

Guide to Research and Writing in the Humanities

How to Find and Research a Thesis or Creative
Project Topic

How to Prepare a Successful Proposal to Begin the
HUX 598 Course

**Humanities Master of Arts Degree Program (HUX)
College of Extended and International Education
California State University, Dominguez Hills**



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Guide prepared by Dr. Jim Jeffers, 2007.

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is intended to help you understand and navigate the process from finding a topic for your final thesis or creative project for HUX to submitting a proposal and contract for acceptance into the HUX 598: Final Project Proposal course. This is the first step of the Phase III process (described below). **Be sure to read this guide in its entirety before you begin developing a thesis topic.**

Overview of the Thesis/Creative Project Process

The final phase of your HUX degree is called Phase III or the Capstone Experience phase. In it you write and/or create your final thesis or creative project. This process has three distinct steps, each of which must be completed before the next can be begun.

1. HUX 598 Proposal. The first step, with which this guide is concerned, is to find a workable topic and put together a proposal that one of our faculty will agree to mentor. As explained below, you need to do a certain amount of research to determine whether or not you can turn your idea into an acceptable thesis or project.

2. HUX 598 Course. The second step is to refine the proposal begun in step 1 so that by the time you enroll in HUX 599, you know exactly how to proceed in writing the thesis. Many students finish their research during the 598 course so that they can focus on writing in the 599 course (though this is not required). Students doing a creative project usually finish the academic portion of their final work, or at least all of the research for it, at this stage.

3. HUX 599 Course. The final step is to write and revise the thesis (or to do the creative work which is the largest part of the creative project). As challenging as finding a topic and doing the research are, with very few exceptions students find writing the thesis the hardest and longest part of the process.

Required Elements of the pre-HUX 598 Thesis/Project Proposal

The proposal you submit along with the HUX 598 contract must include the following:

a) A brief description (one page) of your proposed project, including its central argument. Indicate on which discipline of the humanities you are focusing (Curriculum B; Disciplinary track), or on which two disciplines you will focus (Curriculum A: Interdisciplinary track). Include also the theoretical methodology you intend to employ.

b) Preliminary outline of the thesis/project, presented in complete sentences (not bullet points).

c) Bibliography including at least five sources. Include the full bibliographic reference and a brief synopsis of each source. Your sources should be recent, and if possible should include at least one pertinent professional journal article.

If you have a mentor in mind, include the name of the professor who has agreed to mentor or look at your proposal, or (*not on the contract*) the name of the mentor you want us to approach. Please note that we may have to send your proposal to a different mentor than the one you request for a variety of reasons such as availability

and expertise. Look at the faculty page on the HUX website for information about faculty expertise.

Purpose of the Pre-HUX 598 Thesis/Project Proposal

The purpose of this guide, and of the pre-HUX 598 proposal process, is to help you realize what it takes to develop a workable and useful thesis topic, and to help you succeed in developing it.

Students understandably question the purpose of submitting a proposal in order to enter a proposal preparation course. HUX 598 is designed to help you prepare a formal proposal and plan for your final thesis or project, so that you are ready to write your thesis by the time you enroll in HUX 599. You will submit a copy of the formal proposal that you produce in the 598 course with your HUX 599 course contract. This proposal becomes your way of attracting three professors to work with your thesis or project.

So why do we make you submit a proposal to develop a proposal? Why don't we allow students to enroll in 598 and figure out their topic and write their proposal during that term? We require a HUX 598 proposal for the following reasons:

1. We have discovered that most HUX students need the full 15 weeks of HUX 598 to learn how to do research, to refine their approved topic, to do their basic research, and to be ready to begin writing the final work. They need a good, approved proposal going into HUX 598 so that they have time to do all this. Many students' undergraduate degree was not in their HUX field of emphasis. Many do not have strong backgrounds in humanities research. And most have never had to do a project as involved and demanding as a master's thesis or creative project. Most students need to do 10-20% of their eventual research work before they can settle on a good topic. It takes time and effort to make sure that enough resources are available to

allow them to complete the work eventually, and to understand what has and hasn't already been done by researchers so that they don't duplicate the efforts of others or take on a task that is too monumental.

2. Just finding an appropriate topic for a master's thesis requires more work than you probably realize at this point. As you will see from the section below on developing a topic, it is not as simple as asking: "What interests me? What do I want to learn more about?" Neither you nor a potential faculty mentor will be able to judge fully the merit of your topic until you have done some preliminary research, and this needs to happen prior to enrolling in 598. What if you discovered after enrolling in 598 that your topic was unworkable and you had to start over? We want to help you avoid such a calamity by making sure that, going into the 598, you have a solid, workable topic and approach. Helping you find a good topic is the main purpose of this guide.

