

Guidelines Master Thesis Applied Econ Master

MA Thesis

The Master Thesis is an 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, the student should be able to defend the thesis within six months of the submission of a Master Thesis agreement.

Masters 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 inquires using formal methods or (in some cases) simulations. Reviews of the literature or discussion essays do not constitute a valid master thesis.

Masters theses are innovative. The thesis must clearly state the contribution by referring to the 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 the execution and the 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 informally faculty members.
2. The student should submit the expose before the start of the semester (approx. Feb 15th/Sept 10th). 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 expose.
3. The program directorate reviews the exposes. In case the exposes are defective (e.g. unclear research question or methodology, no fit to the program), the student will be requested to modify it accordingly.
4. If the expose is deemed suitable, it will be then allocated to a supervisor, who would then sign the supervision agreement.

The student should enrol in the conversatorium in the area that is closest to the topic of her thesis (macro, policy evaluation, experimental, etc.) Enrolment is contingent upon getting a supervisor.

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 suggests 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 has to be submitted at least two weeks earlier than the defense.

Master Exams

The defense panel is composed of three individuals: the advisor, a chair, and a second examiner. We will centralize the allocation of second examiners and chairs in order to reduce the administrative burden. In order to smooth the organization of exams, vSPL will set exams on specific dates (exceptions should be requested to the vSPL). The student should 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: vSPL Team (vize-spl.econ@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 footnotes 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-writting and, very often, shortening.