



Guidelines for Writing your Master's Thesis

1. General remarks

If you wish to write a master's thesis under my supervision, you are welcome to propose a topic that interests you. The research question must be designed to generate a scientific contribution. You should carefully think about appropriate methods, research which data are available, and how you can analyze the data meaningfully. In a personal conversation, we will discuss the precise formulation of the topic. In particular, I will ensure that your project is not overly ambitious but can be successfully completed within six months (or four months in the one-year master's program).

After having registered your master's thesis, please send me an informal mail once a month with a short report on the progress of your work, any problems encountered, and your work plan for the coming month. In your third report (i. e. after four months), please send the results that are intended to form the core of your thesis (in the one-year master's program with your second report, i. e. after three months). This should not be a finished text, short explanations are sufficient so that I understand what you have done.

I recommend writing the master's thesis in English.

2. Content and length of the thesis

For a strong academic thesis, it is essential to formulate a clearly defined research question within the given topic. This research question should serve as the conceptual guiding thread of the entire thesis. My primary criterion for evaluating your work is the quality with which this research question is addressed and answered.

For this reason, I do not specify a required length for the thesis, as length alone does not indicate quality. However, academic papers are rarely longer than 25–30 pages. You should be able to present your results concisely and precisely, especially since your contribution to scientific knowledge will likely be more limited than that of articles published in academic journals.

You are free to join an appendix to your work. The appendix is no part of the main thesis and I usually do not read it completely, only major parts. I expect all important findings to be documented in the main text, which should comprehensively present your approach and be readable without consulting the appendix.

The appendix should merely offer the reader the option to explore details in greater depth. For example, it may contain additional information on the markets under consideration or more extensive documentation of regression results. Robustness checks may also be documented in the appendix, provided they broadly confirm the main results; in the main text, these should then be summarized only briefly.

3. Structure and organization

Students often invest considerable effort at the beginning in developing a detailed outline. And in fact, it is important to think in advance of how to structure your work (approach). Yet, on the other hand, the outline of your work also results from the conceptual structure of your work: If you have a systematic, logical approach in mind, the formal outline of your work is clear. It is also entirely unproblematic if, in the course of your work, you realize that a different approach or structure is more appropriate than originally planned. In that case, simply adapt the outline accordingly. Only upon submission the outline becomes a fixed framework that guides the reader; until then just treat it as flexible.

Avoid a too detailed outline. In most cases, a single level of structure is sufficient, for example: 1. Introduction, 2. Economic question/model, 3. Methodological approach, 4. Data and empirical results, 5. Conclusions. Choose section titles that are as informative as possible. In some cases, further subdivision may be useful. Keep in mind that, for example, a section 3.1 necessarily requires a section 3.2. In general, however, use sub-sections sparingly. I advise against a third level of subdivision.

A good introduction is extremely important and should be well thought of. After briefly introducing the topic, you must clearly state the research question and situate it within the existing literature. (Briefly) demonstrate that you have gained an adequate overview of the relevant literature, both in terms of content/economics and methodology. Then outline your approach and explain why it is appropriate and, perhaps, innovative. This will spark the reader's interest. You should conclude the introduction with a short outline paragraph that describes the guiding thread of the thesis and briefly summarizes the content of the subsequent chapters.

You do not have to write the introduction first. It is often useful to sketch it only conceptually at the beginning and then focus quickly on the main part. You can write the introduction once your findings are established. You will be better able to introduce the thesis when you know what it contains and which findings you have obtained. However, do not anticipate your findings in the introduction.

In the main part of the thesis, make sure your line of thought is clear, your argumentation is strong, and your language precise. Present your results in an easily comprehensible and legible

form. Never copy raw regression output into the thesis, as it contains a lot of irrelevant information. Always create your own tables that include only the key results.

A thesis usually includes a conclusion. In addition to a brief summary of the results and, if appropriate, a critical assessment, it should point to further questions and alternative approaches. In contrast to the introduction which is quite important, the conclusion is rather unimportant. In a good thesis, all essential points are made in the main text. Keep the conclusion short if you have nothing substantial to add.

4. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

I permit the use of artificial intelligence subject to the following conditions:

- a) You must attach the declaration of authorship for theses required by the Academic Office Economics.
- b) You may use AI in your thesis in any way you choose, provided that your own intellectual contribution predominates in every part of the work. In particular, this means that you must write the text yourself and generate the research results yourself.
- c) You may have texts corrected by AI that you have written yourself. I assess both the conceptual structure of your thesis and the quality of your written expression. I deduct points for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. If you have weaknesses in these areas, I strongly recommend using ChatGPT or similar AI tools for support.
- d) You may use AI to search for literature. However, I expect that you have actually read the literature that you cite.

Note: ChatGPT sometimes invents references that do not exist. You alone bear responsibility for the accuracy of citations.

