Thesis Guide

Rules and guidelines for writing a master's thesis in business studies in the Department of Business Administration

Contents

Introduction

All students in a Master of Science (MSc) programme must write a 30 ECTS credit master's thesis. A master's thesis is a document that presents the author's own research and findings and is submitted in support of candidature for a Master of Science degree. A master's thesis is more than just a requirement towards an MSc degree—it is an opportunity to deepen knowledge and understanding of a specific topic within a field of study and train students to work independently. With that in mind, the thesis must be completed in a professional manner. Students must allocate sufficient time for preparation and work on the thesis. This guidebook is designed to assist students in their work. The most important feature of a good thesis is its content. The guidebook will help you get started and outlines content requirements and formal aspects such as structure and format.

1. General rules of procedure and guidelines

1.1 Learning outcomes

Knowledge: A collection of facts, concepts, theories, and techniques acquired by students. The student should

- be able to account for the basic building blocks of a good research project,

- understand and account for the empirical conditions in the studied field (e.g., a market and industry),

- have a solid understanding of the fundaments of the methodology applied in the thesis (e.g., concepts and techniques),

- be able to account for relevant theories concerning the research field,

- know what constitutes a good research question.

Skills: The ability to apply knowledge to the different tasks of the research process. The student should be able to

- demonstrate independence and effectiveness in conducting the thesis research,

- develop an effective research question and set a clear focus for the thesis,

- adopt, adapt, and argue for a relevant methodology,

- critically analyse empirical data,

- independently discuss implications of analysis and results on relevant theory,

- provide answer(s) to the stated research question(s),

- discuss possible implications of results, for example, for managers in a relevant industry.

Competences: The ability to apply knowledge and skills. At the end of the thesis process, students should be able to

- design research projects,
- conduct independent research,
- systematically evaluate research in their field of expertise,
- communicate and apply expert knowledge gained from the thesis process.

1.2. ECTS credits and workload

The workload for a master's thesis corresponds to 30 ECTS credits. One ECTS credit typically consists of 25–30 hours of student workload. Therefore, a 30 ECTS-credit thesis usually results from no less than 750 hours of work.

A master's thesis can only be written and submitted by one individual. Work on the thesis shall be based on independent contributions by the student under the guidance and supervision of the supervisor. The writing of the thesis is entirely the responsibility of the student.

Students can apply to divide their thesis work over two semesters, with 15 ECTS credits each semester. An application to spread the thesis over two semesters must be submitted to the Program Administrator before the first day of teaching in the semester the student starts writing the thesis. The student is expected to complete the thesis in the following semester. Approval is subject to the availability of the supervisor. An application form for partial submission can be found in Appendix 4.

1.3. Choice of topic

Choosing a thesis topic is the student's responsibility but requires the supervisor's approval, who can reject proposals or set conditions for their acceptance.

The general objective of the thesis is that students **show their ability to work independently on a topic related to their field of study**. For example, if you are a student in the MSc programme in Marketing, your subject area must be connected to marketing. In the same way, a subject area for a student in Corporate Finance would be related to corporate finance.

A master's thesis will commonly combine both theory and empirical elements. It should be based on an issue and a research problem that needs answering or clarifying. The problem should then be developed into a research question. The student attempts to answer the research question by gathering and analysing data and consulting literature on the topic.

The importance of a clear research problem and question cannot be overstated. Firstly, it provides a compass that guides students in their research, helping them to decide the content of their thesis. This includes what kind of data is needed, evaluating its relevance, and placing the study within the relevant literature. Secondly, an apparent research problem will help the reader understand the purpose of the thesis and evaluate its relevance and quality.

A good research problem is clear and precise, but it may take time to formulate fully. Therefore, reviewing and refining the stated research problem regularly throughout the process is a good idea. The research problem must result in an open question rather than a closed one. For example: '*can companies live up to CFA's corporate ethical standards?*' is a closed question with possible answers being 'yes' or 'no'. On the other hand, '*how do companies enforce CFA's corporate ethical standards*?' is an open question allowing for closer examination. To make it explicit that the research also leads to further discussion, it is possible, for instance, to formulate the following supporting question: 'how can companies improve their adoption of CFA's corporate ethical standard?'. In addition, there is usually a need to clarify the exact meaning of research questions and concepts; for example, what do 'enforce' and 'improve' mean in this context, what does CFA stand for, and why is it relevant?

