

Policies and Procedures for Final Projects for the AL and TESOL M.A. and Ed.M. Degrees

1. Overall Purpose of the Project

The M.A. and Ed.M. Projects have the following goals:

- (a) To provide students with the opportunity to reexamine books and articles already read in courses;
- (b) To provide students with the opportunity to read and critically discuss other books and articles in a specialized area within the scope of the program which they have not read in their courses but which are essential to establishing expertise in that specialized area;
- (c) To assess students' ability to write an extended academic paper in which a topic is analyzed critically from a number of perspectives, with claims supported by evidence both from the research literature and from your own investigation.

2. Selecting a Topic

Obviously, it is to everyone's benefit if you choose to write on a topic that truly interests you. By the time you are ready to start a project (see details about the different types of project in the next section), we hope that you will already have found possible topics and questions to address, whether from coursework or from other reading within the general area of AL/TESOL; your particular interest may be stimulated by a paper that you have written for an AL or TESOL class at TC. The AL/TESOL Program expects this topic to be suitably narrow and clearly focused on a single question or on a set of integrated questions; the Program also expects that the paper will not simply be a general summarization of literature or points made in one of your core courses or course papers. However, it is entirely possible to extend a paper already written for a course, provided the paper is extended substantially, both in the outside sources it incorporates and in original personal contributions.

When you feel that you have a possible topic for a project, consult a faculty member to discuss this topic before proceeding to research and write. Normally, a student will decide on the topic and make it known to a faculty member sometime during the semester prior to its planned completion. The Program expects that each student working towards the M.A. or Ed.M. will have an unofficial 'advisor' for the project and that any major changes in this topic will be discussed with the advisor as they occur. If the project involves a substantial extension of a paper done for a prior course, the instructor of that course will normally be the advisor.

A paper will not be accepted if there is no record of consultation with faculty before the paper was written. The main purpose of consultation with faculty is not to monitor but to assist; it has been our own experience that students tend to make short projects too ambitious rather than not ambitious enough. While the M.A. project will normally not involve the same depth or breadth of coverage of a topic as a Master's thesis, it will be much more than a term paper written for a 2 regular course. While we anticipate that informal discussions of the topic with advisors will be necessary from time to time, the project is not intended to be submitted in multiple drafts for revision, as in a writing class. When you have consulted with a faculty member and settled on a topic, your advisor must sign off your Program Sheet before the following dates:

- For May graduation: End of November
- For February graduation: End of April

3. Types of Project

For the M.A. /Ed.M. degrees, project options are categorized as follows (the page numbers are exclusive of appendices and bibliography):

TESOL-MA, General Track and K-12 Track:

- (a) Literature Review (20-25 pages)
- (b) Teacher Development Literature Review
 - For the General Track (20-25 pages)
 - For the K-12 Track (10-15 pages)

Applied Linguistics-M.A. and Ed.M.:

- (a) Literature Review (20-25 pages)
- (b) Data-based study or empirical study (20-25 pages)

Each type of project will be discussed in turn below.

3.1. Literature Review (M.A., all tracks, and Ed.M.):

The most commonly-chosen option is an extensive literature review in a specialized area which systematically and critically covers seminal articles and books in that area, which takes account of multiple perspectives in a reasonable way, and which finishes with an overview discussion. For example, a literature review might focus on the current state of research on teaching

Japanese topic/subject markers. A focus that was narrow enough a decade or two ago may now be too broad if a substantial amount of research has been done since then. To take an exemplary case, a literature review that covers empirical research on the effectiveness of the explicit teaching of linguistic form (as opposed to following a more implicit or ‘natural’ approach) might have been acceptable as a topic in 1995; however, it would be impossible to cover that literature adequately in 25 pages today.

The basic organizational features of literature reviews are discussed at the yearly M.A.-Ed.M. Project Orientation sessions in the fall, and (more importantly) in the MA Project Workshops given several times per year. You should plan to attend one orientation and one workshop early in your time in the program. For convenience, separate orientation sessions are offered for TESOL and Applied Linguistics in the fall. The dates for these sessions are announced at the beginning of each fall semester. See section 9 of the current document for more information.

