# Transition from Coursework to Research | 1

## 1.1 Why is Master Thesis the Requirement?

Very briefly, thesis is a research paper based on a student project. [**Exeed College**, **n.d.**] This is probably what you found when you scrolled several websites on Master Thesis. *Still confused?* Let me tell you more. Master thesis, unlike courses, usually takes 2 or more semesters to complete, and you will work closely with thesis supervisor / advisor. [**Exeed College**, **n.d.**] *You still wonder whether it is a two-semester course with micromarketing* (you might hear this jargon in marketing course). The answer is no. You will have a "big" test called oral defense with a few professors, and you need to present your research paper. *Isn't it going back to the first sentence?*

The above paragraph serves two purposes. First, it represents what you commonly found in Internet searches. Second, it is an example of advisor and advisee discussions when advisee does not do enough preparations before the meeting. In reality, for several students, Master thesis is the requirement imposed by the university that is way more difficult than completing 3-4 courses. However, by changing perspective, Master Thesis is a chance to work on big projects where university trusts you to do so.

You still have a question: *why university does not instead give you company consulting projects, but decides to let you work on academic and abstract-looking research paper*. Yes, I admit that the consulting project gives you practical skills for the workplace from getting business requirements, teamwork, detail orientation to presentation to the senior management. However, working on consulting projects means you get 2-3 years of experience (or even less) by not getting paid salary. In short, you are not differentiated from your peers who decided to work in consulting firms after finishing Bachelor degree, at best. Your knowledge will be very specific to the company. However, if you work on academic thesis, you will get transferable skills, such as Statistics, Social Psychology and Economic Theory. No matter where and what career you end up, you can quickly learn and adapt to new environment as you have strong foundations. Today, upskill, retooling, relearning-unlearning have become buzzwords in company job postings, and Master research is a good way to serve such disruption.

You may wonder: *what value I get from doing Master thesis to differentiate from working undergrads*. In strategy, we talked about company values in various aspects, such as value chain and resource-based view. First, you will be an expert in a special topic due to the process of learning by doing. What percentage of class content do you remember after attending (mandatory) lectures? Probably around 10% without review. With frustration as your best friend along the journey, you will have a deep understanding of the topic you research, which is presentable to job interviews as well. Second, due to the norm of academic research, you will gain several soft skills,

mainly project management, data visualization and academic writing with formal presentation. Companies today emphasize on soft skills, and you can present that you have earned them during this tough journey.

Wait! *What if I have option to choose between Thesis and non-Thesis track?* If you have that luxury, first confirm that non-Thesis (Independent Study, Capstone Project, Comprehensive Exam, etc) is actually lighter than Thesis option. The significant reason that I recommend for non-Thesis is that you want to complete degree faster in order to switch jobs, especially in Business healthcare, education and IT management where barrier of entry in terms of academic standard is not high (but could be high in other aspects such as healthcare) [**Potomac, 2023**]. **Thesis option sends strong signals of rigorous training and ability to execute difficult problems.**

## 1.2  Why is Master Thesis so Hard?

You have probably asked senior students about this question already. *They unanimously agreed that Master thesis is the most difficult requirement* despite no lectures and no letter grades (for most cases Pass or Fail). However, they widely disagree on why exactly this requirement is so tough.

Let me describe a journal article with title "Postgraduate Studies: The Challenges of Research and Thesis Writing" written by Uduak Imo Ekpoh published in Journal of Educational and Social Research. *Remember our purpose is to discover why Master Thesis is difficult.* This research uses interview questionnaire in a university located in Nigeria where 64 % are Master candidates. Most of respondents studied in graduate school to hope for better employment prospect. Furthermore, 92 % of respondents report that they encounter challenges in conducting Master Thesis. *Is background information of respondents similar to yours?* According to the research finding, the challenges are divided into three main factors: supervisor-related, student-related and institution-related. Supervisor-related factor means that supervisors are too busy with their own works, rather than supervising students. Student-related factor means lack of funding, especially occurred to self-sponsored students paying higher fee (undergraduate study is partially funded by government). Institutional-related factor means that there could be riots causing prolonged sessions and department delay in graduation. Aside from reasons, recommendations are 1) supervisors should have fewer students with more interactive relationship, and 2) background material and literature review should be taught in courses.

*Does the research finding help answering your question?* You probably wonder after asking several student experiences. Although I believe this paper does not help answering your question, there is an important lesson we can learn: *many students do not feel prepared to do Master thesis and are not confident that they could graduate.* Yet, many reasons, even published in research article, are too specific to certain groups of students and sometimes are external beyond one's control. The follow-up question is *what is the general reason explaining this phenomenon, that could be controlled by students themselves.*

Let me cite another online article written by a former Assistant Professor of marketing at Bocconi with title "Making the master thesis great again: It's about tea and water. And the replication crisis." This article raises the most important reason, also closely related to the Business Management or related degrees. **There is a mismatch between teaching and research**. Teaching is often industry-oriented and contains ready-to-use material. Suddenly, after teaching, thesis supervisors expect students to come up with very academic and sometimes fundamental research topics. The implication is that students feel insecure as professors show frustrations when students say that they want to do marketing plan for a company as their thesis, or any other vague topics that are not yet academic. The final result is that students either get no supervision, or they get too much last-minute supervision by sacrificing professors precious time to do their own research for academic tenure.

You may wonder *why most Master students do not tell you this explicit reason of thesis difficulty*. They (including me) also feel frustrations through Master Thesis process; however, to say the mismatch between teaching and research as underlying reason needs clear understanding of both coursework materials and research process to see the gap. Despite the fact that you may get good grades in business courses, it is likely that you still struggle with the research. This applies to many management disciplines. Aside from marketing, operation teaches queuing system, procurement, linear programming, overbooking and other materials that are useful in workplace, but the teaching material alone does not provide solid foundation for academic research.

To bridge this gap, we need to understand **Research Methodology**. **The earlier you actively learn these concepts, the less frustrated you will become through research process.**

## 1.3 Why Research Methodology? Not Research Method?

*This book mainly discusses Research Methodology, not Research Method*. Differentiating these two terms is not only about academic accuracy, but will set your expectations right before you read the next chapter.

My definition is **Research Methodology mainly involves soft skills while Research Method mainly involves hard skills**. Specifically, this book (Research Methodology) does not teach you about Economics theory, Social Psychology, survey design or even how to run regressions. Hard skills are obviously necessary, but I will mention them in the context of research process to give you the clear pictures of soft skills. My definition is similar to Bhosale 2023 article on differences between two terms. In that article, the author said that Research Methodology is a strategy to find the appropriate research method and involves several techniques in conducting academic research.

To bridge the gap between teaching and research, this book plan is

as follows:

- ▶ How to find good topics and papers (Day 2-3)
- ▶ How to find theory and conduct literature review (Day 4-5)
- ▶ How to select model and present the result (Day 6-7)
- ▶ How to write and present (Day 8-10)

Unlike other business courses you have taken earlier, the outline here seems simple and straightforward. Yet, active reading is still required, even though I try to simplify the content as much as I can.

**Article Links**

- ▶ https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/jesr/article/view/9487
- ▶ https://onabike.cc/2018/07/12/making-the-master-thesis-great-again-its-about-tea-and-water-and-the-replication-crisis/
- ▶ https://www.enago.com/academy/difference-methods-and-methodology/
- ▶ https://exeedcollege.com/blog/why-is-the-thesis-report-mandatory-for-mba-students/
- ▶ https://potomac.edu/thesis-vs-non-thesis-masters/