MASTER'S THESIS GUIDE

Master American Studies
School of History
Utrecht University
2014-2015

Contents

INTRODUCTION

What is a master's thesis?

The thesis is comparable to a final exam that every student must pass in order to graduate with a master's degree. In all probability it will be the most extensive research report that you will write during your graduate studies, and in general you will be given a great amount of freedom to choose a topic and formulate a specific research question. In that sense the thesis is truly the culmination of your entire master's education: with it you demonstrate your ability to formulate research questions, conduct independent research, and present your results in written form according to the highest academic standards. You are of course not alone in this process; one or more thesis advisors will be there to help guide your research and offer constructive feedback. However, the final responsibility for formulating a central research question, finding and processing relevant literature and source material, and applying concepts and methodologies that you have learned during your academic education, lies with the student. The thesis is a large project that often takes months to complete.

The basis of every thesis is an academic research question: a question or issue that is the subject of scholarly debate but has yet to be fully resolved or adequately answered. The idea is to contribute to a current academic discussion or debate by way of a systematic analysis of primary and secondary source material, an analysis which ultimately guides your arguments and leads to (new) conclusions.

Simply put, the thesis should

- be 15.000-22.500 words in length for 15 ECTS (excluding footnotes/endnotes, title page, and bibliography); the required length depends on the nature of the source material and disciplinary angle of the thesis and should be determined in consultation with the thesis advisor; as a general rule archival research tends to lead to longer manuscripts, and literary topics often allow for shorter, more condensed manuscripts
- consist of an original topic, main research question, sub-questions, thorough research, analysis, a main body (text) and conclusions
- employ correct primary source analysis
- be written according to the regulations and methods that are currently used in the humanities
- **final deadline: 26 June 2014**

The purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to offer you support and a reference tool as you organize and write your master's thesis, because many students appear not to fully understand what is expected of them. This guide should be used together with other guides. For example, the basic principles of historical research—as students who received a bachelor's degree in Utrecht learned in their research seminars (Onderzoeksseminar) I, II, and III—are clarified in the Onderzoeksgids Nederlandse Geschiedenis (http://www.let.uu.nl/ong/). Another somewhat dated, but still very useful guide is: P. de Buck, e.a., *Zoeken en schrijven: Handleiding bij het maken van een historisch werkstuk* (Haarlem, 1982, reprinted several times). A more general guide in English is: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (7th ed. Chicago 2007, or later).

The information in this guide simply provides you with an overview of the different phases in writing a successful thesis, as well as information regarding the various parts of which a thesis consists. Finally, this guide provides information about what students should and should not expect from their thesis advisors, and how thesis supervision should be organized.

PHASES

Summary:

- Finding a suitable topic
- Advisors and co-advisors
- Secondary literature research
- Narrowing down your topic
- Formulating a central research question and sub-questions
- Developing a preliminary outline
- Writing and rewriting

1. Finding a suitable topic

The easiest way of finding a suitable topic for your thesis (i.e., developing an academic question or problem) is by drawing from the research seminars and/or tutorials that you have taken during your graduate studies.

We advise against formulating a research question from scratch about themes that are completely foreign to you, because reading up on a totally new topic takes a lot of time—time that you often do not have, since the thesis should be completed within a relatively short timeframe. For the same reason we discourage you from coming up with a topic that may be too path breaking or revisionist—major discoveries in historical research usually do not occur at the thesis level, but rather after extensive and time-consuming research. The best advice is to try to develop a topic that you already know something about. There are many ways of going about this, and often many strategies are employed simultaneously. Here are a few examples:

- Begin with a broad idea and keep narrowing it down—from "something about the history of racial boundaries" to a topic from "the history of affirmative action in the United States in the twentieth century" or "multiculturalism and identity politics" to a research question regarding "the racial assumptions that informed the landmark Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978." Try to contribute to current academic discussions on a specific topic, for example by employing one of the strategies listed below.
- Look for differences of opinion in the secondary literature. If two or more scholars disagree on a particular issue, then you have an academic discussion. This is an excellent basis for a thesis—by examining relevant primary and secondary source material you could draw conclusions that contribute to such a discussion or debate. Consulting book reviews is especially useful for this method!
- Test hypotheses using case studies. If you are interested in the iconoclasm in the Northern Netherlands, for example, you could examine this event in three different cities based on assertions made in the secondary literature. In this manner you can test

existing hypotheses by focusing on three particular case studies. Look for strong assertions made in the secondary literature that make you ask yourself, "is that really the way it was?" Or if you're interested in the deconstruction of Jewish masculinity in Nazi ideology you could come up with a hypothesis concerning the *reconstruction* of Jewish masculinity in Jewish American fiction and draw on theories of Jewish masculinity in analyzing three novels by post-War Jewish American authors.