5. Common weaknesses and mistakes

- Students often choose an overly lengthy and cumbersome introduction. Address your topic directly and write concisely and with focus.
- Insufficient engagement with the literature typically becomes apparent if the student excessively relies on one or only a few authors or documents.
- Excessive use of direct quotations hampers readability and gives the impression that the author avoids formulating ideas independently. Direct quotations should be used sparingly.
- Present arguments from the literature in your own words. This demonstrates that you have understood the results presented and can interpret them with respect to your specific research question. Do not forget to cite the original source when paraphrasing someone else's ideas.

- Avoid verbosity. Write clearly and precisely, using appropriate economic terminology. Long-winded discussions or a journalistic writing style are not desired.
- Make sure the quality of your language is high. If you write in German, avoid unnecessary Anglicisms. I also assess whether you have a good command of the technical language of the discipline. For English technical terms, there is almost always an appropriate German equivalent. In the few cases where translation is difficult, choose a suitable German term and include the English term in parentheses at its first occurrence (e. g. “Versuchungen für Fehlverhalten (moral hazard)”).
- Not every statement requires a citation. Some facts may be assumed to be common knowledge, especially if they are easy to verify. Descriptions and subjective assessments generally do not need to be “backed up” by references, as those sources could also be mistaken. Have the confidence to present your own estimates and judgments—explaining and justifying them scientifically is your task.
- Make sure that tables and figures are self-explanatory and can be understood without reading the text. Tables and figures should be included in the main text whenever they are important for understanding. They must have titles. If you use external sources, provide the source directly below the figure or table.

6. Citations

In your paper, use the so-called American citation format. This normally consists of the authors' names followed by the year of publication in parentheses. For shorter works (e. g. journal articles), page numbers are generally not required. For monographs and other longer texts, however, please also indicate the page(s) you are referring to. If an author has published several papers you are citing in the same year, distinguish them by adding a, b, c, etc. to the year.

In the American citation format, sources are referenced as briefly as possible within the text. The full reference is given in the bibliography — not in a footnote!

Examples:

Leeper (2011) shows that ...

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012, S. 125) argue that ...

The fundamental theory was formulated by King, Plosser and Rebelo (1988a), while King, Plosser and Rebelo (1988b) applied it to technology shocks with unit roots.

In the literature review, the complete title of the book or article is given. Titles are ordered alphabetically by author. Publications by the same author are sorted chronologically. Many different citation formats exist. I do not care which citation format you use as long as it is applied consistently to all sources and contains the relevant information. AI may help you format your bibliography consistently and in line with technical standards.

Examples:

Kraft K. (1991): Lohnflexibilität und Beschäftigung in der bundesdeutschen Industrie. Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik 208, 239-253.

Pfann G. A., Palm F. C. (1993): Asymmetric Adjustment Costs in Non-linear Labour Demand Models for the Netherlands and U.K. Manufacturing. Review of Economic Studies 60, 397-412.

Nickel S. J. (1986): Dynamic Models of Labor Demand. In: Ashenfelter O., Layard R. (eds.), *Handbook of Labor Economics*, Amsterdam.

Hasset K., Metcalf G. E. (1994): Investment with Uncertain Tax Policy: Does Random Tax Policy Discourage Investment? National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge), working paper no. 4780.

Internet sources are cited analogously; however, please add the full URL and the date of access. If no author is given, use the abbreviation “n.a.” (no author). If the year of publication cannot be determined, use the abbreviation “n.d.” (no date).

Example:

Bundesministerium der Finanzen (2025): Der Wachstumsbooster kommt. <https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Web/DE/Themen/Steuern/Wachstumsbooster/wachstumsbooster.html>, accessed on 6.8.2025.

7. Formal requirements

Please consult the publications of the Academic Office Economics for formal requirements as well as the conditions for registration and submission.

Ensure that your thesis has a standard, clean layout. Beyond that, I do not impose specific formatting requirements. Please note:

Footnotes should be used for supplementary explanations that are not essential for understanding the main text.

The reference list must include all works cited in the thesis—and no others.

A list of figures and tables is required only if you have a large number of figures or tables.

8. Grading of a master’s thesis

The overall grade of a master’s thesis is determined according to the criteria listed below. These criteria cannot always be clearly separated, so the weighting factors provided should be understood as rough guidelines and may be adjusted in individual cases.

- | | |
|---|------|
| I. <i>Structure and outline of your work:</i> | 15 % |
| a. Clarity | |
| b. Relevance to the topic | |
| c. Completeness | |
| d. Structured, systematic organization | |
| II. Content-related processing of the topic: | 60 % |
| a. Knowledge and understanding of the relevant literature | |
| b. Academic contribution of the thesis | |
| c. Economic and methodological understanding | |
| d. Completeness of your line of reasoning | |
| e. Quality of the argument | |

III. Linguistic quality	20 %
a. Overall linguistic quality of your work, precise expressions	
b. Orthography and grammar	
IV. <i>Literature and formal aspects:</i>	5 %
a. Correct citation format	
b. Overall appearance of your work	