3. In order to help you find the right faculty mentor we need to know your topic. Many HUX students need help formulating a topic that is properly focused and appropriate to the disciplines of the Humanities. The HUX Coordinator looks at all 598 proposals before sending them to faculty, and may ask you to revise your proposal before approaching potential mentors on your behalf. We expect you to follow the instructions in this guide as you prepare your proposal. They are not merely suggestions! If you do not address all points below satisfactorily, we will return the proposal for revision.

4. A HUX professor will have to agree to mentor your 598 course and guide your development of the formal thesis or project proposal before the course can begin. The

better conceived and better developed the initial proposal, the more likely it is to be accepted by the first professor who sees it. The proposal then is an official agreement between you and your mentor about what your thesis will and will not be. Be sure to keep a copy of your proposal.

What Makes for an Appropriate Topic?

Before you begin to brainstorm possible thesis or project topics, and begin to develop a list of topics (see next section), you need to understand the principles below.

1. What makes for a good master's thesis or creative project topic?

Certainly you want to pick a topic that is so interesting to you that you can keep your interest in it for the time it takes to finish it. But personal interest in the topic is not enough to insure that it's a good topic.

Your thesis should attempt to make a useful contribution to scholarship. It should be sufficiently distinct from what anyone else has written in order to justify its coming into existence. That doesn't mean that it has to be earth-shaking in its significance. Scholarship sometimes proceeds by leaps and bounds, but usually it proceeds by small, careful steps. In fact, if you come up with an idea that is quite different from what any scholar in your field has said, it's more likely than not that your idea is not sustainable based on the evidence that's available.

A creative project needs to be a worthwhile contribution to its creative field, but it does not need to amaze and astound the world of art or music, for example.

2. The intended audience of your thesis or project

You need to understand the intended audience of your thesis before you can research and write it. Your audience is the scholars (or scholar/artists in the case of creative projects) working in the discipline(s), and more specifically in the area of your topic. You are entering into a dialogue between scholars. Below we will look at the various implications of this for how you focus your topic.

Students naturally assume that the academic books they've read in their field are an appropriate model for how to construct a scholarly thesis (apart from being much longer than a thesis). This is for the most part not true. Most of the academic books you've read, even the texts in many HUX courses, were intended for a popular audience. Publishers assume that a popular-level audience will simply not read a book containing the level of documentation and argumentation which scholars in a given field demand of each other. The tone and audience of a published book is set by the publisher, not by the author. Books by highly respected scholars are usually intended for a popular audience. Later we will see how to spot a book written by a scholar for other scholars (called a "monograph"), and where to find other, more appropriate models for your thesis.

3. What a creative project is and is not

If you have received prior approval to enter the Creative Track, and are planning a creative project, bear in mind that for the most part the Creative Track is available only in the disciplines of art, music, and literature. If you have not been admitted to the Creative Track by the time you are ready to start your capstone work, it is too late to propose a creative project. A creative project is a combination of a creative work

and a written, scholarly component that places the creative work in its appropriate contexts and explains the directions you took with the work.

Our use of the word “creative” does not mean that you can do any project that you consider “creative.” Your topic most likely will not be approved unless the creative work is within an area normally considered to be art, or literary composition, or musical composition. Information on the Creative Track is available at:

www.csudh.edu/hux/creative.html. See below for more on the Creative Project.

4. Humanities v. social science and other academic fields

As you consider potential topics, bear in mind that your degree will be in the humanities, not in the social sciences, education, or any other field. Your thesis should build naturally on topics in your courses, or at the very least on the methods and approaches of the humanities. Ideally the courses you took in HUX should have helped equip you to do your thesis. If your proposed topic has no relationship to any of your HUX courses, even tangentially, there is a good chance that it won't be approved. To write a thesis on how to teach history to elementary children, or on the psychological impact of war on soldiers, is to stray away from the humanities. The HUX program cannot approve topics that would more naturally belong in other academic disciplines.

How can you tell if your topic is appropriate to the humanities? Think back on the topics and approaches in your HUX courses as well as in undergraduate humanities courses you took and ask yourself if your idea is consistent with them. The humanities are about how we approach life, how we think about the world around us, and about what others have said and written concerning life and its issues.

They do not attempt to prescribe future actions, nor focus on the development of skills. They generally focus more on qualitative measurements than on quantitative ones, though the use of statistics and measurements may be appropriate. It is more a question of emphasis. It's not that the humanities are impractical per se, but rather that their focus is on preparing one to think clearly and fairly about a topic so that one can make good decisions and develop good techniques. You could for example do a thesis that makes an argument based on comparing two philosophical approaches to organizing human society, but not a thesis that argues for how the United States should formulate public policy. In general students who are focusing on history have more trouble with this limitation, because the discipline of history has for the last century had one foot in the humanities and one in the social sciences.

Your thesis or project also needs to have a specific disciplinary focus in one of the five disciplines of our program. Even if you are following Curriculum A and are doing a multi-disciplinary thesis, your thesis still must identify one discipline as primary. Your faculty mentor will come from this discipline and will expect your work to apply theoretical methods and approaches principally from that discipline.

