

Guidelines on writing seminar, bachelor and master theses

at the
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especially for the Economy of Japan

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1) Introduction

The main purpose of any academic thesis (seminar, bachelor, or master) is to make students familiar with the process of scholarly research and academic writing under the direction and supervision of an experienced faculty member. This still means that it is the student's responsibility to work on a subject independently and to create own ideas and arguments in a specific field. A major goal of academic theses is that students can prove their capabilities to successfully work on an academic problem, choose and apply appropriate methods, and present the results in a way that shows they are qualified to contribute to the generation of new knowledge.

Writing an academic thesis is both challenging and rewarding at the same time. Doubtless, it demands a lot of time, effort, it can sometimes be challenging, but the final outcome should be a manuscript, which you are satisfied with and proud of. It expresses one's very own thoughts and the solution to an academic problem, and sometimes is the start of a promising academic career.

This guideline should help students to compile an academic thesis – from developing an interesting idea to submitting the final thesis.

It is important to note that while this guide focuses on issues of actually 'creating' the thesis, when it comes to submitting the thesis, the rules of the examination authority (Prüfungsamt) apply. It is the students' responsibility to make sure that the General Examination Rules are followed. In case of doubt, students should bring any issues up ahead of time by asking the respective supervisor and/or the staff of the examination authority.

2) Assessment and Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of seminar, bachelor and master theses is based on various assessment criteria. To inform the students about the expectations of the department, all criteria and their weighting can be found in the following table.

Evaluation of seminar, bachelor and master theses

Evaluation criteria	Weighting	Grade	Comments
1. Research question and objective	20%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practical relevance - Theoretical relevance - Topicality - Appropriateness/clarity of objective 			
2. Structure	10%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematics - Balance between chapters 			
3. Content	25%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Range - Depth - Reference to objective - Consistency of argumentation - Originality - Contribution to knowledge 			
4. Methodology	20%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriateness - Transparency - Analytical Rigor - Quality (Representativeness, Validity, Reliability) 			
5. Literature analysis	15%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specificity (Quality) - Topicality - Critical reflection of references - Depth of analysis - Transparency of references 			
6. Form and style	10%		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensibility - Precision - Illustration through figures and tables - Correctness - Appearance - Uniformity (APA Guide) 			
Weighted average	100%		
Total grade			

When assessing a seminar, bachelor and master thesis, the first question that arises is whether the author has managed to elaborate a convincing and illustrative **research question** (why are you dealing with this topic?). In this context two criteria are of major importance, namely the relevance and the topicality of the subject. Regarding relevance, one can distinguish between practical and theoretical relevance. A research question is of high theoretical relevance if the author proves that the problem has not or only rarely been addressed in previous studies or that it is discussed very controversially. This is often the case when current developments challenge central assumptions of theories. The practical relevance of a problem is generally high if new implications for the management can be derived from its solution.

After the research question has been elaborated, the **objective of the thesis** has to be defined (which problem shall be solved in the paper?), which again can consist of a theoretical and a practical component. Generally, one can distinguish between descriptive, analytical, prescriptive and normative objectives, whereas a descriptive objective is usually not demanding enough for bachelor and master thesis. In most cases, academic theses are based on analytical objectives and e.g. the influence of several independent on one or more dependent variables is analyzed. Master theses commonly cover potential conditional effects as well.

For the table of contents, the argumentation and the choice of adequate research methods, it is very useful to have the formal character of the objective in mind as well as to explicitly illustrate and explain it. The precise phrasing of the objective is of major importance and it serves as a 'yardstick' for the evaluation of the content of the thesis. A common mistake is to choose a too demanding objective (e.g. 'a general and encompassing model shall be derived'), which cannot be fulfilled in the given period of time. In many cases, the objective is phrased so generally and vaguely, that at the end of the paper one cannot judge whether the objective has been reached (e.g. 'foreign direct investment in Japan shall be analyzed'). Many authors lose sight of the objective they stated in the beginning of their thesis and in the end provide an answer that does not match the question raised. It is highly emphasized that a statement such as e.g. 'the objective lies in displaying the existing approaches' does not stand for a proper objective, as its generalized wording does not imply a research question and therefore no knowledge progress can be expected (the systematic presentation of existing approaches relating to a certain topic can, however, be a reasonable objective if the author proves that such does not yet exist and that relevant approaches have not yet been presented, analyzed or compared with each other).

Regarding content, the **discussion**, which in most cases is the most extensive part of the thesis, is especially assessed in terms of its relevance to the solution of the objective, as well as its theoretical range (are all relevant aspects mentioned?) and depth (does the author make operational, that is, measurable and verifiable statements?). Other criteria are the consistency (is the line of thought structured clearly or are there gaps and repetitions?) and originality of the argumentation (does the author reveal new and surprising findings or are largely known facts simply repeated?).

