Guidelines for Completing Master’s Project

at the Adler Graduate School
The Master’s Project:
Guidelines for Completing Research Paper and an Experiential Project
at the Adler Graduate School

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Introduction

Completion of the Master’s Project marks the end of your academic journey at the Adler Graduate School. It is the final stage of your work toward the master’s degree. At this final stage, you have achieved not only a general awareness about the helping profession, but a specific set of knowledge about Adlerian psychology. In addition, you are making your first serious steps in using scientific methods in clinical thinking and applying Adlerian ideas to practice. Optimally, the Master’s Project demonstrates one of the best qualities of Adlerian psychology – psychology of use.

This publication guides you through the Master’s Project, its process, and its content. It contains the optimal timeline and other recommendations. These guidelines describe options in completing this academic experience based on your track at the AGS, your special interests, and your developing competencies.

None of the options described in this document is superior or inferior to another, and none is more or less rigorous. The options create choices for you to complete the Master’s project rather than alternatives around it. The idea of options encourages you to recognize and to use your personal, academic, and practical strengths in this very important academic exercise. The existence of more than one option in completing the Master’s Project is designed exclusively to highlight the richness of voices, talents, and experiences and to incorporate these experiences into the collective wisdom of Adler students and alumni.

AGS Masters Project Guidelines, 2015
With this, you are also encouraged to think whether you may plan to pursue a doctoral degree in the future and, thus, explore whether admission to a potential doctoral programs has specific requirements for a Master’s level final project.

In sum, and unless specific track/program requirements apply, the decision about the type of Masters Project belongs to you. You will make and exercise the decision in consultation with your academic advisor and under the guidance of your Master’s Project Chairperson.

**Overview of the Master’s Project**

Regardless of the option you chose, the Master’s Project is an in-depth study of a topic in your area of academic interest that includes the topic’s interface with Adlerian psychology. In consultation with your academic advisor and your Master’s Project Chairperson, you select an academic topic of personal interest and professional or community significance and examine it through the Adlerian lens. The in-depth investigation of this topic includes, but is not limited to, the history of the issue, current status, clinical or practical utilization, and future implications.

You are encouraged to identify a topic that appears in current research literature and is subject to analysis through primary sources (i.e., contemporary academic peer-reviewed journals). The Master’s Project delivers recommendations for both professional practice and future research.

**Options for Completing the Master’s Project**

Generally, there are three types of project. Unless your track has specific requirements, you may choose from one of the options.

**Option One: Literature Review.** A literature review is an in-depth academic investigation of a topic of academic interest related to Adlerian psychology. A well-conceived and well-written literature review is part of your academic portfolio which can be presented to
graduate schools (e.g., Ph.D, Psy.D) as a part of your admission materials or could lay the foundation for future graduate research such as a doctoral dissertation. The length of this literature review is at least 45 pages not counting appendices, references, a title page, and a table of contents.

**Option Two: Literature Review + Experiential Product or Professional Presentation.** This option involves an in-depth academic investigation and presentation of a topic of professional or community significance, studied in current academic research, and interfaced with Adlerian psychology. For example, you could create and present a grant proposal, a new community or therapeutic program, a theatrical play, curriculum for group or classroom psychosocial counseling, or a book submitted for a publication.

A highlight of such a project is a community-based or professional event (e.g., in-service training, a conference presentation, play, an art exhibit, or other type of presentation determined by the student, her or his committee, and approved by the AGS Vice President for Academic Affairs). A presentation cannot be delivered at the Adler Graduate School without the special permission of your chairperson and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. As evidence of your work and part of your final submission, you will create a video recording of the event. In addition to the presentation, you will write a paper outlining objectives, summary of the project, the evidence in the literature that supports the product or presentation, and recommendations developed based on the project. This summary, background research, and recommendations section must be at least 15 pages long not counting the abstract, reference page, or title page.

**Option Three: Literature Review + Research Project.** Option three is an in-depth academic investigation (a literature review) of a topic of academic interest, community usefulness, and professional significance related to Adlerian psychology and followed by a
research project involving examination of records or using human participants. Such a project can only be undertaken with the approval of the Adler Graduate School Institutional Review Board (IRB). Please see IRB application and MP Proposal Form for more information and to determine whether your proposal may be subject to IRB review.