Occasionally faculty might be looking for students to work on a specific research topic or to assist with ongoing projects. This can provide opportunities to develop further ideas or use existing data. Students should not hesitate to contact a faculty member for advice and consultation.

Please note that the thesis coordinator does reserve the right to refuse any suggested thesis topic for specific reasons (e.g., non-availability of a qualified supervisor, the triviality of a topic, etc.).

When developing research ideas, students can start by:

Investigating the possibility of using a current issue or problem from within an organisation or industry where they have already gained work experience.

Searching business databases for a comprehensive literature review (e.g., in journal articles, business magazines, and publicly available theses) could lead to a list of ideas within a topic of interest (e.g., international human resources,

marketing and communication, leadership, public management, or entrepreneurship).

Reading through academic articles on a subject of interest and noting the "further research" issues often mentioned in the concluding section.

In any case, it is strongly recommended that students carefully examine topics that fit their interests and career goals and seek advice from RU faculty members.

It is worth noting that forming a research topic is quite a demanding part of the thesis project. Developing a topic and research question takes much work and independent thinking. **The subject matter of your thesis should be considered early.**

In some cases, a master's thesis can be written in the context of a specific company. Before committing to any such topic, students must consult their thesis supervisor or the thesis coordinator.

1.4. Content of a master's thesis

A master's thesis includes several key elements: an introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions.

The introduction provides background information on the research topic and presents the research question(s) or hypothesis the thesis aims to address. The literature review is a comprehensive examination of existing research on the subject and provides context for the study.

The methods section describes the procedures used to conduct the research, including the research design, population or sample, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

The results section presents the research findings in a clear and organised manner and includes tables, figures, and statistics to support the data.

The discussion section interprets and explains the significance of the results and relates them to the research question(s) or hypothesis, existing literature, and theories. It should also address the study's limitations and include recommendations for future research. The conclusion summarises the main findings, their significance, and their implications for future research and practice.

1.5. Research methodology

Concerning research methodology, in principle, all research methods are acceptable (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, one-company case study, survey research, etc.), provided that the methodology and design are appropriate and in alignment with the study's objective and research question(s).

Reputable sources on research methodology should be consulted when designing a research project. This will help students choose the appropriate methods for the selected topic and to rationalise their choice. Students are expected to propose the methodology for the study in a research proposal.

The student may collect primary data to address a research problem. This includes conducting surveys or interviews, making first-hand observations, or conducting experiments. Another option is to use so-called 'secondary data', which is data initially collected by someone else, typically for a different purpose than the student has. Secondary data sources include existing databases, reports, reviews, etc. The type of data gathered (primary or secondary) depends on the study's objective and the nature of the research question(s).

1.6. Research Proposal

The master's thesis process starts the semester before the student plans to hand in the thesis, with the student registering for the Research Proposal course (V-898-REPR). The course yields no ECTS credits but helps students to start thinking about their thesis topic. The student must submit a Preliminary Research Proposal during the course. Failing to do so can result in the student being unable to continue the thesis process.

The Preliminary Research Proposal is the first attempt at outlining the thesis topic, but students should aim for it to be as specific as possible. It should contain the same elements as the final Research Proposal (see below) but in a much shorter format (3–5 pages). Before (or while) developing the Preliminary Research Proposal, students may want to meet with internal faculty to discuss ideas.

At the beginning of the thesis semester, students must have written a detailed final Research Proposal that needs to be approved by their supervisor. The final Research Proposal can be up to 15 pages.

A Research Proposal should include the following:

A clear statement of objectives and one or more well-defined focused research questions.

A brief literature review – This includes a summary of the main findings of selected scholarly articles in the relevant field of study.

Proposed methodology – What type of data collection is proposed?

Potential outcomes.

Possible implications.

A timeline for the thesis work.

A list of references.

1.7. Supervisor

Thesis supervision is mainly done by DBA core faculty. A complete list of faculty members should be available on RU's website[1]. Students can (but are not obligated to) contact faculty and discuss potential supervision before handing in the Preliminary Research Proposal. However, at that stage, students can't negotiate possible supervision with individuals outside the DBA's core faculty (e.g., part-time teachers)[2]. If the Preliminary Research Proposal is handed in without mention of a supervisor, the thesis coordinator will recommend a suitable and available supervisor. Students are advised to consult the programme administrator if in doubt about who can qualify as a supervisor. A student's choice of supervisor is subject to the approval of the thesis coordinator, and the choice of thesis topic depends on the approval of a student's supervisor.