The evaluation of the discussion tends to be particularly positive if the author uses a **solid theoretical concept** (e.g. transaction cost theory, learning theory, motivational theory) which is followed consequently and on which the

discussion is based upon. In a strict sense, the term 'theoretical' has to be understood as a systematic reduction of complexity. A deficit that can often be seen in theses with a strong practical focus is the lack of theoretical concepts in the empirical investigation. Even if there are no findings on some of the theoretically developed relationships, the theoretical concept should be followed. Missing evidence often does not imply a deficiency, but rather an important finding of an academic thesis from which implications for future research can be derived.

Concerning **empirical theses**, the depiction of the used methods of data collection, preparation and analysis are of major importance. The author should reflect on the basic quality criteria of scientific research (validity, reliability, representativeness, etc.) and demonstrate how they were taken into consideration (analytical rigor). The approach should be comprehensible for readers. This includes interview documentation in an appendix, explanation of measures and operationalization, etc.

Apart from this, it is important that **authors take a critical stance** towards their research topic. This is especially valid for theses with practice-oriented research questions. Academic research and practice follow different logics. Academic research should collect and systemize all existing empirical practices, test those practices for their methodical stability and, if necessary, develop new methods and apply the logic of practitioners on verifiable theories and concepts. Practitioners on the other hand, are supposed to find solutions adjusted to concrete situations.

Another important assessment criterion is the question whether the thesis comes to a comprehensible and systematically derived **conclusion**, which is related to the objectives in the beginning. There should be a critical reflection of the methodology towards the end of the thesis. This may include, for example, a discussion of whether the results are robust, i.e. how much they depend on the theoretical framework or methodology used in the study, and whether the findings may be transferred to other contexts (e.g., companies, industries or countries). It is often critical and questionable, however, if at the end of a thesis completely new aspects are introduced ('Outlook') or vague and general practical implications are derived (e.g., 'Companies should check their choice of foreign markets precisely').

Any thesis requires an extensive and detailed **analysis of literature**. It is essential that students do not only analyze general basic literature (textbooks) but also include special literature on the respective topic (articles in international well-established journals, edited volumes, dissertations, etc.). A reader's basic textbook knowledge is taken for granted and therefore should not be completely reproduced. Other criteria are the topicality and range of used literature (analysis of foreign sources and sources of adjacent research disciplines) as well as their quality. Regarding the quality evaluation of sources, the Journal-ranking of the 'Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft' can be considered as a reliable source. It is highly important to not only cite sources, but to adapt and reflect on them critically.

Finally, the **style of writing** is an important assessment criterion. This includes the scientific presentation (no journalistic jargon), the consistent and coherent usage of essential terms, a clear presentation (e.g. no nested sentences or sentences spanning multiple lines) as well as the illustration by examples or

clearly arranged figures. It is particularly important, to not use any kind of discriminatory terms. An elegant and comprehensible language is often a sign for how well-read and informed the author is about the subject.

3) General Structure and Table of Contents

In general, the structure, the content and the argumentation of an academic thesis should be coherent. The table of contents derived from the research question and objective should be balanced and systematic. The individual chapters have to exclude each other logically (mutual exclusiveness) and cover the entire superior segment (collective exhaustiveness) (MECE principle). A thesis should start with a meaningful introduction - comprising the practical and theoretical relevance - from which the research question, the objective of the thesis and the methodology emerge. All subsequent explanations should visibly follow this structure. The chapters should not simply be titled 'introduction', 'main part' or 'conclusion', but rather give a good overview of the main contents of the chapters. For example, the title of the final chapter should indicate whether the author wants to summarize the results, give an overview of the hypotheses or show up further perspectives on unsolved problems.

Especially for theses with an empirical (quantitative) focus the following table of contents is suitable, as most academic studies are structured in this way.

1	Research question, objective and structure of the study
2	State of research (theoretical foundations and empirical studies)
3	Derivation of research hypotheses
4	Methodology
4.1	Sample: selection of respondents
4.2	Methods of data collection
4.3	Measures: operationalization of variables
4.4	Methods of data processing and analysis
5	Findings
5.1	Description
5.2	Analysis and test of hypotheses
6	Discussion of the results
7	Contributions, limitations and implications
7.1	Contributions to practical and theoretical knowledge
7.2	Limitations: critical reflection of methodology
7.3	Implications for future research

All these aspects should be listed both in the table of contents as well as in the text itself. A subchapter 1.1 has to be followed by 1.2 and so on. Normally subchapters should not be shorter than one page as this can quickly get confusing. Otherwise a structure within the text is necessary, using a), b), c), or dashes (-) is preferred.