5. The narrow focus of a thesis

The focus of your master's thesis needs to be fairly narrow—considerably more narrow than the focus of most books you have read, even accounting for the difference in length. That is because when you write for other scholars in your field, you must document and argue every point you make very carefully and fully. It will take much longer to establish any point than is taken by most textbooks you have read.

This reality frequently clashes with the desire of students to write a thesis that answers some “big question” they have about life. We understand that study in the humanities sparks such big questions, and one of our goals as educators is to encourage you to pursue a life of humanistic inquiry. But you may need to see your thesis as only a small step in that process. Below we encourage you to consult appropriate academic journals both to establish the state of research on your topic, as well as to see the best models available for how to construct a master’s thesis. They will show you the kind of narrow focus that is necessary to truly advance our understanding of a topic.

6. The expertise of HUX faculty

A limitation on what topics you may pursue is the expertise and interests of our faculty. As is generally true of graduate programs, we do not assign HUX faculty to mentor final theses and projects. They must volunteer to do so. A professor will not agree to mentor your topic unless he or she feels qualified to do so. See the HUX faculty webpage (www.csudh.edu/hux/faculty.html) for this information. Contact the HUX office for a printed summary of HUX faculty expertise and interests if you cannot access our website.

Develop a List of Possible Topics

With the definitions and limitations above in mind, begin brainstorming topics. Your first goal is to develop a list of four or five viable topics ranked in order of preference that you can take to the next stage of research. At any point in this process,

feel free to contact the HUX Coordinator to make sure that your ideas are on track. But note that if you only have a one- or two-sentence topic description, the coordinator will not be able to give you much help. He or she may not be able to tell you more than whether or not the topic is ruled out by the issues mentioned above.

NOTE: You will need to understand the information in “Essential Elements in a Work of Research” later in this guide as you begin to focus and research your topic idea.

1. Start with topics in your primary discipline that interest you. Perhaps a paper you wrote sparked your interest in a topic that seems to deserve further thought. Jot down possible topics. As you do some research, some of your topics will prove to be “dead ends” for several reasons: your ideas have already been thoroughly explored, or there is insufficient data to make the argument you want to make, or you do not possess the foreign language skills necessary to pursue your topic adequately. Assemble a list of at least four or five possible topics, and rank them according to your level of interest.

2. You may want to take a look at the titles of HUX theses. They will show you the kind of topics that we have approved, and they will give you ideas about how to focus your topic. You will not want to write on one of those exact topics, of course. But the exercise may stimulate your thinking. You can view completed HUX theses by going to the CSUDH Online Reference Shelf (<http://library.csudh.edu/RefDatabases/RefdatabaseGuide.htm>) and selecting Dissertations and Master Theses. Read “Finding Research Resources” below to learn how to access this resource.

3. Browse books in the appropriate fields and topics at a library or a big bookstore. See what subtopics exist within this general topic. Does one of them spark your interest? The point is not to read the books, per se, but to get ideas. You may want to consult the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (the printed version comes in five red volumes) for further inspiration. You can access this resource online through the CSUDH library: <http://library.csudh.edu/inntext/d.php>. Here you will find topics broken down into several components. This tells you what scholarly topics are included in the general topic, and will guide you to specific books via the library's card catalog or electronic database. See the CSUDH library's Subject Research Guide online for help with subject research in a variety of fields (<http://library.csudh.edu/subjectguide.htm>).

4. Keep your options open. Do not become “wedded” to any topic at this point. Your topics list represents areas of interest, not formal topics, because your thesis topic will have to be more narrowly focused and thoroughly researched and argued than you are probably yet able to realize. Your preferred topic may well prove unworkable for one of many reasons (e.g., it has been so worked over that there's really nothing you could contribute to scholarship, there's not enough evidence available to properly do the topic, you don't possess the foreign language ability or other technical skill required to do the topic justice, etc.).

Creative Projects and HUX 598

Since a Creative Project would seem to be mainly a creative endeavor by definition, you may wonder why, if you have been approved to do a creative project, you need to bother about the information in this guide related to topic selection and

research. The short answer is that those doing creative projects still need to define a properly focused and academically viable topic, and that all projects must include a scholarly, research-based written component along with the creative work. Below is a fuller explanation. Some of this information is taken from the *CSUDH Thesis and Project Guide*, which you can find via the HUX Thesis and Project webpage (www.csudh.edu/hux/finproj.html). Most of the information in that guide relates to how the final work needs to be organized and formatted, but some of it is useful to students at the topic formation stage. The *CSUDH Thesis and Project Guide* will give you a good idea of what we will require in the final version of your creative project.

The Education Code that governs the California State University system (Title 5, Section 40510, p. 473) defines a creative project as:

a significant undertaking appropriate to the fine and applied arts or to professional fields. It evidences originality and independent thinking, appropriate form and organization, and rationale. It is described and summarized in a written abstract that includes the project's significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion or recommendation.

