

Writing a Bachelor's or Master's Thesis

1. General Guidelines

The central task when writing a thesis is to document your ability to work independently on a scientific project. You are expected to show that you understand complex lines of arguments, can reduce them to their core and reproduce them clearly and precisely in your own words. To do this, you have to research the academic literature on your topic, and you need to document that you know the most important pieces of literature on the topic. Try to place the topic in a larger context and independently interpret the essential parts of the literature. In doing so, you should question and discuss model assumptions and methodological approaches and point out connections to problems relevant to economic policy.

Copying other people's words or just translating them is, of course, not what you are expected to do. Hence, use your own words when reflecting on other authors' lines of thought. The more original and independent your presentation is, the easier it will be for you to document your own command of the subject matter.

Reduce your presentation to its core when presenting more complex theoretical or empirical considerations. Show your understanding by shortening a line of argument, and by deciding what to include in your thesis and what to leave out. Think carefully what minor points or details that can be left unmentioned, or what assumptions or considerations need only be introduced in passing, if at all. This helps you to find out what the central line of argument or the key result of a study is.

When discussing the different sources you cover, it is important that you work out the essential connections between the articles. How do key assumptions, methods and main results of the different articles relate to each other? What are the crucial differences between the different papers?

Try to write down a thesis that is easily understandable and internally consistent. Importantly, ask another person to read and comment on thesis before handing it in.

2. Structure and Length of the Thesis

A thesis consists of the following parts:

(i) Title page

The title page contains the following information: Title of the thesis, type of thesis (Bachelor's thesis/Master's thesis), details of the chair (head of chair, name,

university), place and date of submission, name of the supervisor, personal details of the author: name, address, e-mail, matriculation number (see sample in the appendix).

(ii) Table of contents

After the title page, include a table of contents with page references. The table of contents should already make clear the main line of thought of the thesis. However, you should make sure that your table of contents is not too detailed. Make sure that the items in the table of contents correspond to the chapter and subchapter titles in the thesis.

(iii) Main part

The length of the main part depends on an individual agreement made with your supervisor. For a Bachelor's thesis, it is usually in the range of 90,000 to 100,000 characters (including spaces and footnotes, but without tables, figures/graphs, table of contents and list of references and, if applicable, the appendix). Depending on the page layout, number of formulas, tables, etc., this results in a text of approximately 40 pages. The length of a Master's thesis is usually in the range of 140,000 to 150,000 characters (approximately 60 pages of text). Choose a page layout making it easy to read and comment the thesis. As a guideline, you might use Times New Roman 12pt or Arial 11pt; line spacing 1.5; justification; margins 2.5cm left and right. Footnotes should appear at the end of each page.

(iv) Appendix

All calculations, tables, graphs, etc. that are central to the line of argument should be integrated into the main text. Supplemental material (i.e., material that is not necessary for understanding the text) can be relegated to an appendix.

(v) List of references

The list of references must include all sources and materials referred to in the paper. Conversely, all cited sources must actually be included in the work. The list of references must be designed and arranged uniformly and alphabetically by author name (first author of a publication), following a consistent citation style:

Books:

Oates, W.E. (1972). *Fiscal Federalism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Contributions to academic journals and collections:

Boadway, R., M. Marchand und M. Vigneault (1998). The Consequences of Overlapping Tax Bases for Redistribution and Public Spending in a Federation, *Journal of Public Economics* 68, 453-478.

Persson, T. und G. Tabellini (1995). Double-Edged Incentives: Institutions and Policy Coordination. In: Grossman, G. und K. Rogoff (Hrsg.), *Handbook of International Economics*, Vol. III. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Wildasin, D.E. (1991a). Some Rudimentary Duopoly-Theory. *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 21, 393-421.

Wildasin, D.E. (1991b). Income Redistribution in a Common Labor Market. *American Economic Review* 81, 757-774.

3. Content of the Thesis

A thesis should contain an introduction, a detailed main section (with subsections) and a short summary of the central results with references to further questions or policy implications at the end.

The introduction is a central part of your paper. It should motivate the topic (why is the topic important and interesting? Are there references to current events? How does your question fit into a larger context?) and specify the concrete question (what exactly is dealt with in the thesis?). In addition, a good introduction contains an overview of the literature on the topic, a rough overview of the most important results you derive, and a brief outline of the thesis's structure.

