Guidelines for writing a master’s thesis

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Contents

Guidelines for writing a master’s thesis ................................................................. 1

The master’s thesis is an opportunity to demonstrate your learning outcomes and creativity .......... 2
Choosing a topic ........................................................................................................ 3
Orientation to the topic and specifying the research question ....................................... 3
Research type and research plan .................................................................................. 4
Thesis supervision ....................................................................................................... 6
Writing your thesis ....................................................................................................... 7
Layout of the master’s thesis .......................................................................................... 16
Assessment of master’s theses ..................................................................................... 19
Plagiarism detection with Urkund ............................................................................... 19
The master’s thesis is an opportunity to demonstrate your learning outcomes and creativity

For the Master of Social Sciences degree, you write a master’s thesis in your major subject and complete a maturity exam related to the thesis. The thesis is written individually or jointly by two students, either from the same or from different major subjects. The thesis can be written in Finnish, Swedish or English. At the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, theses cannot be declared confidential.

The master’s thesis is your most important demonstration of competence so far. It is an opportunity to evidence your academic maturity and ability to put your thoughts into text. You can show that you are able to choose a relevant topic, define a research question and master the required research methods. In addition, you can demonstrate your scholarship, critical and logical approach, and adherence to academic practices and rules. Thesis work involves independent reflection on social phenomena, familiarisation with theoretical discussions in the field, application of academic research methods, and integration of theory and empirical data. Furthermore, writing your thesis enables you to learn new things about yourself, for example, about your ways of work and capacity, perception, creativity and perseverance.

Guidance for the thesis process is provided in master’s seminars, in which the research topic and plan are accepted. Individual guidance is also provided during and after the seminars. Additional fine-tuning seminars may be arranged at the final stage of the process. At the beginning of the second seminar, at the latest, one or two supervisors are assigned for each thesis. Students can (and are often recommended to) find other supervisors in addition to the seminar lecturer. Peer support is also important during the thesis process. You are thus recommended to find other thesis writers and, for instance, establish a thesis circle where you can discuss the various phases of thesis writing and share experiences.

You should plan your studies in a way that facilitates your thesis work. For example, you should schedule your methodological studies so that they support your thesis writing, and select the literature of methodological discussions to support your chosen research method. Complete the literature relevant to the research area simultaneously with the master’s seminars.

Writing the master’s thesis usually takes a little over a year from the first seminar session. It can also be done faster, but the writing and gestation process often takes its own time. The thesis process involves extensive, independent long-term work and consists of various phases. That is why you should create an indicative schedule and goals for yourself right at the beginning of the process. The length of theses varies a lot depending on study design and research data. Writing a long thesis is not a merit as such. Things can sometimes be said in a concise way, even in 50–60 pages. Excessive length can even be a symptom of unclear structure and poor topic narrowing. Most theses in social sciences have consisted of 50–100 pages. The length also varies between the various disciplines.

There are a wide variety of guides for writing the thesis, some of which are mentioned in Appendix 5. Some of them are general research guides, whereas others focus on specific issues such as academic writing. You are recommended to familiarise yourself with them at an early stage of your thesis process. Examples of thesis guides are available also on the University of Helsinki website.
Choosing a topic

Students choose a topic for their master’s thesis independently. It is accepted in the first master’s seminar. The starting point for the thesis can be a theoretical or empirical observation you have made or an interesting phenomenon occupying your mind. It can have emerged while studying, following research in the field, in everyday routines, or through the mass media. Topics are sometimes offered to students by parties outside of the University (e.g. the local or regional administration, enterprises and organisations). Thesis supervisors also propose topics that are relevant to the research projects of the department or the discipline. Topics related to your unit’s project themes are recommended, but others are also allowed, of course. Please discuss your topic choice with your supervisor in good time.

In the process of selecting a topic, you should take into account the following points:

- Personal interest in the theme will ensure that you complete the process.
- Theoretical and conceptual “edge”: the topic should be interpretable using an interesting approach and relevant concepts.
- The topic should be researchable, in other words, there should be problems related to the topic that you try to resolve using available data.
- The theme is topical and socially significant.
- The researchability of the topic is also related to the resources, time and costs needed to handle the topic.

The supervisor helps you to modify your topic into a feasible research question. You should remember, in particular, that the research question must not be too broad.

In addition, it is good to take into account the topic’s relevance to your department’s focus areas of research.