**Specific Emphasis Area Requirements and Recommendations**

*School Counseling students* may choose any of the project types identified above. In addition, The Master’s project in School Counseling involves licensure portfolio review. Students pursuing *School Counseling and another track (LMFT, MHC)* complete the Master’s Project according to the School Counseling Program requirements. Students are encouraged to choose a topic that combines both interests.

*Art Therapy* students may complete any of the project types identified and could submit research for publication in a professional journal, present at a national conference, or have a public art exhibition.

**General Content and Process Requirements**

Please note that regardless of the option you choose, the amount of work involved in completing the Master’s Project and the quality of the final product will remain the same and will be representative of the highest academic standards. The Literature Review and the Literature Review + Research Project (options 1 and 3) contain at least 45 pages or 30 pages for School Counseling students. The empirical justification and summary of the Literature Review and Presentation Project (option 2) contains at least 15 pages of narrative. In all of these cases, the minimum number of pages does not include the title page, abstract, references, tables, graphs, and images.
All of the Master’s Project options are based on a minimum of 30 original sources, at least 75% of which are from scholarly peer-reviewed publications. In the search for scholarly sources, students are encouraged to use research conducted within the last 5 years.

The presentation, teaching, books, and other materials created as a part of the Master’s Project should contain a statement about the project being conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s of Art degree at the Adler Graduate School.

**Oral Exam**

In addition to the previously stated options, students have to pass an oral examination. No part of the Master’s Project (a conference presentation, in-service training, or other type of presentation) can be used in lieu of the oral examination. During the oral examination, students engage in an in-depth discussion of the topic of the project, its major accomplishments and implications. Other topics may include personal reflections about the Master’s Project process, about studies at the Adler Graduate School, and in-depth discussion about Adlerian psychology. This part of the oral examination pulls together the many facets of graduate education and examines how the student as a professional has changed and grown.

**Phases and Stages of the Master’s Project**

Timing is important. The following is a time or step-line that will assist you in making the Master’s Project experience a success:

1. AGS course 601: Introduction to Graduate Writing and the Master’s Project should be taken as your second course. You will continue to improve your writing skills throughout the studies.

2. AGS Course 500: Principles of Research should be taken as approximately your fourth or fifth course or as prescribed by your respective academic advising team.
3. Course 602 Developing the Masters Project Proposals could be taken no later than a year before your intended graduation date. As a part of your course 602 completion, you will
   a. confirm your topic,
   b. decide on the type of project and,
   c. choose a Chairperson and a Reader who have agreed to work with you.

The 602 course is passed when our Proposal form is approved by the VP for Academic Affairs.

4. From that point on, your Chairperson becomes the primary contact and the ultimate authority in Master’s Project-related tasks: content, structure, and timing.

5. **If you plan to conduct research with human participants** or any other sources of information requiring the IRB approval, you need to complete a one credit course 599C.

6. At least 3 months before the oral exam is to take place, you submit your first draft to the Chairperson.

7. At least 4 weeks before your anticipated graduation date, the oral exam is scheduled and completed. You should discuss with your Chairperson the expectations of the oral examination so you can come prepared.

8. At least 10 days (but preferably one month) before the oral exam, send your paper and other products to your reader for review. Your project Reader has the right to request more time for review.

Please see the Adler Graduate School webpage for other details concerning your MP process.

Good planning makes for a much more rewarding and useful process in completing the Master’s
Project. If you follow and complete all the steps listed, conducting the Master’s Project and composing the written portion of it can be a very enjoyable experience.

Certainly, there are situations where students must revise their timeline to completion. If you feel stuck in the process or are experiencing events in life that may necessitate revisions to the plans, you are encouraged to consult with your Chairperson immediately and get help.

**Other Important Items to Consider**

Except as described later in these guidelines or as required by a specific type of task, you will follow the writing standard set forth in the APA Publication Manual (6th ed., 2009). For an *Ethical Compliance Checklist*, you can refer to the APA Publication Manual (2009, p. 20). This document also contains writing tips (Figure 1).

