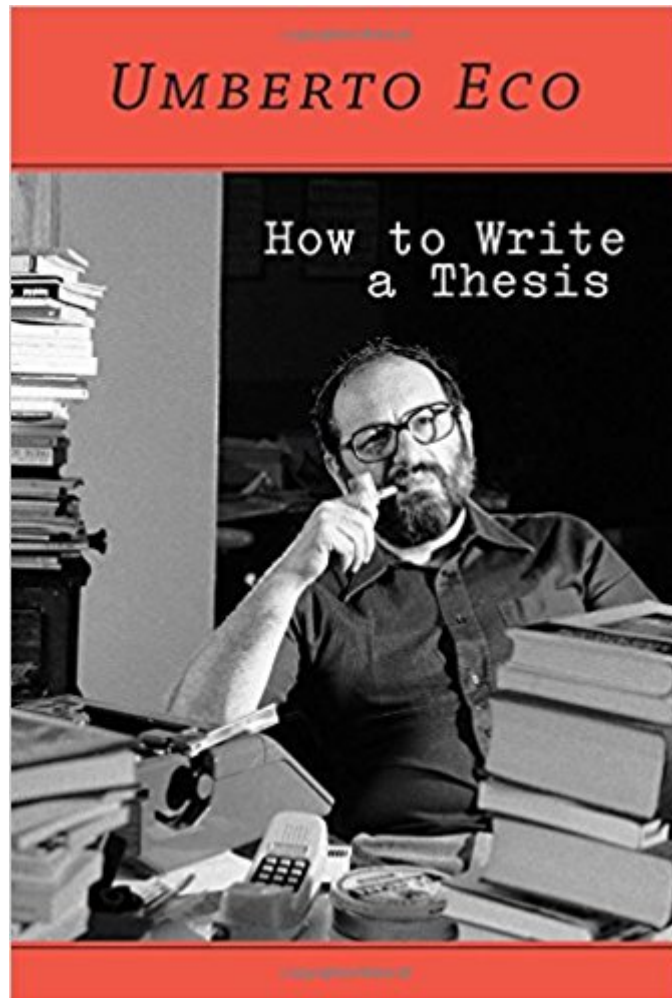




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# How To Write A Thesis (MIT Press)



## Synopsis

By the time Umberto Eco published his best-selling novel *The Name of the Rose*, he was one of Italy's most celebrated intellectuals, a distinguished academic and the author of influential works on semiotics. Some years before that, in 1977, Eco published a little book for his students, *How to Write a Thesis*, in which he offered useful advice on all the steps involved in researching and writing a thesis -- from choosing a topic to organizing a work schedule to writing the final draft. Now in its twenty-third edition in Italy and translated into seventeen languages, *How to Write a Thesis* has become a classic. Remarkably, this is its first, long overdue publication in English. Eco's approach is anything but dry and academic. He not only offers practical advice but also considers larger questions about the value of the thesis-writing exercise. *How to Write a Thesis* is unlike any other writing manual. It reads like a novel. It is opinionated. It is frequently irreverent, sometimes polemical, and often hilarious. Eco advises students how to avoid "thesis neurosis" and he answers the important question "Must You Read Books?" He reminds students "You are not Proust" and "Write everything that comes into your head, but only in the first draft." Of course, there was no Internet in 1977, but Eco's index card research system offers important lessons about critical thinking and information curating for students of today who may be burdened by Big Data. *How to Write a Thesis* belongs on the bookshelves of students, teachers, writers, and Eco fans everywhere. Already a classic, it would fit nicely between two other classics: *Strunk and White* and *The Name of the Rose*.

Contents

The Definition and Purpose of a Thesis

Choosing the Topic

Conducting Research

The Work Plan and the Index Cards

Writing the Thesis

The Final Draft

## Book Information

Series: MIT Press

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: The MIT Press; 1 Tra edition (March 6, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0262527138

ISBN-13: 978-0262527132

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 35 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #28,586 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in Books > Education &

Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Education Theory > Research #81 in Books > Reference >

