

# Guidelines for Completion of Master's Thesis 2009

OFFICE OF BUSINESS SCHOOL



INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
AUDENTES

Last updated on 16.04.2009

The Master's Thesis Guideline is designed for all master students in (international) Business Administration at International University Audentes Tallinn University of Technology. During the thesis seminar each student should be familiar with writing academic papers and requirements of a defendable thesis.

During the final year of IUA, students will be required to do independent, individual research in the chosen academic field; the Master thesis counts for 20 CP (30 ECTS CP). Thesis is an integral and important part of all academic programs. After successful completion of all Master level courses and Master's thesis, each student will receive a Master of Business Administration degree after fulfilling all graduation requirements.

This Master's thesis guideline intends to inform in details about assessment criteria, practical procedures and timing, organizational processes such advice and defense. In addition, the rules and regulation for submitting the thesis, and oral defense are explained. The intended readers include students who are preparing their thesis, their advisors, 2<sup>nd</sup> readers, faculty and staff members who coordinate thesis related tasks at Business School.

In addition, this guideline is intended to be supplementary to the textbook: Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003. An online concise version is available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/>

## I. Thesis Outline (General Overview of Necessary Content)

### A. Title Page

The Master's thesis should contain a title page which gives: the thesis title (centered across the top of the page); the student's name (centered in middle of page); centered across the bottom of the page should be, "A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at International University Audentes Tallinn University of Technology" (include instructor's name and month and year of completion).

The title for a Master's thesis "should be kept as short as possible consistent with clearly and comprehensively conveying the theme of the work. Rather like an extremely compact

summary, a title should provide insight into the sub-discipline to which the study relate, and at the same time reveal something about the chief goals, methods, focus, and/or results.”\*

The ideal title consists of no more than about ten or twelve words. If you find this standard too restrictive, try solving the problem by appending a subtitle, but make sure the most important information still falls within the main title. A subtitle should be limited to furnishing supplementary thoughts that clarify the title, or delimit it in some one. Often a subtitle functions mainly as a device to shift some critical term forward within the main title, because for documentation purposes first words play a uniquely important role.

The student is responsible for providing the title of the thesis in both English and an eligible Estonian translation. The title is limited to 200 characters (or four lines), including the spaces, which is the equivalent of about 25 words.

## **B. Thesis Statement**

The thesis statement should be a short (one or two sentences) assertion of what is to be proven in the thesis.

The statement should be written so that it clearly specifies the problem to be addressed and solved in the thesis paper. The statement should also allude to how it will be proven.

## **C. Introduction (Chapter 1)**

The introduction should discuss the thesis statement and how it will be proven. The introduction should include the following:

1. A brief explanation regarding the origin of the present study, i.e., it should offer an explanation as to the current relevance of the research. It should address the questions: Why is the research important? Why is the subject of the thesis up to date? How was the subject identified or how did it come about that this became the chosen subject?
2. A clear specification of the objective of the research. If possible this should be included in the thesis statement. A cross-reference to chapter 3 should be made explaining the scope of the study: what are the specific issues to be addressed and which specific issues, which may be related to the research, will not be addressed. A more detailed description will appear in Chapter 3.
3. A brief explanation of how the research was implemented: what methods of data analysis are used and what are the data sources. The detailed description appears in chapter 4.
4. A description of the logical sequence or structure of the research indicating how the various chapters comprise a meaningful whole. It should be clearly specified how the chapters are connected to one another to elucidate the objective of the research.

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\* Russey, William E. et al. How to Write a Successful Science Thesis: The Concise Guide for Students. Weinheim: Wiley-VCH, 2006. 54-56.

#### **D. Review of Literature (Chapter 2) – the student may specify their own title for this chapter**

This is a well-documented description and/or evaluation of previous important works in the field chosen.

The literature review should draw on original sources or alternatively prove familiarity with the field via discussion of standard textbook theory.

#### **E. Behavioral Model (Chapter 3 or more)**

This is a detailed presentation and investigation of the topic proposed.

This chapter(s) should set forth the problem to be solved or analyzed.

The chapter(s) should clarify means by which the thesis can be proven (statistical proof highly desirable).

Chapter 3 should develop something new based on what was presented in chapter 2.

#### **F. Empirical Support for Thesis or Model (Chapter 4)**

This chapter should demonstrate an ability to apply techniques learned in Statistics class.

The chapter should use statistical methods – e.g. trend analysis, regression analysis – to facilitate verification of thesis.

