

STUDENT GUIDE TO THE MASTER's THESIS

MA Media, Society and Communication

1. Procedure for registration and submission of Master's Thesis

Purpose and Scope of the Master's Thesis

The Master's thesis is an independent scientific project designed to demonstrate the student's ability to formulate and address research questions using appropriate scientific methods. The thesis must be thematically connected to the field of media and communication research.

Choosing a Topic and a Thesis Advisor: Guidelines

While topics are chosen by students, each course instructor supervises theses only within a limited range of topics and methods. To find out which topics and methods each instructor supports, please visit the department website:

<https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/media-communication/>

1. Click on "**Department**", then "**Team**".
2. Select the name of the instructor you are interested in.
3. Click on the last toggle titled "**Master's Thesis Topics**" to view their preferred topics and methods.

If you find a course or topic that aligns with your interests, contact the instructor directly to confirm whether they can currently take on thesis supervision. Please make sure to have an alternative option in mind, as the instructor may not be available.

Important Information


Please note that all Master's theses are publicly accessible. In cases where academic dishonesty is detected after the degree has been awarded, the university reserves the right to revoke the academic title.

All relevant information and required forms can be found here:

<https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/programmes/ma-media-society-and-communication/>

(see the section titled "**Forms**")

1.1 Registration of the Master's Thesis

To register your thesis, the following form must be signed by your supervisor and submitted together with the application for the Master's thesis to the **Examination Office** of the University of Innsbruck: [Assessment of the compulsory module: Preparation of the Master's Thesis](#) (currently only in German).  pruefungsreferat@uibk.ac.at

It is advisable to register your Master's thesis as soon as you begin working on it. There is **no submission deadline** once the thesis has been registered: [Application for the Master's Thesis](#) (currently available only in German)

It is also advisable to complete the compulsory module "Preparation of the Master's Thesis" before registering your Master's thesis. This module must be completed by the time the Master's thesis is submitted at the latest.

Please note: Completing the compulsory module "Preparation of the Master's Thesis" does not involve taking a preparatory course or attending a colloquium. It simply requires that your supervisor confirms you have participated in advising sessions—typically held during their office hours or conducted via email, as specified by the supervisor.

1.2 Submission of the Master's Thesis and Registration for the Thesis Defense

General information on the procedure for submitting the Master's thesis is available here:

https://www.uibk.ac.at/fakultaeten-servicestelle/pruefungsreferate/einreichung_da_ma_01.11.2023_aktuelles.html.en

Please make sure to submit all required documents and to fill out all required forms:

https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/college-service-center/news/elektronische-einreichung-dipl-ma_en/

The performance assessment for the final module, "**Defense of the Master's Thesis**," is conducted as an oral examination before an examination board comprising three members.

Students are required to coordinate the exam date with all members of the examination board. The defensio can take place no earlier than 4 weeks after the grade has been officially announced.

Once the date and time are confirmed, you must inform:

- All members of the examination board, and
- The Examination Office of the University of Innsbruck at

 **pruefungsreferat@uibk.ac.at**

Make sure to arrange and communicate all details well in advance to ensure a smooth and timely defense process.

1.3 Defensio

The defensio will take **approximately 45 minutes**. It includes a presentation followed by a discussion.

Please prepare a **presentation** lasting **approximately 12 minutes**:

- Briefly outline the relevance of the topic and its theoretical context, focusing on the findings and their significance.
- Briefly illustrate your results with examples.

You will defend your thesis in front of a committee consisting of three individuals: 1st examiner, 2nd examiner, and chairperson. At least one of the committee members must have earned the so-called *venia docendi*. This is an academic recognition indicative of scholarly seniority; you can identify who has obtained their *venia docendi* by the title they bear, with “Associate Professors” and “University Professors” meeting the requirement. If your advisor meets this criterion, he or she will serve as the chairperson; otherwise, you can nominate somebody else.

1.4 Grade

There is **no** combined final grade for the Master’s thesis. The written thesis and the oral defense are each graded separately (e.g., “2 – good” for the thesis, “1 – very good” for the defense). These grades appear individually on the certificate and are not averaged or combined.

1.5 Timetable

Exam Weeks: Examinations typically take place around **October 15** and **January 15**.

