BSc and MSc Thesis Writing and Supervision Guide

Abstract:

This booklet provides BSc and MSc students with a structured approach to academic writing alongside an overview of what students can expect from the thesis-writing journey. The first chapters of this booklet: i) provide some brief background about its author (Dr. Conor O'Driscoll), ii) outline strategies for choosing a research topic, iii) discuss the student-supervisor relationship, iv) provide broader insights into the "thesis timeline", and v) explain the assessment procedure. The remaining chapters focus specifically on academic writing. Beginning with a discussion around academic writing in general and the structure of research papers, the booklet goes on to provide an in-depth discussion around writing different sections of your thesis, regardless of whether the work is quantitative or qualitative. These chapters are designed to provide one person's perspective on how to write these specific sections (as well as a thesis) effectively by providing more concrete insights into what the thesis grading rubric is looking for, as interpreted by the author. Relatedly, although much of the advice contained within this booklet is generic enough to prove useful to any student engaged in thesis writing, it must be emphasized that much of the advice stems from the author's perspective on what constitutes a "good" section or "good" writing. Hence, in the first instance, this guide is tailor-made for students under the supervision of Dr. Conor O'Driscoll. Students not under Conor's supervision should incorporate the advice from this booklet (if they find it useful) only when it does not conflict with their supervisor's guidance.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Who Am I?

My name is Conor O'Driscoll and I am an Assistant Professor in Economic Geography. I work in the Department of Economic Geography within the University of Groningen, a department which forms one part of the wider Faculty of Spatial Sciences.

I have a BA in Economics and History (2017-2020) which I obtained from University College Cork, Ireland. I do not have a Master's degree. I obtained my PhD in Economics (2020-2023) from University College Cork's Department of Economics. During my PhD, I studied the relationship linking who we are and where we live to how we travel across Ireland, while also making inferences about the potential economic, environmental, and social consequences associated with such relationships. Within this PhD I tackled questions surrounding the determinants of commuting behaviours, the prevalence of urban sprawl in Ireland, and the environmental degradation (e.g., CO2 emissions) attributable to prevailing travel behaviours.

In many ways, my PhD was a study of the consequences of location decisions. Now, my research interests more broadly capture the mechanisms driving these decisions as they pertain to issues in Economic Geography, Urban Economics, and Regional Science. Thus, I am interested in questions which explore the economic, social, and environmental mechanisms that influence location decisions. This could include studying where people choose to live, where firms choose to locate, and the trade-offs associated with such decisions, for example. But it could also include studying issues related to real estate, migration, and labour markets. Currently, I am working on projects related to working-from-home, residential relocations, residential immobility (i.e., being "stuck" in places), and the spatial distribution of firms.

My preferred medium of research is quantitative methods, something evidenced in my research outputs and teaching experience. Within the FSS, I teach two bachelor courses in Statistics (*Statistics 1* and *Statistics 2*), one bachelor course dedicated to applied quantitative methods (*Applied Statistical Research Methods*), and supervise BSc research projects. At MSc level, I teach *Economic Geography: Theory and Practice* and supervise MSc theses for the Economic Geography and Real Estate Studies programmes. I prefer to supervise students doing quantitative research because it is the type of research I know best. However, I am not too picky if the topic is interesting. Thus, if you have a cool idea which is theoretically grounded in Economic Geography, Urban Economics, and Regional Science and would like to work with me, I encourage you to reach out.

1.2 Choosing a Topic and Research Question

MSc students are generally expected to have a clear, focused idea of their thesis topic before the first supervisory meeting, as much of their coursework up to this point involves developing a thesis proposal. For example, an MSc student interested in innovation should begin narrowing down their focus before they meet their supervisor. In contrast, BSc students usually start with a broad theme and use initial meetings to refine an interesting and feasible thesis topic together with their supervisor. While MSc students do most of the groundwork beforehand, BSc proposals typically develop afterward. Regardless of your level, once you have a broad theme, the next step is to propose a research question. This is where I as a supervisor become more involved, helping you finalize a question that is clear and, importantly, feasible within the scope of your thesis.

If you're unsure about your thesis topic, I strongly encourage you to choose something you find genuinely interesting. It's advice you've likely heard before, but it bears repeating: students who are curious and personally invested in their subject tend to engage more deeply with the research process. This doesn't just mean working longer hours; it means working better. Such students read more widely, refine their ideas carefully, seek feedback proactively, and revise their work thoughtfully. Assessors and supervisors can usually tell when a student lacks interest, as it often shows up in two ways: a surface-level treatment of the topic, and minimal effort to improve the work beyond ticking boxes. In contrast, students who enjoy their research often go the extra mile, not to chase grades *per se*, but because they care about getting it right. I firmly believe completing a thesis should be rewarding and insightful, so choosing a topic that doesn't excite you can make the process unnecessarily unpleasant.

Developing a valid research question can be challenging, especially if you feel overwhelmed. It helps to step back and think about how you will approach your research: considering your project's scope, the types of information or evidence you want to use, and whether it's realistic to answer your question with what's available. Many questions fail because the necessary resources aren't accessible, so this reflection narrows your options early. For example, if you want to study the impact of urban green spaces on community wellbeing, you might start with a broad question like, "How do parks affect wellbeing?" To refine it, consider what evidence you can gather: surveys, health records, policy documents? Then focus on your main concept of interest and build your research step-by-step, ensuring you're confident with the basics before adding complexity. Your ideas and intuition can guide you here, but practical

considerations like data access and feasibility are crucial. For instance, you might choose self-reported happiness from surveys rather than medical records due to accessibility. Also, think about the scope and quality of your data, such as which neighbourhoods and timeframes you can realistically include. If multiple sources fit your criteria, balance quality and accessibility to select the best fit. Once your project's focus is clear, turn to factors that might explain your main topic. Consider differences across your cases (i.e., income levels, age groups, proximity to parks) and which might influence wellbeing. Identifying these will give you a solid foundation for your research.

Feasibility often makes or breaks both MSc and BSc theses. Feasibility means that your research can actually be done within time and resource limits, which is obviously important for grading. Ambition is admirable, and every supervisor loves to see the "fire" to tackle big questions. However, as an experienced researcher, it's our role to help focus that energy on projects that are doable within the scope of your degree, thus tempering this fire. Because you're relatively new to producing such projects, it can be hard to judge when a project becomes too ambitious. While it may feel like "clipping your wings," this guidance helps avoid the many obstacles that can derail complex projects given the constraints students and supervisors face. Indeed, we understand how appealing it is to tackle the "big questions", but these are the very questions which are fraught with difficulties, challenges, and obstacles. Sometimes, the road less travelled is less travelled for a reason.

One common misconception is that a more complex project is inherently better. In reality, a simple, well-scoped question answered coherently and rigorously usually outperforms an ambitious but inconsistent, or a methodologically scattered, project. The best theses I supervise focus on one main method or conceptual lens applied thoroughly and transparently. I generally discourage mixed-method or multi-method approaches because it is extremely difficult do tackle each component adequately within the confines of a single thesis. Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques or multiple different types of statistical tests can also create internal tensions and confusion, something usually evidenced in the writing and a general lack of connection between what students want to study and what happens methodologically-speaking. This "mosaic of methods" approach further risks producing incomplete answers to the questions students proposed. If each question is answered using a different method, then each answer is fundamentally incomplete, creating a patchwork thesis. This can be viewed as a fundamental flaw in the research as you falter at the core task: answering your research

question. Thus, your goal should be to form a solid foundation that clearly demonstrates how your question was addressed. A tightly scoped project with fewer moving parts offers more opportunities to show this clarity of thinking, mastery of method, and showcases your ability to deliver.