Data is to be accumulated, presented and analyzed by the students themselves (use of other people's data presentation is *not* permitted).

Data should be self-generated and presented utilizing Excel Chart Wizard.

Monthly, quarterly or annual data is preferable in creation of graphics.

The chapter should conclude via indicating if data presented supports the thesis statement.

#### **G. Future Research (Chapter 5)**

This chapter should draw implications of current research for future research. In addition, the chapter should suggest areas of further inquiry.

#### **H. Conclusion (Chapter 6)**

This chapter is the summing up of your stance, what you have added to the aggregate of human knowledge and why. This will also reflect the impact of the theoretical material of your findings, and can also suggest wider implications, new question which have been raised. What must *never* come into your conclusion is any new material or new arguments.

## II. Important Points to be Aware of in the Process of Completing the Thesis

### A. Spelling

Prior to writing any draft students are required to study the proper grammatical use of the definite and indefinite articles in English (e.g., when to use, and when not to use the following: a, an, the).

The student must proofread all drafts – be sure to use spell check - prior to submitting them to the instructor.

Never divide words at the end of lines.

### B. Foreign words

Non-English quotes must reproduce all accents, etc. as they appear – marks not available on keyboard may be put in by hand

### C. Punctuation

To make breaks in sentence continuity use (in order of sharpness of break):

commas

dashes

parenthesis

Dash = double hyphen – without space between words

Dash can also be used as a colon

Parentheses within parentheses: ([ ]) not [( )]

Where foreign words (non-English) are used put English translation in quotes

All sentences should end in a period (.) or a question mark (?) (no exclamation points [!])

### D. Italics

Use underlining for italics.

Underline foreign words in an English text.

Do not use for emphasis of words.

### E. Names of Persons

Use full name as it appears in source and subsequently just use last name.

Do not use formal titles (e.g. Prof., Dr., Mr., Miss).

### F. Numbers

Never begin a sentence with a number: spell it out.

For large numbers use combination of number and word, e.g. 4,000,000 should be 4 million.

Use American system for numbers and decimal points, e.g. 0.25 not 0,25 or 10,000.00 not 10.000,00.

### **H. Dates**

Be consistent in writing dates.

July 7, 1999 – month/day/year.

7 July 1999 – day/month/year.

Use one or the other and stick with it.

### **I. Titles of Works**

Underline titles (exactly as from title page of source) capitalizing first, last and all principal words.

Also underlined: newspapers, TV programs, CD, magazines, film.

Use quotation marks for works within larger works, e.g. articles from magazines, newspapers or journals (also for chapters from a book).

### **J. Quotations**

Quotations from other sources should be used selectively.

They should only be used in cases where they are particularly relevant.

Where they are used they should be kept brief.

They must exactly reproduce the original source.

Quotations of more than four lines should be indented without using quotation marks.

Use ellipsis points (. . .) (periods followed by space) when words have been omitted from a quotation.

Comments on quotes appear in parenthesis after quote, e.g. (emphasis added).

Comments inside quotes must appear in brackets.

### **K. Printing**

All typing must be double-spaced.

The right hand side margin should not be justified.

The first word of every paragraph should be indented five spaces.

### **L. Page Numbering**

In the upper right corner of the page the last name of the writer appears along with the page number.

## **M. Tables**

All tables must have a title.

Tables should be placed inside the text as close as possible to where they are discussed (preferably on the same page).

Never insert a table without referring to it in the text.

Below the table the source of the data must appear along with any necessary notes.

Tables must appear on one page only. Never divide a table between pages.

Time-series graphs (Excel charts) should be labeled as Figures (with an appropriate title).

Source for the data in graphs must also appear below the figure. The raw data for these figures must appear in an Excel spreadsheet compiled in a Data Appendix at the end of the work.

## **N. Binding**

At the primary advisor's discretion the student may be told to submit all drafts to a qualified English instructor in order to correct grammar. Please note that this is to be done prior to the advisor reading the draft.

The student is responsible for submitting to the Business School, the approved titles of the thesis in English and Estonian translation.

There must be an Abstract (one-half to three-quarters of a page) of the thesis, which appears after the title page and prior to the Table of Contents.

The final library copy must be hard bound with the name of the author and the title on the spine. The student must submit three (3) copies to the primary advisor, including one (1) hard bound library copy and two (2) spiral-bound copies for the two second-readers.