Submission Deadlines:

- For the October exam period, the submission deadline is **August 15**.
- For the January exam period, the submission deadline is **November 15**.

2. Extended Abstract

Once you have reached an agreement with your advisor on a broad topic and an approach, you will be asked to write an extended abstract of 500 words. Here is a helpful template:

Many agree that this issue is particularly important. However, we do not know much about this specific question, although it matters a great deal, for these reasons. I approach the problem from this perspective. My research design focuses on these cases and relies on these data, which we analyze using this method. Results are expected to show this and that. The findings will have these broader implications for communication research, these implications for communication practice (e.g., journalism, strategic communication), and these implications for society.

Please provide a tentative timeline at the end of the extended abstract.

3. Extended time table

On average, students complete their Master's thesis within 18 weeks. Please find a suggested timeline for a quantitative empirical study below (i.e., an experimental study). The number of pages allocated to each section is a very rough estimate and may differ based on your approach (i.e., it will be different for a qualitative study or for a theoretical thesis).

Week	Focus
1-2	Identify a relevant theory able to inform your study. Write-up the theory section. (about 2 pages) Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Who proposed the theory?– What are its main tenets?– Precisely how is this theory informing your work?
3-5	Review all the empirical studies you can find that relate to your research goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none">– If you are conducting an experiment, make sure that you only include experiments in your review. Sometimes, you might be able to include survey-based studies, but make sure you contextualize them properly (i.e., correlation \neq causation). // If you are conducting a content analysis, include only content analyses. // If you are conducting interviews or a survey, you can include both interview-based studies and surveys. // And so on.– While reading these studies, also check what theories their authors used to inform their work. If needed, revise your own theory section accordingly.

Week	Focus
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend that you schedule an office hours appointment with your advisor in week 5.
6	<p>Write-up the literature review section. (about 8 pages)</p> <p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main findings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rather than summarizing one study after another, make sure you condense the available evidence surrounding key ideas. Structure the literature review in such a way that the specific aspects on which you focus come across like the most relevant ones. (E.g., “Attitudes and voting intentions were studied as the key outcomes.”) Based on the research gaps, propose hypotheses or formulate research questions.
7	<p>Collect measures for the constructs of interests (e.g., how are going to operationalize “voting intentions?”).</p>
8	<p>Refresh your knowledge about the method you seek to employ (e.g., experimental research, content analysis, interviews). Refamiliarize yourself with programming the questions in SoSciSurvey / Qualtrics (incl. the upload of stimuli). Make sure you deal with all conceivable problems well in advance.</p>
9-11	<p>Write-up the Methods section (about 10 pages)</p> <p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A description of the design used (e.g., a single-factor, between-subjects experiment, with a control group) Stimuli, incl. a report of a successful manipulation check. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Measures, i.e. the way in which you operationalized the constructs of interest. Answering the questions should not take more than 7 minutes. Program the questionnaire on SoSciSurvey / Qualtrics. Conduct a pretest using the final link. Click through the questionnaire at least 5 times (until you saw each stimulus at least twice); ask friends and family to do the same. Take notes on what looked wrong, was unclear, etc. and what changes you made based on this, as this is something you will need to report in the thesis. Do not blindly accept every suggestion made, but rather ascertain whether each suggestion is truly meaningful. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mention that participants gave informed consent, whether they were incentivized in any way, and that they were debriefed. Include the Informed Consent Form, the stimuli, the full questionnaire, and the debriefing statement

Week	Focus
	<p>in the appendix.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participants. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct a power analysis to determine how many participants you need. b. Prepare a strategy for recruiting participants. c. Write-up a section describing your sample using placeholders (e.g., XX participants were recruited via...) – Procedure. – We recommend that you schedule an office hours appointment with your advisor in week 11.
12-14	Data collection
15	<p>Data analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Data cleaning: Save a master copy of the data set. Using another copy, start cleaning the data, building indices, etc. – Data analysis: Conduct the data analysis and write-up the findings section. – Write-up the Findings section. (about 10 pages) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make sure you provide a definitive answer to the hypotheses / research questions.
16	<p>Interpret your findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Write-up the Discussion section. (about 10 pages) – Link your findings to the theory used and to the studies summarized in your literature review. – What do your findings mean? For communication science, for communication practice (e.g., journalism, strategic communication), for society? – We recommend that you schedule an office hours appointment with your advisor in week 16.
17	<p>Finalize the thesis by including an abstract of 200 words (1 page), an introduction (about 3 pages), a conclusion (about 2 pages), and a references list (about 14 pages).</p> <p>“The module “Preparation of the Master’s Thesis (CM1) is evaluated by the supervisor on the basis of a synopsis. Positive evaluation reads, “participated with success”, negative evaluations “participated without success”.”</p>

