



IRM Fact Sheet for Master's Thesis

Notes on the preparation of master's theses

The general information sheet for master's theses, which can be viewed at <http://www.unisg.ch>, is authoritative for the preparation of master's theses.

The Gottlieb Duttweiler Chair's information sheet merely serves to supplement the general information sheet.

1. Aim and Purpose of the Master's Thesis

Master's theses should produce an independent contribution to knowledge on a relevant management problem. In contrast to bachelor's theses, master's theses must pay more attention to the theoretical part. A detailed overview of literature and theory is necessary for master's theses.

2. Success Factors

2.1 Success Factors for an Outstanding Master's Thesis

Please note the following tips for writing an excellent master's thesis.

- It is based on thorough literature research, for which you should generally allow several weeks. This refers to a thorough search for literature sources that are closely related to the topic. Dissertations, dictionaries of business administration, scientific publications in international journals and monographs on the topic are particularly suitable. Those who only discover important literature sources at the end of their master's thesis will likely be unable to incorporate them properly.

- Convincing problem statement: Outstanding master's theses focus the work on a core problem that has been identified both in practice and in literature. A problem statement that is too broad prevents depth in the work. This problem statement should be developed at the beginning and not at the end of the writing process.
- Excellent master's theses are characterized by a theoretical foundation. In contrast to bachelor's theses, the theoretical part of master's theses must be more detailed. It is not just a matter of reproducing one or two theoretical approaches in the theory section, but various theories must be considered comprehensively. This means that a theoretical overview is absolutely essential. The core theory for the work must then be localized and justified. Theoretical considerations also play an important role in the design part of the master's thesis. Recommendations for action should, whenever possible, also find a theoretical justification.
- Empirical study: An excellent master's thesis is based on an empirical study in the form of interviews with experts and/or the distribution of a questionnaire, etc. This ensures an independent contribution to knowledge.
- Perfect language: Spelling and grammatical errors as well as long-winded sentence constructions make reading difficult and lead to a grade deduction. It is therefore advisable to have the master's thesis proofread at the end (a professional editor is recommended).
- Independent contribution to knowledge: An excellent master's thesis contains an independent contribution to knowledge. This should be presented at the beginning of the thesis but should also be emphasized in the conclusion. Those who merely summarize literature sources cannot receive an excellent grade.

- Motivation for the topic: The student should be motivated to work on the selected topic. Motivation is an important driver of outstanding master's theses.
- Comprehensive conclusion: At the end of the thesis, the findings should be summarized in two to three pages. The aim should not be to describe the procedure again and repeat what has already been said. The contribution to the findings of each chapter should be clearly and precisely stated. The work should be subjected to a critical evaluation, which should also address its limitations. The conclusion can also provide an outlook on further questions that arise in the course of the thesis and have the potential for future research from a scientific point of view.

2.2 Additional Information for a Successful Thesis

Please find below some general information that we at the Institute would like to draw your attention to:

- Recommended method books are, for example:
 - Van de Ven, Andrew H. (2007). Engaged scholarship: a guide for organizational and social research. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press,
 - Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2022). Business research methods. Oxford university press.
- Avoid using one-sided internet sources (if you do, use the Economist, HBR, WSJ, etc.). The same applies to studies by management consultancies. These sources should serve as a supplement to your technical arguments, not as a basis. In this way, you will achieve greater stringency in your work.



- Agree on a rough schedule with milestones with your assistant. The aim is not to adhere to the schedule exactly. Rather, it helps you to get a feel for when you should prioritize tasks.
- In order to manage your literature in a structured way, we recommend a literature program such as EndNote or Citavi (for a fee). However, there are also other programs (Mendeley) that are provided free of charge by the university. With these, you can, for example, generate the bibliography in the correct citation style (APA).
- You should already include a list of core literature titles during the planning stage. This makes it easier for us to recognize the direction in which the work will develop.
- Please note the registration deadlines for final theses, as they are crucial to ensure timely registration for graduation.
- We also recommend our HSG method consultation. You should **definitely** make an appointment as soon as you have a rough idea of what your empirical part will look like. The consultation can provide valuable feedback on your planned approach and ensure methodological quality (<https://www.unisg.ch/en/research/research-at-hsg/research-services/data-and-method-consulting/>).



3. Structure of a Master's Thesis

Ideally, a master's thesis is structured as follows:

1. Introduction: This section defines the problem, the objective, the procedure and the terminology. Approximately 10% of the thesis should be allocated to the introductory.
2. Theory section: This section contains the most important literature sources and prior work on this topic. If possible, theoretical links to the topic should be included in this section. Approximately 25% of the pages of the master's thesis should be allocated to the theory section.
3. Main section: At least 60% of the pages of the master's thesis should be allocated to this. The reader should be able to identify the main focus of this section from the outline.
4. Conclusion: Finally, the key findings are described and summarized in a well-founded conclusion. Approximately 5% of the pages of the master thesis should be set aside for this. The conclusion should not repeat the procedure, but instead provide a differentiated description of the central findings.
5. If interviews were conducted: Include a list of interviews in the appendix including details such as the interviewee, date, duration, and whether it was conducted by telephone or in person.