Note that the reference to “professional fields” in the definition above does not apply to humanities programs such as HUX.

All creative projects submitted to a California State University must have two components: 1) An explanation of the project in a scholarly framework, and 2) the creative work itself. The scholarly framework puts the creative work in its appropriate contexts in terms of, for example, artistic technique, historical evolution of the creative work, the theories behind various approaches to this creative genre, etc.

For this reason, your HUX 598 creative project proposal must describe not only your intended creative work, but how that work fits with, responds to, and/or builds upon similar work by other artists, and how scholars look at such creative

work. The scholarly section of your project will need to include an introduction, a review of related literature, a presentation of your methodology, a summary/conclusions section, and a works cited section. It will likely be 15 pages or so in length. Your creative work will then go in an appendix.

An important element of your HUX 598 proposal, and of your interaction with the professor who mentors your project, is to determine the appropriate scope of your creative activity. This is something that you and your mentor will decide together. We do have a few basic rules, however. We do not allow the creative component of a creative literary project to be as long as a novel. Also, a creative work needs to be presented as a complete project, not as part of a larger project. So, for example, it is not appropriate to present the first few chapters of a book as your creative project.

Steps in Initial Research

The next step is to determine which of your topic ideas you want to turn into your formal HUX 598 thesis or project proposal. Start with your favorite topic on your list and follow the steps below. If at some point the topic appears no longer workable, move to the next ranked topic. Hopefully your first topic will prove viable, but if not you can take some consolation in the fact that every scholar has had to drop topics that he or she wanted to pursue.

1. Begin the important task of background reading. The more reading you do, the better you will be able to grasp the subject matter, writings, and approaches of scholars to the topic. At this point, you will want to determine which (if any) of the other humanities disciplines are involved in the topic. An example for the Interdisciplinary, Curriculum A track: Stalin's repressive regime: literature of

repression and its authors. This topic includes both history and literature. If you are familiar with any critical approaches or methodologies that are appropriate to your topic, and that you will rely on for analyzing your research question, make a note.

The point of broad or background reading is for you to become better acquainted with the general subject so that you can, for one thing, develop a better sense of the kinds of questions that scholars ask about a field and topic. Write down questions you see or think of that don't appear to be answered in the readings you've done. It may be that they are answered elsewhere, but it may also be that no one has attempted to answer one of them before (or that another scholar's answer seems unsatisfactory to you based on your background reading. As you can imagine, the more background reading you do, the better you will be able to make these determinations. On the other hand, there is always more background reading that one can do, so one of the skills of research is learning when you've done enough reading at this stage.

If your field is literature, you might start with interest in a particular novelist. You will want to read other works by her, and perhaps also other works that appear to have influenced her work. You will want to check out what other writers and scholars say about her and her work. You will want to get a sense of how literary critics approach a critique of this author. What critical theories do they employ? What philosophical approaches do they think that the author employs? What does the author say about herself?

Don't hone in too quickly on the focus and central argument you want to make. One of the biggest mistakes young researchers make is to determine too soon

what they want to say, and then to filter their readings through that grid. Do all you can to avoid bringing a predetermined viewpoint to your research.

2. Focus your reading more narrowly and deeply. Apart from background reading to better understand a field/topic/era/literary work/philosophy/artist (as described above), what exactly is one trying to do in research? Some think that the purpose of research is simply to amass information that will later be summarized in the thesis.

While in your thesis you will present a lot of information that you gathered in your research, this is not the right way to think about research. A thesis should be a work of analysis and argumentation, not a summary of information. This is true even if you have amassed data that has never been published before. As a scholar you have the responsibility to interpret whatever information you present--to attempt to make some sense out of it.

So your goal in initial research is to see if any of the questions or hypotheses running through your head, as a result of your background reading and your earlier studies, have not been addressed by any scholar, or at least not addressed by anyone in quite the way you have in mind. You also need to discover whether or not you can access the necessary resources, and that you possess the skills to make and sustain a valid and meaningful central argument.

This is a good point to begin reading journal articles by scholars in your field. The professional journals are often where the cutting edge of research is taking place. Later in this guide you will find more information about journal articles and how to find them.

3. Develop a thesis statement. This is the central argument of your eventual thesis. It is the answer to your work's big question, the solution to its main problem. It is a working hypothesis, subject to change as you continue to do research. As such its purpose is to give focus and guidance to your further research so long as it proves useful and workable. If at some point it proves unsupportable, you will have to abandon it for a better thesis. This is part of the process of research that every scholar knows well. It is virtually certain that you will revise it in the course of future research and writing, so we do not regard the thesis presented in your HUX 598 proposal as final and unchangeable. To think this way would be to violate a basic principle of research—to be guided as much as possible by one's research rather than forcing it to fit one's preconceptions. So we consider this a provisional thesis statement. A history thesis might seek to answer this question: to what extent was Stalin successful in ordering all Soviet literature to be a tool in his attempt to control and direct public thought and emotions? You'd need to further focus your topic to make it appropriate for a 40-60 page thesis, perhaps by narrowing the era to 1934-1939.