18	<p>Submit your thesis, await your grading. Then, prepare your defense, and if provided, responding to the feedback and criticism raised.</p> <p>“The performance of the “Master’s Thesis Defense”, the module finalizing the study program, is evaluated by an oral examination before an examination board consisting of three persons.”</p>
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4. Structure of the Master’s Thesis

The following example structure serves as a general guideline for organizing your thesis. You should adapt the chapter and section titles, as well as the overall structure, to appropriately reflect the content of your Master’s thesis. Any uncertainties regarding the structure should be discussed with your supervisor, who is responsible for the assessment of your work.

- **Length:** The Master’s thesis should be between **60 and 80 pages**, including references, tables, and figures, but excluding the appendix.
Recommended formatting is **11 pt. Arial** or **12 pt. Times New Roman** font, with **1.5 line spacing**.
- **Cover Sheet:** The official **Cover Sheet of the Master’s Thesis** provided by the department must be used: [Cover Sheet of the Master's Thesis](#)

4.1 Abstract

Together with your thesis, you are required to submit an abstract of **approximately 200 words**. This abstract is essentially an updated and abbreviated version of the extended abstract you submitted at the start of your thesis work. It must succinctly summarize your thesis by clearly stating the topic and research problem, outlining the main theoretical frameworks used, describing the methodological approach, and highlighting the key findings and their implications. Avoid general statements about the structure of the thesis and do not include citations in the abstract.

4.2 Table of Contents

For the Master’s thesis, subchapters should not extend beyond the third level (e.g., 1.1.1 Title XY). Generally, **each chapter or subchapter** should contain **at least half a page** of continuous text, preferably more. Chapter and subchapter titles must be clear and meaningful while remaining as concise as possible. **Avoid repeating the same title** within different chapters or subchapters.

4.3 List of Figure and/or List of Tables

Create separate lists for figures and tables. Your thesis must include at least one figure or table. Number each figure and table separately, starting at 1, and provide a brief, clear title—for example, “*Fig. 1: Internet Usage over Time.*”

Do not include source information in the lists. Instead, place a short source note directly below each figure or table, with the full reference listed in the bibliography. In the text, avoid placing multiple figures or tables stacked directly one below the other.

4.4 Introductory Chapter

The introductory chapter (about 3 pages) outlines the research interest, defines the problem, identifies the research gap, and describes the overall structure of the Master’s thesis. It should include at least the following subchapters: **Research Gap**, **Research Interest**, and **Structure of the Master’s Thesis**.

Research Relevance

This section explains the relevance of your chosen topic—why it is important to address. The relevance may be based on technological, social, or economic factors related to media and communication. It is essential to clearly link the topic to the content of your studies and to the overall context of your thesis. The argument for relevance must be supported by scientific literature wherever possible.

Research Gap (Problem Definition)

In science, the term problem differs from everyday use and follows the principle articulated by Karl Popper: “*Science begins with a problem.*” A scientific problem arises where current knowledge ends—that is, where questions cannot be answered sufficiently or at all based on existing scientific evidence. Problems often emerge from evolving social phenomena (e.g., technological or temporal changes) or contradictions within existing theories and models.

Identifying a scientific problem requires thorough engagement with peer-reviewed journals and scientific literature, including empirical studies. Market research and journalistic sources, while valuable for recognizing social trends, follow different standards and should only be used as preliminary references or starting points for problem formulation.

The problem definition should provide a concise overview of the current scientific debate, adhering to academic standards such as source criticism, citation, and objectivity. It must conclude with a clear statement of the specific question or issue that remains unanswered or insufficiently addressed from the current scientific perspective.