- In exceptional cases you may have the opportunity to work with recently uncovered or published source material, such as archival documents, or a recently published collection of letters. Even when working with new materials, however, it is still important to consult and contribute to the secondary literature written about your topic. For example, if you will be working with a newly published collection of letters, consider whether any scholars have written anything about the author of the letters that you will be examining. How can your research contribute to what we know about him/her? Or, if you will be working with new archival material, consider how such sources may change what we know about a certain topic or time period. These are excellent points of departure for a master's thesis.

Please remember that it is the responsibility of the student—not the thesis advisor—to conduct preliminary research, uncover academic discussions, and choose a suitable topic. Do not ask your thesis advisor to choose a topic for you because you cannot think of one yourself. You may of course propose your ideas to your advisor and ask his/her opinion. This first phase of your thesis research should not be taken lightly—finding a suitable point of departure for a master's thesis costs a lot of time and energy; the amount of time you spend during this preliminary phase all depends on the amount of literature you consult and your own initiative in contacting a thesis advisor. A good rule of thumb is to remember that it is always easier to choose a topic that you already know something about—nobody can formulate a suitable research question without reading up on the academic literature on a certain subject. The earlier you start on this, the better.

2. Thesis advisors and co-advisors

The American Studies program offers a seminar in block 3 and 4 for students who start writing a thesis. In this seminar students develop a research proposal that will guide their research and help them plan their work. During the of seminar sessions students meet to discuss the requirements of the thesis, select a thesis topic, and develop a suitable thesis question or research statement. Students work in peer-group to evaluate their work and improve their research proposal. Each proposal includes 1) Topic description and orientation; 2) Overview of academic discussion; 3) Research question or thesis statement; 4) Discussion of methodology; and 5) Bibliography. On the basis of the sub-questions a chapter outline is presented.

After completion of the research proposal all students write their master's thesis under the supervision of one or more academic faculty members involved in the American Studies master's program. If there are no staff members with the necessary expertise on a certain topic, then co-advisors may be sought outside of this master's program, or even outside the School of History, with the permission of the coordinator of the master's program. The main thesis advisor, however, must be based in the American Studies master's program. The role of

the co-advisor is merely to offer advice and feedback, usually only after a first draft has been written. The final grade of the thesis will be determined by the advisor and a second reader, who will be appointed by your main thesis advisor . All advisors or second readers must hold a PhD degree. Both the advisor and the second reader fill out an assessment form and give a grade. The final grade is the average of the two grades. If the grade is higher than 8.5 a third reader is invited to assess the grade.

As soon as you have found or been assigned a suitable thesis advisor, make an appointment to discuss your research plans. Be sure to already have a relatively clear idea of what you want to research and how you intend to go about it; your advisor will be better able to offer constructive tips and feedback if you have already done the preliminary work. A good idea is to come to the appointment well prepared with typed notes regarding the topic and possible research questions. In many cases your advisor will ask you to read up on a particular topic, and/or to elaborate your ideas in a preliminary thesis outline. Students often feel overwhelmed at the advice they are given during these first appointments—it frequently turns out that they do not know enough about the topic they are interested in, and that the advisor advises them to become familiar with a number of books and authors that they have never heard of. This is perfectly normal and need not be a problem, especially if you have already read a number of other books and articles on your topic. From the second appointment on you will find that you know a lot more about your topic and you will feel much more confident; as a result, your discussions with your advisor will also be more effective and research-oriented. Your secondary literature research will be based on these first literature suggestions from your thesis advisor—at this point your real research begins. Only after you have immersed yourself in the literature on your topic can you further distill your research question and sub-questions.

3. Secondary literature research

Once you and your advisor have agreed on a thesis topic and a (general) research question, the next step is to delve into the secondary literature on your subject. Basically, this means learning as much as you can about your subject within a relatively short time span, so that you can formulate a more specific and relevant research question. It is important to read the “classics” in your field as well as the most recent publications. Your thesis advisor will most likely suggest a number of books to read, but in the end the responsibility for finding and analyzing all relevant secondary literature lies with the student. Keep track of what you read by making a bibliography—that will save you time looking up bibliographical information for footnotes once you have started writing.