## **O. Deadlines**

The thesis statement should be finalized (with the cooperation of the primary advisor) in the course of Master's Thesis Seminar, i.e., prior to the Prospectus presentation.

Deadlines for the spring semester 2009:

The final version of title is due by Monday, **April 20, 2009** to the Office of Business School.

The student should submit the final version of thesis to primary advisor latest by Friday **May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009** so that thesis advisor will have time to read and fill up the evaluate form.

The final copy with primary advisor's signature is due by Monday, **May 4, 2009** to the Office of Business School together with primary advisor's evaluation form (appendix 2).

The primary advisor should appoint two second readers as opponents to evaluate the thesis in full. They can be the current faculty member(s) or outside expert(s). Both second readers are to submit their independent evaluation form (appendix 2) at least three days before the scheduled thesis defense. The evaluation form should be sent to the Office of Business School by the student or evaluator(s) in paper, by fax or via email attachment.

## **P. Thesis Defense**

The Master thesis must be orally defended by each student publicly in the presence of a Thesis Examining Committee consisting of three faculty members appointed by the office of Business School. The defense is not an automatic, routine procedure: if the committee concluded that the student has not met the established standards the student will receive a grade of zero (0) for Master's Thesis.

Thesis Examination Committee evaluates the student's ability to express verbally his/her research question, methodological approach, primary findings, and implications. The committee votes to pass or fail the Thesis and the oral defense at the conclusion of the public presentation.

All Master's Thesis Examination Committee members must have read the Thesis in its final form at least two weeks before the defense. The defense announcement should be posted in the Business School webpage and delivered to students at least 10 working days before the defense.

The English language thesis defense at Business School in spring 2009 is scheduled on Tuesday **May 26** and Thursday **May 28, 2009**.

The student should be well prepared for their oral defense of fifteen (15) to twenty (20) minutes, in which they will make the presentation on the summary of research and main conclusions. Each student is encouraged to use visual aids such as the data projector or overhead projector during the presentation. Students should present in English and are advised not to exceed fifteen power point slides.

The Master thesis defense takes about 1 hour, including:

- Presentation (15-20 min)
- The thesis committee questions the student (20-25 min)
- Public discussion (optional)
- The thesis committee withdraws for consultation and will establish the final grade of the Master's thesis (10 min)

## **Q. Grading**

The Thesis examination committee shall, by majority vote, reach one of the grade decisions:

- Grade "5" – Excellent – Outstanding and exceptionally thorough competence in both theoretical and applied aspects of thesis, free and creative application of acquired competence, extensive independent work, comprehensive knowledge of specialized literature. Thesis is ready for publication with minor adjustments. Acquired mark of 91-100%.
- Grade "4" - Very good – Very good competence in theoretical and applied aspects of thesis, very good skills in application of acquired competence. The thesis examination has revealed non-essential errors, not of principle understanding. Acquired mark of 81-90%.
- Grade "3" – Good – Good competence in theoretical and applied aspects of thesis, good skills in application of acquired competence. Uncertainty and lack of precision in aspects concerning more complex and detailed part of thesis subject(s). Acquired mark of 71-80%.

- Grade “2” – Satisfactory – Competence in mostly fundamental theoretical and applied aspects concerning principles, facts and methods to be used in typical situations, with visible knowledge gaps and misinterpretation. Acquired mark of 61-70%.
- Grade “1” – Sufficient – Demonstrating a minimum level of competence, with serious weaknesses in application of acquired competence. Acquired mark of 51-60%.
- Grade “0” – Fail – lack of minimum level of competence in the thesis subject(s). Acquired mark of 0-50%.

The Thesis examination committee chairperson shall submit the grade to the registrar. The examination committee evaluation form (see appendix 3) will be kept at the office of Business School. The signed hard bound copy together with the completed evaluation forms from all evaluators shall be kept in the library.

### III. Documentation

#### **A. MLA Style**

All facts, opinions and quotations used from research must be documented according to MLA style. In MLA style all documentation appears parenthetically at the end of sentences. Documentation must provide the last name of the author cited and the page number from the source cited.

Footnotes are not to be used. Endnotes should be used selectively and should appear at the end of the text on a separately numbered page prior to the bibliography.

When the author’s name already appears in the text where reference is made, only the page number is required in the parentheses.

#### **B. List of Works Cited**

This should include all the works that are cited in the text.

The bibliography appears at the end of the paper with a continuation of text page numbers (the title should be centered).

