for the upcoming chapters. Rather, give a reason or purpose for your choosing your topics. In the literature review, for example, ask yourself why you chose to survey “Instructional Methods” or “Models of Evaluation.” What does each topic contribute to your overall purpose?

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

This chapter contains a brief overview of who has written what, that bears on the inquiry. The literature review specifically establishes the theoretical framework for the study and the methods used. In this chapter, the student locates the research work in the larger field of adult education and specifically focuses on your area and aspect (e.g., nursing education and program design). Do not just cite ideas, procedures, and findings; be comparative and critical yet be sure that those you cite are relevant and current to this study. The recommended length of this chapter approximately is 25 pages, double-spaced.

To decide what literature to include in this chapter, review the area and aspect of this study. If the area is continuing professional education (CPE) then the literature review needs to contain a section on CPE. If the aspect is planning programs, then the literature review needs to address this topic. Providing relevant literature on adult education will ensure that the thesis contributes not only to the student's specific area (e.g., health education, nutrition education) but also to the field of adult education. It makes sense to begin in adult education since this is the focus of the program, but again this is often determined by the nature of the study.

Take the stance of a critical journalist reporting on the existing literature. In a sense, this chapter is a report on "what is known" in a systematic framework. The critiquing should be from published literature, not personal opinions. Arrange your survey in some meaningful order—not necessarily in chronological order. Ensure that the recent literature is included but you may want to recognize the debt to and significance of early theorists and foundational texts, e.g., a literature review of experiential learning would be incomplete without reference to Dewey and Lindeman. Arrange themes and sub-themes in sections and subsections, each devoted to a different facet of the inquiry and, of course, aspects considered for generating knowledge and/or change. *Always keep the reader in mind.*

The chapter closes with a summary of the research reviewed. Remind the reader of the focus of the research/inquiry and, if possible, identify the gaps in the literature that this research seeks to address. Students may also wish to provide their theoretical framework at the end of this chapter. This provides the transition to Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology of the Study

In this chapter, students describe in detail the methodology they chose as most appropriate for this study as well as their research methods, such as their ethics approval process; and any adjustments made during the study, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and provisions for ensuring the trustworthiness (validity),

dependability (reliability), and transferability (generalizability) of their findings. If students used a specific process for facilitating a workshop, they would describe this process in this section. The recommended length of this chapter is approximately 15 pages, double-spaced.

Chapter 4: Findings

Here, students describe their research findings. Describe what is called the *first-level findings* or the *descriptive findings*. However, most of the analysis, interpretation, and critique will occur in the next chapter. Recommended length approximately 30 pages, double spaced.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter, students present their critical analysis of the findings that emerged and interpretations of what these findings mean. Here, students return to their original purpose statement, research questions and literature review to integrate the new knowledge they have generated. The recommended length of this chapter is approximately 20 pages, double spaced.

It is often helpful to begin by re-stating the purpose from Chapter 1. How does the study, as informed by the literature, either support, challenge, and/or extend the literature as reviewed in Chapter 2. Students want to show how what they did (a) builds upon the literature or adds to the existing literature, and (b) is consistent with others' findings, differs from them, or whether it opens new possibilities.

The second task is to present their findings, discussing each in depth. The third task, then, is to connect these findings to and interpret them through the literature and theoretical framework.

Relate the study and its findings to Chapter 2 literature on (a) *area* (e.g., health education, literacy); (b) *aspect* (e.g., facilitation, evaluation, program planning); and (c) *adult learning*

—the student's and participants' (e.g., identifiable teachable moments, perspective transformation).

Chapter 6 Significance and Conclusions

The closing chapter consists of a summary, the significance of the study in connection with the existing literature, conclusions, and recommendations from the student's perspective. The student wants to tell the reader how and why their study is significant to their practice and the field of adult education. It is here where the student makes their statement—or articulates a special meaning – in light of what they did.

This section provides the *summary* and *conclusions* and based on these it gives *implications* for the student's practice and the field of adult education generally. The conclusions must be based on the research data and should be a logical extension of the discussion. Is there a useful set of principles, models, or new knowledge the student wishes to convey?

Finally, the student should acknowledge any limitations of the study. If appropriate, the student can include their recommendations for practice and further research. This should be succinct and should flow from the conclusions and implications.

The closing paragraph (or two) should be brief and bring the reader back to the student and their practice. Work on an encapsulating statement of how the study has affected the student's everyday professional practice and/or how they anticipate their study will affect their practice in the future. Identify future research questions or lines of inquiry. This creates symmetry with the first chapter and reinforces the holistic nature of this thesis.

Sample Title Page

FACILITATING CRITICAL THINKING AND REFLECTION
IN A CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR NURSES

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ADULT EDUCATION

BY

Insert student's name

APPROVED BY:

SUPERVISOR: *insert name*

SECOND READER: *insert name*

EXTERNAL EXAMINER: *insert name*

EXAMINER'S INSTITUTION: *insert external's
institute.*

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY

ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

MONTH, YEAR

Sample Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
 1. INTRODUCTION	 7
Background to Study.....	8
Statement of Problem.....	12
Purpose of the Study	13
Research Questions	15
Positionality	
Definitions.....	
Scope	
Methodological Issues.....	
Delimitations and Limitations.....	
 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	
 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
Research Plan / Context	
Site Selection.....	
Participant Selection.....	
Research Methods.....	
Data Collection	
Data Analysis.....	
Trustworthiness of Findings	
Ethics Process.....	
 4. PROJECT FINDINGS.....	
1. Finding One:	
2. Finding Two:.....	
3. Finding Three:.....	
 5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS	
Limitations	
Recommendations for Practice	
New Research Directions.....	
Conclusion and Implications.....	
 References	
Appendix A	
Appendix B	