Orientation to the topic and specifying the research question

Planning your thesis starts by reading earlier research literature on the theme. While creating the research plan, you should read a lot and also take this into account in planning your schedule. The better you get acquainted with the theme during the seminar, the more precise and feasible your thesis plan will be – and the easier the writing process. First you map what is already known about the topic and how it has been studied. Your own questions and the connecting theme of the study will be crystallised during this process. You can find earlier research in a variety ways, including library searches and databases, journals, publication series, and based on tips given by teachers. It is useful to follow international journals and their book review columns. The university library organises guidance on the use of different databases (library courses).

When reading literature, pay attention to references related to the theme as well as those related to theory, methods and analysis. Reading literature helps you to discover what is known about the topic so far and simultaneously to find new ideas – new theories, hypotheses – that you can apply to your own work. It is naturally an advantage to have a broad knowledge of areas even outside of
your own topic. Ideas, insights and interpretative concepts can sometimes be found in unexpected places.

Orientation to earlier research and creating a theoretical background should be synchronised with your own research task. The research task should be defined and limited at an early stage, so that you can link existing theory and concepts to it. Defining the research task properly is crucial in order to know all the time what you are doing. You should be able to summarise the research problem into a single main question. This makes it easier for you to keep in mind the focus of your thesis. Remember that you can continue studying the topic even after the master’s thesis, so you need not clarify every side-track yet.

Research type and research plan

Various types of theses are written in social sciences. They combine reasoning, concepts and empirical observations in different ways. They can also be purely “theoretical”, that is, analyse a theory or concept based on earlier research literature. There is no ready-made formula for the theoretical thesis: it consists of reading, analysing, reasoning, and translating your thoughts into text.

Empirical study also requires reading, reasoning and analysing, but in it you also collect a systematic empirical set of data. The data can consist of existing statistics, archives, documents, media products (newspaper articles, TV programmes, films, etc.), or you can collect the data with questionnaires and interviews or through observation.

It is important to plan empirical research carefully in advance. The researcher specifies the research task, lists the questions to be answered, and plans the data needed to answer the questions. When considering the research method and data, it is good to evaluate different alternatives and the consequences of your choices (e.g. what kinds of questions can be answered with different data, how can the data be analysed, how and where are the data available and what does data acquisition require, are research permits needed, how long does data collection take, etc.). If you carry out, for instance, an inquiry study, you need to specify the target group (sample) in the research plan, as well as where and how the sample is selected, the content of the questionnaire, and how the data are processed.

Students make a research plan in the first or second master’s seminar, depending on the major subject or master’s degree programme. The structure of the research plan is usually as follows:

1. Introduction (1 page)
   - Research topic: what is studied
   - A brief presentation of the study background, that is, the context from which the topic arises
   - The topic’s contribution to a) research b) society

2. Aim of the study (1 page)
The research task (or research question/problem/subject), for example, in 1–3 clear questions
Defining and limiting the research task, and justifying the definition

3. Theoretical background (4–5 pages)
- Literature review, in which you briefly summarise earlier research and theories related to the topic
- Conceptual starting points and definition of central terms

4. Methods (1–2 pages)
- The methods used to resolve the research problems, mentioning a potential preliminary study
- The philosophical basis of the methods need not be explained at this stage

5. Research data (2–3 pages)
- The people, participants or literature used to achieve the aim of the study
- Potential schedule for data collection
- Potential cost plan for data collection

6. Research report and the preliminary sources you intend to use (1–2 pages)
- Format of the thesis if not traditional (e.g. electronic)
- Nature of results and the method of presenting them
- Usability of results (if not specified in item 1)
- Potential confidentiality issues
- Schedule
- Preliminary reference list
Thesis supervision

You are entitled to receive active, high-quality supervision during the thesis process. Remember to contact your supervisor actively – it is not only the supervisor’s responsibility. Utilise your supervisor’s expertise and experience in research by asking questions and testing your own interpretations. Do not pretend to know more than you actually know, and do not try to give the impression that you are much further along in your research than you really are. This could make the supervisor focus on the wrong things in the sessions. Do not hesitate to ask directly if something seems unclear. Make sure you understand the supervisor’s tips and comments by asking such questions as “so, do you mean that…” If you only nod in agreement, your supervisor cannot know that something is unclear. In the same way, make sure that the supervisor understands what you find particularly interesting in the topic area, so that he/she can guide you exactly in the right direction.