So what does this mean? Well, it means that it is the student's responsibility to pick a subject area and topic which they find interesting. Then, students need to come up with some potentially interesting, and broad, questions they want to explore. I recommend generally picking 2-3 candidates to work with and interrogate each of these further until a winning question becomes apparent.

2.0 Thesis Timeline and Assessment Procedure

This thesis timeline primarily addresses MSc students, while BSc students follow a different, more structured process detailed elsewhere (on Brightspace).

2.1 MSc Students

Once assigned a supervisor, students should promptly contact them to arrange an introductory meeting. This initial meeting is informal but important, as it sets expectations (see Appendix 1) for supervision style, frequency of meetings, long-term goals, and begins shaping the research question. Although plans made here are flexible, by the end of this meeting both parties should have a clear understanding of how the supervision will work. It may take one-to-two meetings to finalise the sub-questions your thesis will address, and it may take a bit longer to finalise the methodological approach and theoretical frameworks students will use, and that is totally fine. This is a learning experience for the student much more than it is for the supervisor, so this is not to be rushed. As a supervisor, I see myself as a mentor who is there to guide students along and keep them on track. But the track students choose to go on, and how far they wish to travel along said track, is entirely up to them.

In saying that, students and supervisors will only meet six-or-seven times to discuss the thesis and the progress made in the research process, making the time students and supervisors spend together rather precious. To make supervisory meetings effective, students are encouraged to come prepared with key topics or questions to discuss, take notes during meetings, and submit drafts of thesis sections at least two working days in advance to allow for meaningful feedback. Meetings are informal but focused, and students maximize their benefit by actively participating and being punctual with submissions. In this way, you can treat meetings like a mini-lecture to a certain degree, or you can treat them like you are talking to ChatGPT about your thesis; the meetings will only be valuable if you come prepared and ask questions.

As your primary supervisor, *I work for you*, so by not coming prepared or by not sending relevant materials on time, you are effectively saying you have no work for me. Not all students will need every minute of every meeting. In fact, the best students often don't need meetings at all and are completely independent, but most students are not like that. Indeed, in my experience, most students really do not maximise the value they get out of these meetings, and this ends up costing them points at the very end because of usually avoidable mistakes and errors. This last point is also a point of inspiration for why this booklet was written in the first place.

The typical MSc thesis should be completed within 6-8 months, aligning with the duration of the MSc program. Therefore, any student working with me will be expected to have at least 90% of their thesis completed within 6 months. Completing on time benefits students by supporting better grades and positive references, should they need them. Finishing on time demonstrates your ability to work according to a schedule, meet deadlines, and plan work appropriately, skills which will be relevant for future employers and topics which explicitly appear in the thesis grading rubric. Delays beyond this period may lead to reduced marks and cessation of supervisor feedback/input, requiring students to finish independently.

2.2 BSc Student

The thesis process for BSc students is group-based, with students selecting a research theme and completing multiple assignments that together form the thesis. Group meetings are mandatory and ensure steady progress and timely feedback. This group setup can be valuable since research can be quite a lonely endeavour, and it can be very hard to gauge progress when working at these things alone. Thus, having a group setting forms a convenient support group for each member. The assignment-based structure of the thesis course puts some pressure on students to ensure that each section of the thesis develops somewhat quickly. Theoretically, this avoids situations in which students present “24-hour theses”, but it also ensures that students cannot really get “lost” in the process, as feedback on work is regularly provided and lines of communication remain short between students and supervisors.

The BSc thesis timeline is shorter, typically around 5 months starting in February, with a resit opportunity in July. Early in the BSc process, students receive “go/no-go” advice on whether their proposed project is feasible based on their research proposal and proposed methodology at that stage in the project. No-Go decisions amount to advice suggesting that this research topic not be pursued and that you “try again”. Go decisions are a green-flag. No-Go decisions are quite common, so students should not be disheartened if they happen to receive one. The thesis is often the first piece of independent research BSc students do, so it is important that they cut themselves some slack. Moreover, research is a difficult process and often it does not become apparent that ideas are not feasible until the very last moment. In my experience, this usually occurs because there is no bridge linking what students want to do in theory to what they can do in practice; that is, there is no data available or some other empirical limitation, hence why I emphasize data and methods so early in student-supervisor meetings, but it does not always have to be like this.

Initial student-supervisor meetings at the BSc level focus heavily on teaching key research concepts such as formulating research questions, theoretical frameworks, data methods, and academic writing. As the thesis progresses, meetings become more open and student-led, focusing on addressing specific issues or questions.

2.3 The Thesis Submission Process

The thesis submission process varies by programme within the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FSS). For BSc students, the process is structured around seven sequential research steps, all of which must be submitted on Brightspace by specific deadlines to receive feedback. The final thesis (Step 7) is the primary component graded, though Step 4 (the presentation) and active participation also contribute to the final mark. Timely submission is essential, as late work is not reviewed, and if the thesis is failed, only one resit is allowed, with a maximum possible grade of 5.5.

For **MSc Economic Geography students** (across all tracks), the process begins with a final round of supervisor feedback, typically covering the entire thesis. Once this feedback is addressed, students submit their thesis formally via email, clearly stating it is intended for grading. This submission must include all required sections and satisfy the "Quickscan" component of the grading rubric if it is to be seriously considered. The submitted thesis must also be uploaded to Brightspace for a plagiarism check. If satisfactory, the supervisor forwards the thesis to a second assessor. After both assessors agree on a grade, students are notified and should contact the FSS education office to complete graduation procedures.

The **MSc Real Estate Studies** thesis submission process follows a similar structure in principle, the major difference being the role of the second assessor. As per the Economic Geography cohort, students submit a final version of the thesis for grading formally via email. Prior to a final grade being awarded, the second assessor and primary supervisor review the thesis one last time. At this stage, the second assessor takes the lead in highlighting potential areas for improvement in the thesis. Therefore, the second assessor plays a highly influential role in determining the final grade. Failing to address, or at least meaningfully engage with, the feedback provided by the second assessor usually results in a lower grade than what otherwise would have been possible. Once this feedback has been sent to the students, the final step of their submission process involves submitting three documents: i) a detailed reply to the comments, ii) a tracked-changes version of the document showcasing where changes have been made within the manuscript, and iii) a clean final version of the thesis. This final version must also be uploaded to Brightspace for plagiarism screening before it can be graded.

Across all programmes, strict attention to submission requirements, format, and deadlines is essential, as incomplete or late submissions may delay grading and graduation.

2.4 The Thesis Assessment Procedure

Theses at both BSc and MSc levels are assessed by two people: your primary supervisor and an independent assessor. While both evaluations matter, the independent assessor's assessment is particularly important, as they help ensure fairness and objectivity throughout the process. For a grade to be awarded, both assessors must agree; and although they often align on the overall grade, differences in how they evaluate specific sections can sometimes lead to surprisingly different final scores.