During your secondary literature research you will most likely change your central research question a number of times, as you come across information that changes your perspective on the chosen topic. This is normal—every advisor anticipates that the student’s original thesis plan will radically change within a month of the first appointment. What is most important to consider each time you change your research question, however, is to make sure that the questions you are asking can really be answered based on the literature you read. At first you will find that your central research question changes each time you read a new book, but as you become more familiar with the secondary literature you will most likely uncover a core problem or question that will form the point of departure for your thesis. In most cases

the core problem (or central research question) can be subdivided into a number sub-questions, each of which can eventually be addressed in a separate chapter of your thesis.

4. Narrowing down your topic

Determining precisely what your thesis will be about begins during your secondary literature research. You may, for example, find that some of your original questions are nearly impossible to answer, or you may be presented with new questions that appear to be more suitable than your original question. Narrowing down your topic entails not just determining a more precise research question, however, but also determining what *not* to include in your thesis. Many students are surprised to discover just how little can be adequately examined in a thesis of this magnitude, and since graduate research entails detailed analyses rather than broad overviews, it is important to narrow your topic down to relatively small proportions. A few tips on how to do this are as follows:

- Choose to answer your central research question and sub-questions by consulting a limited collection of (archival) source material, rather than all available sources.
- Define your focus, whether it be chronology, geography, or corpus, as narrowly as possible (not "the United States in the 20th century," but "Los Angeles between 1945-48"; not "the ideal of success in American television series," but "the ideal of success in *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* and *Boardwalk Empire*").
- Choose to analyze the arguments of five scholars, rather than every scholar who has ever written about your topic.
- Choose to illuminate a limited number of (neglected) aspects of a given problem, rather than trying to examine a subject in its entirety.
- Choose to explore a problem from a specific theoretical point of view (for instance, a gender analysis).

The specific choices involved in narrowing down your topic must of course be logically explained; the secondary literature will serve as a guide in this. In the introduction to your master's thesis you must justify to the reader precisely why the central research question should be examined, why you have narrowed down the topic in the way that you have, and how you intend to go about answering the questions you have posed (i.e., what kinds of sources you intend to consult).

5. Formulating a central research question and sub-questions

It is important to formulate all of your research questions as specifically as possible so that the reader is never confused about the point you are trying to make. As a rule, formulating questions accurately often leads to very long research questions, with specific references to place, time, and often source material. For example, "To what extent do the arguments of author A about topic B hold up, based on the letters written by X in the period P through Q?" The fact that such a research question appears disproportionately long need not be a problem; the question posed in this manner is mainly for yourself. In the definitive version of your thesis you will most likely adapt the separate elements of your central question (and sub-questions) into a paragraph of prose, rather than stating it all in one sentence.

Furthermore, it is important to make sure that your sub-questions deal with specific elements of the central research question, in a manner that is clear to the reader. The idea is to eventually be able to answer the central research question in the conclusion by drawing from the answers to the sub-questions in the main body of the thesis. In other words, the central research question should serve as an "umbrella" for the sub-questions that you will be investigating in the separate chapters; the sub-questions should *not* deal with topics that do *not* fall under the central research question. If they do, you must reformulate either the central research question or the sub-question, so that they connect more precisely.

6. Developing a preliminary outline

Once you have read up on the secondary literature and formulated specific research questions, you can begin to develop a preliminary outline for your thesis. For some students this may sound excessive, but for a thesis of this magnitude it is very important to develop a clear plan and determine exactly what you want to say and in what order. A vague outline such as "Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Conclusion" is useless for both you and your thesis advisor. In your preliminary outline you should make clear how you will be answering the sub-questions in each chapter. This is also a good way of testing that questions that you have formulated—can they be thoroughly answered based on the literature you have consulted? If that is not the case, then this is the time to change or adapt your questions. Of course, at this stage you still do not know what the final conclusions of your research will be, but you can already determine what kind of literature and sources you will need to consult for each chapter. This requires planning and thinking ahead, but in the end a good outline will save you a great deal of work and frustration. Students who do not make adequate outlines often discover well into Chapter 3 that there are a number of issues that they should have addressed much earlier in their thesis, and that earlier chapters will have to be rewritten. For this reason it is always a good idea to continually ask yourself: "does the reader know enough at this stage to be able to understand the point I am trying to make?" The idea is for the reader to easily be able to follow your argument through every chapter. Do not apply complicated concepts before you have fully explained them, for example.