Always prepare carefully for the meetings with your supervisor. Think in advance what questions need to be clarified at that particular moment. If you have given a piece of text to the supervisor beforehand, you can mark and comment on your current problems in the text or list them separately. In any case, when you submit text to your supervisor, always include an explanation of its role in the thesis (e.g. preliminary table of contents, or reference to your latest agreement with the supervisor). Do not hesitate to submit even unfinished sections, because they help the supervisor to comment on your work and understand points that you may find problematic. However, remember that you are independently responsible for decisions related to the content and form of your thesis.

You can honestly tell your supervisor if, for instance, the meetings make you nervous or you find the whole thesis process stressful, particularly if it makes working difficult. This should not be the case, because the thesis is after all only a practical exercise! If you do not address this issue, the supervisor may, in the worst-case scenario, think you are lazy or uninterested. A well-known teacher once said that laziness does not exist – it is only fear (of failing, for example). What do you think?

Make a separate appointment with your supervisor for thesis supervision (regular reception hours are mainly intended for other counselling and study guidance). Remember to cancel your appointment in time if you cannot arrive. Thesis supervision is provided during the autumn and spring terms, but usually not during summer and Christmas breaks.

The department does not provide official preliminary examination for theses. However, in good time before submitting your thesis for evaluation, you should contact your supervisor and agree on having it read.

By the beginning of the second master’s seminar, you should have agreed on one or two supervisors assigned to your thesis. This step is particularly important in the master’s degree programmes where supervisors come from different programmes and major subjects.
Writing your thesis

General

Writing is naturally an essential part of the thesis process. Keep on writing, for example, your stream of thoughts related to the theme; write a research diary, sketch drafts for your thesis structure and table of contents, and make notes on the literature you have read. When reading literature, remember to write down the complete bibliographical data as well as the thoughts the texts have evoked. When you get an idea, write it down. Do not write down mere citations or lists but, above all, how the text you read is related to your thesis. These kinds of notes and drafts provide a solid foundation for the final text.

Both content and design are important in a research report. The thesis presents in a clear and systematic way the motivation and background of the study, the research task and problems, the decisions made by the author along with their justifications, and the results. Writing a thesis does not mean that you mechanically record the various phases of the thesis process and list the results. It is instead an opportunity to demonstrate that you have developed an academic way of thinking and the ability to produce logical text in good academic style. The results must be reflected upon and not only reported – the aim is to present them “thoughtfully”.

Writing a thesis can sometimes feel difficult – especially if it is your first large-scale written assignment. But writing should be practised even though it seems difficult. You should rather write too much than too little: text can always be cut down and edited. Do not think you are producing text in its final form. The main thing is that you manage to put your present thoughts on paper. Ideas, structures and formatting can be edited afterwards.

Different writing styles suit different people, and it is important to develop your own style. For some of us, it is natural to write a small piece (e.g. section or subsection) at a time, particularly at the beginning of the process. Others write complete wholes at once, either by proceeding from the beginning to the end or by producing pieces of text for different contexts. It is worth familiarising yourself with different techniques that facilitate writing and reading, such as process writing and mind maps. For more information on these techniques, please contact your supervisor or the library.

Research ethics and the responsible conduct of research should cover the entire research process from topic selection to the reporting of results. If the data are collected by, for example, interviewing or observing, the participants’ self-determination must be respected, no harm must be done to them, and their privacy and data protection must be ensured. If the research requires data collection without permission from the participants, or if the research could harm them, the research plan must be submitted to the Ethical Committee of the University of Jyväskylä (https://www.jyu.fi/hallinto/toimikunnat/eettinentoimikunta/en) for evaluation.

At the master’s level, you can complete courses in academic writing at the University Language Centre in addition to the course completed at the bachelor’s level. Please see further information on suitable academic writing courses on the website of the Language Centre and in Korppi.
**Design and structure**

The way the study proceeds and is structured is highly important. A research report can be divided into two or three levels, into major sections and subsections. Structuring shows how well you are able to perceive wholes. The study can proceed in various ways. Empirical studies, in particular, are typically structured as follows:

- The introduction provides a preliminary orientation to the theme, explaining what the study is about from the perspective of the topic, the discipline and society.
- The section presenting earlier research on the topic describes what is already known, explaining how earlier research data relates to your own, more precisely limited topic and the way you handle the topic.
- The section describing the research task presents, in more detail, the research task, the research problem(s) and questions, as well as the research data.
- The theory section presents the approach and central concepts.
- The methods section describes the data collection and analysis methods. It may also include discussion on the data collection process and possible experiences in the field.
- The results are presented in thematic sections, in which they are also interpreted.
- The conclusion gathers the main results and discusses them in light of the whole study; it is important to illustrate the contribution of the results to the theory, methods and earlier research presented in the previous sections.