## Customer Reviews

Although first published in Italian in 1977, before Eco ( *The Name of the Rose*) became an internationally renowned novelist, this guide to writing a thesis -- originally aimed at Italian humanities undergraduates -- brims with practical advice useful for writing research papers.... His advocacy of index card files to organize data seems quaintly nostalgic in the age of laptops and online databases, but it only underscores the importance of applying these more sophisticated tools to achieve the thoroughness of the results that he advocates. (Publishers Weekly) *How to Write a Thesis* is full of friendly, no-bullshit, entry-level advice on what to do and how to do it, illustrated with lucid examples and -- significantly -- explanations of why, by one of the great researchers and writers in the post-war humanities â | Best of all, the absolutely superb chapter on how to write is worth triple the price of admission on its own. (Robert Eaglestone *Times Higher Education*) *How to Write a Thesis* remains valuable after all this time largely thanks to the spirit of Eco's advice. It is witty but sober, genial but demanding -- and remarkably uncynical about the rewards of the thesis, both for the person writing it and for the enterprise of scholarship itself.... Some of Eco's advice is, if anything, even more valuable now, given the ubiquity and seeming omniscience of our digital tools.... Eco's humor never detracts from his serious intent. And anyway, even the sardonic pointers on cheating are instructive in their way. (Scott McLemee *Inside Higher Education*) Eco is a first-rate storyteller and unpretentious instructor who thrives on describing the twists and turns of research projects as well as how to avoid accusations of plagiarism. (Jan Gardner *Boston Globe*) The book's enduring appeal -- the reason it might interest someone whose life no longer demands the writing of anything longer than an e-mail -- has little to do with the rigors of undergraduate honors requirements. Instead, it's about what, in Eco's rhapsodic and often funny book, the thesis represents: a magical process of self-realization, a kind of careful, curious engagement with the world that need not end in one's early twenties. "Your thesis," Eco foretells, "is like your first love: it will be difficult to forget." By mastering the demands and protocols of the fusty old thesis, Eco passionately demonstrates, we become equipped for a world outside ourselves -- a world of ideas, philosophies, and debates. (Hua Hsu *The New Yorker*) Well beyond the completion of the thesis, Eco's manual makes for pleasant reading and is deserving of a place on the desks of scholars and professional writers. Even sections such as that recommending the combinatorial system of handwritten index cards, while outdated in the digital age, can propose a helpful exercise in critical

thinking, and add a certain vintage appeal to the book. (Times Literary Supplement)

Umberto Eco is an Italian semiotician, philosopher, literary critic, and novelist. He is the author of *The Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, and *The Prague Cemetery*, all bestsellers in many languages, as well as a number of influential scholarly works.

This book is nothing short of brilliant. But what would one expect from Umberto Eco? It is an old, somewhat outdated, guide for students in Italian universities, who must, as undergraduates, produce a thesis. The book is a step by step guide in how to do this. I live in the United States where there is no such demand on undergraduates, and I am a high school English teacher. Yet I am in love with this book. Eco says that the researching and writing of an extended essay is an exercise in creativity and in exploration. Anyone who is interested in writing, particularly non-fiction, or who is in charge of student writers, from high school through graduate school, should add this to their library--right alongside Fowler's, Strunk and White, and the OED. It is that good.

Umberto Eco's instructional booklet on how to write a thesis is almost 40 years old, but was finally published in English translation. While much of the technology has changed (digital databases, Google, etc.) Eco's basic advice remains valuable. The basic approach to researching a topic, initiating a literature search, keeping track of your data, and compiling it into a sensible report remains the same. I enjoyed his many examples and his great dedication to making students understand what is involved.

The book contains a set of practical suggestions based not only on good writing practices, but also based on Eco's extensive academic experience, both as a writer and a student. Though some sections that refer to practical aspects of the investigation are outdated due to the advancements in technology, the text contains valuable, evergreen tips that are essential today as much as they were when the book was first published. I highly recommend it.

Very few books on this topic are at all concerned with the mindset of the student as he/she writes, and this concern is the chief benefit of this book. Eco genuinely cared whether his students finished their theses, and how well they were equipped for their future lives. His tone is eminently practical; here is what you need to know to get through the process; here is what you should do; here is what you should not do. His tone can still be a bit too magisterial for the undergraduate (especially

today's undergraduate), and in an internet age many of his paperwork procedures are quite out of date. I'm glad the book is still in print, and happy to own a copy, but I wouldn't call it essential.

A great read even if written in the 70's - much of the information inside is readily applicable to current times. A great quick read for anyone struggling with that thesis or dissertation process. And the snarkiness of the author will keep you laughing out loud ! A fun read.

A superb writing guide

WRITING IT NOW, WE WILL SEE HOW GOOD IT WAS AFTER IT IS SUBMITTED. WELL WRITTEN BOOK!

Once I became aware of this book I asked every grad student I was mentoring to get it, read it and use it. I altered how I mentor and advise students, even revised core course information after reading it. A must read for all grad students faced with writing a thesis for publication.

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