A preliminary outline usually consists of a couple of pages and a bibliography of the literature you have consulted. As soon as you have completed it, make an appointment with your thesis advisor. When your advisor gives you the green light you can begin writing.

7. Writing and rewriting

Writing a master's thesis consists of at least three phases. In most cases you will begin by writing a very rudimentary rough draft of the first couple of chapters and turn them in to your supervisor for feedback. Then, based on his/her comments, you will write a full first draft of your thesis. Once the first draft of your entire thesis is ready, turn it in to your supervisor(s) again for feedback. Based on this final feedback you will write the final version of your thesis. In the first phase, the emphasis of your supervisor's feedback will be on the internal structure of your chapters, language, the ways in which you have analyzed and processed primary and secondary source material, and content. In the next phase, when you turn in your first draft, your supervisor will be looking for internal coherence, the connection between your questions and conclusions, the links between the separate chapters, etc. Remember that a thesis is never

written in just one round—it consists of a long process of writing and rewriting, applying feedback, reading more literature, and reformulating your research questions. Supervisors often provide lots of criticism during all but the final stages—students do not always like having their work criticized, but it is all part of the process and in the end it always leads to an even better master's thesis.

If you have difficulties with writing, spelling, or grammar, it is a good idea to let someone else read the final version of your thesis. Your supervisor may advise you to correct language errors, but he/she is not an editor and will not correct these mistakes for you. Theses which contain too many language errors cannot be accepted (according to university regulations).

In what order should you write the various parts of your thesis?
It may sound most logical to start with the introduction, but that is not always the most efficient way to go about writing your thesis. Broadly speaking, there are two options:

1. Begin with the first chapter, in which you tackle your first sub-question and thus immediately delve into your real research. Then write the other chapters and the conclusion. Save the introduction for last, because only then do you know *exactly* what your thesis is about.
2. Begin by writing a rudimentary version of your introduction, so that you will be forced to really think about your central research question and sub-questions, methodology, and selection of source material. Once you have done this, write your chapters and conclusion. Write the definitive version of your introduction after you have written all the rest.

How do you prevent plagiarism?
Plagiarism is obviously something that you should avoid at all costs. Even just giving the *impression* of passing off somebody else's idea as your own can lead to problems. There are two ways to ensure that your work is never suspected of plagiarism:

1. The simplest way of safeguarding your work against charges of plagiarism is through adequate and thorough annotation throughout your entire thesis. Paraphrasing an author? Footnote! Summarizing the secondary literature? Footnote! Citing a primary source? Footnote! Repeating the opinions or conclusions of another scholar (even if you agree with them)? Footnote! If you ensure that *everything* you got from the sources or the secondary literature is properly annotated, then nothing can go wrong. Long excerpts without annotation in a master's thesis are by definition suspect; the reader is bound to ask where you got your information from. In such cases it is important to remember what plagiarism exactly means: borrowing the ideas of others without saying that they are borrowed. Leaving out the footnotes can be considered theft and will be taken very seriously.
2. Make absolutely certain that *everything* in your thesis is formulated in your own words, except in cases of a direct quote (which must fall within quotation marks and be fully annotated).Even if another author has perfectly and succinctly written what you want to say, use your own words. This not only proves your writing skills to the reader, but it also demonstrates your distance from the literature.

For more information on plagiarism, see the site of the Student Desk (www.uu.nl/hum/studentdesk)
Every student is expected to know these rules on fraud and plagiarism.

Final version
A master's thesis is usually turned in and discussed at regular intervals, for example per chapter. The thesis advisor offers feedback and comments at all of these stages, and based on this feedback you will eventually turn in a complete first draft of the thesis (including footnotes, title page, bibliography, etc.). The final bits of feedback you receive on this first draft are then applied to the text, and a definitive version of your thesis is turned in for a final grade.

THE VARIOUS PARTS OF A MASTER'S THESIS

The basic structure of every thesis is generally the same. Specifically, it should contain the following parts:

- An introduction, which presents and justifies to the reader your topic, central research question and sub-questions, critical evaluation of the academic discussion in the field *(status questionis)*, methodology, source material, and chapter structure.
- A body (or main text), which answers various sub-questions (usually one per chapter; never more than three or four per chapter).
- A conclusion, in which the answers to your sub-questions are succinctly summarized and lead to the final answer(s) to your central research question.