4) Types of Academic Theses

In every degree program, students write and turn in a variety of different types of academic papers. From the very first seminar thesis to the final graduation project, the standards will vary. The following chapter is intended to outline the specific demands and formal requirements of these different types of academic theses.

4.1. Seminar Theses

Broadly speaking, a seminar thesis is the most common form of an academic paper at a university.

Typically, seminar theses are based on a topic on which students have worked on in a seminar. Over the time of the course, students will develop their specific ideas and start composing the thesis. This process is done either individually (e.g. a student is solely responsible) or in group work, depending on the respective setting of the course.

Length of seminar theses

Typically, a seminar paper contains approximately 2-3 pages (1,400 words) per ECTS credit rewarded for the seminar. Commonly, it is harder to produce a shorter text rather than a long one – while still delivering the same context. As a result, one goal should be to meet the appointed word-count, with a tolerance of +/- 10 percent.

In each course the exact requirements in terms of word-count (depending on the degree program) will be outlined in the kick-off meeting. These are generally governed by the respective examination regulations.

Deadlines and submissions of seminar theses

Deadlines for seminar theses will be announced by the lecturer and individual dates for presentations will be scheduled.

Unless otherwise discussed with the respective lecturer, one hard copy (printed and stapled, one page per sheet of paper, printed on front-side only) of the seminar thesis has to be handed in to Mr. Kinadeter's office (Sekretariat, room D 106, Oettingenstr. 67) before noon (12:00) on the specified date. In case Mr. Kinadeter is not available, seminar theses can be handed in to Mrs. Peñas. In addition, two electronic versions (Adobe PDF and Word) have to be sent via email to the respective supervisor prior to the deadline, which will be used for a digital plagiarism check.

4.2. Bachelor Theses

A bachelor thesis should prove that a student is able to solve a problem independently, correctly apply appropriate methods, and present the results in

a way that suits academic standards. Students should make use of all knowledge acquired during their study and are invited to present own ideas and arguments.

In contrary to a seminar thesis, students can either choose a topic from the department homepage (which is most common) or come up with own ideas for a bachelor thesis.

Students will be guided throughout the process by a faculty member and should make use of office/consultation hours if they require further assistance. Appointments with the advisor should be used for discussing ideas and issues based on the student's input. Appointments are not Q&A sessions in which the advisor dictates the thesis, e.g. the advisor should be considered as mentor or sparring partner, rather than a co-author.

Length of bachelor theses

The length of the bachelor thesis is governed by the respective examination office. Students should seek clarification in the relevant examination regulations.

Deadlines and submissions of bachelor theses

Typically, bachelor theses are submitted directly to the examination authority (Prüfungsamt) and then distributed to the respective supervisor. Therefore, hard copies of the bachelor thesis needs to be bound. For details on how to submit your bachelor theses, please refer directly to the respective examination office guidelines. Failure to deliver on time will result in failing the bachelor thesis.

4.3. Master Theses

A master thesis should prove that a student is able to solve a problem independently, correctly apply appropriate methods, and present the results in a way that suits academic standards. In contrast to bachelor theses, an empirical analysis (conducting an online survey, doing interviews, or analyzing secondary data) is mandatory. Similar to a bachelor thesis, students can choose either a topic from the department homepage or come up with their own idea. In addition, writing a master thesis in cooperation with a company is possible.

Students will be guided throughout the process by a faculty member and should make use of office/consultation hours if they require further assistance. Appointments with the advisor should be used for discussing ideas and issues based on the student's input. Appointments are not Q&A sessions in which the advisor dictates the thesis, e.g. the advisor should be considered as mentor or sparring partner, rather than a co-author.

Length of master theses

The length of the bachelor thesis is governed by the respective examination office. Students should seek clarification in the relevant examination regulations.

Deadlines and submissions of master theses

Typically, master theses are submitted directly to the examination authority (Prüfungsamt) and then distributed to the respective supervisor. Therefore, hard copies of the master thesis needs to be bound. For details on how to submit your master thesis, please refer directly to the respective examination office guidelines. Failure to deliver on time will result in failing the bachelor thesis.

5) General Formal Requirements

An academic thesis consists of the following elements:

1. Cover sheet
2. Table of Contents
3. List of Figures
4. List of Tables
5. List of Abbreviations
6. Body (e.g. actual thesis)
7. Reference list
8. Appendix
9. Declaration of Authorship

This general structure is valid for any theses and should be strictly adhered to. A cover sheet template can be found on the department's website.