For example, the grading process uses a rubric which only evaluates sections in whole numbers; but how do you score a section which you think deserves a 6.5? Some people may give a 6, others may give a 7. Personally, my default position is to round down, or in this case, give a 6. The difference between a 6 and a 7 in one section is not necessarily a big deal, but taken across all sections these slight differences add up to substantially different grades. Moreover, the choice of whether to give a 6 or a 7 may differ depending on how other sections have been evaluated, and the number given may change if the overall grade is slightly too high or slightly too low than the assessors think warranted. In other words, this assessment process inevitably involves some subjectivity. Different assessors have different ideas about what makes a strong thesis and vary in how strict or lenient they are. Appreciating this, the discussion between second assessors and supervisors usually focuses on coming to an agreement over the final overall grade, rather than negotiating scores for individual sections.

Because of this, it is important to appreciate that assessing a thesis is something of an uncertain process – no supervisor is certain of the *precise* grade students will receive. Thus, it is important for students not to rely too heavily on their supervisor's feedback when setting expectations about their final grade. Supervisors will of course try to temper and manage expectations to a reasonable degree and they will also do their utmost to help guide students to a positive outcome. However, the environment supervisors are navigating is also quite uncertain. Firstly, supervisors are human, and mistakes or oversights can happen in the process. Secondly, supervisors do not know the perspective of the second assessor. Thirdly, supervisors cannot predict the extent to which students will engage with feedback or work independently to improve the thesis. These are important considerations because theses are only assessed only once. While supervisors may review drafts along the way, students should not assume that

supervisors will catch every issue or provide comprehensive guidance on every detail. Thus, taking ownership of the research process, the thesis' contents, and the eventual grade students receive is quite important. That is, students are expected to take ownership of their thesis, independently addressing any shortcomings or basic corrections rather than relying on supervisors to catch everything for you. I personally believe that this independence is among the most important skills you can develop as students transition from education to labour markets. In saying that, if issues do arise that affect the grade and could be linked to missed guidance or feedback, these can and should be addressed constructively. So, even though the ultimate responsibility for the thesis rests with students, there is room for dialogue and resolution if supervision did not fully meet their needs.

A thesis is a written product. Although only one section of the rubric explicitly assesses writing, students' ability to score well across all sections depends on how effectively they convince the assessors, through their writing, that they have met the rubric's criteria. If students find themselves needing to verbally persuade assessors of their thesis' validity, it often signals that the written presentation is not fully successful. Clear, coherent, and compelling writing is essential to demonstrate students' mastery of the topic and to satisfy the expectations of both assessors. For example, how can one disentangle the quality of a theoretical framework from the way in which it is described in writing? In my opinion, you cannot. In this sense, the core message should be that if students cannot write very well, they should not expect a very high grade, irrespective of the extent to which they think the rubric components are satisfied.

As students approach the end of their degree, it's important to reflect on what constitutes the minimum standard for a thesis. Unlike earlier coursework, where passing might have involved doing "just enough," the expectations at this stage are higher. A thesis is meant to showcase students' ability to carry out an independent research project from start to finish, expectations closely resembling that which you will encounter in the workplace. If any part falls significantly short, the overall thesis is likely to be judged as insufficient. In this sense, the "minimum" standard is not about scraping by, but about showing that you can meet the expectations of a graduate in your field. Aiming only to pass is risky: theses that hover near the minimum often do not pass.

3.0 Thesis Writing: The Bigger Picture

3.1 The Benchmark

A thesis is meant to demonstrate that students can carry out an independent research project from start to finish, and this requires competence across all core components: the research question, theoretical framing, methodology, analysis, and writing. Simply excelling in one area will not compensate for serious shortcomings in another.

This is partly because the components of a thesis are deeply interconnected. Weakness in one area often undermines others. For example, if a research question is poorly defined, this will affect not only the grade for the introduction, but also the Theoretical Framework and Methods sections, since it will be unclear how the question can be meaningfully addressed. Similarly, a weak analysis tends to drag down the strength and coherence of your Conclusion. These linkages are taken seriously in the assessment process: assessors will look not only at individual sections, but also at how well the thesis holds together as a unified piece of research.

That said, assessors also evaluate the quality of each section on its own terms, to the extent that this is reasonable. For instance, if the connection between theory and research questions is underdeveloped, that will be reflected in the grades for both the Introduction and Theoretical Framework sections. But even with those linkages in mind, the Theoretical Framework section will also be assessed for the depth, clarity, and relevance of the literature you discuss. The only truly standalone component is the summary; every other section is both part of the whole and an object of independent evaluation. This dual lens (assessing both coherence and component quality) means students need to approach each part of the thesis with care, and aim for a consistently high standard throughout.

All this said, aiming merely to scrape by is unlikely to work. Not because of any artificial grade inflation or deflation, but because theses are judged holistically, and compensating for serious weaknesses in one area by doing better in another is difficult. Moreover, while only one section of the assessment rubric is explicitly about "writing," students' ability to perform well in all categories hinges on how convincingly your ideas, evidence, and reasoning are presented in writing. If students need to verbally defend or explain core elements of their thesis after submission, it often signals that something hasn't been communicated clearly enough on the page.

This ties closely to how thesis grades typically unfold in practice. For **BSc students**, it's not uncommon to fail or scrape a pass on the first submission. But equally so, it is not uncommon

to produce a well-written and solid thesis that produces a grade of around 7.0 first-time-around. At this level, relatively simple projects that are executed well are usually the ones which score highest. That is, clarity, rather than complexity, is often the stronger asset. Of course, if students can do both they will be rewarded, but doing both is rather difficult. The context is different for **MSc students**. Because they are further along in their academic training, the baseline expectation is higher. At this level, simple or overly descriptive projects may hit a lower ceiling as they are expected to take the analysis and framing a step further and offer deeper insights into the problem than could be expected from a BSc student.

It's important to recognize that a thesis doesn't need to be perfect. Things often go wrong: methods do not work out as expected, data may be messier than anticipated, or the analysis might not lead to clear conclusions. What matters is that students are transparent about these challenges and reflect critically on what could or should have been done differently.

For **BSc students**, thoughtful reflection can go a long way in compensating for weaknesses in execution. If an analysis runs into problems, showing that you understand what went wrong, and why, can still result in a strong grade. This is because the process of learning and reasoning is often as important as the end result. For **MSc students**, expectations are higher. Students are generally expected to get the technical and analytical aspects right first time around. That said, critical reflection still plays a key role, especially when it comes to acknowledging limitations, articulating trade-offs, and demonstrating that you have thought carefully about your methodological and conceptual choices.

In both cases, the final grade reflects not just what students accomplished, but how well they understood the task, navigated obstacles, and made sense of the results. A thesis is not simply a record of what you did, it's also a demonstration of how students think. In the broadest sense, this is what is being assessed.

