

# Advice for the Writing of a Final Thesis/Seminar Paper at the Research Group Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

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## 1. Procedure of Writing a Final Thesis/Seminar Paper at the Research Group Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

### 1.1. Qualification for Writing a Final Thesis/Seminar Paper at our Research Group

You can find the specific qualification criteria for your course of study in the current examination regulations.

You are eligible to apply for one of our seminars if it can be accredited as a module in your course of study.

[Link to the current examination regulations](#)

### 1.2. Seminar Registration

You can find all important dates and deadlines on the homepage of the Examination Office. Please note that the registration period for each seminar starts in the semester before the one in which the seminar takes place. The kick-off meeting also takes place at the the end of the previous semester.

[Link to the website of the Examination Office](#)

### 1.3. Selection of a Thesis Topic

#### *Seminar Papers*

Topics for seminar papers are usually issued via e-mail to seminar participants, prior to the seminar kickoff-meeting. The topics are either allocated among participants via e-mail request on a “first come first serve” basis or during the kickoff meeting. In case of the former, please send us your preferred three topics. We are also open to discuss topic suggestions.

The **language** of the seminar paper will be determined during the kick-off meeting of the seminar. Please note that master seminar papers should be written in English language. English is preferred in general.

#### *Final Theses*

The topic for a final thesis should fall within the context of **environmental, development, behavioral or experimental economics** or a combination thereof. Own suggestions for a thesis topic/research question should be presented to and discussed with [Prof. Vollan](#) during his office hours (please make an appointment using [ILIAS](#)). It is strongly desirable that the respective student has already attained an adequate knowledge of the field he desires to work in during his studies, so that she/he is able to make qualified suggestions and formulate an appropriate research question.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please note that topics leading to a literature review type of thesis will only be accepted in exceptional cases. Especially master students are expected to conduct at least some degree of own empirical research (quantitative or qualitative) and to be able to analyze their respective data with adequate methods. This might also include literature meta-analyses or qualitative work.

Typically, the second supervisor for all theses at our research group will be one of the research group's [PhD students](#). International Development Studies (IDS) students need to suggest another second supervisor. From time to time, topics for final thesis will be published on our [webpage](#). In most cases, these topics are directly related to one of our current research projects.

Please also note that we cannot accept all requests for final theses, due to limited capacity and us wanting to guarantee a good supervision. Therefore, applicants for final thesis should ideally propose a topic that fits our research. They should also have a sound knowledge of empirical methods and have a good performance in exams/seminars offered by our research group.

#### **1.4. Official Authorization of the Final Thesis Topic**

All final thesis topics (Bachelor and Master) must be officially authorized by the responsible examination office. The Office acts as an official overseer of the finalized thesis, can offer suggestions regarding the thesis and propose and select second supervisors.

Students willing to write a final thesis at our research group must take the following steps in order to start working on the thesis with official authorization from the Examination Office:

1. After discussing plans for the final theses with Prof. Vollan (see 1.3.), the student and Prof. Vollan will jointly fill and sign the form "Application for Admission to the Master Thesis" (the exact name of this document might change depending on the course of study). By signing this document, both our research group and the examinee agree on an exact date for officially receiving the thesis topic – only on this day, the working time will officially start.
2. The filled application form must be handed in to the Examinations Office, which will then inform our research group regarding the respective student's eligibility and acceptance for writing a final thesis.
3. In case of the Examination Office's approval, we will receive an additional form which both the supervisor and the student will have to fill and sign. This will take place on the date, which has been agreed upon before in the application form.
4. If both the supervisor and the student have signed the form, the final thesis working time has officially started.

The topic can be withdrawn **once** by the student, but only within the first two weeks of the working time. In this case the entire application process must start again from the beginning, and a new topic must be issued within four weeks. The working time will start anew with the official delivery of the new thesis topic.

#### **1.5. Working Time**

##### *Seminar Papers*

The exact working time/deadlines for the seminar paper will be discussed in the respective seminar's kickoff meeting. The amount of meetings/presentations and the according dates depend on the number of seminar participants. Please note that the active participation in the seminar meetings is mandatory for passing the seminar.