You can also structure the research report by, for example, integrating a framework with your own data. In social sciences research, the aim is often to avoid the traditional research report structure. Some other design, such as integrating theoretical and empirical data, can produce a more interesting outcome. You can also experiment with presenting empirical data first and then interpreting it with your own theory. Writing a narrative is another piece of good advice. When you have a topic, tell a story about it: how you decided to address precisely this problem, how you resolved it, and what you found. Use content-based section headings (and preferably not something like Framework, Results, etc.).

A typical error is to write a theoretical background that is too general. The theory section in a good thesis gives the impression of belonging precisely to “this thesis”, in other words, it is your own and carefully considered. In addition, the plot of the study travels and develops also within the theoretical background. For instance, hearing about modernisation or Giddens is not as interesting as how precisely you utilise the modernisation theory or Giddens. The same goes for describing research methods. Make your whole master’s thesis look like yourself!

**References**
Research typically involves a combination of reading earlier research and theories, independent thinking of your own, and empirical observations. Therefore, sources and references are an essential part of academic research.

The sources given in your study are the publications that you have actually used when preparing the thesis – not the ones that you have only familiarised yourself with or that have been referred to in the writings you read. All used sources are given in text and in the list of references at the end of the thesis. The sources of citations that are not used word for word are also given. The sources of commonly known facts need not be mentioned. Indicating sources carefully is particularly important for the readers of your thesis who may want to read more about the topic. In addition, it is an essential part of good research ethics to mention whose ideas or results you have been using.

When you mention a source for the first time in the text, include the person’s (author etc.) first name and family name. Thereafter, use only the family name in text. If you refer to two people with the same family name, also use the first letters of their first names throughout the text. For example, “according to L. Eräsaari” or “for example, according to R. Eräsaari”.

Within text, references to earlier research and literature are placed in brackets. Most commonly, the reference is written immediately after the quoted part of text or name, or at the end of the sentence. There are also other flexible ways to indicate sources:

- According to Smith (1996, 333–335), ...
- Clarkson (1996) points out that…
- Based on the study by Matilainen (1996), we can…
- Various researchers (e.g. Matilainen 1996; Ratilainen 1994) have paid attention to…
- This has actually been regarded as one of the main reasons for structural differences (Hänninen 2009, 36).

**About hyphens/dashes and spacing**

The most common typographical errors in theses are made with hyphens (-) and dashes (–).

For example, it is correct to write “the French and Indian War (1754–1763)”.

In the same way, you write “Allardt (1976, 120–123)” to indicate the span from page 120 to page 123. The reason: a span requires a dash, and the hyphen is short.

For further information, please see e.g. [the Purdue OWL](https://owl.purdue.edu). Another formatting issue worth remembering is that in English (unlike in e.g. Finnish) there is no space between numerical values and the percent sign, for example: 10%.

An in-text reference should include the following information:

- The author’s family name
The year of publication and the pages on which the quoted data can be found, e.g. (Matilainen 1996, 333)

If you exceptionally have had to use a secondary source, it is also indicated (Matilainen 1966, 333–335, cited in Ratilainen 1973, 95). As a rule, however, you should use only original sources.

Always include the page numbers if it is not an entire book or article you are referring to. You can use general references to entire works, without page numbers, when you want to focus the reader's attention to a certain approach or way of thinking. General references to entire articles are possible particularly when referring to the general result or approach of an article, or when it is used as an example of research on a specific subject area (see e.g. Hänninen 2009).

Referring to various sources in the same context:

All the different sources are placed within the same brackets in chronological order: “In conclusion, these factors affect relative poverty (Huttunen 1972; Tammilehto 1977)”. Names and years are separated by a semicolon. If the authors’ names are integrated into the text, only the year of publication and page are indicated in brackets. If the same author has several publications from the same year, they are distinguished from each other by a lowercase letter that comes immediately after the year of publication, with no space: “The same conclusion has been made by Huttunen (1972) and Tammilehto (1977a; 1977b; 1977c).”

If you can refer to various studies from the same context, or if the issue can be regarded as relatively well-known, you can use the form “see e.g. ...”