In the main part, you comprehensively discuss your topic. It is crucial to put the main sources and their results into context. In any case, you should discuss the structure of the main part and your selection of literature to be covered with your supervisor. Make sure that you use high-quality scientific sources. These are mostly journal articles and academic discussion papers from series such as NBER, CEPR, CESifo. Textbooks are rarely useful sources.

At the start of each chapter, explain briefly what you intend to do in the respective chapter, and how the chapter relates to the other chapters. Make clear why you are proceeding this way. At the end of a chapter, a short summary of the main results might be helpful.

You should interpret your results independently and, if possible, point out economic policy implications. In particular, it is important to discuss the sources dealt with independently. Such a critical discussion of other people's work can be challenging. A prerequisite is that you have obtained an overview over the literature.

For all parts of your work, whenever you make a statement or give an interpretation, the foundations for your statement of interpretation must be perfectly clear. It is not sufficient to simply include a reference to some piece of literature that might (or might not) support your statement. Instead, you are expected to be specific and highlight in what sense your statement or conclusion is supported by the cited sources. This also applies to the introduction and conclusion. Do not simply quote the (possibly opposing) opinions of different authors, but provide the most important arguments for the respective position.

4. Formal Design of the Thesis

If you refer to common knowledge (stuff from textbooks or lecture notes), you do not have to include a reference. However, if you refer to other people's ideas or thoughts more specifically, you need to be careful to always provide a reference (in

the main text or in a footnote). Not providing a reference if other people's ideas or thoughts are used is considered a violation of the rules of good scientific conduct. Such violations may have very serious consequences and should be strictly avoided. Always make sure that you refer to the work which is considered the original source for an idea (not some later reference to the original idea).

Use the so-called American citation style. In this case, only the name, year of publication and, if applicable, page of the source used are stated in the text. For example,

Adams (2000) discusses an alternative approach. She assumes that...

or:

Some authors have questioned the approach (Adams, 2000; Wright 2016).

If the cited source comes from more than two authors, you might use the form "et al. ("and others") to shorten the citation of the names to the first author. For example,

Boadway et al. (1998) discuss another approach. The authors show that...

If you want to explain or comment on a paper beyond simply citing the source, do so in a footnote. For example, you can refer to results that you do not want to explain further. Use footnotes to document your knowledge of the literature, but use them sparingly. In any case, the main text must be understandable without the footnotes.

You should avoid direct quotations. They are mostly unnecessary in our discipline and should especially not be used to save yourself the hassle of independently motivating, justifying or summing up statements. After all, that is exactly what you are supposed to do in your thesis!

Figures and tables are rarely self-explanatory. Make sure that you explain all elements of a figure or table in the text and comment on the most important parts. The same applies to formulas. You need to first explain the notation, and then discuss properly their basic intuition.

5. Submission of the Thesis

We ask you to strictly comply with the deadline for submission (Bachelor's thesis: 9 weeks after start; Master's thesis: by arrangement, maximum 6 months after start). If you do not submit in time, your thesis will be graded as "failed". An extension of the deadline is possible in case of illness (submit a medical certificate to the examination office).

The examination paper must be submitted to the examination office in electronic form and in print (two copies). We recommend to use standard paper, a cardboard cover, and a basic form of binding.

In addition, the thesis should be submitted to the supervisor via email as a Word (or TEX) document and as a PDF. Submit your paper as one document (i.e., including title page, table of contents, appendix, etc.).

On the last page, your thesis must contain a declaration about your authorship and academic honesty. Please use the sample in the appendix.

Appendix A: Model for title page

Title of the thesis

Bachelor's [Master's] thesis

written under the supervision of

Prof. Dr. Johannes Rincke

Chair of Economics, Economic Policy

Department of Economics, Business and Society

FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg

Nuremberg, xx.xx.xxxx

John Doe

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00000 Sample City

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Matriculation no. 987654321

Appendix B: Declaration

Declaration:

I hereby confirm that I have prepared this thesis without outside help and without using sources other than those indicated. All statements that have been used literally or correspondingly are marked as such.

Nuremberg, <DATE>

SIGNATURE