Format:

- DIN A4 paper in portrait format (single pages can be landscaped if necessary, e.g. for bigger tables)
- Margins: 2.5cm top, 2.5cm top bottom, 4.0cm left, 2.0cm right
- Font: Times New Roman
- Font size: 12 pt
- Line spacing in text: 1.5
- Line spacing in footnotes/header: 1.0
- Full justification (Blocksatz)
- Syllabification
- Hanging indention within directories or indexes
- Pagination, lower right corner

6) Citation Style and Referencing

In an academic thesis, all explanations that have been adopted literally (direct citation) or analogously (indirect citation) have to be marked as such. If this rule is not applied, an author presents the thoughts of others as his/her own (e.g. adoptions from websites, books and articles, or from theses retrieved from the internet), this is considered to be plagiarism. Plagiarism is theft of intellectual property, which is drastically sanctioned for legal and ethical reasons. Experienced advisors usually recognize plagiarism at first glance and regularly use special programs designed for plagiarism checks.

Regarding citation style and formal composition, aside from the specifications here, the rules of the American Psychological Association (APA rules) are to be followed (e.g. sources must be ordered alphabetically by last name of (first) authors or the name of the authoring organization. Sources from the same author should furthermore be ordered by year of publication, listing the earliest first. If the years of publication are also identical, differentiate entries by adding small letters ("a", "b", "c", etc.) after the years.

Amongst others, the following online source can be used for further explanation of the citation style: <http://www.docstyles.com/library/apalite.pdf>. Questions regarding formal composition and citation style are generally not answered by the advisor. In cases that are not covered by the APA rules, please use a way of citing that comes closest to their philosophy.

It is highly recommended to use a citation program (reference management software) for writing a thesis. This way, students will have less trouble with the references and bibliography (especially at the end of your thesis). In fact, apart from efficiency, the advantage lies in not having to learn every single detail of a citation style. In fact, the APA guide is implemented automatically. There are quite many citation programs available, examples are EndNote, Citavi, or Mendeley. Which one to use is up to the student, however, it is recommended to use it from the very beginning in order to get the most out of it. While the first two are commercial solutions, Mendeley is a free, open-source software.

7) Declaration of Authorship

The last, unnumbered page of the thesis must contain the following declaration:

I hereby declare that the preceding thesis was written entirely by myself, without the help of others, and without the use of other sources than mentioned. This thesis has never been submitted in the same or substantially similar version to any other examination office. All explanations that have been adopted literally or analogously are marked as such.

München,

Signature

8) A Guide to Relevant Literature

The following recommendations are intended to guide students through the process of writing your thesis – at any stage by outlining relevant literature and literature sources.

General recommendations for finding literature

- EBSCO: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com>
- Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.de/>
- Web of Knowledge: <https://apps.webofknowledge.com/>
- Electronic journal library: <http://rzblx1.uni-regensburg.de/ezeit/search.phtml>
- Springer (via university): <http://link.springer.com/>
- OPAC: <https://opac.ub.uni-muenchen.de>
- Gateway Bavaria: <https://opacplus.bib-bvb.de/>

Finding an interesting topic

Alvesson, M. & Kärreman, D. 2007. Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4): 1265-1281.

Alvesson, M. & Sandberg, J. 2013. *Constructing research questions: Doing interesting research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. 2003. *The craft of research* (2 ed.): University of Chicago press.

Colquitt, J. A. & George, G. 2011. Publishing in AMJ—part 1: topic choice. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(3): 432-435.

Davis, M. S. 1971. That's interesting! Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1(2): 309-344.

Choosing an appropriate research design

Bono, J. E. & McNamara, G. 2011. Publishing in AMJ—Part 2: Research design. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(4): 657-660.

Edmondson, A. C. & McManus, S. E. 2007. Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4): 1155-1179.

McGrath, J. E. 1981. Dilemmatics: The study of research choices and dilemmas. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 25(2): 179-211.

Conceptual research design

Mintzberg, H. 2005. Developing theory about the development of theory. *Great minds in management: The process of theory development*: 355-372.

Smithey Fulmer, I. 2012. Editor's Comments: The Craft of Writing Theory Articles—Variety and Similarity in AMR. *Academy of Management Review*, 37(3): 327-331.

Whetten, D. A., Felin, T., & King, B. G. 2009. The Practice of Theory Borrowing in Organizational Studies: Current Issues and Future Directions. *Journal of Management*, 35(3): 537-563.

Qualitative methods design

Bansal, P. & Corley, K. 2012. Publishing in AMJ—Part 7: What's Different about Qualitative Research? *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3): 509-513.