Correspondingly, if you want to refer to the results presented in another study on the same subject, which do not necessarily give the same idea about the issue, you can formulate the reference as follows: (Matilainen 1974, 224; cf. Ratilainen 1969, 92–100). When using ‘see’ or ‘cf.’, make sure that it is clear in the text what and why one needs to see or compare something.

If you need to make notes that do not seamlessly fit in the text but still deserve to be presented in the context, the notes are presented as footnotes.

Particularly in historical master’s theses, the sources may include personal communication in addition to written materials. In connection with a source like this, the year need not be mentioned. The reference can be as follows, for instance: (Interview with Heikki Waris). In the list of references, these sources are presented as a group of their own, including the interview dates.

If a source has more than one author:

When referring for the first time to a source with more than one author, you mention all the authors, for example: (Kotiranta, Pyykkönen & Pöllänen 2013).
Thereafter, when referring to the same work, you can mention only the first author and after his/her name the abbreviation ‘et al.’, for example: (Kotiranta et al. 2013).

Later in the list of references, however, all the authors mentioned in the original source must be listed. If a source has two authors, both of them are mentioned each time they occur in the text, for example: (Kotiranta & Pyykkönen 2009).

Articles in collections or journals:

In the body text, you mention the author of the article whose text you have used, but not the editor of the collection, for instance. Editors are mentioned only in the list of references in connection with the title of the collection or publication. The list of references and the in-text references must correspond to each other so that the source can be easily found in the list of references based on the in-text reference.

Articles and other publications with unknown author:

The reference begins with the title of the publication, which also determines its place in the list of references. Newspaper articles, which do not always provide the name of the author, can also be indicated according to the name of the newspaper. If the author is an organisation, it can be given in the reference (e.g. WHO 1972; Economic Council 1972).

References to interviews are marked in text after the quotations, in brackets, as follows:

- (Interviewee 1); in cases requiring the highest level of anonymity
- (Male, 46); gender and age – high anonymity
- (Male, 46, farmer); profession or other status depending on the topic is mentioned when relevant for interpreting the examples and results
- (Ivan Informant, 34, physician); name only if agreed upon with the interviewee
- (Male / Ivan Informant, 47, social work supervisor); job title or position is, as a rule, given when using expert interviews.

Discuss with your supervisor whether interview dates are given.

Newspaper articles used as research material are referred to as follows:

- (Helsingin Sanomat 13.7.2011, A2); name of paper, date and page number.
- (Saarikoski 2011, Helsingin Sanomat 13.7.2011, C5); the name of the editor or author is given when particularly relevant.

Reports, official documents, and so on, which are used as sources, are referred to in the same way as literature:

- (Council of State 2007, 32); if the author is an organisation.
- (Kähkönen 2012, 4); if a person has been mentioned as an author on the document title page.
Creating the List of References

All the sources that have been referred to in text must be listed in the list of references. The list must be clear and precise, so that each source can be easily found. The list can be called (List of) References or Bibliography. Remember to separate the research literature you have used and the research data you have collected clearly from each other, for example, by dividing them under the headings ‘Research Literature’ and ‘Research Data’.

Your work will be easier when you make good bibliographic notes in your card file or electronic file each time you find and use sources. It is tedious to start looking for bibliographic information afterwards when you are about to finish your thesis. There are various ways of creating the list of references. Different academic journals have their own, slightly differing practices as to where the year is marked and what the order of publisher and publication place is, for instance. At the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy of the University of Jyväskylä, we comply with the following instructions, adapted from the international Harvard and Chicago styles.

Printed sources in the List of References:

Sources are indicated in alphabetical order based on the name of the author. On each source, the following data are given: author(s), name of publication, publisher, publisher’s domicile / place of publication (*note! not printing place*), and year of publication. After the author’s family name, you give either one first name or one first name and the initials of the other first names, depending on the author’s own usage.

Book:

- Allardt, Erik (1976): Hyvinvoinnin ulottuvuusia. Porvoo: WSOY (Note: if the author is unknown, listing is based on the book title, for example: Reipasta meininkiä (2004). Helsinki: Stakes.)

Different works by the same author are listed in alphabetical or chronological order. Publications from the same year written by the same author are distinguished in the bibliography (and in text) by a lower-case a, b, c, and so on, marked after the year without a space. The sources written by one author alone are given first, and thereafter the sources that also include other authors. The order of these sources depends on the initial of the second (or third, if needed) author. Even when the list of references includes several publications by the same author, the author’s name is mentioned in connection with all of them.