**Originality.** One of the requirements of the APA Publication Manual and an AGS policy is that any work produced by you should be original work. Although you may choose or be directed by your Chairperson to use a knowledgeable consultant to proofread your work for style, grammar, and general flow, *plagiarism (including self-plagiarism) in the Master’s Project is not acceptable under any circumstances and may constitute grounds for an NC grade or dismissal from the Adler Graduate School.* You may not use any paper written for any other class as a part of your Master’s Project. For a detailed description of plagiarism and self-plagiarism, see the APA Publication Manual (2009, pp. 15-16).

**Issues concerning intellectual property.** If you use information (tests, tables, figures in their entirety) that is copyrighted, steps must be taken to protect the intellectual property of others, including obtaining necessary copyright permissions.

**Protecting human participants.** In an effort to protect human participants, you must follow the AGS policy concerning the use of human participants and other sources of
confidential information. The APA Publication Manual contains a detailed discussion on this matter (2009, pp. 16-17). The Adler Graduate School IRB policies and application form contain all the necessary and specific information as well. Additionally, you have to comply with all and any policies on protecting human participants should you use an agency or institution other than the AGS.

**Choosing a Chairperson and a Reader.** You have one Master’s Project Chairperson and one Master’s Project Reader. Your MP Chair is an Adler Graduate School faculty member ideally with whom you feel comfortable, who has similar and compatible research interests, who understands requirements of APA format, and who expresses readiness to work with you on your Master’s Project. The AGS website has a list of approved faculty Chairpersons with their areas of interests, philosophy, and a description of project types they are willing or able to chair. When selecting the Chairperson, you may consider additional factors such as the potential Chairperson’s preferred mode of communication, general availability for ongoing consultations, rules on draft reviews (pages, sections, or an entire manuscript), and other variables such as their availability for the specific term when you anticipate having your project finished and presented.

The Reader will be most involved in the project during its final phase when they read, review, and add comments to a project that has already been reviewed and approved by the Chairperson. The Reader will assist the Master’s Project Chairperson in conducting the oral exam. Although the Reader can be helpful in developing and composing the Master’s project, the Master’s Project Chairperson is the primary contact and the ultimate authority for your Master’s Project work. You are encouraged to select the Reader in consultation with the MP Chairperson and your Program Director.
**Final drafts and oral examination.** You will discuss with your Chairperson the specifics of the timeline and tasks to accomplish during all stages of the Master’s Project process including specific content and preparedness for the final examination.

The final oral examination takes 90 minutes. Generally, it is composed of two sections: an examination of your knowledge of Adlerian psychology and a discussion of the Master’s Project. **School counseling students** will experience three sections: 30 minutes reviewing the Masters Project, 30 minutes reviewing the licensure portfolio, and 30 minutes reviewing Adlerian Psychology and readiness for the field.

Once the final draft is approved and permission is given by the Chairperson to schedule an oral examination, you are responsible for scheduling the oral examination in consultation with your Master’s Project team. The oral examination is not the completion of the process because additional reviews and rewrites might take place after the oral exam. The process is considered completed when (a) your oral exam is passed and (b) your paper is cleared by the Media Center Coordinator. In option 2, this also includes a copy of your video presentation, copies of any flyers and advertisements you used, and participants’ feedback forms. In option 3, this also includes final review and clearance from the IRB.

**Use an APA expert to scrutinize your work.** The research component of the Master’s Project must meet the publication guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2009). It is, therefore, imperative that either (a) you become expert in APA style, (b) your MP Chair is expert in APA style, (c) you use an APA-knowledgeable consultant, or (d) you utilize some combination of a, b, and c. Preferably, your Master’s Project Chair is knowledgeable in APA format and can guide you on the details even though you may have a good working knowledge of APA style.
**Formatting.** Regardless of the length, the literature review should be organized and formatted by levels of headings (see Levels of Headings, APA, 2009, pp. 62-63). Formatting the paper properly makes writing significantly easier and more focused. In preparing the Master’s Project for cataloging, you may choose to include an “acknowledgement page” where you mention people who have been instrumental in helping you complete your final papers and master’s degree or who assisted in conducting your project or critiquing your manuscript. Explain any relationships that could be seen as a conflict of interest. If any organization involved in your project requires a disclaimer, you have to include a required statement. It is your responsibility to check on whether any disclaimer may be required. Because the title page is always page i of this document, the acknowledgement page should be marked as ii.