Students must regularly keep their supervisors informed about their thesis progress. Students should follow the deadline scheme provided in Section 2.1, failure to do so may result in exclusion from the process.

To structure the process of writing the thesis and monitoring progress, it is highly recommended that students set up a work schedule with the supervisor as early as possible. A significant factor in successful thesis writing is time management and

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[1] https://www.ru.is/vd/um-deildina/starfsfolk-vidskiptafraedi

[2] The Department of Business Administration must utilise its core resources and faculty for supervision before looking elsewhere. However, this does not exclude the use of external supervisors, for instance, at times when members of the core faculty are not available.

working with deadlines. The University's policies stipulate that the supervisor and the student agree on a timeline and procedure for the thesis process. Section 2.1 provides an overview of the processes, time and deadlines involved.

Success in the thesis work is, however, entirely in the student´s hands; they are responsible for managing the overall process from proposing the research topic to submitting the finished work.

Supervisors and students should agree on the form of their communication and consultations. Students are strongly encouraged to prepare a plan with dates and deadlines for the different stages of writing.

Suppose serious problems or differences occur in the collaboration between a student and a supervisor. In that case, students are encouraged to contact the thesis coordinator.

2. Deadlines, submission, and grading

2.1. Deadlines

Writing a master's thesis is a time-consuming task. It is usually the most significant written assignment that a student works on. For that reason, good preparation and continuous planning make a big difference in productivity and quality. Students must start outlining the thesis project proposal in detail during the semester preceding the semester they plan to write their thesis. When students have drafted a detailed project proposal, they are expected to work *full-time* for four months on the thesis before handing in the final product.

The deadlines for submitting the master's thesis are set according to graduation dates. If the stated hand-in date is during a weekend or a national holiday, it moves to the first following workday.

Thesis Writing semester	Hand in Preliminary Research Proposal	Supervisor assigned by DBA	Hand in a Research Proposal	Data collection complete	Hand in final draft	Hand in final thesis
Spring	**October 15**	November 20	**January 5**	March 1	April 15	**May 15**
Summer	**April 1**	April 20	**May 20**	July 1	August 15	**September 15**
Fall	**April 15**	June 1	**August 31**	October 15	December 1	**January 2**
Submission	Canvas	–	Supervisor	–	Supervisor	Canvas

Table 1: Important deadlines

2.2. Final draft submission

A final draft of the thesis should be submitted to the supervisor a few weeks before the final submission date. The final draft should include all sections and materials (literature review, methods, results, discussion, and references). Students should not plan to add new data after submitting the final draft unless instructed to do so by their supervisor. Late submission of a final draft is highly discouraged. Although an almost completed work has been submitted, plans should be made for having plenty to work on after receiving comments from the supervisor on the final draft.

If the submitted final draft is insufficient, the supervisor *can* recommend that the student request an extension to the following term or that the master's thesis work be discontinued. Supervisors are required to consult with the thesis coordinator in such cases. If an extension is granted, the student must register for 15 ECTS credits for the following semester and pay tuition at the master's level.

2.3. Final submission of master's thesis

Only digital copies of the thesis are to be submitted. A digital copy should be uploaded to Canvas in a PDF format within the relevant deadline specified in Section 2.1. The upload to Canvas is also a submission to *Turnitin*[3], a plagiarism detection software. **No theses will be accepted after the published deadline**. Students are *not* permitted to withdraw a submitted thesis.

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[3] More information on plagiarism and Turnitin can be found at https://bokasafn.ru.is/en/turnitin.

Following the final examination (see section 2.4), the thesis must also be submitted electronically to the repository *Skemman*[4].

The final thesis should be open for reading in Skemman following RU's Open Access Policy. However, access to a final thesis can be restricted, e.g., if the thesis contains confidential information. A student wishing to limit access to a final thesis must apply to do so (see Appendix 3). The application is subject to the approval of the supervisor and the Department of Business Administration. The signed application must be submitted with the thesis when uploading to Skemman.