3.2 What Should Your Thesis Look Like?

An academic thesis can take various valid forms, but for grading within the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), it should broadly follow the structure commonly found in social science research journals. To some extent, these structures are altered to reflect the fact that a thesis is not only a body of research but also a pedagogical tool which will be formally assessed and graded. This is why, for example, the Introduction section of a thesis will look very different from Introductions seen published by eminent scholars in academic journals. It is not because we are imposing an archaic structure, but rather, we are providing a structure to an otherwise

ad-hoc way of distinguishing between, for instance, societal and academic relevance. Aside from these engineered differences, a thesis should broadly contain the same elements as in these journal articles.

A thesis must have six main sections, starting with an abstract and ending with a conclusion, followed by a reference list formatted consistently (preferably Harvard or APA style), and any appendices or supplementary materials. A comprehensive discussion on what should be included in each of these sections is provided below, but transcending each individual section are issues related to style and formatting.

Beyond content, style and formatting are critical and directly influence the final grade. When we think about thesis formatting, we think about cover pages, font sizes and styles, text spacing, sub-section headings and so on. These are all objectively *small* details, but details which go a long way in shaping the first impression of the reader. Students are effectively throwing away marks, in my opinion, if they submit a thesis that is not formatted professionally.

The minimum formatting standards include:

1. Proper paragraph spacing;
2. Justified text alignment (creating neat blocks of text);
3. Consistent and clearly numbered section headings and sub-headings;
4. Consistent styling and presentation of Tables and Figures given the content they convey.

The cover page, while present, is not evaluated in grading, so it should not take precedence over ensuring the main thesis formatting is professional and consistent.

3.3 Advice on Writing

The following sections offer detailed guidance on constructing each part of your thesis. While they reflect my personal views on what makes for a strong thesis, these views are rooted in the formal assessment rubrics students are graded against. So, following this advice should, at least in theory, help students meet those expectations. That said, writing is subjective, and other supervisors may emphasize different aspects, but I believe the overarching recommendations are useful for any research student. Students looking for more general writing advice can see the bibliography at the end of this booklet.

“Good writing” is difficult to define and depends on cultural and disciplinary norms. As a native English speaker trained in the UK-US tradition, I tend to value clarity of meaning, straightforward language, and relatively short sentences. Avoiding unnecessary complexity can

make your writing more accessible without dumbing it down. At the same time, trying to strike a balance and avoiding going too informal or colloquial is important. Tone also matters. Just as you speak differently with friends than with a professor or supervisor, your writing should match the academic context. Avoid vague words like “things,” “stuff,” “very,” or “really.” Write with your reader in mind (typically academic supervisors) and aim for a professional, clear tone. I personally prefer the active voice and think it’s perfectly appropriate in academic writing. Using “I” can help improve flow and clarity, though this remains a debated topic. If you are comfortable, do not be afraid to use the first person, as long as your writing stays focused and formal.

In terms of content, a good rule of thumb is to start from the assumption that you need to explain (nearly) everything. Leave no stone unturned: make your assumptions explicit, clarify your interpretation of results, and spell out how your findings connect to the existing literature. Academic writing is not the place for implicit leaps of logic, unstated premises, or circular arguments. If your argument depends on a link, the reader should see it clearly. Writing is the core ingredient in achieving this clarity, though structure and formatting can support it, for example, through subheadings, numbered hypotheses, or clearly labelled sections.

Beyond the sentence level, paragraphs and sections are key to clarity. A strong paragraph should represent a single, coherent idea, not just a block of text. One style of constructing paragraphs starts with the core argument, and uses the rest of the paragraph to provide evidence and justification for said point. Another style flips this and emphasizes opening the paragraph with some broader context, and then eventually build toward making a core point at the end. Both styles are valid. The former starts out specific, and gradually gets broader in focus as you read down, while the latter starts out broad, and eventually focuses toward the end. A popular way of explaining these structures is through the use of triangles, where the tip represents the specific argument you wish to make. The overlap between these two styles of writing lay in the implication that the core sentence of any paragraph should not lay in the middle. Paragraphs that are too short (1–2 sentences) or too long tend to weaken the flow and signal issues in structure. To make your writing engaging, vary your sentence length and vocabulary – what I call “elegant variation.” Avoid excessive repetition of key terms, link words, or phrases. For example, I tend to rotate between “furthermore,” “however,” “therefore,” and “accordingly” depending on context. This kind of variety helps maintain rhythm and reader interest.

Sections**,** like paragraphs, also need clear structure and progression. Subsections can help, but even when not used, the flow should move in a clear direction: either from general to specific, or from specific to general. Whatever style you adopt, whether it be for paragraphs or sections, what matters is that you keep the style consistent, otherwise readers will have a hard time following your train of thought.

4.0 Thesis Writing: Section-Specific Guidance

4.1 Abstract

The abstract is easy to get wrong. It is short, carries relatively few marks, and is often overlooked. But those marks are easy to secure if the abstract is constructed properly.

Length matters: I strongly recommend keeping the abstract under 300 words (ideally between 125 and 225). Within that space, an abstract should clearly state:

1. The broader research context and/or theoretical foundation;
2. What you study (i.e., your core research question);
3. How you study it;
4. What you found;
5. The key implication(s) of your findings.

That order tends to work best from a flow perspective, but it is not mandatory. Either way, one common mistake is to write vague phrases like:

- "Policy implications are discussed."
- "Research limitations and avenues for future research are explored."

These tell the reader nothing meaningful. Every decent study includes such discussions so abstracts do not need to flag them in advance. Worse, such phrases take up valuable space. Instead, state the actual implication: what should readers take away from the findings? What is the practical or theoretical message? Similarly, I recommend leaving limitations out of the abstract entirely. They belong in the conclusion, not the summary.

In short: keep the abstract concise, focused, and informative. A well-constructed abstract sets the stage for the reader and earns students easy points. Do not waste the opportunity. One important thing to consider for assessment is that the information conveyed in the abstract aligns with what is presented in the main body of the thesis. An inaccurate abstract, regardless of how well-written it is, will not score well.

The following links provide further resources around constructing an effective research abstract/summary:

1. https://www.nature.com/documents/nature-summary-paragraph.pdf

4.2 Introduction

In my view, the Introduction is one of the most important sections of a thesis. While the grading rubric might not give it the most weight, a strong Introduction separates those who truly understand their research from those likely to scrape a 5.5. A well-written introduction shows a clear research question and a clear understanding of where the topic sits within broader societal debates and academic literature.

Introductions should be short but substantial: Introductions in MSc theses should span between ~900–1300 words, while Introductions in BSc theses should span between ~600–1000 words. These are rough guidelines, based on the idea that the Introduction should be around 10% of the total word count. Too short, and the objectives and relevance may be unclear. Too long, and the writing likely lacks focus. At a minimum, Introduction sections must explain what you do, how you do it, why it matters (academically and societally), provide some theoretical background, and explain how the work adds to the literature.

What follows is a suggested structure for writing a clear and compelling Introduction. It breaks the Introduction into its core components (i.e., what each paragraph *should do*), but it is important to understand that this is a scaffold, not a prescription. I stress this because I do not write in this way, as evidenced in my published research papers. Therefore, instead of following this one-paragraph-per-function layout in a literal sense, I encourage students to use it to ensure that the Introduction includes the essential building blocks. As writing skills develop, these elements will start to blend more naturally into 3–4 integrated paragraphs that flow as a coherent narrative.