3.2. Teacher Development Project (M.A.-TESOL General track):

The topic for this project is derived from your own teaching or learning experience. Consider a certain teaching or learning experience with a certain group of students (or, perhaps, with a particular student). Use theories, if appropriate, to identify and define the issue, review the literature to see what scholars have said about it, and think about how you can address in a specific teaching or learning context. The project should be between 20 and 25 pages and be organized approximately as follows:

Part 1: Context (3-5 pages): Provide a description and an analysis of the issue itself, including your experience with the issue.

Part 2: Literature review (10-12 pages): Address what the research literature (theoretical and/or empirical) says about this issue. Guidelines for this section are similar to the main body of the literature review for the regular MA project option; however, bear in mind the purpose outlined in Part 3.

Part 3: Implications for practice (5-8 pages): Synthesize the evidence and translate it into recommendations for practice, bearing in mind what you know personally about the context. Do the research findings make sense in light of your context? Do the theoretical, methodological, and/or pedagogical implications apply in your context? How might you implement changes into the classroom based on the research recommendations or findings? How successful do you think these changes would be?

3.3. Teacher Development Project (M.A.-K-12 track):

Guidelines for this project are identical to those for the Teacher Development Project for the TESOL-General Track, except for the required page number which is 10-15 pages. The length difference between projects for the General and K-12 Tracks is due to the extensive additional state exit requirements for K-12 students. The project can approximately be as follows:

Part 1: Context (2-3 pages)

Part 2: Literature review (5-7 pages)

Part 3: Implications for practice (3-5 pages)

3.4. Empirical Research (M.A./A.L. and Ed.M. tracks):

Another project option is a data-based or empirical research that is either completely original or replicates prior research, if there is merit in doing replication. Such a project might involve second-language classroom research; it might involve the construction of a pilot test; it might be a data-based language project in grammar or discourse. You may consider this option if you plan to apply for doctoral programs after obtaining your M.A./Ed.M. degree.

Keep in mind that you are not expected to provide definitive answers to the 'big' questions in your paper; if you continue toward doctoral work, there will be time for that later in your academic career. If your paper involves classroom research, take the necessary first steps to see whether you will actually have classrooms at your disposal to collect your data. If you plan to collect another kind of field data, make sure beforehand that the type and amount of data that you need is in fact collectable within a time span that will allow you to analyze the data comfortably.

Be sure to consult with an advisor before proceeding.

Whatever your area of focus, the project should address the topic in an organized, coherent way. The central question that you are addressing should be adequately clear to the reader and be treated with sophistication. You should support all assertions either (a) with evidence (= data or logical arguments) from the research literature, and/or (b) with evidence from data which you have personally gathered and analyzed, and/or (c) with logical arguments of your own.

Personally-gathered data may come, for example, from surveys, questionnaires, tests, observations inside or outside a classroom context, or experimental research; if appropriate, data may come from introspective judgments. We encourage well-supported original analyses and reinterpretations of data that others have collected. However, any conclusions drawn from data must be presented as tentatively established; avoid absolute statements and bald assertions about linear cause and effect.

4. Organization

As with all academic papers, the broad format will include an introduction in which a thesis is presented, a body in which the thesis is developed directly and in depth, and a conclusion in which the paper's results are commented on. If you are doing primary research -- i.e. collecting and analyzing field data for the purpose of testing research hypotheses, your paper should follow the standard format used in scientific papers. We will make more detailed organizational schemes available for your review.

5. Language

(a) Your paper should be written in formal academic register. It should be free of grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors. You are encouraged to use a spell check and grammar check on your computer, but do not rely exclusively on these tools, as they will not identify every possible error in spelling and grammar; it is often best to find a colleague with good proofreading skills who can scan your paper for errors.

(b) Your paper should include in-text references to research literature cited. Page numbers of references should be included wherever possible. Example:

...Use of the Total Physical Response method of second-language teaching is reported to lead to higher student evaluations in foreign-language courses (Krashen 1982, p.158)...

