



Rules and guidelines for writing BA and MA theses at the Department of Economics UZH (recommendations)

These guidelines contain some best practice examples and act as recommendation for BA/MA theses at the Department of Economics @ University of Zurich. Please note, that each supervisor is free to modify according to his/her specific requirements. You should check the website of the professor you want to write your thesis with for more details.

At the Department of Economics, BA/MA theses are not allocated centrally. Therefore, we do not have an overview of free capacities. Please have a look at the list of topics from our faculty (<https://www.oec.uzh.ch/de/studies/general/theses.html>) and contact the professor or contact person directly. This does not need to be a professor from our department, even if your Major is Economics, you can write your thesis under the supervision of a professor from the other departments of our faculty (Business Administration, Banking & Finance, Informatics).

Formalities

A Bachelor's thesis is 18 ECTS, this equals a student workload of 540 hours.

A Master's thesis is 30 ECTS, this equals a student workload of 900 hours.

For both, the period for completion is 6 months.

You can start at any time (on agreement with your supervisor)– if you want to graduate at a specific date, please check the registration deadlines:

<https://www.oec.uzh.ch/en/studies/general/graduation/degree-deadlines.html>

Thesis in Economics

The thesis should be written like current research papers in economics, probably more in the style of a working paper, providing more detail than the final published version (tbd with supervisor). These do not include things that are sometimes seen in BA or MA theses such as lists of tables, lists of figures, or tables of contents. Please do not include such things either.

Language: English or German (tbd with supervisor).

General format: 1.5 line spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font and margins of 1.5 inches on the top, bottom, and sides. Length of text: about 40 pages maximum (tbd with supervisor).

Whether you have enough material is a question of content, not a question of the number of words. You are on the right track if you find it difficult to shorten your paper to the page limit (i.e., you should have enough substantive material to make it such). Mark Twain gets the idea:

"I apologize for such a long letter - I didn't have time to write a short one." – Mark Twain

Structure of your thesis

0. Include an **abstract** of 150 or fewer words

1. Introduction

- The introduction should convey everything the reader needs to know, in particular: What is the question? What is the answer? How did you get the answer? The reader should need to read the rest of your paper in only two cases: (i) (s)he wants to check you did everything correctly, (ii) (s)he is interested in further details of exactly how you carried out the research.
- Structure of the introduction (follow these steps precisely):
 - 1) Begin with the motivation. What is the context of your research? This will take one paragraph, around half a page.
 - 2) State the research question clearly (it ends with a question mark!).
 - Good example: "What is the effect on unemployment of raising the minimum wage to 15\$ per hour in Mississippi?"
 - Bad example: "I explore the topic of minimum wage and unemployment".
 - 3) State the answer clearly.
 - Good example: "Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour will increase the unemployment rate by 20% for individuals below 25 years, by 5% for individuals above 25 years of age. These effects are concentrated among the less highly educated population, with unemployment for individuals without a college degree estimated to increase by an additional 10% compared to those with a college degree".
 - Bad example: "Raising the minimum wage will tend to increase unemployment, especially amongst some age groups and specific demographics"
 - 4) Explain how you found the answer: What are the data, what are the methods, what is the intuition of the model (if you have these parts).
 - This part takes up most of the space of your introduction
 - 5) Explain implications for policy.
 - 6) Relate your work to the literature.
 - This is a part of the introduction section. Do not include the literature review as a separate section. It should be a part of the flow.

- The literature paragraph(s) should not simply be a list of related papers. Instead, for each paper, it should explain clearly how it contributes to the research question, or why it partially answers the research question but stops short of providing a full answer.

2. Body

The body of the paper can comprise multiple sections (in the case experiments, for instance, there will typically be one section on the design and one or more sections on analysis).

3. Conclusion

This can be very short (e.g., half a page). Typically, you restate the research question and the main findings. Then you outline some limitations of your work and scope for further research.

4. You may include **Appendices** with supplementary material (tbd with supervisor).

5. You have to include a declaration of authorship (form is provided).

Grading

The paper should be written like current research papers in economics. Examples are provided by the supervisors.

The grade is mainly defined by the content; although if the language is very unclear or unpolished, if references are missing or inconsistent, etc., this will be taken as a signal about the quality of the substance of the research.

The Department of Economics offers a course “English writing skills for BA/MA theses” (usually in the fall semester). For more info contact Sonja Verel (sonja.verel@econ.uzh.ch).

It is highly recommended that non-native speakers take this course and get help and individual feedback from language experts.

Tips

- Write the first page of the introduction (which contains the context and the question) first. A danger in writing papers is that one can get lost in the vast amount of detail. If you know exactly what your research question is, you are much more likely to stay focused on the main task. Also do the literature review early on.

- Except for the part regarding context, question, and literature review, write the introduction last. The introduction is a summary of all the work you have done, which you can only do once you know exactly what that is, and what answers you have obtained.
- Keep an automatic security copy of your work (e.g., drobox, time machine, etc.)
- Use an automatic reference management tool. If you are writing in MS word, you can use the tools related to References / Insert Citation. If you are writing in LaTeX, you can use bibtex. The reference list at the end of the paper needs to include all papers you cite, and all papers you include there need to be cited in the main text. Reference management software does that for you automatically and error-free.

For more information/questions, please contact Sonja Verel, sonja.verel@econ.uzh.ch, 43651.