



Master's Thesis Guide Arts and Culture

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1. What is a Master's thesis? Learning objectives and final attainment levels

In the Faculty of Humanities, knowledge of a specific subject is set in a broad cultural and academic perspective. The aim is to provide students with knowledge and understanding of specific issues while teaching them to maintain a critical stance. The issues in question are academic practice, the significance of the students' profession for individuals and for society at large, and the social role played by academics. The thesis is a part of this learning process and can be seen as a test of

academic skill and the culmination of the Master's programme.

The thesis shows that the student possesses knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to their specific field of study. This knowledge of a specific subject is embedded in a broad cultural and/or social context. The student also possesses theoretical and methodological insights into the field and the ability to apply these insights independently. The students will show themselves to be capable of carrying out research according to academic standards and of developing their own perspective on the material studied. Students are expected to be able to contribute to generating new academic insights and to carry out independent research. The Master's thesis therefore contains innovative elements.

The thesis also demonstrates that the student possesses the following general academic and social skills and is able to apply them. These skills are derived from the Dublin descriptors, summarized in the evaluation forms in the appendix.

- Knowledge and understanding: The student is able to systematically and expediently collect and interpret information. He/she is able to read, understand and analyse academic and other complex texts. In this way, the student acquires demonstrable knowledge and understanding that go further and deeper than the level of the Bachelor's programme and is capable of making an original contribution to the development and/or application of ideas.
- Applying knowledge and understanding: The student is able to apply knowledge, understanding and problem-solving skills in new or unfamiliar environments within a broader context that relates to his/her field of study. He/she is able to integrate knowledge and to deal with complex material.
- Making judgments: The student is able to discern general themes and make connections which are meaningfully supported by a wide variety of primary and secondary literature and primary sources where relevant. He/she is able to independently, critically and honestly formulate and defend a position.
- (Communication): The student is able to present a complex problem clearly and concisely in written or spoken form to an audience of specialists and non-specialists.
- (Combination of the above): The student is able to write a scientific paper in clear, effective and academic language and to deliver it within an agreed period.
- (Learning skills): The student possesses sufficient learning skills to tackle further studies that are largely self-directed or autonomous in nature.

2. Structure

A thesis is written as a fully independent research report in accordance with the standard academic design. The thesis should contain the following standard components:

- Introduction with problem definition / research question
- Explanation of the chosen method (including reasons for the selection of material)
- Answer to the research question
- Notes, bibliography, source references
- Illustrations if relevant (including source references)
- Appendices if relevant (including source references)

3. Length and study load

The Master's thesis should be between 15,000 and 25,000 words in length; shorter or longer variations may be possible depending on the discipline. The thesis has a study load of 18 credits. That represents over 12 weeks (504 hours) of full-time study. Here is an example of how a student might allocate his/her time:

- 80 hours of literature study
- 160 hours to collect material
- 160 hours to analyse material
- 80 hours to write report
- 20 hours to produce final version

4. Choice of topic, selection or assignment of supervisors, entrance requirements

Depending on the agreements made within the specialization, students can choose their thesis topic in different ways. An explicit relationship between the thesis topic and the programme is mandatory.

The coordinator of the track/programme is formally responsible for the whole process and secures the right match between students' interests and those of the supervisor. Second readers evaluate the final product independently at the end. The choice of second reader is agreed upon by the coordinator.

Students are advised to consider possible thesis topics at an early stage of their studies, including the availability of a suitable supervisor.

If a program (track) so requires, the student is obliged to attend a thesis tutorial or thesis colloquium.

5. Thesis contract and thesis plan of work

Once a student has chosen a topic and has found or been assigned a supervisor, the supervisor and the student jointly draw up a thesis contract. This is a written record of the agreements between student, supervisor, and second reader.

The supervisor is a member of the Faculty of Humanities at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; while usually the same goes for the second reader, (s)he can come from outside the Faculty if appropriate,

but (s)he needs to be affiliated with a university (and agreed upon by examination Board). If the topic requires extra expertise, an extra supervisor can be appointed (possibly from outside of the university as long as the other two are academics). The programme at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam takes primary responsibility for both the supervision process and the assessment.

If the research is connected to (or based on) the thesis research that the student has already carried out (or plans to carry out) in the context of a different programme/track, the research in question must, in the view of the Examination Board, contain a sufficient number of distinctive elements. The same thesis/graduation study cannot therefore count towards two separate Master's degrees. The thesis contract offers the supervisor and the student clarity about the nature of the supervision. Students know what is expected of them and what they can expect of the supervisor. The same goes for the supervisor.

The thesis contract includes at least the following elements:

- the start date and the planned end date. The student is required to submit the final product on the agreed date. The end date can be changed if both parties consider this to be desirable.
- name of the supervisor(s);
- name of the second reader;
- the plan of work. This plan must at least include the planning of a sequence of activities and a timeline for these activities;
- the description of the topic;
- agreements on the frequency of supervision interviews;
- the period within which the supervisor and the second reader assess the final product. In July and August, teachers are usually unavailable for supervision or grading but it is up to the parties involved to set the dates and plan accordingly. The Faculty of Humanities has its own strict deadlines for submission, which will be communicated in due course.
- the number of credits;
- the language in which the report should be written (theses for a Master's or Research Master's taught in English must of course be written in English);
- possible additional agreements;
- for interdisciplinary theses, the division of responsibility between the first and second supervisor may be formalized in the thesis contract if desired;

As an appendix to the thesis contract, the student draws up a thesis plan of work, which is submitted to the supervisor and second reader for approval. (If a second supervisor is involved in the thesis, he/she should also approve this plan of work in advance.) The plan must at least include the planning of a sequence of activities and a timeline for these activities.

