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| Guidelines |
| Guidelines for the MSc Thesis Research Proposal |

**The Research Proposal**

Broad agreement exists on the basic scientific standards that apply for a scientific study. Above all, the scientific standards that apply (and thus must be met) are the following:

**The thesis must be theory-based.   
The research must be verifiable.   
The research must be in principle replicable.**

To make sure that your research is complying with these rules, you should start by making a research proposal attending to these standards. A proposal consists of the following parts:

**Problem statement:** This gives the motivation for the selection of the topic and a clear description of the problem field, finally resulting in a concise problem statement. This part includes a review of the theoretical and empirical literature, which is most relevant to the topic and ensures that the topic has not already been exhausted by other researchers.

**Theoretical framework**: This part gives the background of your topic and leads up to your research questions/hypotheses. Which information is already known from the literature? The theory acts as a base for further investigation and comparison with the (future) results. You must indicate which concepts are important to be looked at in answering the research questions.

**Research objective(s) and research questions/hypotheses:** This clearly states the scientific objectives of the research. It is important that the objectives of the research are strictly related to the research topic. Subsequently, the research objective(s) should be translated into research questions/hypotheses. These are the questions that need to be tested and/or answered in order to fulfil the research objective(s).

**Methodology:** In this part of the proposal it should be explained how the theory and research questions can be examined and answered empirically. The function of the methodology part within the research proposal (and later in the thesis report) is to specify reliability, validity and replicability of the research.

You need to consider the following points when setting up a sound methodological framework:

Identify **the character of the thesis work.** For instance: is it an explorative, or comparative, or experimental study?

Design **the data collection**. This step requires arguing about, and providing an answer to, the following questions:

What is seen as **data** and from which **sources of information** do you obtain these data?

What are the criteria for determining and **delineating the sources** of information?

What **methods** are employed to derive the data from the sources of information? Is the case of experimental work: what is the experimental design, which factors do you explicitly test for, how many replicates do you have, etc.?

Which **instruments** will be used? It is important to think about the instruments you need far in advance, because not all equipment is available, or it can be in use elsewhere.

Design **the data analysis:** It should be pointed out that the description of the methods is necessary for data collection as well as for data analysis. How can the data be processed? Which statistical tests can be applied given the employed data collection methods or experimental design? Note that it is important to think about data analysis before you start to collect data. Certain analyses require certain data formats and experimental set-up.

**Working plan and time schedule:** The research proposal finally should be completed by a comprehensive working plan, indicating the necessary steps in carrying out the research, as well as their logical order in time, specification of milestones and quarterly status presentations – all to ensure that the workload is realistic and the thesis work is progressing in a sound way.

In some cases, you need a **financial plan.** The general necessity of financial means to carry out the thesis work needs to be discussed and agreed between student and supervisor before the actual thesis work starts.

**Guidelines for writing the Thesis Report**

The thesis report (max. 100 normal pages), should be written in Danish or English with a summary in English. A normal page for written submissions is 2400 type units (i.e., characters plus spaces). To calculate normal pages, text is included, but not the front page, table of contents, bibliography, appendix, figures, tables and models.

**Writing style:** The thesis report should be written in an academic writing style. An academic writing style is in its essence short, clear and unambiguous. You use the terminology of the discipline. When you propose a hypothesis or theory, it must be substantiated. You bring documentation for any methods and postulates in terms of reference to scientific, peer reviewed research (scientific journal papers) or in terms of data. You discuss your actual results in relation to the applied methods and relevant peer reviewed research. You conclude on you hypothesis and on your actual results.

**Referencing:** It is very important that you give proper references when making statements from the literature. References acknowledge the work of others, and provide the reader with information on the sources that you used. Plagiarism is not acceptable and in serious cases students risk to be expelled from the university.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is using another person’s text as your own without making precise source references. Plagiarism is considered a very serious offense because it is a theft of another person’s work and because you are assessed on work that in actual fact is not yours. You avoid plagiarism by always making a precise source reference when you use other people’s work – this applies to quotations, reproductions, interpretations, translations, figures, illustrations, etc. When you produce a text, it must appear clearly which is the result of your own ideas and which passages are a result of your processing of other people’s knowledge.

You must be aware that it is your responsibility: If you plagiarise, the consequences may be quite serious.

**Suggested structure of the report**

Front page: This is the cover of your thesis. It should mention the title of the research, the name of the author, the name of the master’s degree programme, year and date. The front page also needs to carry the logo of the university.