The bibliography must be double-spaced throughout indenting five spaces after the first line.

When authors having the same last name are cited in the text, they should be distinguished via use of their first initial.

When citing different works of the same author a shortened title must be included to allow for differentiation by the reader.

Entries are arranged alphabetically according to the last name of the author.

If the author is unknown arrange alphabetically by title.

#### **C. Citing Books**

In MLA style the entries should include: the author’s name; title of book; publication information.

Author's names appear last name first.

The subtitles of books must be included.

The publication information must include: city of publication; the publisher's name; the year of publication.

Author's having multiple entries will have their name appearing only in the first source cited: the remaining entries receive three hyphens and a comma. The entries should be listed chronologically.

In the case of multiple authors for the same work, only the first author appears last name first.

When there are three or more authors the abbreviation "et.al." may be used.

When corporate authors (e.g., a committee) are cited list them alphabetically by the name of the committee or organization.

When citing a translated book it should appear listed by the original author's name followed by trans. and the translator's name.

When citing a government publication, if no author's name is provided use the government agency in lieu of the author's name. Be sure to underline the title and give the publication information.

The documentation of non-English language books is exactly as above with the inclusion of a translated title appearing in brackets after the title.

To cite an unpublished thesis put the title in quotation marks and add the descriptive label: Diss.

#### **D. Citing Articles in Periodicals**

These entries have the same three divisions as for books: author's name; "title of article"; publication information.

Authors appear last name first in alphabetical order (with a comma after the last name and a period after the first name).

Titles appear in quotation marks with a period before the last quotation mark.

The necessary publication information is: an underlined journal title; the volume number of the journal; the year of publication in parenthesis followed by a colon; inclusive page numbers.

##### **Citing Newspapers**

If the city of the newspaper does not appear in the title include it after the title in brackets.

When there are different editions of the newspaper include the edition number.

##### **Citing Magazines**

Provide author's name, the title in quotations, a complete date followed by a colon and inclusive page numbers.

#### **E. Internet Documentation**

Citations from internet sources (web pages) should include the following:

- 1.author's name last name first
- 2.the title of the work in quotation marks
- 3.the date when the article or book was written
- 4.the title of the web page from which the selection was taken
- 5.the medium (online)
- 6.the internet or web site address
- 7.the date when the document was downloaded from the web page

## Appendix 1 Master (MBA) Thesis Assessment Diagram

The six columns in this diagram represent the criteria of assessment in the Master’s thesis. Each row corresponds to a level of achievement. The combined dimension forms the basis for the final Master’s thesis grade and represents the joint opinion / judgment of the Master thesis examination committee. The diagram is meant to enhance the transparency concerning the Master’s thesis assessment by IUA business school faculty and students.

Master (MBA) Thesis Assessment Diagram					
Identify a research question and research design	Literature Review and conceptual framework	Collect and analyze research data	Define, validate and evaluate solutions / models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations	Write a persuasive, well structured Master thesis	Master thesis presentation and oral defense of candidate
<b>Excellent – 5</b>					
Well-balanced and distinctive composition of research question, research design and method	Literature review is itself a significant contribution. Significant additions to the theoretical / conceptual understanding of the subject	Contribution to development and methods of collecting and analyzing research material and/or methodological debate	Sophisticated interpretation of the material. The conclusions are based on the findings but transcend them.	Work of art written with style and with strong arguments	Superior mastery and power in defending the research in its setup, methodology and execution.
<b>Very Good – 4</b>					
Clear and specific research question, research design and method	Literature well described / evaluated from new or complex perspective. Attempt, maybe not wholly successful, made to theorize beyond current state of literature	Modify and develops research methods reflecting methodological understanding	Sophisticated interpretation of findings and conclusions are firmly based but show a creative spark	Clear, persuasive, and well-structured; well written with no grammatical, syntactic, spelling or typographical errors that reflects careful proofreading	Manage to defend or justify choices, methods and conclusions; able to communicate effectively in academic matters
<b>Good – 3</b>					
Well-defined research question, sensible research design and clear plans for conducting research	Literature is cogently evaluated using positions already available in literature. Conceptual framework is developed or existing one adapted in context of evaluated literature	Use adequate methods for gathering and analyzing research material and show an understanding of methodological issues	Use techniques for interpretation in a mechanical way. Conclusions based well on findings.	Expressed well or technically correct (but not both); clear-structured and adequately argued	Answer questions but not always confident and well-prepared