That said, many students find it helpful to start with a structure like this when drafting. It can be especially useful to make sure no key component is missing, like why the research matters, what it contributes, or how it fits into the literature. Ultimately, the goal is to write an Introduction that leaves no stone unturned: explain everything that needs to be explained – the motivation, assumptions, methods, and theoretical logic should all be explicit and easy to follow.

1. **The Hook + Research Question**: Begin with a *hook*: a societal issue or theoretical puzzle that shows why the topic matters. This is the defence against the reader asking: *So what?* End this paragraph by stating the main aim or core research question, structured as “how X relates to Y.” Do not worry about operationalising terms, this comes later.

2. **Societal Relevance**: Explain why this question is important, both in society and in research. What real-world problem might the project help us better understand? What could policymakers, communities, or institutions learn from your findings? In some cases, the hook already covers societal relevance. Indeed, in my experience, students are often better at conveying societal relevance through a strong hook than when they try to write about it explicitly. Creating a smooth, logical flow between motivation and significance, without artificially splitting them up, is a sign of a strong writer, in my opinion.
3. **Theoretical Framing**: Outline the theoretical ideas or mechanisms the research engages with. Are you testing for a causal effect? Exploring correlations? Investigating a process or mechanism? Give a brief sense of how others have studied similar topics: how key concepts are defined, and what the literature generally says. Do not list studies: synthesise the findings and paint a broader picture of what the evidence-base tells us about the problem. This should make the conceptual lens through which the thesis is approaching the topic clear to the reader.
4. **Method & Data**: Briefly describe the strategy for investigating this problem. For example:
    a) *Quantitative*: "This thesis uses quantitative methods, specifically linear regressions, to examine…"
    b) *Qualitative*: "This thesis employs qualitative methods, specifically interviews, to explore…"

    Start broadly, then name your exact method. Be specific, but concise. Explain why this approach is suitable. That is, how it connects to your theoretical framing and helps answer the research question. Avoid leaving methodological assumptions implicit.

5. **Academic Contributions**: The academic contribution is what the thesis adds to the existing body of knowledge. In other words, how does this work go beyond simply summarizing or applying existing literature? What does it offer that helps advance academic understanding of this topic? Contributions can take different forms, including:
    a) Novel theory or perspective
    b) Use of new or underused data
    c) A refined or improved method
    d) Application to a new context or geography

Think of this section as your chance to show how this research complements or extends existing work. Avoid just listing studies; instead, synthesise how your thesis fits into the broader conversation. For example:

- *Theoretical*: "This study explores a mechanism underexplored in prior research…"
- *Empirical*: "This work adds to existing research by applying [method/data] to [new context]…"

MSc students are expected to make at least one clear academic contribution. Two is a good aim (typically one theoretical and one empirical) which can each be developed in a short paragraph. Be sure to link the contributions back to the literature and reflect briefly on how the findings align with or diverge from previous work. For BSc students, explicit contributions are not required for a sufficient grade, all else being equal. However, identifying one clear contribution, no matter how modest, can elevate the work and demonstrate deeper engagement with the material. Even if students are primarily applying existing methods or data, they can still show how the work fills a small gap, raises a new question, or shifts the focus slightly from prior research.

6. **RQ and Sub-questions**: Close the Introduction by clearly stating the main research question again, followed by 2–3 sub-questions. These should structure the investigation and signal how the rest of the thesis is organised:
    a) **Sub-question 1**: Theoretical focus (e.g., what mechanisms might link X and Y?)
    b) **Sub-question 2**: Empirical focus (e.g., how do X and Y relate in your data?)
    c) **Sub-question 3** *(optional)*: Heterogeneity (e.g., does the X–Y relationship differ by gender, income, geography?). Only include this if it's meaningful and grounded in theory, not just because others are doing it.

This structure is not a rigid template, but is designed to give students a strong foundation for thinking about how to keep their writing focused and arguments clear. Assessors do not just want to know *what* students are doing, they want to know *why it matters* and *how to answer the question*.

The following links provide further resources around constructing an introduction for a research paper:

1. https://www.cgdev.org/blog/how-write-introduction-your-development-economics-paper
2. https://blogs.ubc.ca/khead/research/research-advice/formula
3. Faber, J., 2012. "How to write the introduction of a scientific article". *Journal of the World Federation of Orthodontists*, *1*(4), p.e133.

4.3 Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The Theoretical Framework should be longer than the Introduction but remain within 1500–2500 words for MSc theses (1250–1750 for BSc theses). Sections that fall short often under develop key ideas, while overly long sections tend to be inefficient, unclear, or repetitive, signalling difficulties with isolating important material and conveying arguments. Unlike the Introduction, the expectations for this section are largely the same across degree levels.

A common pitfall is mistaking a Literature Review for a Theoretical Framework. Reviewing literature involves summarizing what others have studied or found, and although this is necessary, it is not sufficient. Theorizing requires interpreting how concepts relate to each other in the context of your research. For instance, citing that Rosen, (1974) introduced the concept of housing as a differentiated good is a review; explaining how this framework helps us understand patterns in residential location is theorizing. In other words, you theorize when you move from description to explanation; from summarizing what has been done, to constructing a conceptual structure that supports your inquiry. Strong theoretical frameworks build on this interpretive process.

Another key point is that selecting literature should be intentional, not mechanical. The most recent paper is not always the most relevant. Indeed, for theoretical foundations, older, seminal works, such as Tiebout, (1956) on local public goods or Hägerstrand, (1970) on time-space geography, often remain central and highly relevant. In saying that, for empirical evidence, more recent studies are typically more appropriate as they reflect updated methods and data. A good Theoretical Framework balances these sources: it honours foundational theory while situating it in a contemporary context.

Once concepts and theoretical relationships are clearly defined, this section should articulate either testable hypotheses (in quantitative research) and/or a conceptual model. Hypotheses are useful because they require specificity: a proposed relationship will be supported or not, allowing for clear, focused empirical testing. Importantly, rejecting a hypothesis is not a failure as it still provides insight into the validity or boundaries of a theoretical claim. Conceptual

models illustrate how the core concepts are thought to relate to each other. Even if the empirical analysis only focuses on a subset of these relationships, the broader model helps situate your study in a larger theoretical landscape. It clarifies what the research can (and cannot) address, helps avoid overclaiming, and reinforces coherence between the research questions, theory, and empirical strategy. However, conceptual models should be simple and focused, aimed at feasible relationships you can meaningfully discuss, rather than sprawling diagrams that attempt, but fail, to capture everything.

In general, I recommend organizing the Theoretical Framework into three main subsections, each aligned with a core sub-question or theme. For example, a study on commuting might be structured around: (1) individual or household characteristics, (2) spatial or built environment influences, and (3) the nature of the trip or commute because these are the three "pillars" of how we understand commuting behaviour: the perspective of the individual, the perspective of the built environment, and the perspective of the trip itself. Each subsection should introduce relevant literature, interpret how it informs your research, and conclude with either a key hypothesis or a theoretical relationship. This structure balances depth and clarity. Too few subsections risks overlooking important angles, while too many can lead to fragmentation or superficial coverage. Integrating hypotheses or conceptual models directly into the relevant subsection, as opposed to isolating them at the end, ensures flow, coherence, and relevance and provides direct links to the questions posed in the Introduction.