**Title page**: This page must be in the strict format.

The title page contains the following elements:

Title of the thesis research

Your full name (including all initials)

Student registration number

Name of the master’s degree programme

ECTS of the thesis (60, 45 or 30)

Year and date of submission

Title, name and department of the supervisor(s)

A copyright statement – to be discussed

The proper logo of the university

**Preface**: Less than one page.

**Table of content**: Gives an overview of the chapter structure of the thesis with their respective page numbers. It should also include the summary and possible annexes.

**Abstract**: Maximum of 250 words that describes the research for the general public.

**Summary**: Provides a short (1-2 pages) but comprehensive summary of all chapters, i.e., the research objectives, the methods used, the most important results and conclusions.

**Introduction**: This part includes the problem statement, the scientific objectives as well as the research questions/hypotheses that you have formulated in your proposal. You can also give a characterisation of the type of work and a short outline of the structure of the subsequent chapters can complete it.

**Background/Theoretical Framework**: This section provides a focused review of the theoretical and empirical literature which forms the basis of your work. The section substantiates the research questions/hypotheses of your work. The theoretical framework may be completed by a conceptual model, in which the relations of the relevant concepts of the applied theories are presented. Note that this framework may also be part of the introduction instead of being presented as a separate chapter.

**Methods**: This part reports on the used information sources, as well as the applied methods and instruments for data collection and statistical data analysis. In contrast to the research proposal - where this section is presenting the ambitions/plan - you must present the situation as it has actually worked (incl. problems that occurred) in the final thesis report. In the case of fieldwork, you should describe the area and sites in which the research was carried out. When you have done experimental work, you should give all relevant details of the followed procedure (protocol). This enables others to evaluate your work, and to reproduce it if needed.

**Results**: In this section the results should be presented in the most objective and comprehensive manner. Mixing results with subjective interpretation and discussion must be avoided. The challenge is to structure the results in such a way, that the research questions are addressed as best. Where appropriate, the findings should be illustrated or summarised with tables and figures including a statistical data analysis. In any case tables and figures must be drawn in such a way that they can be read on their own, independent from the surrounding text. Do not forget to include measurement units and an explanation of abbreviations. References to tables and figures should be made in the text (e.g., see table 1; cf. figure 2). Note that table captions are given above the table, whereas figure captions are placed below the figure.

**Discussion**: The discussion section links your own findings, as presented in the result section, with those of others. What do your results mean and imply? The challenge here is to argue for and against the findings and the related theoretical concepts. Literature references are therefore again a requisite in this section. Furthermore, you must discuss your findings in the background of the scientific objective(s) and the research question(s), as well as in the light of the chosen theoretical framework. Last but not least, it should also not be forgotten to discuss to what extent the findings might have been influenced by the chosen methods.

**Conclusions**: This section brings together the most important findings and consequences of your research. The conclusion must state the answer your work provided to the research questions and/or hypothesis you posed

**Implications or Perspectives**: These conclusions normally touch on three aspects: a.) The scientific objective and the research questions (results); b.) Hints for future research on this topic (theoretical framework and methods); c.) Practical application of the results (consequences in management and policy), however, this last part might also be a separate section named ‘Implications’ or ‘Perspectives’.

**Bibliography**: In this section a list of all referred literature should be given, sorted in alphabetical order. The style for the different types of publications (articles in journals, books, chapters in books etc.) should be consistent, e.g., according to the Harvard style, see also the [Harvard online referencing tutorial](http://library.leeds.ac.uk/skills-referencing).  
  
When you refer to information on the Internet you should give the complete web-address, as well as the date on which the information has last been accessed, e.g.,:  
Ministry of LNV (2002): Forestry on paper. Public brochure, downloadable at http://www.minlnv.nl/morepaper.pdf. Information derived on June 15, 2002.  
Royall, C.P., B.L.Thiel, and A. Donald. 2001. Radiation damage of water in environmental scanning electron microscopy. Journal of microscopy [online]. 204(3), [Accessed 17 March 2009], pp.185-195. Available from:

**Annex/Appendix:** This is optional and the content of the annex/appendix is not evaluated, thus all important and relevant information must be given within the frame of the thesis and its main sections. The annex could include supplementary information about protocols, observations, calculations, etc. This could mean for example: the inclusion of the original data, further detailed statistical analysis, etc. Note that also the annex pages should be numbered consistently with the general text.