## Master (MBA) Thesis Assessment Diagram (cont'd)

Identify a research question and research design	Literature Review and conceptual framework	Collect and analyze research data	Define, validate and evaluate solutions / models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations	Write a persuasive, well structured Master thesis	Master thesis presentation and oral defense of candidate
<b>Satisfactory – 2</b>					
Explicit ideas but there are some doubts about relation between question, design and methods	Good description of appropriate field(s) and some general criticisms made, but no close evaluation of concepts. Concepts clearly defined and appropriate, set in the context of literature	Methods for gathering and analyzing research are used competently	Findings are treated as straightforward and unproblematic. Conclusions have some connection with the findings	Adequate expression but several mistakes. Argumentation sometimes replaced by assumption or assertion	Taking effort in answering questions, sometimes loses focus and tendency to enter into irrelevant issues
<b>Sufficient – 1</b>					
Identified interesting topic but broad research question, while design and methods are vague	Inadequate or limited description of literature, and / or no criticism or evaluation. Definition and use of theoretical concepts is confused and no attempt made to theoretical synthesis or evaluation	Methods for gathering data and analyzing research materials are confusing and unsystematically used	Occasional insight takes the place of interpretation and conclusions have a tenuous link with findings	Sentences often do not make sense, with excessive use of bulleting points; lack of logic arguments	Occasionally showing effort giving precise answers but often wanders into feeble excuses, showing lack of abstract argumentation
<b>Fail - 0</b>					
Research focus, purpose and method are unclear	Author appears to have read little and understood less than necessary. No conceptual or theoretical discussion of any value	No primary research of any value	Not providing evidence knowing what the outcome is about	Scrappy presentation, illogical structure, no argument or silly ones	Giving ambiguous answers and showing clear lack of systematic, abstract thinking

Appendix 2 Thesis Evaluation Form

<b>Name and roles of the evaluator</b>	
<b>Date of evaluation</b>	
<b>Degree program</b>	
<b>Title of thesis</b>	
<b>Name of the student</b>	

		Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Not applicable	Evaluator's notes on item rated
<b>Identify a research question and research design</b>							
1	Title is clearly phrased and concise						
2	Question is significant and clearly stated						
3	Limitations and delimitations of the study are stated						
4	Delimitations are well defined and appropriate to solutions to the research question						
5	Assumptions are clearly stated						
6	Assumptions are tenable						
7	Important terms are well defined						
8	Special questions to be studied are clearly stated						
9	<i>Overall rating of significance of the research question, its definition and related research design</i>						
<b>Literature review and conceptual framework</b>							
10	Hypotheses, elements, or research questions are clearly stated						
12	Hypotheses, elements, or research questions are testable, discoverable, or answerable						
13	Hypotheses, elements, or research questions derive from the review of the literature						
14	Relationship of study of previous research is clear						
15	Review of literature is efficiently summarized						

16	<i>Overall rating of critical review of the literature</i>									
<b>Collect and analyze research data</b>		<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Evaluator's notes on item rated</b>			
17	Research procedures are described in detail									
18	Research procedures are appropriate for the solution of problem									
19	Population and sample are clearly described									
20	Method of sampling is appropriate									
21	Variables have been controlled									
22	Data-gathering methods are appropriate to solution of the problem									
23	Validation and reliability of data gathered are explained									
24	Appropriate methods are used to analyze data									
25	<i>Overall rating of the methodology and conduct of primary research</i>									
<b>Define, validate and evaluation solutions / models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations</b>		<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Evaluator's notes on item rated</b>			
26	Results of analysis are presented clearly									
27	Major findings are discussed clearly and related to previous research									
28	Importance of the findings is explained									
29	The relationship between the research and findings is demonstrated with tight, logical reasoning									
30	Conclusions are clearly stated									
31	Conclusions are based on the results									
32	Generalization are confirmed									
33	Limitations and weaknesses of study are discussed									
34	Implications of findings for the field are discussed									
35	Suggestions for future research are cited									
36	<i>Overall rating of the research execution and results</i>									



Committee members								
Name	Signature	Date	Remark					
			Proposed Grades by Evaluators					
			Primary advisor	2 <sup>nd</sup> reader	3 <sup>rd</sup> reader	Arbitrator	Committee <b>Final Grade</b>	Remark
1	MBA							
2	MBA							
3	MBA							
4	MBA							
5	MBA							
6	MBA							
7	MBA							
8	MBA							
9	MBA							