It must be clear to the reader at all times whether you are presenting your statements as original statements or statements attributed to your research sources. In general, unless some kind of explicit citation is done in each paragraph, the reader will assume that the statements within the paragraph are original. If you are in doubt about whether you have made your attributions clear, consult an advisor or other competent person before you hand in a final copy of your paper.

(c) Your paper must include a bibliography of all references used for the paper. These normally include all books, articles and films. Every item in the bibliography must be referenced at least once within the text of your paper (i.e., don't give 'ghost references'). Follow the format of the APA Manual for both bibliography and in-text references.

6. Format

Your paper should be word-processed and presented without erasures, white-out, or tack changes. The standard word-processing font is in twelve-point block letters. Papers should be double-spaced. The standard margin size is one inch; page numbers should appear either on the top or bottom of the paper, where the margin will be slightly larger; pagination begins with the first page of text. Shorter tables, charts, transcript segments, pictures and diagrams, where they

play a central role in the discussion, should be conveniently located for reference within the body of the paper. Longer tables, charts, transcripts, etc. are more suitably placed in separate, labeled appendices following the main text of the paper.

7. Submission Procedure

Two hard copies and **one e-copy** of the paper should be submitted. The e-copy submission should be done via a Canvas page for the M.A. /Ed.M. project. Email Dr. Vafaee (pv2203@tc.columbia.edu) to be added to the page. Follow the instructions on the page carefully, which also includes instructions on running an **originality check** (via a program called Turn-it-in, which is embedded in the Canvas page).

Each of the two hard copies should have a cover page which includes (1) paper title, (2) "AL/TESOL Project for the M.A./Ed.M. Degree", (3) the kind of project (i.e., lit. review or teacher development), (4) your track in the program (i.e., TESOL General, TESOL k-12, or AL), (5) the last four digits of your student ID#, and (6) the date of submission.

You should also place a **separate cover sheet** with all above information plus your name on the top of the two hard copies.

The hard copies of the TESOL (Both General and K-12 Tracks) projects should be placed in the mail box of Dr. Vafaee, and the AL projects should be placed in the mail box of Dr. Williams. Both of these two mail boxes are located in the main office of the AL/TESOL program at Zankel 316.

8. Submission Deadlines

Submit both hard copies and the e-copy of the paper within the established deadline for the project, as follows:

Planned graduation date

February, 2026
May, 2026
February, 2027
May, 2027
February, 2028

Project due date

Friday, October 3, 2025
Friday, February 6, 2026
Friday, October 4, 2026
Friday, February 5, 2027
Friday, February 4, 2028

You are welcome to submit a paper before the deadline as well.

9. Workshops and Orientation Sessions

(a) Please note that the program has a workshop on MA Project writing that is offered multiple times each year. This course has been very well received, and we strongly recommend it to those who want further guidance in the writing of their projects.

(b) Please also note that the program holds orientation sessions each fall – one for TESOL, the other for AL - in which the details of M.A. and EdM. Projects are discussed. **The document that you are now reading is not meant to replace these orientation meetings.** You will be informed by e-mail about the dates of these sessions.

10. Evaluation Criteria for the Primary Literature Reviews

Your paper will be read by two readers, at least one of whom will be a AL/TESOL faculty member, according to area of specialty; there may be a third reader as well. The grades given are 'high pass' (A), 'pass' (B), or 'rewrite' (R) based on the following criteria.

A) CONTENT ('A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 3)

- (a) The paper addresses a question or issue in an organized, coherent, and cogent way.
- (b) The topic is sufficiently narrow and focused, given the expected length of the paper (20-25 pages for MA-AL); the paper is not overly general in scope. 7
- (c) The main idea is clear and treated with sophistication.
- (d) The paper clearly and consistently engages available research literature that is directly relevant to the topic.
- (e) The paper properly cites all sources used and cites no sources not used.
- (f) The paper provides support for any specific or general claims made by the writer. These claims may be original, or they may be attempts to refine or reinforce others' prior claims.
- (g) The paper clearly documents specific and general claims made by authors cite and clearly outlines (where relevant) the support given by those authors for their claims.
- (h) The paper adequately permits the reader to distinguish the claims of the writer from those of the research sources used by the writer.

