

## **Annotated Bibliography: Guidelines for Poetry Thesis Students**

Along with the book-length manuscript, all thesis students are required to produce an annotated bibliography. You should not think of it as a mere addendum to your thesis, but rather as the cornerstone. It is an opportunity for you to articulate what it is you aspire to in your writing, to think about the role literature has played in your life, and the role you hope to play some day in literature. The best bibliographies pull together the themes of your poetry collection and unify the thesis.

The bibliography is not an academic paper in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a thoughtful, well-constructed personal essay in which you discuss the books that have influenced your own writing. For the most part, the books you discuss should be ones you read while working on your thesis: collections of poems, anthologies and literary journals, perhaps a work of literary nonfiction. Works of fiction or other genres that traverse the boundaries of poetry may be included as well. Some might be books suggested by your advisor, other authors, and works you discovered on your own. You might reach back a little farther to include one or two books you read at a pivotal point in your life, books that made you want to write, made you feel you could write, books that inspired you in some way as an artist. This bibliography might be best thought of as a sort of field exam, an extension of the point of your own inquiry.

You should discuss a minimum of ten books in the essay, although you can certainly list many more in your bibliography. Typically, the bibliography is between 10 and 15 pages long.

The style can be similar to what it might be in a final paper for an academic course, if this is what you're most comfortable with. Or, you might choose a more conversational style that reflects your personality. Whatever style or tone you choose, you must be clear, precise, focused, and detailed. This is a structured essay, not a rambling meditation. You must use quotes from the books to illustrate your points. Discuss specific technical matters that you learned from author X, and then choose a line, a stanza, or an entire poem that illustrates what you're discussing: grammar, syntax, structure, form, and so on. Why was this work inspiring? What did you learn from author A? Some books might have inspired you to tackle certain theme, forms, or subject matter.

Most students write the bibliography toward the end of their second semester senior year, as their thesis is nearing completion. However, it would be most helpful to you to keep notes on your reading throughout the two years of the thesis process, as both a way of keeping track of what you read and as documentation of the trajectory of your interests as a writer over time.