4. Develop a tentative outline. The thesis statement described in the last section indicates where your thesis is headed. The outline describes how you plan to get there. You may be one of those students who hate to work from outlines and avoid them whenever possible. But in a thesis of 40 or more pages you need to divide the support for your thesis statement into logical sections. The outline should tell you and anyone who reads it the strategy that you plan to use in presenting and supporting your main argument. As with most essays, your thesis will have an introduction and a

conclusion. How you organize the material between the two is more flexible and should be adapted to the needs of your topic and your central argument. Each chapter of the thesis in this body section should contribute in a unique way to supporting your overall argument. As with the thesis statement, the outline at this point is provisional. For you it's an exercise in again determining your central argument's viability. For us, when you submit an outline with your HUX 598 proposal, it's an opportunity to see not only what you intend to demonstrate but how you plan to go about demonstrating it.

Every main chapter in the thesis will present arguments that you have formulated. Since you are writing the thesis for scholars in your field, you do not need an introductory section for non-scholars. In determining how much background or contextual information to include, bear in mind that you are writing for scholars in your field (say, philosophy) who may have done some reading by and about a given philosopher but who have not done in-depth research and writing on that philosopher or your topic. So it would be appropriate to present some information that the scholars doing research in your narrow field already know. But it is not appropriate to gear your thesis for (in this example) non-philosophers.

Each point in your outline should be a complete sentence that presents the central theme or argument of that chapter or section. Bullet points such as "Stalin's policies in the 1930s" do not tell you or us what you intend to argue about those policies, so they are not very helpful in evaluating the viability of a thesis topic.

5. Put together a list of key books and articles. These should be *annotated*: write a few lines to indicate the point of view, focus, and contribution of each work

towards your thesis/project topic. Your annotation should not be a summary of the book per se, but of how it contributes to your study. This assumes that you have examined each, and have determined why and in what way it will be a useful resource for your thesis/project. Do not list sources in your bibliography that you haven't read but that you *think* will be helpful. We would probably require a proposal with such a list of works to be revised, which could cost you several weeks of valuable time. But even if you manage to put together a list of works that looks like you know what you're doing, you'll end up paying for it over the course of the next year—for example, by having to ditch a topic that didn't pan out and starting over.

6. Submit your proposal to the HUX Office. At this point you can write out your HUX 598 Thesis/Project Proposal. Please adhere to the deadlines for submission as posted in the HUX Student Handbook and on the HUX website. The review process takes time, particularly if we have to ask you to revise your topic before we can accept it.

Once the proposal is reviewed and accepted by the HUX Coordinator, it will be submitted to a potential mentor. Once a mentor accepts your preliminary proposal, he or she may ask you to modify the proposal before you can enroll in HUX 598.

(The steps above are adapted from guidelines written originally by Dr. Howard Holter of the HUX program.)

Essential Elements of a Work of Research

1. **Primary and secondary sources.** As you consider possible topics and begin to refine your choice of topic, you will need to consider how you might use both

primary and secondary sources. A primary source is like raw data that needs to be interpreted. It includes accounts of an event written or spoken by someone who experienced the event such as diaries, letters, speeches, or newspaper articles. It also includes photographs, paintings, sculpture, screenplays, musical compositions and performances, archaeological discoveries, and audio or video recordings. It includes the writings of philosophers, literary authors, historians, etc., when they are not writing about some event, idea, or person with which they do not have personal experience (including the “experience” of creating a fictional character or thinking a new idea).

Secondary evidence is the work of others who seek to interpret primary evidence. Most of the sources you cite in your thesis will be secondary sources, and your master’s thesis, when approved and printed by Proquest/UMI, may well become a secondary source for other researchers.

The vast majority of HUX theses work with both kinds of evidence (all of them must use secondary evidence). They present a central argument based on their interpretation of primary evidence, and support that interpretation in part by presenting the secondary work of other scholars. In addition, they present the key secondary evidence on a topic in order to show how their central argument relates to what other scholars have said and are currently saying.

You won’t know until you’ve done some focused research what secondary evidence exists for your potential topics. That is fine at this point, but you do need to identify the primary evidence that is available to you, and to make sure that you can read it. If a topic you have in mind requires you to understand the ancient Hebrew

language, for instance, and you don't, you will either need to learn Hebrew or to find a new topic. Depending on your topic, translations in English may be adequate. But you should not presume make an original argument that is based on how you think a foreign language passage should be translated if you have to rely on the work of others for that translation.