The supervisor discusses with the student the time that should be allocated to the various aspects of the thesis. This involves matters such as other activities being undertaken by the student during the thesis period, the number of hours the student works each week, and which components of the programme have yet to be completed. Based on this discussion, a timeline is produced, taking into account the number of hours per period or per week to be devoted to the thesis. The timeline is part of the thesis plan of work. Both the supervisor and the student are obliged to adhere to the plan and they share responsibility for monitoring the process.

The student should report any overrun as soon as possible to the supervisor. If the end date stated in the thesis contract cannot be met due to particular circumstances, it can be altered as long as both parties consider it desirable to do so.

The supervisor or student will notify the second reader as soon as possible of any changes to the agreements regarding the content and process of the thesis.

The plan of work for the thesis structures the student's thoughts on the topic and his/her work and lists the activities for the thesis.

6. Supervision

6.1 Form and frequency of supervision

Students have the right to systematic supervision when producing the thesis. The supervisor and the student discuss the nature of the supervision in advance. Supervision should consist at least of the following elements:

- advice on the choice of research topic and on setting appropriate limits;
- approval of the design;
- instructions regarding the rewriting of inadequate sections of the thesis.

The frequency of the supervision interviews is also stated in the plan of work. As a guideline, the student is entitled to a maximum of eight sessions. According to the norms for teaching load, a supervisor can spend a total of 30 hours on supervising a Master's thesis, including all assessments. The supervisor will provide written comments (in the margins or separately) on submitted work.

During the supervision interviews, the supervisor explains the comments to the student and advises him/her on how to follow them through. Good feedback is characterized by:

- recognition (necessary precondition for revisions);
- applicability (concrete pointers for a better approach);
- assurance (the feedback does not make the student feel insecure).

In principle the supervisor gives one round of feedback on the full draft of the thesis, after which the student submits the final version to both the supervisor and the second reader. If the thesis is declared unsatisfactory, the resit period comes into effect and the student has one more chance to rewrite it. In order to officially recognize the start of the resit period, the supervisor must submit the failed grade. If the resit delivers a thesis that is still unsatisfactory, the student has failed this thesis. The student will then have to write a new thesis on another topic under the supervision of other lecturers.

6.2 Delays

If material is submitted to the supervisor late or not at all, the supervision interview is cancelled. Supervision interviews must be cancelled at least two days in advance. If a supervisor is unable to meet his/her obligations (due to long-term absence/illness, etc.), the student is informed and the coordinator organizes a replacement in consultation with the holder of the Chair. If the student is unable to meet his/her obligations (due to long-term absence/illness, etc.), the supervisor is informed. In such cases, the plan of work and the thesis contract are revised.

If the student exceeds the agreed deadline for submitting the final version by *three months*, without consultation, he/she will automatically fail the thesis.

7. Closing date for the thesis

The date on which the final version of the thesis is to be submitted to the supervisor(s) is stated in the thesis contract. The thesis contract also stipulates the amount of time that the supervisor(s) and second reader are given to read the thesis.

8. Assessment

See thesis regulations on VU.nl

9. Appendices

Master's thesis contract (with one supervisor)

Student

Address

Postcode/Town or city

Telephone

Degree programme student number

Supervisor

(Name and Chair)

Second reader

(Name and Chair)

Description of topic

.....

.....

Language of final version

Number of credits teaching load

Start date end date

Delivery date for plan of work

Minimum number of supervision interviews

Maximum number of supervision interviews

Agreements on submission of parts of thesis

.....

Assessment timescale for supervisor(s)

Assessment timescale for second reader

Additional agreements

.....

Signed for agreement:

Place and date

.....

signature of student signature of supervisor signature of 2nd reader

Master's thesis contract (with two supervisors)

Student:

Address:

Postcode/Town or city:

Tel. no.:

Degree programme: student number.....

Supervisor 1:

(Name and Chair)

Supervisor 2:

(Name and Chair)

Third reader:

(Name and Chair)

Description of topic:

.....

Language of final version:

Contribution by Supervisor 1:

.....

Contribution by Supervisor 2:

.....

Number of credits: Teaching load for Supervisor 1

Teaching load for Supervisor 2

Start date: end date:

Submission date for plan of work.....

Minimum and maximum number of supervision interviews with Supervisor 1/.....

with Supervisor 2/.....

At least once every weeks, a joint meeting with both supervisors will take place.

Assessment timescale for supervisors:

Assessment timescale for third reader:

Additional agreements:

.....

Signed for agreement:

Place and date

.....
signature of	signature of	signature of	signature of
student	Supervisor 1	Supervisor 2	third reader

Plan of work (appended to thesis contract)

Name of student

Degree programme student number

Name of supervisor(s)/

Chair

Second reader/

Chair Working
title

Topic

.....

Aim and relevance

.....

Problem definition

.....

.....

Data-collection/
research method

.....

.....

Provisional organization of chapters

.....

.....

.....

.....

Provisional book list (appendix)

Timetable

- start date
- orientation phase
- execution phase
- (submission dates for chapters)
-
- completion phase
- planned thesis presentation date.....
- planned graduation date

Remarks

Example of title page

Seeing and Being the Other: (Im)possibilities of the representations of Roma as subaltern in Hungarian video art

Student's name + address:

Master's Programme + specialization: Student
number:

E-mail address:

Supervisor:

2nd reader:

Date:

Evaluation Form

See Faculty webpage on thesis information for all forms.