The biggest part of any thesis is the body, or main text; both the introduction and the conclusion are relatively short. The following paragraphs will provide you with an overview of the three main parts of the master's thesis.

<u>The introduction</u>

As any advanced student of any discipline knows, the introduction to an academic paper is crucial—if the author is able to spark the reader's curiosity early on, he/she will want to continue reading; if not, then reading the paper may amount to drudgery. It is therefore very important to spark the reader's interest in the opening lines of your introduction. One of the best ways of doing so is to start off with an interesting anecdote, followed by a rhetorical question like "how can this be explained?" This can then lead to the more formal part of your introduction.

The intention of the introduction is to make clear to the reader what he/she can expect from the rest of your thesis. Presenting and justifying your central research question and sub-questions are central here (what are your questions and why are they relevant?), but you must also present and justify your selections regarding time and place, and your methodology. Do not forget to present these elements in a way that is engaging and interesting to read. A common beginner's mistake is to present a research topic in a boring and overly businesslike manner, along the lines of "my research question is…" and "my methodology is…". An introduction should be written in readable and interesting prose. Please avoid personal reflections on how you became interested in your topic (i.e., "when I took Dr. X's class, we discussed such and such and that made me want to know more about it…")—such information is irrelevant to the reader. The introduction is also not the place to thank people for their help and advice—if you feel the need to thank certain people, do so in a separate foreword. Keep your introduction formal, but also readable and especially succinct. Even ten percent of the total length of your thesis is really too long for an introduction.

<u>The body (main text)</u>

This is the main text of your thesis, in which you present the results of your research by answering various sub-questions in an argumentative style. This part of the thesis consists of

several chapters, all of which should be of roughly equal length. You will be drawing from and processing a great deal of academic literature in this part of your thesis, because each chapter and each theme will be based on academic discussions and debates. The main thing to try to avoid here is spending too much time on descriptions, background information, repeating the origins of historical developments, etc. (i.e., a story that jumps from "then this happened" to "and then this happened"…), and too little time on the main academic discussions and the sub-questions that you are trying to answer. Of course you must provide the reader with enough information to be able to understand your arguments, but you need not delve into the entire history of the United States in order to describe the gender ideals propagated in illustrated magazines during the nineteenth century.

Another important point is to make sure that the reader always understands where you are going with your argument, and that transitions from one theme to the next are smooth and logical. The best way to ensure this is to succinctly explain to the reader at various intervals what you will be discussing next. (For example: "Now it is clear what the arguments for and against position X are, it follows to examine the extent to which position Y is fundamentally different.") These kinds of transitional sentences keep the reader well informed of your argument and provide the "glue" that keep the various parts of your thesis together. Often it is a good idea to even succinctly summarize your point or argument to the reader, using phrases like "In short,…" or "To summarize, …".

It is always important to remember that the main body of your thesis should really be the main body—this is where you really attempt to *convince* the reader of your points by presenting and justifying your arguments as clearly and forcefully as possible. Of course historical research is almost never completely clear-cut: one never knows if something is "true" or not. This is not something you should try to hide—if something is unclear even after having read all there is to read about it, and after having tested various hypotheses, there is little choice but to reach the conclusion that we simply do not know for certain. (This should not prevent you from suggesting what you believe to be the most convincing explanation, and why.)

Conclusion

The conclusion should never contain new information, but rather a succinct summary of your research and a clear answer to your central research question. This will be the shortest part of your thesis, with the least number of footnotes. Remember that a summary is not enough—you need to place the answer to your research question within a broader context. You may make suggestions for further research, where relevant.

Bibliography and footnotes

Every thesis must include a full bibliography, which should be organized alphabetically and divided into two parts: primary sources and secondary sources (in some cases students may wish to include a third category for websites). Strict rules apply to the format of a bibliography, and these rules must be followed precisely. Since there are several different systems in use, it is important to pick one and be absolutely consistent (for example the widely used *Chicago Manual of Style*, or the Harvard citation and referencing system). Be sure to ask your thesis advisor which system you should use.

A bibliography contains all of the bibliographical information of the sources and literature cited in the footnotes. If you read extra literature but did not use it while writing your thesis, you do not need to list it in your bibliography. Also, be sure to only list academic publications in your bibliography—do not list encyclopedias, Wikipedia, or any other unverifiable data that you found on the internet. An academic thesis is based on academic literature; all of the literature that you cite and use to write your thesis must therefore be academic and verifiable.