2. Popular-level books v. monographs. It's very important, as you do research, to know the difference between a book written for a general or popular audience and a "monograph." A monograph is a book-length scholarly treatise written by a scholar for an audience of other scholars. You can also think of it as a book-length version of a scholarly journal article (see below). A popular-level book may also be written by a scholar, as many are, but it is written for a general audience. The author of a popular book cannot take for granted any specific knowledge of the field or the topic. Top scholars frequently write both types of books, so you can't tell the difference by the author's name or credentials. Scholars write monographs when they want to make a full presentation of their research on a topic, but they know that usually only a few hundred people will ever buy the book. They write popular-level books when they want to disseminate their ideas to a broader audience and when they want to actually make some money on the books they write.

How can you tell the difference? The most obvious indication is the level of documentation. In a monograph you will find footnotes one-quarter or more of the bottom of each page (or the equivalent in endnotes). Their bibliography or works cited sections are very extensive. You'll also commonly see the use of non-English languages and technical jargon. The book will typically have a fairly plain cover and

is almost never stocked in local bookstores. Are popular-level books written by experts useful in research? Yes, certainly, and you should use them. But it is vitally important that you do not think of them as models for how scholars write for other scholars (or for your master's thesis). They will be far too broad in scope and far too weak on documentation. They will give general background that you should not give in your thesis. Often they will not be organized around a central argument (as monographs, journal articles, Ph.D. dissertations, and master's theses usually are).

Monographs are generally more helpful resources because they will give you a much fuller list of sources that you can use in your own research, and they will help you learn how to use evidence to prove a point and how to weave together the use of evidence with your own argumentation. Monographs are usually published by university publishing houses (Oxford University Press, University of California Press, e.g.) or by smaller specialty publishers that focus on the scholarly market.

3. Using a theoretical model in your research. Every time we write we employ a set of assumptions about how the world works. The facts do not speak for themselves, nor is any interpreter completely objective. Sometimes we're conscious of them, sometimes not. The more conscious of our assumptions we are, the more careful we can be that our assumptions serve us well, and the more honest we can be with those around us about the values that motivate us. On the most basic level, this is the reason for telling the reader of your thesis the approach you will use as you examine your topic.

A theoretical approach also has to do with the kinds of questions we ask because of the kinds of things we're interested in. You can't ask every possible

question about a person, text, or event. You can't present all of the information you collect, and if you could no one would want to read your work. So we focus on certain aspects, and do so in part because of the theory we are using. A researcher has to decide which questions she will ask and which ones she won't. When you present your theoretical model to your reader, you are telling him or her why you are approaching the material in this way and not in another.

Michelle reads about a private plane crash. What questions might she ask about the event? She might say, "Those poor people--is there any way I can help the survivors?" But Dawn's first question might be, "I wonder if the plane was properly serviced before take-off?" These very different questions reflect very different priorities and interests. In academic research, the formal expression of this is to choose a theoretical model that you will use to analyze the subject matter and to make clear to your reader what assumptions and approach underlay your work.

Scholars, including professors in this program, differ on how important it is that a thesis intentionally employ a theoretical model. So be sure to discuss this topic with your HUX thesis or project mentor.

As you read the journal articles on this topic, try to figure out what approaches to their discipline they are using. It is likely that they will represent more than one approach. Then consider what, in your limited experience with this topic, would seem to constitute a "fruitful" approach. How does one determine fruitfulness? Consider the kinds of evidence that that approach tends to emphasize. Is such evidence available for your topic? Also consider the kinds of questions that a given approach would ask of your topic. Does it seem that the available evidence could be used to

answer such questions? In addition, consider the basic philosophical assumptions that a given theory makes. If you find yourself in fundamental disagreement with those assumptions, you may choose not to use the theory even though it might be applicable to the topic.

4. State of Research/Literature Review. Academic research cannot be conducted in a vacuum. So much has been written on just about any possible topic within the humanities that, if you don't know what has already been written, you are likely to redo work that has already been done.

It may appear, when you read a popular-level work by a scholar, that she has conceived of her topics and conclusions all on her own. Nothing could be further from the truth. Scholars in the humanities, like those in the social and natural sciences, are constantly communicating with one another about their ideas. They do this informally via personal correspondence and more formally via papers read and discussions conducted at professional conferences and published journal articles and monographs. When a scholar writes a scholarly book or article, she may imagine herself standing in front of a room filled with the past and present experts on her topic. She writes as though she is speaking to them, taking into account their work and building her new arguments on the basis of past work and/or as a challenge to past work. She must acknowledge the work of those who have helped her reach her conclusions, and she must defend her conclusions that contradict the work of others.

Your state of research section, then, is your way of positioning your topic and the central argument of your essay or thesis with respect to what scholars have said and are continuing to say about the topic.

As you research the state of research on a topic, you will almost certainly encounter journal articles and books written in a language other than English. At the Ph.D. dissertation level you would be required to learn any languages necessary to understand the state of research by scholars worldwide on your topic. At the M.A. level (including the HUX master's thesis), however, you are not required to work in languages other than English.