A student can request an extension to the following term at any time before the final hand-in date. An extension is subject to the approval and availability of the supervisor. If granted, the student must register for 15 ECTS credits for the following semester and pay tuition at the master's level.

2.4. Final examination (oral defence)

When the final thesis is submitted, the thesis coordinator will appoint an examiner. A time and place for the defence will be announced at least one week beforehand. The oral defence is closed to the public unless stated otherwise. The oral defence will take place on campus with the student, supervisor, and examiner present. In exceptional cases, the oral defence can be held in a hybrid format (on-campus & online) or entirely online.

The oral defence consists of three stages: 1) Presentation by the student, 2) Discussion and questions and answers, and 3) Evaluation and grading and feedback. The presentation should be limited to 10 minutes—focusing on contributions, primary findings, and conclusions. After the presentation, the examiner and supervisor will examine the student regarding the content of the thesis and presentation. This stage should take no more than 20 minutes. Following the discussion, the student is requested to leave the room. The supervisor and examiner decide the final grade and prepare the oral feedback. The final grade is based on the written thesis and oral defence quality. If the examiner and supervisor cannot reach a unanimous decision, the final grade will be the average of the grades from the supervisor and examiner.

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[4] Guidelines for submitting a thesis to Skemman and other relevant information can be found at https://bokasafn.ru.is/business/thesis. For more information or questions regarding Skemman, please contact RU's library.

The student will be reinvited to the room—notified about the grading decision, and receives brief oral feedback (about 10 minutes) explaining the assigned grade.

Thesis grades will be provided according to the usual grading system from 0 to 10. A passing grade for a thesis is 6.0. Along with a passing grade, the supervisor and examiner can require minor revisions (i.e., format changes, proofreading, editorial changes, etc.). The student must implement those changes before uploading a final version of the thesis to Skemman (see also section 2.3), and the supervisor needs to confirm the changes.

If the thesis is graded below 6.0, the student has failed and cannot resubmit. However, the student can request to be re-registered for a master's thesis. In the case of re-registration, the student will have to pay full tuition (30 ECTS). Under most circumstances of re-registration, the thesis coordinator will appoint a new supervisor. The student must submit a detailed research proposal for a new thesis which the new supervisor must approve. Data collected for the former thesis can be re-used if the new supervisor approves. Re-registration for a master's thesis is only permitted once.

3. Guidelines on the form and layout of theses

3.1. Length
The length of a 30 ECTS-credit thesis shall be 10,000 to 15,000 words, as counted in a word processing program. This limit refers to the main body of the thesis, excluding the abstract, table of contents, list of references, lists of tables and figures, and appendices. Footnotes count as part of the thesis. **If the length of a thesis is not within these limits, it can be dismissed.**

3.2. Structure of the thesis
A thesis should include the following:

Title page

Abstract and up to 6 keywords

Affidavit confirming that the student was the original author of the thesis and that the thesis has not been submitted for a similar purpose in another educational program. (cf. Appendix 2 of this thesis guide)

Table of contents

List of tables and figures

Hierarchically numbered chapters and sections (see bullets below). The thesis structure and content should complement scientific journal papers in the relevant fields.*

- o Introduction
- o Problem statement and research question/s
- o Literature review
- o Conceptual framework (model based on the literature review)
- o If applicable, hypotheses or possible results
- o Methodology
- o Results (analysis of empirical data)
- o Discussion
- o Conclusion and recommendations
- o List of references
- o Appendices

Not all themes mentioned here may apply to your thesis. On this topic, please consult your supervisor.

3.3. Title page of the thesis

Instructions on creating a cover for the master's thesis may be accessed at http://en.ru.is/rusb/information-for-current-students/, under 'Final projects & Thesis'.

3.4. Abstract

Each thesis should include a 200–300 word abstract. An abstract must consist of the research problem, the primary substance of the thesis, and principal conclusions.

3.5. Formatting

The following formatting requirements apply to the final document containing the submitted thesis:

Font type: Times New Roman
Font size: 12 pt for text body, larger for headings, smaller for tables, etc.
Line spacing: 1.5
Margins: left 2.5 cm, right 2.5 cm, top 2.5 cm, bottom 2.5 cm
Footnotes: all notes are to be provided in the form of numbered footnotes

4. Use of sources, assessment of sources and ethical matters

4.1. Use of sources

Sources need to be cited for virtually everything that does not originate directly from the student, except for generally known facts. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Anything written without a source being cited is considered the student's own. Rules on integrity in work methods and penalties for violation are laid down in RU's General Rules on Study and Assessment[5] and RU's Code of Ethics[6].