### *Bachelor Thesis*

The permitted working time for a bachelor thesis is **nine weeks**. In certain cases, the chair of the examination office committee will, upon review, grant an exception for a two-week extension. Reasons for such an extension include illness, handicap, or important family matters.

### *Master Thesis*

The permitted working time for a master thesis is **six months** (for MSc Economics and Institutions and MA International Development Studies – different regulations may apply for other programs). In certain cases, the chair of the examination office committee will, upon review, grant an exception for a two-week extension. Reasons for such an extension include illness, handicap, or important family matters.

## **1.6. Working Process and Colloquium**

### *Seminar Papers*

Students are, of course, permitted to ask questions on their work in progress via e-mail or make use of our research group's consultation hours.

### *Final Theses*

Students writing a final thesis at our chair are expected to fix at least one meeting with Prof. Vollan and/or the respective second supervisor during their time working on the thesis. Optimally, students would first visit our research group to do a short brainstorming/discussion session on the topic, as well as the corresponding potentials and challenges very early in the working progress. In case of significant problems or ambiguities, students should always feel free to contact their (second) supervisor during their work on the thesis, to clarify matters via e-mail or during a short meeting at our offices.

**At the end of the thesis working time, students are expected to present their final work in front of their supervisors and potentially other members of our research group.** Regularly, these presentations take place in our research group's offices. However, we are also trying to organize bachelor/master thesis colloquia on a regular basis in order to bring together several presentations and ensure additional input/feedback. We will contact you via e-mail in case there will be a colloquium during your working time.

Please note that your performance during any of these presentations/meetings/discussions will and must **NOT** affect your final grade. They are exclusively meant to facilitate your working process and enhance the quality and relevance of your work itself.

## **1.7. Delivery**

### *Seminar Papers*

Seminar papers must be handed in digitally only via e-mail at the deadline, which is set during the seminar's kick-off meeting. Please hand in both PDF and Word documents of the paper, as well as datasets and do-files in case you worked with Stata.

### *Final Theses*

Two printed and one digital editions of the final thesis must be handed in at the examination office at the deadline (until 12 am). The digital version can be handed in via CD, e-mail or a digital storage

device (e.g. USB-stick) and should include both PDF and Word versions of the thesis. In case you worked with Stata, please include both your dataset and do-files. It is also possible to hand in your physical copies via physical mail. In such a case, the examination office uses the official post stamp as delivery date.

## 2. Formal Appearance of the Thesis/Paper

Please note that we strongly encourage all students to stick to the following formal guidelines, which hold for all final thesis and seminar papers written at our research group. Deviations from these guidelines, especially severe cases, can theoretically lead to points deducted from your final grade.

### 2.1. Content of the Thesis/Paper

Please make sure that your thesis/paper contains the following contents (if applicable):

- Title page
  - o Name of the University of Marburg's School of Business and Economics and the Research Group Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
  - o Name of the supervisor and second supervisor (only for final theses)
  - o Name of the seminar (only for seminar papers)
  - o The title of the thesis/paper
  - o Name, address, e-mail and matriculation number of the author
  - o Information on the author's study program and their current semester
  - o The title page should not be numbered
- Abstract:
  - o Please include a short abstract of your work. This abstract should not contain more than 200 words, but still give an adequate short overview of your work. Try to touch upon the problem you are working on and its relevance, the methods you are using in tackling the problem, as well as your results and conclusions you draw from your work.
- The following parts shall facilitate navigating through your document. Please use Roman numerals for all following tables and lists (both in the table of content, as well as for page numbering)
  - o Table of content (with page numbers):
  - o List of tables (with page numbers)
  - o List of figures (with page numbers)
  - o List of abbreviations (with page numbers)
  - o List of symbols (with page numbers)
- Your main text (numbered with Arabic numerals)
  - o Please make sure that your text is logically organized and marked between sections (e.g. chapter 1 may be subdivided into 1.1., 1.2., etc.). Please note that a subsection 1.1. would not be allowed without a 1.2. following it. Please also avoid excessive usage of subsections: the subdivision of your thesis should not go beyond a third level (e.g. 1.2.3. is allowed but 1.2.3.4. should be avoided).
- Bibliography (Roman numerals)
- Appendix (Roman numerals)
- Signed declaration of assurance (roman numerals)

### 2.2. Formatting

- **Font:** Please use a common and eligible font as e.g. Times New Roman or Arial for your thesis/paper. For the text itself, you should use a font size of 12 for Times New Roman, and 11 for Arial. For footnotes, please use font size 10.