(i) The paper provides a critical approach to the analysis and includes a reasonable consideration of other perspectives.

(j) The paper shows depth and breadth of thinking. If the entire paper is a comprehensive literature review on a particular topic, it is expected that the writer will go beyond mere summarization of others' work by highlighting problems and potential directions for future research.

B) ORGANIZATION ("A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 2)

(a) The paper includes an introduction which effectively orients the reader to the topic and explicitly states a thesis which informs the reader of what to expect in the body of the paper.

(b) The essay includes a literature review (where applicable) which orients the reader to the current state of opinion regarding the topic. (In a research paper, the literature review normally follows the introduction.)

(c) The paper includes a conclusion which not only reinforces the thesis but also guides the reader toward new insights into the topic.

(d) The paper is organized into discrete, logically ordered sections which are separate but form a logical whole. If the paper involves original, primary research following an experimental design, the organization of the paper will normally follow the standard format of "Introduction > Methods > Results > Discussion".

(e) The sections of the paper are organized into separate, internally unified paragraphs.

(f) The paper shows coherence between paragraphs and between sections. Where helpful, cohesive devices should assist the reader in understanding how the various parts of the paper fit together.

(g) The paper contains logical headings for the different sections of the paper and subheadings, if applicable. Headings should be easily distinguishable from subheadings.

(h) (For Ed.M. papers only:) If a paper is longer than thirty pages and contains multiple sections and subsections, a table of contents is desirable.

D) LANGUAGE ("A", "B", "Rewrite", weighted by 1)

- (a) The paper is written in formal academic register.
- (b) The paper is free of grammatical and mechanical errors (e.g., misspellings and punctuation errors).
- (c) The paper demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for in-text referencing (including both paraphrases and direct quotations) based on the APA system, 7th edition, as used in publications such as TESOL Quarterly.
- (d) The essay contains a full bibliography which follows the APA conventions used in publications such as TESOL Quarterly.
- (e) Where applicable, the paper includes ordered and numbered appendices.
- (f) The paper includes a cover page with student name and paper title; pages are properly formatted and are numbered beginning with the first page of text.

11. Evaluation Criteria for the Teacher Development Projects

An analytic rubric will be used to score Teacher Development Projects. Criteria include:

A) CONTEXT

Quality of Introduction; level of detail of the context description; clarity of the description of the teaching/learning issue)

B) LITERATURE REVIEW

Quality of the literature review and discussion; see earlier description under “Content” and “Organization” for literature reviews.

C) IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE (IF ANY)

Relevance and practicality of recommendations

D) LANGUAGE

- (a) The paper is written in formal academic register.
- (b) The paper is free of grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors.
- (c) The paper demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for in-text referencing (including both paraphrases and direct quotations) based on the APA system, 6th edition, as used in publications such as *TESOL Quarterly*.
- (d) The essay contains a full bibliography which follows the APA conventions used in publications such as *TESOL Quarterly*.
- (e) Where applicable, the paper includes ordered and numbered appendices.
- (f) The paper includes a cover page with student name and paper title; pages are properly formatted and are numbered beginning with the first page of text.

12. APPLE Award

Each year outstanding papers, as determined by the faculty, are eligible to receive the APPLE Award. For consideration, a paper should receive two high passes in the first round of the review.

APPLE-Award-winning MA Projects from previous years are published each year in Issue 2 of our program's peer-reviewed web-journal, *Studies in Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, available at <https://tesolal.columbia.edu/>

Summary Table

Project Type	
TESOL-MA, General Track and K-12 Track: - Primary Literature Review (20-25 pages) - Teacher Development Literature Review - For the General Track (20-25 pages) - For the K-12 Track (10-15 pages)	
Applied Linguistics-M.A. and Ed.M.: - Primary Literature Review (20-25 pages) - Data-based study or empirical study (20-25 pages)	
Topic Approval Deadlines	
-For May graduation: end of November -For February graduation: end of April	
Project Submission Guidelines	
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