When the author of a publication is unknown or not given, the list item begins with the title of the publication. Here the initials of the first word determine the alphabetical order.

When the source is a collection that includes articles by several authors, the editor is given as the author in the list of references (and alphabetisation is based on the editor’s name). In this case you mention (ed.) after the editor’s name. The abbreviation is (eds.) for several editors.
When you have referred in text to a specific author’s article in a collection of articles, the author and the article must be listed individually in the list of references. The following details are given: the author of the article, the article title, and the author and title of the collection of articles. The article’s page numbers are also given.

Article in a collection:

- Haatanen, Pekka: Sosiaalihistoria. In Alapuro, Risto, Matti Alestalo and Elina Haavio-Mannila (eds.): Suomalaisen sosiologian juuret. WSOY, Porvoo 1973, 148–225. (*Note: The order of the first name and the family name changes after the first author!*)

When using articles from academic journals, reference is also made to the author both in text and in the list of references. The list of references provides the following details: article title, journal, year, volume (issue), number, and pages.

Article in a journal:


In indicating publication series, various numerical codes are needed. In addition to the author, the following data are included: the title of the publication; the title of the publication series; the letters and/or numbers possibly connected to the title of the series; the volume number, the year or part in Arabic numerals; the issue of the publication or pamphlet if the volume includes several publications or pamphlets.

A work in a publication series:


Newspaper articles are referred to with the name of the newspaper, the date, the page and title of the article. The author of the article is mentioned if known.

- If the author’s or reporter’s name is included, the source is listed based on the name, for example: Saarikoski, Saska (Helsingin Sanomat 11.3.2011, C5): Kulttuuri on kivaa.

**Unpublished sources in the List of References:**

Unpublished sources include manuscripts, letters, records and other archived documents. These sources are stored in archives or in the manuscript collections of libraries, or they may be owned by individuals. An unpublished source is usually preserved in one single place. Unlike books,
unpublished sources are not listed alphabetically. Instead, the document data of each archive or collection is grouped as a unit of its own. These units are usually put in alphabetical order. Unpublished assignments and reports (such as theses) are listed among published sources in the list of references.


If you are preparing a historical master’s thesis or otherwise use archival material, please familiarise yourself with history research guides and their details on indicating sources.

Electronic sources in the List of References:

Data is commonly searched for from various electronic sources, such as websites, CD-ROMs or email messages. Academic journals are published also electronically, and you can access them via the University Library website. On the other hand, it is easy to publish anything on the Internet, so you should be particularly critical regarding online sources.

The same basic rule used in all referencing applies to referencing electronic sources: the source must be identified precisely enough to enable the reader to find it easily and to check the correctness of the data. In other words, the reference must include exactly the same identifiers as any other source. In addition, in referencing an electronic source, the reference must include information on the availability of the source, its method of application and date of referencing. Electronic sources are listed in the list of references consisting of books and articles.

A book, serial publication or report published online:


An article in an electronic serial publication:

Online newspaper article:


Webpage, column or blog:


Article in a CD-ROM encyclopedia:


DVD:


A mailing list message:

Term-List. Mailing list. Vaasa: University of Vaasa. Available at: listserv@uwasa.fi, accessed 2 September 1996.

Individual email message:


Please note that these referencing guidelines are those of the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä, and they are not the only applicable ones. If you want to use different guidelines, first agree on it with your supervisor. In any case, the main thing is that referencing and the use of sources is consistent throughout your thesis. Do not hesitate to discuss unclear cases with your supervisor.
Layout of the master’s thesis

Title page

The title page (i.e. cover) can be, for example, like the attached sample. You can select the font size taking into consideration the length of the heading to create a harmonious whole. The recommended font size is 14 or 16 points. The main title is written in UPPER CASE and the subtitle in lower case. The title page should include the following information:

- University, department and major subject (+master’s degree programme)
- Title of the thesis
- Author’s name
- Type of work (e.g. Master’s Thesis)
- Time (e.g. Autumn 2014)
- In joint theses, the names, major subjects and departments of both authors are mentioned.