Research Interest

The research interest, or objective, directly follows from the problem definition. While the problem statement highlights what is unknown or unresolved, the objective specifies what the present study aims to achieve. This section refines the research gap by narrowing the topic's focus and clarifying the intended contribution.

Importantly, the objective should be a declarative statement, not a question. Research questions, which further refine the objective, should be formulated separately and may be introduced here. These questions guide the study by breaking down the broader objective into specific inquiries.

The research interest section may also include a preliminary outline of the methodological approach, though this can alternatively be presented in a dedicated chapter.

Structure of the Master's Thesis

Typically, a separate subchapter, this section provides readers with a roadmap of the thesis and helps the author maintain a coherent academic framework throughout the writing process.

4.5 Theoretical Foundation of the Master's Thesis

Organize this chapter by dedicating separate subchapters to the key theories and models, and to the review of empirical evidence (i.e., the literature review). Focus on those theories and empirical studies that are immediately relevant to your topic and research question(s). This section serves as the scientific basis for addressing your research questions.

In the theoretical framework, you present essential literature; theories and previous empirical research/studies related to your topic / research question(s) and explain key terms. This provides a scientific basis for answering your research question later on. Most of the time it is good to devote a separate subchapter to the theories and models, and one to the review of the empirical evidence, i.e. the literature review.

Avoid simply listing different approaches in isolated paragraphs or sections, as often seen in textbooks. Instead, focus on the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that are directly relevant to your topic, critically discuss their interrelations, and clearly link them to your research focus.

4.6 Empirical Section

The empirical section of the Master's thesis involves the analysis and presentation of data collected through your own research to address the research question(s). This section should include a detailed description of the chosen methodology, the data sample, data collection process, and the techniques used for data analysis.

The **method section** describes in detail the specific method used for data collection such as a survey or an experiment, or qualitative interviews or content analysis. The **methodological procedures** (note: the specific method of **data collection** and **analysis**) must be explained and justified in a comprehensible manner with reference to methodological literature. The **data collection** describes how the data was collected, including the sample selection, the data collection process (e.g., sending out questionnaires or conducting interviews), and the materials used. The description on **data analysis** starts with a short explanation on how the collected data was prepared for analysis. This may include coding interviews, entering data into a database, or compiling statistics, in the following this section includes the evaluation of the collected data.

Methodological approach	Sample size
Qualitative interviews	15 to 20 interviews (15 to 20 hours net)
Group discussions with 4 to 6 participants	approx. 4
Survey / Experiment sample size	approx. 200 (based on your power analysis)
Quantitative content analysis (social) media coverage	approx. 200

Presentation and Discussion of Results

In the **results** section, you present and visualize the findings from your data analysis using appropriate formats such as figures, tables, or interview quotes.

The **discussion** section interprets these results in relation to the research question(s) and any hypotheses. It also establishes connections to the theoretical framework introduced earlier. This section critically reflects on the empirical findings against the theoretical foundation, engaging in an academic discussion rather than a personal interpretation.

Focus on areas where the empirical evidence supports the theory, as well as any contradictions or differing perspectives, considering current debates within academia and professional practice.

4.7 Conclusion

In the conclusion section, the research question(s) must be answered. Please note that all questions formulated in academic papers must be answered. In the course of this, the limitations of your own work should be addressed and a critical outlook on possible further scientific discussions should be presented. For example, after a qualitative survey has been conducted, a quantitative study based on the findings can now be considered, or vice versa.

In the conclusion section, you must provide clear answers to all research question(s) posed in your thesis. It is essential that every question formulated in the academic paper be thoroughly addressed.

Additionally, discuss the limitations of your study and offer a critical outlook on potential avenues for further research.

4.8 References

All primary sources cited in your thesis must be listed in alphabetical order. Dividing the list by source type (e.g., online, print, books, journal articles, etc.) is not recommended, as it complicates locating sources. Additionally, sources for all tables and figures must be included in the list of references.

There are various citation styles; the widely used APA guidelines are recommended: American Psychological Association (2024). Style and Grammar Guidelines. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines>

4.9 Appendix

The appendix follows the references and is considered separate from the main body of the thesis. It includes supplementary materials such as interview guidelines, additional tables, figures, and documentation of data analysis that support the research but are not essential to the central argument. Including these materials in the appendix helps to maintain the flow and readability of the Master's thesis.