Corley, K. 2011. The coming of age for qualitative research: Embracing the diversity of qualitative methods. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(2): 233-237.

Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550.

Eisenhardt, K. M. & Graebner, M. E. 2007. Theory Building from Cases: Opportunities and Challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 25-32.

Langley, A. 1999. Strategies for Theorizing from Process Data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4): 691-710.

Locke, E. A. 2007. The case for inductive theory building. *Journal of Management*, 33(6): 867-890.

Siggelkow, N. 2007. Persuasion With Case Studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 20-24.

Suddaby, R. 2006. From the editors: What Grounded Theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4): 633-642.

Quantitative methods design

Murphy, K. 2002. Using power analysis to evaluate and improve research. *Handbook of research methods in industrial and organizational psychology*: 119-137.

Sackett, P. R. & Larson Jr, J. R. 1990. Research strategies and tactics in industrial and organizational psychology. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*, 2 ed., Vol. 1: 419-489.

Sparrow, R. T. & Mayer, K. J. 2011. Publishing in AMJ—Part 4: Grounding Hypotheses. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(6): 1098-1102

Suddaby, R. 2010. Editor's comments: Construct clarity in theories of management and organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(3): 346-357.

Zhang, Y. A. & Shaw, J. D. 2012. Publishing in AMJ—Part 5: Crafting the methods and results. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(1): 8-12.

Mixed methods design

Creswell, J. W. 2003. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2 ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jick, T. D. 1979. Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4): 602-611.

Lee, A. S. 1991. Integrating positivist and interpretive approaches to organizational research. *Organization Science*, 2(4): 342-365.

Structuring your argument

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. 2003. *The craft of research* (2 ed.): University of Chicago press.

Minto, B. 2002. *The pyramid principle* (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.

Academic Writing

Bem, D. J. 1987. Writing the empirical journal article. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Darley (Eds.), *The complete academic: A practical guide for the beginning social scientist*: 171-201. New York: Random House.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. 2003. *The craft of research* (2 ed.): University of Chicago press. PART IV

Grant, A. M. & Pollock, T. G. 2011. Publishing in AMJ—Part 3: Setting the hook. *Academy of Management Journal* , 54(5): 873-879.

Sternberg, R. J. 2000. Article Writing 101: A crib sheet of 50 tips for the final exam. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Guide to publishing in psychology journals*: 199-206. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Improving your writing style

Gopen, G. & Swan, J. 1990. The Science of Scientific Writing If the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader needs.

American Scientist , 78(6): 550-558.

Ragins, B. 2012. Reflections on the craft of clear writing. *Academy of Management Review* : amr. 2012.0165.

Williams, J. M. & Colomb, G. G. 2012. *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace* (4th ed.). Boston: Longman.

How to reference properly

Campion, M. A. 1997. Rules for references: Suggested guidelines for choosing literary citations for research articles in applied psychology. *Personnel Psychology*, 50(1): 165-167.

Crafting a theoretical and practical contribution

Bacharach, S. B. 1989. Organizational Theories: Some Criteria for Evaluation.

Academy of Management Review, 14(4): 496-515.

Corley, K. G. & Gioia, D. A. 2011. Building Theory about Theory Building: What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 36(1): 12-32.

Feldman, D. 2004. What are we talking about when we talk about theory? *Journal of Management*, 30(5): 565-567.

Geletkanycz, M. & Tepper, B. J. 2012. Publishing in AMJ—part 6: Discussing the implications. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(2): 256-260.

Klein, K. J. & Zedeck, S. 2004. Introduction to the Special Section on Theoretical Models and Conceptual Analyses: Theory in Applied Psychology: Lessons (Re) Learned. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(6): 931.

Locke, K. & Golden-Biddle, K. 1997. Constructing Opportunities for Contribution: Structuring Intertextual Coherence and "Problematizing" in Organizational Studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5): 1023-1062.

Romme, A. G. L. 2003. Making a Difference: Organization as Design. *Organization Science*, 14(5): 558-573.

Suddaby, R. 2014. Editor's Comments: Why Theory? *Academy of Management Review*, 39(4): 407-411.

Whetten, D. A. 1989. What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 490-495.

Whetten, D. A. 2009. Modeling theoretic proposition. In A. S. Huff (Ed.), *Designing Research for Publication*: 217-250. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Presenting your thesis

Davies, G. 2010. *The Presentation Coach*. UK: Capstone Publishing Ltd. Chapter 1-7

Ethical considerations

Bedeian, A. G., Taylor, S. G., & Miller, A. N. 2010. Management science on the credibility bubble: Cardinal sins and various misdemeanors. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 9(4): 715-725.