Here's an excellent strategy to follow as you put together your list of sources for the 598 proposal, and especially for the state of research section of the thesis as part of the 598 class:

a. Find the most recent article that is related as directly as possible to your topic. It should not be older than one year ideally. Finding a very recent article is important for several reasons. If it is a fairly new article (6-12 months old) and very close to your focused topic, 1) It probably represents the "last word" to date on your topic, and 2) You can then "mine" its bibliography as the foundation for your bibliography. That's because that author also needed to present the current state of research on his topic, and if your topic overlaps very well with his, he may have in essence done your basic research in secondary sources for you. So finding this one article (in some cases two or more, depending on how close they are to your topic) is key.

b. Once you've downloaded one or more articles, you can quickly determine the value of each article by either skimming it or by doing keyword searches. The article may come as a text document that can be brought into your word processor and searched. If it comes as an Adobe PDF file, you can also search the text if you are

using a recent version of the free Adobe Reader program (get it at <http://www.adobe.com>).

These techniques can allow you to pursue a number of articles in the time it would have taken you to read one thoroughly. While at some point you will need to read articles and books very carefully, the mass of information so readily available now requires scholars to have different skill sets from in the past. We have to be able to use technology to filter large amounts of information and determine which sources need more careful reading. So having the text of a journal article on your computer is far superior to having a hard copy in your hand, and well worth the effort involved in first learning the technology.

5. Identify Scholarly or Professional Journals* A scholarly journal contains articles written by and for professionals or scholars. Scholarly journals are widely regarded as a reliable source of information on a topic because each article is evaluated both by an editorial board and by experts who are not part of the editorial staff before it is accepted for publication. This process of evaluation is called a peer review or referee process.

Other terms used to refer to scholarly journals include: journal, refereed journal, peer-reviewed journal, academic journal, research journal, professional journal, and juried publication.

Periodical articles from magazines or newspapers will provide some basic information on a topic but will usually lack the depth and authority of scholarly journal articles, and in most cases should not be included in your Works Cited.

Characteristics of scholarly journals:

- authors of articles are authorities in their fields
- most articles are reports on scholarly research
- articles use jargon of the discipline or technical language
- articles have little or no advertising
- illustrations are usually charts and graphs
- the journals are usually long (more than 5 pages) with footnotes, endnotes and lists of references (bibliographies) citing the authors' sources
- journals are often published by professional organizations (such as the American Historical Association)

How can you be sure you are consulting scholarly articles?*

1. Use a periodical index that indexes primarily scholarly journals such as JSTOR or Wilson Web.
2. Use a periodical index that allows you to restrict or limit your search to scholarly journal articles by making a checkmark in the appropriate box. Academic Search Premier and ABI Inform/ProQuest offer this function.
3. Determine whether a particular journal you want to cite is a refereed journal by looking up its title in *Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory* (kept at the CSUDH Library Reference Desk) or check the title in *Ulrich's Periodical Directory* online.
4. Read through abstracts (brief summaries provided with search results in many electronic periodical indexes, and often found at the beginning of a scholarly article, just below the title).
5. Look for some of these characteristics of a scholarly article:

a. Description of recent formal research or a scientific study conducted by the authors, or a summary of previous work in the field by the authors or other researchers (literature review)

b. References to subjects or materials that were studied and methods that were used to conduct research

c. Description of results or conclusions drawn from the research

6. Read over the article itself, looking for:

a. Technical language or jargon that belongs to a particular academic field

b. Charts or graphs that illustrate results of research

c. Citations to the author's sources (other books and articles) in footnotes or at the end of the article.

*Adapted from the CSUDH Library website. Used with permission.

6. Assessing the Academic Value of Books and Articles Online

A work is not necessarily less scholarly because it is available online.

However, bear in mind that no one monitors and screens the internet. One can write anything and make any number of claims on a webpage without being forced to correct it. So you simply cannot trust something just because you saw it on the web. There are ways, however, that you can use sources available on the internet with confidence.

1. Get your sources from academic, paid subscription services such as those available via the CSUDH Distance Library. In general you get what you pay for. It's possible to get good, free resources online, but your best bet is to go with paid

services. Fortunately the CSUDH service is free to you as a HUX student. See the instructions for using this service below.

2. Use a resource like **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.com>) to filter for scholarly sources. According to its website, Google Scholar provides a simple way to broadly search for scholarly literature. From one place, you can search across many disciplines and sources: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles, from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities and other scholarly organizations. Click on “About Google Scholar” on the webpage above for instructions. This site is a very positive development because it gives us another way to search for journal articles as well as books. But note that in many cases you will have to pay for journal articles that you want to download. For example, typing the keyword string “british textile mills child labor” resulted in nearly 9,000 hits. Most, of course, won’t be useful. But the third return was “Child Labor and Malnutrition,” published in *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* in March 2005 (one year before the search was conducted). You can read a synopsis of the article, but you’d have to pay \$39 for the full article. In many cases, however, you can use this reference information to search the CSUDH online library and get the article at no charge.

