

# Guidelines for writing a Master's thesis

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## Legal Basis (from the Study Regulations 2020)

### *Art. 20 – Master's thesis: nature and objectives*

1. The Master's thesis is a rigorously researched and argued academic essay. The student is guided in his/her work by a supervisor, a lecturer of one of the courses worth a minimum of 3 ECTS points passed by the student and taught as part of the Master's curriculum. The thesis examines a topic chosen by the candidate in agreement with the supervisor and the Master's director.
2. The thesis is expected to present findings of academic research on a subject within the disciplinary area covered by the Master's programme, and must be thorough and original.
3. The Faculty regulates the structure of the thesis and submission procedures in a separate set of guidelines. The Master's thesis is written in the official language in which the Master's is taught. Other languages may be permitted, subject to the approval of the Director responsible for the Master's degree in question.

### *Art. 21 – Master's thesis: conditions*

1. The Master's thesis can only be submitted after any shortfall in ECTS credits has been recovered, the study plan has been completed and possible language requirements have been met.
2. The title of the Master's thesis may be submitted to the Dean's office after achieving at least 39 ECTS prescribed in the first year of the Master's programme. The title of the Master's thesis must be notified to the Dean's office at least six months before the date of submission of the thesis and may be specified up to one month prior to the oral examination with the consent of the supervisor.
3. The Master's thesis is to be submitted by and no later than the end of the eighth semester from admission to the Master's programme.
4. Failure to comply with this deadline will result in the student's expulsion from the Faculty.

### *Art. 22 – Master's thesis: assessment*

1. The commission appointed to evaluate the Master's thesis is made up of the supervisor, a possible co-supervisor and a Faculty lecturer or senior assistant (post-doc), with the role of co-examiner. The co-examiner is proposed by the supervisor and confirmed by the relevant Director of the Master.
  2. If the commission rejects the Master's thesis, the student is invited to:
    - a) submit a new proposal on a different subject and with a different supervisor within a month from this invitation. In this case the student must hand in the new thesis within six months. Students may request to submit a new proposal on a different subject and with a different supervisor only once.
    - b) revise the Master's thesis on the basis of the remarks made by the commission members. In this case the student has three months to hand in the new thesis. If the student fails for a second time, he/she will be expelled from the Faculty.
  3. If the thesis is not approved, the student must repeat the entire procedure set out in the assessment guidelines.
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### **Value in ECTS**

The Master's thesis corresponds to 18, 21 or 30 ECTS, depending on the Master's programme.

### **Choice of the thesis supervisor (and co-supervisor, where required) and the co-examiner**

The person in charge of the Master's programme (the Director) is responsible for checking that the topic of the Master's thesis relates to the supervisor's area of competence and that there is a suitable distribution of Master's theses among the various professors on the Master's programme.

If the supervisor considers it necessary, a co-supervisor may be appointed. The name of the co-supervisor is to be communicated to the Dean's office at the time of submission of the thesis title.

The Director of the Master's programme nominates the co-examiner in agreement with the thesis supervisor. Only professors who have an official course at USI (worth at least 3 ECTS) and/or post-doctoral researchers may be co-examiners.

The co-examiner's name is to be communicated to the Dean's office at the time of submission of the thesis.

### **Registration of the title**

The title of the Master's thesis must be registered with the Dean's office at least 6 months before the thesis is handed in, using the appropriate registration form (see "Form for handing in a Master's thesis title").

Once it has been registered, the title may be changed only to better specify the topic of the research, but the choice of new topics cannot be authorised. Any modification to the title, duly authorised and justified, is to be communicated to the Dean's office by email, at least one month prior to the oral examination.

Any major modifications to the topic or change of supervisor of the Master's thesis require a new registration of the title at least 6 months before the thesis is handed in.

### **Layout and binding of a Master's thesis**

*Length:* The Master's thesis must demonstrate critical and coherent knowledge of the research topic chosen. The thesis must include: the abstract, contents, bibliography and possible annexes or figures and tables.

A Master's thesis worth 18 ECTS should be at least 26,000 words long, corresponding to about 65 pages (the abstract, contents, bibliography and any annexes are excluded from the word count).

A Master's thesis worth 21 ECTS should be at least 30,000 words long, corresponding to about 75 pages (the abstract, contents, bibliography and any annexes are excluded from the word count).

A Master's thesis worth 30 ECTS should be at least 37,000 words long, corresponding to about 92 pages (the abstract, contents, bibliography and any annexes are excluded from the word count).

*Language:* The Master's thesis is normally written in the official language of that Master's programme (Italian or English); if the thesis is written in either French or German, this choice must be duly justified and approved by the Director of the Master.

*Layout:* The Master's thesis must be laid out vertically on A4 paper. It must be set in a 12 point font, with a line spacing of 1.5.

The title page must have a precise layout (see the form "Title Page for

Master's thesis"). The indications of the title page must take the same format as page 1 of the thesis.

**Binding:** The Master's thesis must be bound as a hardback book (spiral binding is not allowed).

### **Structure and content of the Master's thesis**

The Master's thesis is a written argument in which a specific research topic is presented within a relevant academic field, explored with appropriate methodology, and discussed in consideration of the available academic literature.