Ultimately, the purpose of this section is not just to summarize prior work but to build a theoretical scaffold that supports the proposed research. A strong framework clearly tracks how students move from idea to theory to analysis, and it lays the foundation for meaningful interpretation, regardless of whether the data confirms your expectations. The following links provide further resources around constructing a strong core of research papers:

1. https://marcfbellemare.com/wordpress/12797
2. https://t.co/Co167shTrN
3. Van Wee, B. and Banister, D. 2016. 'How to Write a Literature Review Paper?'. Transport Reviews, 36(2). Pp. 278–288.

4.4 Data and Methods

Whether a thesis adopts a quantitative or qualitative approach, the Introduction and Literature Review sections typically follow a similar format. In contrast, the Data and Methods section will differ considerably depending on the methodological choices made. That said, some

general principles apply across BSc or MSc theses alike, and these can help students structure this section clearly and consistently. A common structure for this section includes:

- **Study Context**
- **Data**
- **Methods**

The recommended length for this section is 1000 to 2500 words. Writing fewer than 1000 words usually leads to an underdeveloped explanation of the empirical work. Going over 2500 may be appropriate in rare, complex cases, but most students are unlikely to require that much space. The goal here is clarity, transparency, and replicability: a reader should be able to understand exactly what students did, and why, as well as replicate the study without needing to consult the code or raw materials.

The **Study Context** subsection allows students to explain the *where*, *when*, and *for whom* of the study. Is the research focused on a particular place, time period, or population group? If so, make that explicit. For example, urban studies theses may involve a specific city, planning reform, or housing system that affects how we interpret your results. If the case is especially niche or contextualised, some detail is helpful. This may include a map, descriptive statistics, or brief background information. If not, keep the section short and focused.

The **Data** subsection should explain what kind of data is used, how it was obtained, and how it relates to the research question. Whether the data is primary or secondary, qualitative or quantitative, this section should address core issues such as:

- How was the data collected?
- What is the sample size and sampling strategy?
- Who is the population of interest?
- What are the key variables or materials?
- Why is this dataset or material appropriate?

In *quantitative theses*, include a table of descriptive statistics for the main variables. This helps to establish the structure of the dataset and shows that students understand what they are working with. It can be especially useful to also include a map, or another visualisation focusing on some key variables the research is interested in.

In *qualitative theses*, while summary statistics may not apply in the same way, students should still provide a clear sense of how the data fits into a broader context. For instance, a thesis based on interviews with transport planners might include contextual figures on travel behaviour in the study area, or a map showing the transport infrastructure under discussion.

The **Methods** subsection should clearly describe *how* students analysed the data and *why* that method is suitable. Here, transparency and reflection are key. Research always involves a number of arbitrary or subjective decisions: what data to include, which variables to operationalise, which cases to drop, how to define key categories, and which models or coding strategies to adopt. These choices matter. Rather than downplaying them, it is important to acknowledge and reflect on them. Why were certain choices made? How might they have influenced the findings?

For *quantitative theses*, students should clearly name and describe the method used as well as present the model equation, as it applies to their specific context, and explain its components. When doing this, it should be clear how the chosen method links to your proposed research question. In addition, it is important to discuss the assumptions of the model and whether they are met. Testing model assumptions (e.g., linearity, homoscedasticity, independence) is important for evaluating whether the results are statistically meaningful, and this provides a nice gateway to reflecting on the generalisability of the findings: under what conditions are they likely to hold?

To support these claims, students should also reflect upon the robustness of the results: Have you tested alternative model specifications? Have you changed the sample, scale, or time period to check if results hold? Robustness checks are essential in any empirical work. They help test whether your conclusions are sensitive to minor variations in model design or data structure. The inclusion of a properly specified equation is particularly helpful. It not only clarifies the empirical strategy, but it also serves as a signal that students understand the logic of the method. If students are using regression, for example, the equation should make clear what the dependent and independent variables are, and how the model links them.

For *qualitative theses*, the same principles of transparency and reflection apply. Students must explain what method of analysis is used (e.g., thematic coding, grounded theory, discourse analysis), why this method suits the research question, as well as who the participants or sources are, how they were selected, and how many were included. From there, students need

to discuss how the data was processed (e.g., coding tree, analytical software) and how the findings relate back to the core concepts or framework While qualitative research does not involve statistical assumptions in the same way as quantitative work, students still need to reflect on the scope, limits, and generalisability of the findings. What perspectives are included, and which are not? Does the data allow you to speak more broadly, or is it more appropriate to emphasise the specificity of the case? These kinds of reflections demonstrate that students understand the logic and limitations of the chosen approach.

Finally, in both cases, remember that any raw material used (i.e., data, transcripts, code, or coding trees) must be kept and submitted as part of the thesis. For quantitative work, this includes both the dataset and code. For qualitative work, it includes anonymised interview transcripts, raw documents, notes, coding outputs, or software exports. These materials allow supervisors and assessors to verify the work if needed.

The following links provide further resources around constructing a strong core of research papers:

1. https://marcfbellemare.com/wordpress/12797
2. https://t.co/Co167shTrN

4.5 Results (and Discussion)

The section following your Data and Methods section can be titled either Results or Results and Discussion, and this applies equally to BSc and MSc theses. The distinction matters. If students label the section Results, the focus should be strictly on presenting and interpreting the findings as they relate directly to the research question, without yet discussing broader implications. In a quantitative thesis, this means clearly interpreting the sign, magnitude, and statistical significance of coefficients, and commenting on model fit where relevant. Shallow reporting, such as simply stating whether results are significant, is not sufficient. Students are expected to interpret the results correctly and completely. Any evaluation of practical relevance, policy implications, or theoretical significance should be reserved for the Discussion.

If the section is instead titled Results and Discussion, students are expected to weave these interpretations together with broader reflections. This includes linking the findings back to theory and existing literature, which is essential for demonstrating what the results mean in a wider academic or societal context. This is also where students can begin to propose answers

to the research question. For this reason, combined Results and Discussion sections typically run about 1500–2000 words, compared to 750–1250 words for Results-only sections.

In *qualitative theses*, the same standards apply. Results should be structured around clear analytical themes, grounded in data, and tied directly to your research question. Quotations should serve to illustrate key points, not to substitute for analysis. Avoid listing what individual interviewees said in isolation; instead, synthesise across respondents and use subheadings to organise key themes.

Crucially, in both qualitative and quantitative work, the content students choose to present, whether tables, graphs, or quotes, must be deliberate and meaningful. Not all visualisations or excerpts add value. Avoid overloading the section with unfiltered outputs. Instead, guide the reader: explain what each element shows, why it matters, and how it contributes to answering your research question. Content should always be contextualised, not just displayed. Whether students separate Results and Discussion or integrate them, the goal is to show not just what you found, but that you understand it, can explain it clearly, and can situate it within the relevant theoretical and empirical landscape.

The following links provide further resources around constructing a strong core of research papers:

1. https://marcfbellemare.com/wordpress/12797
2. https://t.co/Co167shTrN

4.6 (Discussion and) Conclusion

If you choose to include your Discussion within the Conclusion section, that is perfectly acceptable. The same expectations apply regardless of structure or whether students are writing a BSc or MSc thesis. Importantly, the length of the discussion component should remain consistent even if it is merged into the conclusion: around 750 words is a good target.