Sample Layout for Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND ITS CONTEXT	1
Background to the Study	7
The Focus of Inquiry	15
Purpose of the Study	
Scope of the Study	
Limitations of the Study	
Assumptions	
Research Design	
Definitions	
Plan of Presentation	
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	
Foundations of Adult Education	
Perspectives of Adult Education	
Adult Learning Theories	
Self-directed learning	
Life-long learning	
Transformative learning	
Experiential learning	
Situating Learning	
Theories of situated learning	
Applications in adult education	
Applications to employment development	
Employment Development and Planning	
Theories of Employment Development	
Social Learning Theories	
Developmental Career Theory	
Summary	
3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY	
Planning the Study	
Selecting Participants	
Selecting and Designing Instruments	
The Data Collection	
Process	

Note that these are
right-aligned **dot
leader tabs**, not
periods and spaces.

Note that in this
thesis, methods
and findings are
in one chapter

	The Findings.....
	Finding 1.....
	Finding 2.....
	Finding 3.....
4.	DISCUSSION OF THE OUTCOMES, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....
	Connecting Purpose to Methods and Results.....
	The Value of Employment Portfolios for the Transition to Work.....
	For employment services managers
	For immigrants and refugees
	For literacy learners.....
	The Value of Portfolios for Employment Planning
	Critiquing Survey Design.....
	Conclusions
	Recommendations
References	
Appendices	
	Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire.....
	Appendix B: Employment Services Survey Questionnaire
	Appendix C: REB Approval Certificate

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1:	Participants’ Responses to Program Selection Methods
Table 2:	Employers; Opinions on the Value of Newly Transitioned Employees’ Sense of Efficacy
Table 3:	Program Participants’ Opinion of Their Own Skill Abilities.....
Table 4:	Employees’ Responses to the Program
Figure 1:	Participant Rendering of her Journey through the Portfolio Process.....

References

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

[See also <http://www.apastyle.org>]

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix A - Thesis Timeline Tracker

	Task	Date Completed
Phase 1 Intention & Thesis Application	Students submit their <i>Declaration to do Research (Thesis)</i> form to the Adult Education Department office (aesecret@stfx.ca) near the beginning of their second year in the program. Students who start in September must submit their <i>Declaration to do Research (Thesis)</i> form by September 15 of their second year in the program. Students who start in January must submit their Declaration to do Research (Thesis) form by December 15 of their first year in the program. Students interested in doing a thesis and students who submit a <i>Declaration to do Research</i> form are encouraged to focus academic analytical assignments on their research interest area.	
	Students submit their thesis application including the draft thesis proposal, writing sample, and Researcher Reflection and Plan at the end of ADED 560: Qualitative Research in Adult Education The Thesis Application Adjudication Committee will meet to discuss the thesis applications. Final approval for admission to the thesis route resides with the Chair and the Dean of Education.	
Phase 2	Once the student has been invited to do a thesis, they will be assigned a thesis supervisor. Together they will discuss the thesis expectations, elements, and process, and develop an activities timeline.	

Proposal Development & Approval	Students expand literature review and methodology sections of initial proposal into draft chapters of each for their thesis.	
	Student revises and resubmits subsequent proposal drafts to their supervisor to develop the draft that will go for single-blind departmental review.	
	The thesis supervisor sends out the proposal for a single-blind department review.	
	Supervisor and student discuss feedback from review. Student incorporates feedback into their final thesis proposal.	
Students who start their thesis after January 2026 and are doing it part-time complete ADED 595A Thesis here and continue Phases 3, 4, and 5 in ADED 595B Thesis		
Phase 3 Research Ethics Application	When the final proposal is complete, the student completes the REB application and shares the first draft of this application with their supervisor. Student revises their application as per review with their supervisor. The student completes and submits their Research Ethics application. For the REB application, the student must include their certificate of completion from the TCPS 2: CORE-2022 (Course on Research Ethics). Note that depending on the thesis topic, students may be required to submit to additional institutional Research Ethics Boards. Check REB website for monthly deadlines and ROMEO link. Note that the REB does not meet in July and August https://www.stfx.ca/research/research-ethics-board	
	Make requested revisions to the Research Ethics application and resubmit, if required. Once all required revisions are made, the Research Ethics Board will grant approval.	

	Apply for additional REB approval(s) as required.	
Phase 4 Data Collection & Analysis	In consultation with your thesis supervisor, conduct your data collection.	
	Analyze research data.	
Phase 5 Thesis	Begin writing the thesis, start with an outline to share with your supervisor for discussion.	
	Submit first draft of your thesis to your supervisor. The first draft should follow the writing guidelines in this document and in the latest APA manual.	
	Revise and resubmit your thesis to your supervisor as required. This may take several rounds of revisions.	
	Supervisor submits your thesis to the second (departmental) reviewer for review.	
	Revise your thesis as per the feedback from the second (departmental) reviewer and resubmit to supervisor.	
	Supervisor submits thesis to the external examiner.	
	Revise thesis as per the feedback from the external examiner and resubmit thesis to your supervisor.	
	After all revisions, submit a final electronic copy of the thesis to the Angus L. MacDonald Library via the StFX Scholar Graduate Thesis or Dissertation Deposit and complete the webform and non-exclusive licensing form. The committee completes the Graduate Thesis Approval Form. https://stfx.libguides.com/theses/depositinggradtheses	