The APA Style is the preferred referencing style for all written work within the Department of Business Administration. You will find the latest version of the APA Publication Manual in RU's Library. You can also use online resources, but use the newest APA-style version. If you run into problems citing one or more of your sources, you are welcome to ask for assistance at the RU's Library Research Assistance or book an appointment with an information specialist at library@ru.is.

Students must sign a Declaration of Research Work Integrity (see Appendix 2) and include that form in the thesis (after the cover page). By signing the declaration, the student confirms that they have read RU´s Code of ethics and the General rules on study and assessment and fully understand the consequences of violating the rules.

4.2. Quality of sources

Source critique is the process of determining whether a source is reliable. For example, newspaper articles are generally unsound sources, while peer-reviewed scholarly articles are sound sources. Primary sources should always be used where appropriate.

All data sources (e.g., transcripts from interviews and survey data) used in writing the thesis need to be preserved, as the supervisor and examiner may wish to see them.

4.3. Research resources

You are welcome to ask the Library and Information Services at RU for assistance regarding your research work. In addition, students working on their thesis can book an appointment with an information specialist at library@ru.is. The library offers several resources to assist you in your thesis work, e.g., books, journals, databases, etc. (Appendix 1)

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[5] See https://en.ru.is/rules/general-rules-on-study-and-assessment
[6] See https://en.ru.is/the-university/ru-code-of-ethics/

Appendix 1 — Resources

The library of Reykjavik University offers several resources to assist you in your thesis work.

www.leitir.is is the library system hosting a national catalogue and gives access to information about material in most libraries in Iceland. For example, college, public, administration, institution, expert, and school libraries at all levels.

Journals and articles in English: http://en.ru.is/journals / http://ru.is/timarit

The RU library can order books and photocopies of articles from journals unavailable in the library or subscribed databases (inter-library loans). These services are intended explicitly for RU faculty and students preparing their final thesis.

Inter-library loans: https://bokasafn.ru.is/c.php?g=1048383

For further information, see also:

https://bokasafn.ru.is/english

https://bokasafn.ru.is/az.php

Skemman, the repository of academic and research documents:

https://skemman.is/?locale=en

You can also follow the library on Facebook at http://facebook.com/bokasafn.

Appendix 2 — Declaration of Research Work Integrity

Declaration of Research Work Integrity

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

By signing the present document, I confirm that I have read RU's Code of ethics and the General rules on study and assessment and that I fully understand the consequences of violating these rules regarding my thesis.

....
Date and place   Kennitala
Signature

Application for Non-Disclosure of Thesis

Student name   **Kennitala**

Title of thesis:

Reason for non-disclosure application

End of non-disclosure period (maximum of 5 years)

Please note that to inform the public about the research output of the Department of Business Administration, abstracts of theses are not covered by non-disclosure agreements. It is the student's responsibility to make sure the abstract does not include sensitive or proprietary information.

The student and the supervisor must sign the application for non-disclosure of a thesis.

Date, Signature of Student

Date, Signature of Supervisor

Application for partial submission of a master's thesis

Student name:	
Hand in date for the first semester:	May 15 (Spring semester) December 2 (Fall semester) September 15 (Summer)
ECTS credits and semesters:	
Name of supervisor:	

To acquire 15 ECTS credits for partial thesis submission, a student must deliver a work effort that amounts to at least 375 hours.

Upon signing this agreement, the student and supervisor confirm that they have agreed on a project schedule for the first thesis semester that amounts to 15 ECTS credits and how they intend to communicate during the semester.

By May 15th (Spring), September 15th (Summer), or January 2nd (Fall), the supervisor has to confirm whether the student has fulfilled the requirements and delivered work that amounts to 15 ECTS credits over the semester. The confirmation is submitted to the Program Administrator, and the student receives a pass/fail grade.

The application must be submitted to the Program Administrator before the first day of teaching in the semester the student starts writing the thesis.

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Date, Signature of Student

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Date, Signature of Supervisor