Without an embedded discussion, the Conclusion should typically be 750–1000 words for MSc theses and 500–800 words for BSc theses. In either case, it should be shorter than the Introduction, but still revisit many of the same themes. Students should briefly restate what has been researched, how it has been approached, what has been found, and why it matters: academically, societally, and/or for policy. More crucially, this section is where students

clearly answer the core research question(s), drawing from the findings in a concise and synthesised way. This can take the form of a summary, but rigid formats are not required.

Equally important is a thoughtful discussion of the limitations of the research and future research directions. These often go hand-in-hand: a limitation (e.g., not being able to study X due to data constraints) can naturally point to a productive future research avenue. However, it is essential to understand what constitutes a genuine limitation. Failing to confirm a hypothesis or research question is a result, not a limitation. A limitation involves theoretical gaps or methodological constraints, such as data that fails to fully capture key variables**,** measurement issues**,** or unaddressed complexity in qualitative frameworks. Simply stating something is a limitation is not enough, students must explain why it limits the findings.

Similarly, proposed directions for future research must be justified, not just listed. Students need to explain why these avenues are meaningful, how they address current shortcomings, or what value they could add. A vague or superficial treatment of these components can weaken the conclusion and cost you marks.

In short, whether or not students include the Discussion here, the Conclusion should synthesise, not repeat. It should communicate that you understand what the findings mean, what their limits are, and where the research can go from here.

The following links provide further resources around constructing a strong concluding section of a research paper:

1. https://marcfbellemare.com/wordpress/12060

4.7 List of References

As advanced university students, you are expected to consistently and correctly format all references throughout your thesis. The specific referencing style is up to each student, but it must be applied uniformly. That said, APA or Harvard styles are recommended, as they align with FSS standards.

Each reference must include all essential elements: author(s), year, title, and DOI (where available). The goal is simple: the assessors must be able to locate the source quickly. If the DOI links do not work or the references are incomplete, marks will be deducted.

This same principle applies to in-text citations. Author names and publication years must be clearly presented, and citations should be integrated smoothly into the text. Avoid clumsy or incorrect formatting, such as:

> *Evidence suggests that agglomeration is good for growth. (O'Driscoll 2024).*

Or overly wordy constructions like:

> *The article written by O'Driscoll (2024) says that agglomeration is good for growth.*

Instead, write:

> *O'Driscoll (2024) says that agglomeration is good for growth*.

4.8 Appendices

Appendices (or Supplementary Materials) can be highly valuable if used appropriately. They are meant to support the work, not form the core of the analysis. Think of them as a space for materials that enhance transparency or demonstrate robustness, but are not essential to directly answering your research question.

Typical quantitative content includes robustness checks, sensitivity analyses, assumption tests, or code. These elements strengthen the claims of the results, but are not central to your main argument.

For qualitative theses, include coding frameworks, extended interview transcripts, and any raw data or research materials not presented in the main text. Transparency here is crucial. Failure to include such materials can result in lost marks, and, especially for qualitative work, may trigger academic integrity concerns if there is no clear evidence of how raw data was processed.

In short: use appendices to show the full process and support your findings, but do not overload your main text with details that belong elsewhere.

5.0 Appendix 1: Student-Supervisor Agreement

Name student		
Student number		
Topic		
Supervisor	Dr. Conor O'Driscoll	
Date		
Note: the supervisor has 28 hours available for supervising, reading and grading		
Aim and expectations What area does your supervision relate to? Do you need assistance with a particular task, or work planning? What learning or development needs do you have, and how will supervision help you achieve these?		
Frequency Will the supervision take place weekly, fortnightly or monthly? Or would a one-off session be appropriate? What will the duration of the supervision be? Will the supervision take place at a particular time of day? Have you both set aside protected time?		
Feedback and notes How will feedback be provided to the supervisee, and the supervisor? What type of record will be kept, and how will this record be used? Where will these records kept, and who will have access?		
Planning What does the student's schedule look like? When does he or she expect to be ready? How does this fit into the supervisor's agenda? Which points of attention are important?		
Additional remarks		
Signatures	**Student**	**Supervisor**

6.0 Appendix 2: BSc Grading Rubric

Evaluation Form Bachelor Project

Student Name	
Student Number	
Bachelor Program (HGP/SPD)	
Title Bachelor Project Thesis	
Date	

Supervisor	
Name	
Signature	

Second Assessor	
Name	
Signature	

Final Grade (one decimal)	
Approved by Coordinator	

Quick Scan: the thesis meets the minimum requirements for assessment when all boxes are ticked

The thesis:

- ☐ Only contains original work and no plagiarism has been identified (according to the TER) Contains an academic literature review which is substantial enough to consider it for grading Contains an explanation and discussion of the chosen research methods
- ☐ Contains an empirical section which is substantial enough to consider it for grading Is written in such a way that the contents are understandable

The student:

- ☐ Has completed and uploaded all the research steps Has uploaded the data files and data analysis files Has attended the supervision meetings

Guide Scoring Levels

Excellent	The work is of very good quality for the standards of a Bachelor degree
Good	The work is well beyond the expected minimum requirements of a Bachelor degree but could still be improved on several points
Satisfactory	The work meets the expected minimum requirements of the standards of a Bachelor degree
Unsatisfactory	
Missing	The work does not meet the expected minimum requirement of the standards of a Bachelor degree

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 5% Weighted Points
1. Summary	1	3	6	8	10		
– The thesis contains a concise and factual abstract – Purpose, theory, methods, main results, and conclusions and recommendations are concisely stated – The abstract can be read separately from the thesis							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							

Click or tap here to enter text.

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 5% Weighted Points
2. Research Problem	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Motivated:* the student formulated a relevant and motivated research problem							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 15% Weighted Points
3. Theory	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Selection:* the student was able to identify and select appropriate international academic literature – *Synthesis:* the thesis contains a sound summary of the selected literature in the student's own words – *Conceptual Model:* the selected theoretical concepts were set in a conceptual model and employed consistently as a tool to do research							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 15% Weighted Points
4. Data and Methods	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Selection:* the manuscript shows a conscious consideration of the chosen research method(s) – *Strategy:* the applied methods are framed in a deliberate research strategy – *Transparency:* the thesis accounts well for the collection and analysis of data – *Ethics/Data Management:* ethical and data management risks are identified and appropriately dealt with							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 15% Weighted Points
5. Analysis	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Analysis:* the analysis and presentation of the results is appropriate and creative							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 15% Weighted Points
6. Conclusions	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Theory:* the conclusions are drawn in explicit connection to the theories used – *Data:* the link between conclusions and data is clear – *Generalization:* the generalization of the findings is done realistically – *Reflection:* the student reflects critically on the own process and outcomes							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 10% Weighted Points
7. Reporting (Writing)	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Convincing:* the written thesis presents the arguments in a convincing way – *Writing:* the style of writing is appropriate for a scientific report (e.g., clear, to-the-point, well-structured, correct language, effective use of tables and figures)							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 5% Weighted Points
8. Reporting (Oral)	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Research Step 4:* the presentation of the preliminary results is appropriate for an academic research presentation							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
N/A.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 10% Weighted Points
9. Process	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Working Independently:* the student worked independently and needed only little input from the supervisor – *Processing Feedback:* the student took the supervisor's comments at heart and used them effectively – *Participation:* the student actively and constructively participated in the sessions							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
N/A.							