- **Line spacing:** Please use a line of 1.5 within the main text and 1 in the footnotes
- **Page format:**
  - o Left: 2 cm
  - o Right: 3 cm
  - o Top: 2.5 cm
  - o Bottom: 2 cm
  - o Please number all pages consecutively (use either Arabic or Roman numerals)
- **Footnotes:** Footnotes should generally start on the same page as they appear in the text
- **Equations:** Equations should be numbered consecutively (e.g. (1), (2), (3), etc.)

### 2.3. Number of Pages/Words

#### *Bachelor Thesis*

The number of pages for a **bachelor thesis** including figures and tables should not exceed 25 pages and have minimum of 6.000 words. The title page, appendix and relevant indices do not count towards the page limit

#### *Master Thesis*

The number of pages for a **master thesis** including figures and tables should not exceed 55 pages and have minimum of 12.000 words. The title page, appendix and relevant indices do not count towards the page limit

#### *Seminar Paper*

The number of pages for a **seminar paper** including figures and tables should be between 12 and 15 (3600-4500 words). The title page, appendix and relevant indices do not count towards the page limit

### 2.4. Citations and Bibliography

#### *In-Text Citations*

In-text citations refer to the bibliography at the end of the thesis/paper and should be placed in the relevant text in short form, e.g.: *Todaro & Smith (2006)*. The source of literature should be given each time that the source is used. Each time the source is directly cited, however, the relevant page number from the source should be given. Direct citations should be placed in quotation-marks and the source should be as follows: *Todaro & Smith (2006), p. 87*.

If a source has more than three authors, it is permitted to only name the name of the first author followed by et al. for the in-text citation. However, please note that all authors have to be listed in the bibliography.

If there is ambiguity between in-text citations, e.g. because one author (or a group of authors) published more than one article in the same year, please differentiate between these sources by additionally using letters (e.g. Ostrom, 2001a; Ostrom, 2001b, etc.). The oldest of the sources, should be the one listed first, also in the bibliography.

In the rare case in which you are willing to use a source which has no authors listed, please use the abbreviation N.A. (for not available).

### *Citations for Tables and Figures*

Figures and tables should be numbered, sourced, and given a title. Note: if you include figures and tables, please refer to them in the text and explain them.

#### Examples:

Above Figure: Fig. 2: Development of Indicators for the Level of Debt

Below Figure: Source: World Debt Tables, 1999-00, Vol. 11, p. 9.

### *Bibliography*

The bibliography should contain all the sources referred to in the text, footnotes, as well as tables and figures. They should be listed in alphabetical order according to the name of the first author. Publications belonging in the bibliography include books, papers from academic journals, chapters from collected works, magazine and newspaper articles as well as dissertations and diploma theses.

There are a lot of different possible citation formats, the exact choice of which is up to the author of the thesis/seminar paper. However, the chosen citation format should be consistent throughout the entire manuscript. We suggest the following citation formats for different types of sources:

- **Books:** Ray Debraj (1998). *Development Economics*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, United States.
- **Academic journal and newspaper articles:** Coase, R. (1960). The Problem of Social Cost, *Journal of Law and Economics* 3, 1-44.
- **Chapters in collected works:** Stiglitz, J.E. (1989). Rational Peasants, Efficient Institutions and a Theory of Rural Organization: Methodological Remarks for Development Economics, in: Bardhan, P. (ed.), *The Economic Theory of Agrarian Institutions*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 18.29.
- **Unpublished works:** Mustermann, J. (1999). A Critique of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the IMF and World Bank, *mimeograph*, Philipps-Universität: Marburg.
- **Internet sources:** Mustermann, B. (2000). in: URL: <http://www.tlz.de/tlz/tlz.extra15.startseite.php>, (Date accessed: 10.02.2009)

Internet addresses should be listed alphabetically in an extra index.