A rough framework – to be adapted according to the specific requirements of the Master's thesis and the thesis supervisor's indications – could be as follows:

- Abstract:** Summarises the topic of the thesis, the research questions, the method used, and the main conclusions and contributions that have emerged. The abstract is 200-250 words long.
- Table of contents:** Lists all the chapters with their respective page numbers.
- Introduction:** Introduces the main argument, the research question(s), the relevance of the argument to the relative field, and specifies the procedures followed and the structure of the Master's thesis.
- Literature Review:** This review of the relevant academic literature offers a critical outline of previous work in the field, laying out its shortcomings and the controversies regarding the topic chosen. On the basis of this reading, the research questions of the Master's thesis are modified to make them more precise.
- Methodology:** Describes the field in which the research was carried out, the methods and criteria used to collect the data, and the analytic criteria employed in establishing the results.
- Results:** The data gathered and results of the analyses carried out are explained and illustrated. It is not enough to present the raw data, imagining that it speaks for itself, or to make unfounded claims. Instead it is necessary to display the data and insert it into the argument of the thesis, for example, by organising the data according to the analytical themes (or the variables) discussed in the Literature Review section.
- Discussion:** The author discusses and reflects critically on the data and on the results described in the previous chapter, bringing out the contributions of the Master's thesis.
- Conclusions:** A brief synthesis of the work carried out and the results that have emerged, the limits of the Master's thesis, the implications for theory and practice.
- Bibliography:** Bibliographic references presented according to a conventional standard (usually APA or Chicago style).
- Annexes:** If present, annexes are supplied along with a clear list of their contents.

### **Thesis word count**

The student is responsible for verifying that the number of words corresponds to the prescribed requirements (see: "Layout and binding of a Master's thesis", *Length*). Therefore, it is suggested to create a copy of the thesis and delete the following parts: *Abstract*, *Table of Contents*, *Bibliography*, *Annexes*. Then, the word count check of the document using Word can be performed.

The student performs this check prior to the anti-plagiarism check, prior to obtaining the signature of the form for deposit of the Master's thesis and prior to its paper submission.

In the event of the Dean's office detecting that the thesis falls short of the required word count, the thesis supervisor will be notified of the problem.

### **The anti-plagiarism check (Turnitin)**

The student must follow the following procedure for the anti-plagiarism check. This procedure must be carried out at least two weeks prior to the formal submission of the Master's thesis to the Dean's Office.

- Enter the website: [www.icorsi.ch](http://www.icorsi.ch) and login through "Login USI";
- Select the link for the respective Master's programme in the section: "Courses USI" > "COM" > "Corsi Master COM" > "Consegna della tesi – Thesis submission"
- Click on "Submit paper" and upload the final version of the Master's thesis as a PDF or as a Word file.

Once the anti-plagiarism check is completed, the student will automatically receive an e-mail confirmation.

This check must be performed prior to the request of signature of the form for deposit of the Master's thesis and its paper submission.

### **Form for deposit of the Master's thesis**

Following the word count and plagiarism checks, the student requests the supervisor's (and the co-supervisor's, where appointed) signature of the official form (see "Form for deposit of the Master's thesis"), which then has to be e-mailed to: [decanato.com@usi.ch](mailto:decanato.com@usi.ch).

By countersigning the form for the submission of the Master's thesis, the supervisor confirms that he/she has supervised and read the thesis, that the number of words corresponds to the requirements, that no plagiarism issue was detected and that the thesis is admissible for the oral examination.

Subsequently, the student will be informed via e-mail by the Dean's office that the Master's thesis can be submitted in paper form.

### **Submission of the Master's thesis in paper form**

The following items must be submitted to the Dean's office during opening hours:

- 3 hard copies of the thesis (4, if a co-supervisor is appointed);
- the library clearance statement approved by the library (see "Form – for Library");
- the consent form for the storage of the thesis at the Lugano University Library, allowing it to be accessed by the public if the thesis is awarded a grade of 9 or higher (i.e. "Agreement for the electronic circulation of Master theses").

The Dean's office will not accept a Master's thesis if one or more of the required documents are missing.

The Dean's office will distribute copies of the Master's thesis to the supervisor, to the co-supervisor, where appointed, and to the co-examiner.

### **Oral examination and evaluation**

The oral examination of the Master's thesis takes place in front of a commission made up of the supervisor, the co-examiner and, where appointed, the co-supervisor. The oral examination of the Master's thesis takes the form of a debate, in which the candidate first of all summarises his/her work (in 10/15 minutes) and then discusses the topic with the commission. At the end of the examination, the student receives comments and observations from the commission, as well as the final mark.

The supervisor is responsible for the correct completion of the minutes and for returning them to the Dean's office.

The oral examinations are normally organised during the two semesters (autumn and spring) or during the three exam sessions, no sooner than three weeks after the submission of the thesis to the Dean's office.

Presentations planned outside the abovementioned periods are possible only on condition that the commission is available.

The oral examinations are organised by the Master's assistant or the secretary of the individual Institute in agreement with the members of the commission. The invitation to the presentation is sent by the Master's assistant by email, with a copy to the Dean's office.

The thesis is graded on a scale of 1 to 10, including half points. The final mark is an average of the marks awarded by the commission.

The written text is the main factor considered in awarding the final mark. In the oral presentation, the candidate's presentation skills and ability to answer the questions adequately are taken into account.

If the commission does not approve the Master's thesis, the provisions of article 19 of the 2008/09 Study Regulations will be applicable. In this case, the candidate must repeat the entire submission and presentation procedure, unless he/she is expelled from the Faculty.

**Semester fee**

The autumn fee covers the period from the first day of the autumn semester until the last Friday before the beginning of the spring semester.

The spring fee covers the period from the first day of the spring semester until the last Friday before the beginning of the autumn semester.

**DISCLAIMER:**

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