The abstract is a necessary element of your Master’s Project. The abstract will help readers of your manuscript to review the contents of your project and to decide whether they want to read the entire project. The APA Publication Manual (2009) lists accuracy, non-evaluative stance, coherence and readability, and conciseness as qualities of a good abstract (p. 26). The abstract should be written after the Master’s Project is completed.

Another task in preparation of the final manuscript is to create the Table of Contents. The table of contents usually follows the abstract and the acknowledgment page and may be a useful component of the Master’s Project.

**Cataloging.** In order for a Master’s Project to be housed in AGS’s public Masters Project archive it must meet the following standards: (a) It must be well written, (b) it must adhere to APA guidelines, and (c) it must be free from information that is considered excessively personal. If the student works to the best of their ability but is unable to meet guidelines for quality writing, they may be offered an option to not publish their project but still pass their oral exam.
If this situation presents itself, the Chairperson and Reader will speak with the student about the concerns and the recommendation for not publishing. Again, the student may pass the oral exam and even graduate but the paper will not be published. If the student should choose to enlist an editor or other resource and brings the paper into compliance with expectations for good Master’s level writing, they may have the project added to the electronic archive at a later date.

Once the oral examination is completed and the Master’s Project Chairperson and Reader have each signed off on the examination paperwork, you can move to the final step of preparing your materials for cataloging in the Adler Graduate School Writing Center. Upon review by the Writing Center Coordinator and clearance by the IRB (if necessary), the literature review, all the materials created and presented in the course of a presentation if applicable (manuals, audio/video materials, power point presentation, book, booklets, announcements, and other materials that are part of the Master’s Project), and detailed description of your research project are catalogued in the Media Center of the Adler Graduate School. The written parts of the Master’s Project and any other parts that can be digitized will be stored electronically. Please consult with your Chairperson and the Media Center Coordinator for details and issues concerning bound copies and any items in your Master’s Project that cannot or should not be digitized.

In any case, you will send an electronic copy to the Media Center Coordinator. These bound and electronic copies are the means by which your experience with practicing Adlerian psychology and expertise about a specific topic are available to future AGS students and other investigators interested in learning about the subject you studied. The array of Master’s Projects housed in the Media Center and on the Adler Graduate School website constitutes a rich
exposition of academic interests and expertise developed by matriculating Adler Graduate School students.

Thank you for reading this document carefully and best wishes as you prepare Master’s Project.


Writing Tips: Suggestions for Improving the Quality of Written Assignments

Critical: Know APA format

You must become knowledgeable about this style of writing. It is the format for written work in all professional disciplines in the behavioral sciences. Study the APA Manual carefully as you prepare papers. Do not guess. Stick to the format. The Manual contains answers to most questions.

Writing Style


2. As much as possible, separate ideas and concepts using new paragraphs. Avoid long paragraphs containing multiple ideas and concepts.

3. Use clear and concise paragraphs. Do not create one-sentence paragraphs. Three to five sentences per paragraph is a reasonable guideline. A paragraph longer than one double-spaced page may be too long (APA, 2009, p. 68).

4. Be mindful about sentence length. Shorter and longer sentences may serve different purpose and will make different impact on readers. Read more on this in the APA Publication Manual (2009, p.68).

5. Avoid passive voice and be consistent with the tense you choose to use.

6. Do not make a claim without citing a source.

7. When using quotes, do so accurately in APA format. Be careful to always include author, publication date, and page or a paragraph number when quoting. Avoid block quotes whenever possible. Paraphrase where possible – use quotes only when the phrasing is essential or the meaning would be lost without the quote.
Writing Nuances

1. In sentences, be consistent in use of singular and plural. For example:
   - “The child’s social interest begins to develop when **he or she is** an infant.”
     (correct)
   - “The child’s social interest begins to develop when **they are** an infant.”
     (incorrect)

2. Gender is a social construct and does not identify sex. If you intend to identify a person’s psychosexual orientation, use *gender*. If you intend to identify a person physiologically, use *sex* rather than *gender*. If you intend to identify a person’s psychological orientation to maleness or femaleness, use “gender” rather than “sex.” (Read more in the APA Publication Manual, 2009, pp. 73-75).