## **2.5. Assurance Declaration**

The very last page of the thesis/paper must include the following statement (always in German), signed by the author:

„Ich versichere durch eigenhändige Unterschrift, dass ich die Arbeit selbstständig und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinn-gemäß aus Veröffentlichungen (auch aus dem Internet) entnommen sind, habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht. Ich weiß, dass bei Abgabe einer falschen Versicherung die Arbeit als mit



'nicht ausreichend' (1 Bewertungspunkt gemäß § 16 Abs. 2 *Allgemeine Bestimmungen*, Note 5, ECTS-Grade F) bewertet gilt.“

### **3. Basic Principles of Academic Writing and Grading Criteria**

In the following, we would like to give you some general guiding principles for your thesis/paper as well as a more detailed specification of our grading criteria for both final theses, as well as seminar papers.

#### **3.1. Some guiding principles**

An important principle of academic writing is the thorough handling of the selected sources of literature and thereby extending the work of other researchers. The broad availability of information through libraries and, of course, the internet, offers the opportunity of plagiarism. The citation of literature must therefore be accompanied by a reference to its source, otherwise it will be taken as an attempt of plagiarism. Passing off another's work as one's own will also be considered as an attempt at plagiarism.

Please choose your cited material wisely, focus on journal articles and be careful about their quality. There are very good general interest journals and field journals, but also some journals with not so good reputation.

Generally, your thesis/paper should have a clear topic and set a strong thematic focus. Content that is insufficiently related to your topic is better left excluded from your thesis/paper. Also describe, why your thesis/paper is relevant and might be useful for selected readers to understand. Therefore, your thesis/paper should have a clear aim, take the reader by the hand and lead them step by step towards it.

The reader you are thinking about must not necessarily have the same scientific background as you. Therefore, it is recommended to have a writing style that also fits readers of different academic professions, or even non-academic readers. Try to tell a coherent story and to keep the central theme going smoothly. Self-criticism plays an important role in academic writing: always question your results and report studies that come to different/similar conclusions as you. Explain your reasoning and claims and provide evidence for your findings. Keep your focus on your research question and make sure that in the end the question has been answered sufficiently. Proof that you understood the methods applied in your paper, summarize and critically evaluate the results.

#### **3.2. Grading criteria**

Each of the following six groups of criteria will be graded individually. The final grade and its justification will then be based on these grades. While it should be self-explanatory that some of these criteria are more important than others and therefore are also weighed less heavily, every student should be aware that significant shortcomings with regards to any of these criteria can lead to points deducted from the final grade. Apart from these unambiguously applicable criteria, the overall difficulty of the thesis'/paper's subject matter (or lack thereof) can also influence the final grading positively (or negatively).

##### **Problem Description/Research Objectives**

- Good understanding of the problem and its relevance
- Clear formulation and well-reasoned deduction of objectives

##### **Composition/Structure**

- Logical and convincing structure
- The central theme and line of argumentation is visible throughout the entire work
- Chapters are connected and merge in an easily understandable order

### **Review of Scientific Sources**

- Sources used represent the current state of research and the complexity of the researched topic
- Well-balanced selection of quality sources
- Accurate presentation and synthesis of source material

### **Methodology/Analysis**

- Adequate formulation of assumptions, also based on reviewed literature
- Suitable choice of research method and correct application of the method
- Consistent and independent analysis
- The research problem/question is sufficiently answered and potentially leads to new insights

### **Conclusions and Transfer**

- Conclusions are based on a critical discussion and correct interpretation of the thesis'/paper's results and stand in direct relation to the initial problem/question
- If applicable, correct transfer to other areas of application
- Adequate discussion of the thesis'/paper's limitations and/or recommendations for future research in the field
- Correct classification of the results in the current scientific context

### **Format**

- The student uses format regulations given in this document, correctly and throughout the entire thesis/paper
- Citation methodology and bibliography are complete, correct and consistent
- Meaningful figures, charts and tables with accurate and correct description
- Adequate style of writing (scientific and fluent)
- Accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar free of mistakes