When using footnotes it is useful to remember the above mentioned tips concerning plagiarism—one can never be too frugal with footnotes. As in your bibliography, you must be consistent with the style of your footnotes—ask your advisor what style or system you should use. American Studies scholars work with both the *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS) and MLA (short literature references between parentheses in the text itself). Both endnotes of footnotes are acceptable, with a slight preference for footnotes, following the CMS or the MLA format. For a summary of the *Chicago Manual of Style* see http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/cmosfaq/tools.html. A common mistake that students make is that they leave out the footnotes while writing, then try to fill them in later, when they have already forgotten where they got their information from. It is always a good idea to write out complete footnotes as you write your text!

You may want to consider using reference management software such as Zotero or RefWorks to manage your notes and bibliography (see more information about Refworks on the site of the UU library.

Typeface (font) and lay-out

In the final version of your thesis not only the content should be as good as possible, but the document should also look professional. Choose a standard typeface (most students use Times New Roman) and a readable font size (12 is recommended). Make sure that your title page looks professional. Your page setup should not be too chaotic, so try not to use too many textboxes, subtitles, etc. Allow your advisor adequate space in the margins to write comments, for example with 1,3 margins.

Spelling and style

The final version of your thesis may not contain any grammatical or spelling mistakes. It is highly recommended that you let somebody else read your thesis before turning it in, especially if English is not your native language. Students often do not notice their own language errors until somebody else points them out.

SUPERVISION

What role does the thesis advisor play in this process? The lion's share of the work, initiative, and responsibility lies with the student; the thesis advisor fulfills two main tasks:

1. First, that of sounding board and critic. Especially in the early stages of your thesis research your advisor will help you formulate a proper research question, narrow down your topic, select appropriate source material, and find relevant secondary literature. Once you have started writing your thesis in earnest, the advisor's main task will be to provide feedback on the chapters you turn in (and eventually the complete version). The advisor will also help determine the grade for your definitive version.
2. Second, that of safety net. If you encounter any obstacles during your research, or if you begin to doubt your topic or your approach, or if there are personal reasons why you need to delay your research, you can always contact your advisor. Do not wait too long to seek advice or help.

Please note: Anyone writing a thesis has a right to supervision from a member of the History Department or the Modern Languages Department. Thesis supervision is part of their job function. As a student you are expected to do most of the work independently, of course, but if necessary you may also demand that your advisor comply with regulations. For example, regulations state that the definitive version of your thesis must be graded within 10 (working) days. If it takes longer, you have a right to complain.

Thesis supervision is calculated at a maximum of 25 hours, including appointments and reading all versions of the thesis. When a student has received more than 25 hours of supervision, the supervisor has a right to refuse further supervision. The student will have to complete his/her master's thesis on his/her own and hand it in before the deadline.

If a truly irresolvable conflict arises between the student and the advisor, you can contact the Exam Committee of the School of History and ask them to mediate. This occurs very rarely, but the possibility exists. For smaller problems you can contact the student advisor (*studieadviseur*), who may serve as mediator or request another thesis advisor.

When a lecturer agrees to supervise a student's master's thesis, the following is agreed upon:

<u>The student</u>

- is responsible for her/his master's thesis
- works independently and shows commitment
- follows up on agreements
- includes feedback and advice from her/his supervisor into her/his master's thesis
- hands in a draft version of the master's thesis that is to the best of his/her abilities (including feedback and complete references, and paying attention to style and grammar)
- follows university rules and guidelines

The supervisor

- will be in touch with the student on a regular basis (he/she will be available for advice, will answer emails and will have regular appointments with the student)
- will read the student's research proposal and will provide feedback on that proposal
- will read ***one version*** of every thesis chapter and will provide feedback on that chapter
- will read ***one version*** of the completed draft version of the master's thesis and will provide feedback on that version
- will provide the student with constructive feedback
- bears responsibility for the grading of the final version of the master's thesis, including finding a second reader and handing in a grade form within ten working days.

Please note there is no supervision during July and August.