3. Be sensitive to racial and ethnic identity issues and try to be as specific as possible in the cultural description of individuals. Avoid using the word *minority* without a modifier “ethnic”, “racial”, “sexual”, or “linguistic”. Capitalize racial and ethnic groups (*Black* instead of *black*). (Read more discussion on this topic in the APA Publication Manual, 2009, p. 75-76).

4. Don’t use language that defines an individual by his or her condition (borderline client, schizophrenic parent). You may want to write about “a client diagnosed with borderline personality disorder” or “parents with diagnosed schizophrenia” (pp. 72-73)

5. Don’t use contractions. Use “does not” instead of “doesn’t”, “is not” instead of “isn’t”, etc. It is more formal and appropriate to academic papers.

6. If this might be helpful, proofread papers out loud to yourself in an audible voice or have someone else to proofread it for you.
These are only a few examples. The APA Publication Manual contains a chapter devoted to writing clearly and concisely (APA, 2009, pp.61-87)
The Title of Your Project

A Master’s Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

By:

Your Full Name

Month Year
Approval Process for a Master’s Project’s Inclusion in AGS Media Center

(Appropriate forms available online and in the Media Center)

1. Once approved by a student’s Chairperson and Reader, an electronic version of the literature review and other materials (videotapes, brochures, advertisement, booklets, etc.) are submitted to the AGS Media Center Coordinator for the Media Center archives. Research project (option 3) must also be cleared by the IRB before being submitted to the Media Center Coordinator. Subject to approval by the Master’s Project Chairperson, some Master’s Project components will be made available to students and others wishing to make use of those projects. At the student’s discretion, research components approved for public display may also be submitted in hard copy version for display in AGS Media Center.

2. At the end of the oral examination, the Chairperson completes a form regarding the readiness of the Master’s Project materials for placement in AGS Media Center and for clearance by the IRB.

3. A copy of the form completed by the Chairperson is shared with the student at the end of the oral examination.

4. The original signed form is given to the Writing Center Coordinator for the Master’s Project research component central file.

5. The Writing Center Coordinator only reviews Master’s Project that have been deemed by the Chairperson to be ready for both archiving and final review for possible public placement in the Media Center.
6. Upon receiving clearance by the IRB (if applicable), Writing Center Coordinator reviews Master’s Project and makes one of two judgments:

- Master’s Project is approved and placed in Media Center for public display.
- Master’s Project is returned to student for optional final revisions. If public placement is desired by student, revisions must be made to Writing Center Coordinator’s satisfaction before public placement in Media Center occurs.

7. The Writing Center Coordinator completes the final review form and send the form to the Registrar.

8. Again, all students must submit a final electronic copy of their Master’s Project research component and other materials to the Writing Center Coordinator regardless of whether or not it will be formally placed in Media Center. In addition, any student whose Master’s Project research component is approved for public placement in the AGS Media Center may, at her or his discretion, also provide the Media Center with a bound copy of her or his Master’s Project research component.
**Human Subjects Research Review Process**

Forms and explanations concerning research with human participants can be found online on Adler Graduate School website and in the Media Center.
Master’s Project Completion Checklist

__ Complete course 601 “Introduction to Graduate Writing and The Masters Project

__ Complete course 500 Principles of Research

__ Complete course 599B or 602 “Developing and Master’s Project”

__ As a part of course 599B or 602 requirements

  Confirm your topic

  Decide on the type of project

  Have a Chairperson and a Reader to agree working with you

  If applicable, submit proposal for presentation and have your presentation date and place finalized

  Complete MP proposal form and have it approved

__ Start working with your Chairperson

__ Have your final draft(s) approved by the Chairperson

__ If applicable, have your presentation drafts and other details discussed with and approved by the Chairperson

__ Discuss the completion plans with your team (Chairperson and Reader), including the timeline.

__ Submit your approved final drafts to the Reader

__ Schedule your oral exam, with your Chairperson’s permission

__ Complete your oral exam

__ Complete any outstanding edits and submit your catalogue-ready and approved final draft to the Media Center Coordinator

__ Enjoy your accomplishment!