At this point, reference is once again made to the general information sheet for master's theses at the University of St. Gallen. It explicitly states that the text section (including illustrations) should not exceed sixty pages (with a line spacing of 1,2 to 1,5). A massive under- or overrunning of the number of pages under/over a tolerance range of 10% also leads to a deduction of marks.

Please also refer to the information sheet on citations and plagiarism. In cases of plagiarism, Art. 36 of the Universities Act (UG) provides for official proceedings before the Disciplinary Commission, which can lead to the exclusion of the person concerned from courses and examinations at the university for up to three years and a fine.

4. The Supervision Process

Each student will be assigned an assistant of the supervisor (by your supervisor) at the first meeting. This assistant of the supervisor (usually an assistant at the chair) is the contact person for the student. A total of two to three meetings will take place with the assistant of the supervisor. During the supervision process, the assistant of the supervisor will not intervene significantly in the content of the thesis, as this is an examination, and the student is solely responsible for its success. He/she will only make recommendations or provide support with specific questions.

4.1 Discussion of Disposition, Problem Statement and Procedure:

Please schedule an appointment with the assistant of the supervisor. At least two working days before the meeting, you should send the assistant of the supervisor the disposition (outline), the problem statement (two pages) and the procedure (one page) via email. Without these documents, the meeting makes no sense.

The following aspects are covered in the discussion:

1. **Relevance of the problem:** Your explanations should convince the assistant of the supervisor that the problem is relevant both in practice and in theory. It is also important to check whether the focus of the problem is narrow enough.
2. **Theoretical frame of reference:** The assistant of the supervisor checks whether a theoretical frame of reference is available and makes recommendations.



3. Common thread in the disposition: The disposition should have a common thread and be convincingly structured. There should be at least two pages of text per structural level (with 60 pages of text, this is a maximum of 30 structural levels).

After the first meeting, you draft a protocol of the main decisions made. This protocol is a maximum of ten lines long and is forwarded to Prof. Rudolph.

4.2 Discussion of the Main Part:

The second meeting should take place no later than six months after the start of the master's thesis. Here too, the outline is sent to the assistant of the supervisor by email at least two working days before the meeting. The exact content points to be prepared by the students for the second meeting can be found in the "Study protocol" template, which students receive along with the information sheets. The following content-related points must be prepared by the student for the second meeting:

1. Disposition of the main part: The student shows what he or she wants to focus on in the main section and discusses this with the assistant of the supervisor.
2. Theoretical frame of reference: The assistant of the supervisor examines which theories are used and makes recommendations.
3. Introductory section: Before the meeting, the student sends their revised and formulated introductory section to the assistant of the supervisor. The assistant of the supervisor reads these ten to fifteen pages and gives the student feedback.
4. Progress of knowledge on the basis of the method used: You will discuss the knowledge gained with your assistant of the supervisor, including a detailed description of the methodological approach (see structural levels in the study protocol).



After this second meeting, a short report of the results with the most important decisions must also be prepared and forwarded to Prof. Rudolph.

A third meeting with the assistant of the supervisor might take place, if necessary. Typically, meetings last no longer than 30 minutes. The student's preparation for this meeting plays a key role in its success.

5. Formal Points

1. The language used must be appropriate for a scientific paper, i.e., it should not be colloquial or overly casual. However, overly complex sentence constructions also make the text difficult to read and lead to a deduction of marks.
2. The paper must contain a bibliography as well as a list of abbreviations and figures (if used). Figures must be labeled with a title and a source. If the illustration was developed by the author, the source should be indicated as "Own illustration".
3. Sources must be cited consistently. The procedure is described in the book "Lern- und Arbeitsstrategien" (5th edition, 2002) by Christoph Metzger on pages 134 to 153 (please also refer to the corresponding course at the assessment level). Please note that, contrary to the procedure given in the book, page numbers must always be given for the sources cited in the project work. This book also provides further guidance on the formal preparation of the master's thesis.
4. The number of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors should be minimized by a thorough review of the thesis. It is therefore advisable to have the master's thesis proofread at the end (an professional editor is recommended).
5. This IRM information sheet merely supplements the guidelines provided in the Registrar's Office information sheet on bachelor's and master's theses. All requirements in the IRM and the Registrar's Office leaflet must be met.



Both content-related and formal aspects play a role in the evaluation. The content clearly outweighs the formal aspects. In other words, a paper that is weak in content will not pass even if it fully meets all formal requirements. Nevertheless, it is not enough to submit a paper that is appealing and interesting in terms of content without adhering to the formal guidelines.

6. Registration of the Thesis

First, students must complete the application form available on our website and submit it together with all required documents to abschlussarbeiten-irm@unisg.ch. To avoid extended processing times (over 1 year), we expect students to register their thesis directly after the kick-off via the Thesis Management Platform (further information is available on StudentWeb). Otherwise, we reserve the right to reassign the topic. If the processing time exceeds 1 year (from the kick-off), a new registration form will not be signed.

7. Deadline Extension

Applications for an extension of the IRM deadline are reviewed in accordance with the guidelines of the Student Administration Office (see bachelor's/master's thesis information sheets on StudentWeb). This means that in justified cases, an extension of up to three months may be granted. Obligations to an employer (e.g., internship) and study-related stays abroad are expressly not considered grounds for an extension of the deadline.