Font type and layout

The basic font type is either Times New Roman or Times. The font sizes and spacing are as follows:

Font size:

- Main headings 16 pt
- Subheadings 14 pt
- Text 12 pt

Spacing:

- Text 1.5
- Footnotes 1
- Tables, indents and figure captions 1 or 2
- Abstract 1

Margins:

- Top and bottom margins 2.5 cm
- Left 3 cm
- Right 2.5 cm

NOTE: When converting a file into PDF format, make sure in the page layout settings that the page size for PDF files is A4. The default is often Letter size, which results in incorrect margins.
Paragraphs:

Leave one blank line between paragraphs or separate paragraphs by using 1.5 cm indentation.

Headings

In the body text, headings begin from the left margin. Main headings begin a new page. Main headings are written in CAPITAL LETTERS, bolded and in a font size larger than the text (e.g. 16). Subheadings are written in lower case, bolded and in font size 14. However, you can also use other font sizes if it is justifiable.

Abstract

A one-page summary (titled Abstract) is attached to the thesis immediately after the title page (see an Abstract template). The purpose of the abstract is to briefly explain the contents and main points of the thesis to the reader. The abstract should be an independent unit that can be understood without reading the actual study.

The abstract consists of two parts. The bibliographical data also provided on the title page are listed first (thesis title, author’s name, Master’s Thesis, major subject, master’s degree programme, Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, and time period). The names of all thesis supervisors are also listed here, the principal supervisor first. In addition, the number of pages and appendices are also given. In the actual abstract text, you explain the aim and subject of the study as well as the research methods you have applied. The main research results and conclusions are also reported briefly. No tables and figures are used in the abstract. The main points are expressed in complete sentences, briefly and concisely. Also follow ordinary division into paragraphs if the length and structure of the abstract so requires.

The keywords of the study are listed at the end of the abstract. These 1–7 words should describe the content of the study. You can use different keyword lists (available e.g. on the University Library website) to create your keywords. The abstract must not be longer than one page, and it can be written using line spacing 1.

Tables, figures and appendices

Tables and figures are numbered independently of each other, both as a consecutive number series (e.g. TABLE 1 and FIGURE 1). Pay attention to how you formulate table and figure captions, because based on them the reader should understand what the tables and figures are about without reading the actual text. The captions must also be placed consistently: put table captions above the table and figure captions below the figure.
Try to write full pages. References to tables and figures are made with numbers, for example, (Table 3) and (Fig. 1). In this way the text can continue unbroken around the figures and tables. If there is not enough room for these elements on the same page, you can place them on the following page. Please see further details on their use in specific guidebooks, such as the Chicago Manual of Style.

All figures and tables that are not essential for the text can be included as appendices at the end of the thesis. For example, correlation matrices, questionnaires and interview forms are usually attached as appendices. Sometimes it is also justified to describe the research data or methods in a separate appendix.

**Table of contents**

The table of contents changes constantly while you write your thesis. That is why you should not begin creating a final version before you have completed the whole thesis. The table of contents is placed after the abstract page. It can be made clearer by using a hierarchical structure. It is headlined as “Table of Contents” or “Contents”. Font sizes are the same as in the body text. Avoid italicisation and other effects for clarity’s sake.
Assessment of master’s theses

Master’s theses are assessed by two examiners who give a grade and also write a statement. Examiners pay attention to the following points:

- Topic choice and limiting, justification of approach
- Definition of research task and its logical implementation
- Mastery of the topic area
- Sufficiency and relevance of source literature, source criticism
- Use of theoretical and analytical concepts
- Mastery of data collection and analysis methods
- The way of presenting results; how interesting and significant are the results?
- Research ethical correctness
- Linguistic fluency, clarity and form, academic style

Master’s theses are graded on a scale of 1–5. Theses that differ from each other can receive the same grade, and the differences are often subtle particularly on the interfaces of grades. General impression is decisive in such cases. No thesis is perfect. Shortcomings in one subarea can be compensated by success in another.

You can find the assessment criteria (.pdf) from the Department’s web site.

Plagiarism detection with Urkund

From the beginning of 2014, all master’s theses submitted for assessment must be checked with the Urkund plagiarism detection software. The student and supervisor handle the process as follows: upon submitting the thesis for official assessment to the departmental coordinator (amanuensis), the student specifies when and by whom the Urkund checking has been done. This is marked in the thesis submission agreement and in the actual thesis statement.

For further information on Urkund, go to https://www.jyu.fi/itp/en/plagiarismdetection

In addition, please see the University of Jyväskylä’s Code of Conduct for Preventing and Dealing with Academic Fraud and Plagiarism.