

Guidelines Master Thesis Applied Econ Master

MA Thesis

The Master Thesis is original research work that should be written by the student under the supervision of (at least) one faculty member. The Master Thesis is worth 20 ECTS and therefore corresponds to 2/3 of a normal semester in terms of workload. Ideally, students should be able to defend the thesis within six months of the submission of a Master Thesis agreement.

Master theses written at the Economics department are quantitative. A quantitative thesis uses formal methods, simulation-based methods or rigorous statistical analysis to come to economically relevant conclusions. Examples of quantitative research include analysis of real-world data, implementation of lab or field experiments, survey-based research projects, meta-analysis of a particular literature, or theoretical inquiries using formal methods or (in some cases) simulations. Reviews of literature or discussion essays do not constitute a valid master thesis.

Master theses are innovative. The thesis must clearly state the contribution by referring to existing literature. Examples of innovations: replicate the analysis of another article with a different dataset, a different statistical method or econometric specification, study the robustness of a theoretical result to a specific assumption, etc. The thesis is judged by execution and originality, not the results. (Research articles that aim to be published in journals often are judged based on the result.)

The format of a master thesis is that of a research article. Once completed, the student should send a final draft to the supervisor(s). Upon consent, the thesis has to be printed out (hard copy) and handed in to the SSC (together with an electronic version) and the supervisor(s) for evaluation (see appendix for details). The thesis will be checked for plagiarism (do not copy from other sources without appropriate citations!). The supervisor is the only person who grades the thesis.

Supervisor Search

Once the student has completed a significant portion of their studies (say 60-70 ECTS including all three compulsory modules) it is time to start thinking about the MA Thesis. The process of finding a supervisor is as follows.

1. The student should come up with a research question and methodology and write a short exposé (2-3 pages, see details in Wiki). To fine-tune this expose, the student may contact faculty members informally.
2. The student should submit the exposé before the start of the semester (approx. Feb 5th/Sept 5th). The student should specify a list of up to three supervisors (in order of preference). If the student has discussed the expose with a faculty member, she may signal this in the exposé.
3. The program directorate reviews the exposés. In case they are defective (e.g. unclear research question or methodology, not fit to the program), the student will be requested to modify it accordingly.
4. If the exposé is deemed suitable, it will be then allocated to a supervisor, who will then sign the supervision agreement.

The student should enroll in the conservatorium in the area that is closest to the topic of her thesis (macro, policy evaluation, experimental, etc.) Enrolment is contingent upon getting a supervisor and a certificate of supervision (available on the SSC website).

In the Department of Economics, we have a wide range of potential supervisors. Senior faculty can supervise on their own (e.g. Professors, Associate Professors as well as Tenure-Track Ass-Profes) while Junior faculty (Assistant Professors) can perform co-supervision together with some senior faculty. You may list junior faculty as potential supervisors but only if there is a good match between the topic and their expertise (e.g. if the idea for the project came out from one of their lectures or research papers).

Supervisors typically meet with students a few times to discuss their progress and suggest improvements. Students should submit the thesis to their advisor for comments/approval before submitting it officially to the SSC. Upon approval, the thesis should be submitted for a plagiarism check and printed out. The thesis must be submitted at least three weeks earlier than the desired Examination date.

Artificial Intelligence Tools

The use of AI tools is, in general, allowed but it must be precisely documented. Students should list the tasks in which AI tools were used as support (e.g. debug code) and as main contributor (e.g. writing code). The supervisors will consider this report when evaluating the thesis and examining students. In particular,

1. If the use of AI contravenes the guidelines provided by the supervisor, this may be sufficient grounds for a negative grade (5). For instance, if the supervisor required the student to perform the literature review on their own, but they report it as “AI main contributor”, the supervisor may decide to give a failing grade.
2. Students should be able to explain anything that is contained in the thesis, particularly during the Master exam.
 - a. If a student is unable to explain some crucial part of the work that they did not report as “AI as main contributor”, the thesis will be inconsistent with the “Good Scientific Praxis” at the University of Vienna, and an “X” will be introduced as a grade.
 - b. If the student reports this part instead as “AI as main contributor”, the grade of the thesis may be positive (1-4), but the grade of the exam may be negative (5).

We also recommend students to read the AI guidelines of the department, available (for instance) at (<https://moodle.univie.ac.at/course/view.php?id=433481>)

Master Exams

The Master Examination panel is composed of three individuals: the advisor, a chair, and a second examiner. The student should arrange with their advisor who should be in the panel and agree with the examiners on a date and time in which all are available and then inform the SSC.

The thesis exam begins with a 20’ presentation of the thesis by the student. The examiners may ask only clarifying questions during the presentation. Once the presentation is finished, each examiner can ask questions about the presentation. Afterwards, the examiners deliberate and collectively agree on a grade for the presentation. In total, the exam should not last more than 50’.

Inquires: SPL (daniel.garcia@univie.ac.at)

Appendix 1: Writing Tips

1. The thesis should be written in English language.
2. Citations should follow the style of an economic journal, e.g. Quarterly Journal of Economics, and its respective manuscript submission instructions. Do not use foot notes excessively. Avoid long footnotes altogether.
3. Make clear where you are presenting another author's derivations or arguments and where you present your own. Avoid opinion-based statements and phrases.
4. Use page numbers.
5. Leave standard margins and use a standard font and font size.
6. There are no strict thresholds, but most theses are between 20 and 50 pages long (including all tables, figures, cover sheet, table of contents and bibliography).
7. It is best to typeset mathematical formulas using MathType Equation in your Office Software or using LaTeX.
8. Tables and figures, which are discussed and referenced in the text, should be embedded therein. The reader should not have to move back and forth between the text and the appendix.
9. Tables and figures should have notes and labels to help the reader interpret the content. They should be self-contained and cite sources.
10. Structure the thesis into different sections with numbered headings. There should be an introduction, main part and conclusion as well as sections where the contents (table of content) and the references are listed alphabetically (bibliography). How the main part is structured depends on the thesis content.
11. Proofread your thesis several times. Writing is re-writing and, very often, shortening.