	Missing	Unsatisfactor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Mark	Weight 5% Weighted Points
10. Peer Review	1	3	6	8	10		
– *Research Step 6:* the student gives useful feedback on the work of fellow students							
Feedback supervisor:							
Click or tap here to enter text.							
Feedback second assessor:							
N/A.							

Total of weighted points	

11. Specific Circumstances		
– Points to be added or subtracted here in case of specific circumstances		
Click or tap here to enter text.		

7.0 Appendix 3: MSc Thesis Grading Rubric

Final grade (one decimal)	**Grading not finished**

Quickscan: The thesis meets the minimum requirements for assessment when all boxes are crossed (x)

The thesis:

X only contains original work and no plagiarism has been identified (according to the TER)

X contains an academic literature review which is substantial enough to consider it for grading

X contains an explanation and discussion of the chosen research methods

X contains an empirical section which is substantial enough to consider it for grading

X is written in such a way that the content is understandable

X has been presented at the Graduate Research Day or another academic/professional audience

Guide grades	
Excellent (10):	the work is of high quality for the standards of a Master's degree.
Good (8):	the work is well beyond the expected minimum requirements of a Master's degree but could still be improved.
Satisfactory (6):	the work meets the expected minimum requirements of the standards of a Master's degree.
Unsatisfactory (3):	the work does not meet the expected minimum requirement of the standards of a Master's degree.
Missing (1):	content is not present in the thesis.

Grading criteria	**Grade**	**Applied weight**
1. Summary	**Click to grade**	5
- The thesis contains a concise and factual abstract - Purpose, theory, methods, main results and conclusions and recommendations are concisely stated - The abstract can be read separately from the thesis		
Feedback supervisor:		
Feedback second assessor:		
2. Defining the research problem	**Click to grade**	10
- The introduction convincingly identifies a topic with a societal and/or academic knowledge gap or problem relevant to the Master's programme field - The study aim is clearly formulated and linked to the research problem - The research question is clearly formulated and addresses the research problem and study aim		
Feedback supervisor:		
Feedback second assessor:		
3. Literature review and theory	**Click to grade**	20

- Relevant academic literature is adequately selected, compared, summarised and discussed - The theory and concepts relevant to the study are clearly defined and discussed - The literature and theory are linked to the aim and research question - A reflection on relevant existing studies is provided - Modifications of existing theories/concepts are proposed where applicable - Conclusions are drawn regarding the theory, resulting in a conceptual model or testable hypotheses, clearly connected to the research question.
Feedback supervisor:
Feedback second assessor:

4. Methodology	**Click to grade**	10

- The research design follows logically from the research question and theory - A conscious consideration of the chosen research method(s) is provided - The research design is transparent, valid and reliable so that replication of the study is possible - Applied methods are framed in a deliberate research strategy - Relevant ethical issues and reflection of the student's position as a researcher are addressed - A transparent and complete description of data collection, quality, management and analysis is provided
Feedback supervisor:
Feedback second assessor:

5. Results	**Click to grade**	15

- The results are presented in a valid, transparent and concise way - Raw data are given meaning through meaningful analytical representation - The presented results are an appropriate selection and are embedded in theory/literature - The presented results are defendable, based on the chosen means of data collection and analysis
Feedback supervisor:
Feedback second assessor:

6. Conclusion, discussion and recommendations	**Click to grade**	15

- An answer to the research question has been formulated - Conclusions and implications are derived from empirical data analysis - Generalisations of findings was realistically done in explicit connection to the theory - Outcomes are discussed in context of the research question(s) and societal and/or academic debates - Strengths and weaknesses in relation to the validity of the results are discussed - The contribution of the study to the field of research is explained - Improvements for the current work and/or recommendations for future research is stated
Feedback supervisor:
Feedback second assessor:

7. Reporting (thesis)	**Click to grade**	10

- The thesis is well-structured and presents the arguments in a scientifically convincing way - The writing style complies with the scientific standards for structure, argumentation and referencing - The text is written in an accessible way (clear and to the point) and spelling and grammar are correct - The layout is appropriate, consistent and attractive - The thesis makes effective use of figures, maps, diagrams, tables and/or quotes where applicable
Feedback supervisor:
Feedback second assessor:

8. Reporting (oral presentation)	**Click to grade**	5
- The presentation techniques are well-developed - The oral presentation was clear, well-structured and well-argumented in a scientifically convincing way - The student was able to reflect critically upon the research and was competent in answering questions		
Feedback supervisor:		
Feedback second assessor:		
9. Research process	**Click to grade**	10
- The student was proactive, independent and showed a structured way of managing the process - The supervisor was kept informed adequately on research progress and the student made effective use of feedback - The student was able to deal intelligently with complications and unexpected events (if applicable) - The thesis was finished within a reasonable time frame		
Feedback supervisor:		
Feedback second assessor:		
Grade	**Grading not finished**	**100**
10. Specific circumstances		
- Points to be added or substracted here in case of specific circumstances:	**N/A**	
NA		

Appendix - Master's thesis assessment form guide

General

This form needs to be filled in, signed and sent to the student administration. It also needs to be shared with the student. The student needs to be able to see the feedback from both the supervisor and the second assessor. Both examiners can choose to provide feedback on the same form, or fill out a separate form. If there is disagreement between the supervisor and the second assessor of 2 or more points, a third assessor who is trusted by both examiners can be asked to assess the thesis. In that case, the final grade is the average of the three marks.

Second Assessor

The role of the second assessor is that of reading and assessing the work. In some Double Degree programmes the second assessor can be the acting external supervisor of the partner university under the condition that the second assessor is registered as an examiner at our Faculty.

Final Grade

The final grade (calculated at the bottom of the form) is based on the grades given for each criterium taken into account the applied weight for each criterium.

Quickscan

The purpose of this section is to check the minimum requirements of a thesis to be marked. In some criteria, an 'unsatisfactory' automatically classifies the thesis as a fail. This applies when plagiarism has been identified, if poor language prevents a satisfactory understanding of the thesis, in case no literature review is present or it is not substantial enough, contains no explanation nor discussion on the method chosen, or if the work has not been presented for an audience. In other words, these criteria cannot be compensated. Consequently, all other criteria can be compensated. To make this clear to students and examiners, a first assessment has been placed at the onset of the form to make this clear, and to facilitate a quickscan when marking.

Guide Grades

This section provides a general description of the levels as detailed in this form. In the Dutch system, grading is from 1 to 10: 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest grade. The examiners are required to agree on the grade of each grading criterium. The examiners are required to add their feedback on each grading criterium in the box below. The final grade is calculated as a weighted average.

Specific Circumstances

The supervisor has the freedom to add extra points or subtract points if student achievements are exceptionally good, if personal circumstances have played a significant role or in other specific circumstances. Other examples include continued perseverance in a situation like a pandemic, or if the student has produced work that is (nearly) ready for publication. This section is meant to keep the form flexible, and use of the box lies with judgement of the supervisor and/or second assessor.

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