3. Search an electronic “card catalog” provided by an academic source. Unfortunately most of these will give you only the titles of books and journals, not of individual journal articles. But they are an excellent way to find academic books and to discover what journals are devoted to your field.

4. If you come across a professional journal published exclusively online, it may or may not be acceptable. The number of good online journals is increasing. One objective measure of a journal's academic legitimacy is that its articles are peer-reviewed (this means that articles aren't published until two appropriate scholars, unknown to the author, review and approve them). Such journals will make a point of telling you that their articles are peer-reviewed. If they don't refer to this, they almost certainly aren't peer-reviewed. Also, if it is a legitimate scholarly source, you often will have to pay for the article.

5. In general avoid other sources online unless you know them to be online versions of previously published sources. The fact that these sources were once published in hard copy form usually indicates some level of quality control. It costs virtually nothing to throw up another article online, but paper and ink do cost money. Note also that scholars will be skeptical of sources online different from those above.

Finding Research Resources

If you have a computer and internet access, you are only a few keystrokes away from many thousands of full-text versions of journal and magazine articles. They include scholarly journals published around the world and written by the top scholars in their fields. They are made available in electronic form to libraries such as CSUDH through subscription services. In many ways this is better than going to a local research library. You save on travel and photocopy costs, and since you get the articles in electronic form you can do word searches in them to determine whether or not the article is worth reading thoroughly. Try that with a photocopied page!

You can also use this service to look up approved HUX theses.

Registering to Use the Library Online Resources

In order to successfully access the CSUDH databases away from campus, you must 1) be a current HUX (and therefore a CSUDH) student and 2) be registered for borrowing privileges. If you are not already registered:

1. Open and use one of the following web browsers. Only they have been verified as working with this system: Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 and up, Firefox, Netscape 4.8 and 7 (using either an IBM compatible PC or an Apple Macintosh computer).

2. Go to the Library Patron Registration Form, found at <https://library.csudh.edu/rparegform.php>. Fill out the form completely and don't forget to click Submit. **Registration takes about a week**, so be sure to do this at least a week before you plan to begin research.

Using the CSUDH Online Resources

You may take one of two routes in using these resources. If you know of an article that you want to download and read, you can input the author and title. If that doesn't work you may need to search first for the name of the journal to see which if any of the databases to which CSUDH subscribes carries it. See "Assessing the Academic Value of Books and Articles Online" above for information on ways to use the internet to search for scholarly references (not the book or article, just the reference to it). You can then use the reference information to order the book or search for the article on the CSUDH library site.

The other route is to do your initial search on the CSUDH library site using keywords, as described below.

1. Go to the “Find Journal Articles & Electronic Resources” page (<http://library.csudh.edu/FindJrnArtElecRes.php>).

2. Click on “Alphabetical list of journal article indexes and electronic resources.” As you move your pointer over each letter in the index at top, you will see the various databases available. Each one represents a resource with as many as thousands of journals containing hundreds of thousands of articles.

3. Move your pointer/cursor over the A in the alphabetical index at top to bring up the databases starting with A. Then move the arrow straight down to “**Academic Search Premiere** (EBSCO)”. This service alone links you to 4,500 journals, and is a good place to begin. You can at this point select additional databases or just click on “Continue” at top.

4. Now it’s time to start your search. You can search for up to three keywords at one time. Use “and” when you want to search for both words in the same article, “or” when you want articles with either word, and “not” when you want to exclude a keyword from the search.

Then indicate where you want to search for those terms. You can search the entire text of the article (all text), just the author name, just the title, just the subject terms as entered by the journal in the database, or a variety of other lesser-used options. You can set different search areas for each keyword. You will probably need to experiment with different keywords and search criteria. Usually you will need to

do several searches, trying a variety of keywords, to be sure you know what is available.

Conducting Interviews and the Institutional Research Board Review

All research involving human subjects is subject to review and approval by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Our IRB must review all thesis proposals that involve interviews or surveys (before they are conducted), or that use data previously collected from living humans (which identifies individuals), by CSUDH students and/or faculty. This is intended to insure that the research is conducted according to federally accepted standards, and also to protect the privacy rights of those interviewed or surveyed.

If you wish to conduct interviews or surveys as part of your research, discuss this with the HUX Coordinator (or your thesis mentor once you have one). The IRB may determine that your plans do not require IRB approval. If approval is required, both you and your faculty mentor will need to take the online IRB certification training. Your research plan, including your exact interview or survey form, must be approved by our IRB **before** you can conduct the interviews or surveys.

More information is available at the IRB website, <http://www.csudh.edu/RF/r&fpro3.html> or by calling the Office of Research and Funded Projects at 310-243-3756.