A short overview of the entire process

1. The student and the advisor sign the thesis protocol (see appendix).
2. The student writes a research proposal for the master's thesis as part of the final assignment in the tutorial.
3. First appointment with the advisor, regarding feasibility of proposed research and possible research questions. If necessary the advisor suggests the student analyze specific sources or secondary literature.
4. The student reads the secondary literature on the chosen topic and formulates a central research question and sub-questions.
5. Second appointment with advisor, regarding central research question and bibliography.
6. The student composes a preliminary outline of the thesis, including chapter structure.
7. Third appointment with advisor, regarding preliminary outline (which may need to be adapted). Based on this meeting the student can begin writing.
8. The student turns in separate chapters; the advisor provides feedback in as many appointments as are necessary.
9. The student applies feedback to the text and turns in a complete version of the thesis.
10. Appointment with advisor, who provides feedback on complete version of the thesis.
11. The student applies the final feedback to the thesis and turns in a definitive version. The advisor and second reader grade the thesis within ten days.

What happens if the final version of the thesis is rejected?

If the supervisor and the second reader agree the final version of the master's thesis does not deserve a grade of 5.5 or higher, the student has failed this particular part of the master's program. If the grade is between 4 and 5.5, the student will be given the opportunity to revise his/her thesis, using the comments provided by the first and second reader. This revised version must be handed in within a month after having received grade and feedback. If the grade

accorded after the first reading is lower than 4, or if the grade of the revised thesis is lower than 5.5, the student will have to repeat the module and start from scratch.

If the thesis is has not been completed by the deadline, but sufficient work has been done by the student, the student may submit the thesis within one month as described above. If there is no evidence of any progression whatsoever, the student will have to start anew in the following academic year.

Education and examination regulations

For education and examination regulations, see:

http://www.uu.nl/SiteCollectionDocuments/GW/GW_StudiePunt/GW_OER/GW_master_2012-2013/Facultair-deel-OER-MA-12-13.pdf (general regulations for master's programs)

http://www.uu.nl/SiteCollectionDocuments/GW/GW_StudiePunt/GW_OER/GW_master_2012-2013/MA-Geschiedenis-12-13.pdf (History master's programs)

Graduation

It's the student's responsibility to check if his/her grades have been registered in Osiris correctly. As soon as the student has successfully completed all modules, student administration will automatically set in motion the graduation procedures. Students are required to upload their master's thesis to Igitur, the digital thesis archive. Students who wish to remain enrolled as master students have to request this themselves. For more information, see: http://www.uu.nl/faculty/humanities/EN/education/student-desk/practical-information/graduation/Pages/graduation-procedure.aspx

EVALUATION FORM MASTER'S THESIS

STUDENT INFORMATION
Name
Student number
Study programme
Thesis title
Date submitted
SUPERVISOR INFORMATION
Name
Study programme
2ND EVALUATOR INFORMATION (not involved in supervising student)
Name
Study programme
Evaluation: ☐ Supervisor ☐ 2nd evaluator *Note: Each evaluator must fill in a separate form. The final grade will be added to the supervisor's form.*
Evaluator grade: Final grade* (combined grade 1st & 2nd evaluators):
Date and signature:

** If the final grade is 6 or 6.5, the paper must be evaluated again by a professor (Marginal Cases Regulations, see E&ER, Art. 5.3). The third evaluator must always use the form that has been designed for this purpose.*

FORMAL PRECONDITIONS * *

PRECONDITION		Comments
Plagiarism Rules Awareness Statement	☐ met ☐ not met	
Correct use of language (sentence structure, spelling, punctuation)	☐ met ☐ not met	
Table of contents and summary	☐ met ☐ not met	
Notation and list of sources in accordance with formal rules in the field	☐ met ☐ not met	
Design and layout in accordance with study programme guidelines	☐ met ☐ not met	

** If one of these formal preconditions has not been met, then the supervisor/first evaluator may decide not to evaluate the content of the paper. The student will be given one opportunity to make corrections. The standards for meeting/not meeting the preconditions are determined by the study programme (ex.: number of language mistakes tolerated).

EVALUATION OF THE CONTENT

The evaluator gives a general evaluation for each category, with comments explaining the relevant strong and weak points. For an unsatisfactory evaluation, please indicate exactly which issues the student must improve in order to earn a satisfactory evaluation.
Points 1 to 7 must all be rated at least satisfactory in order to earn a satisfactory final grade.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Was the statement of the problem formulated clearly in the introduction? Were the sub-topics logically derived from the main topic? Was the research topic sufficiently focused, and was the reasoning behind this focus explained in the paper? Is the student aware of the limitations of the chosen approach? Comments:	

2. ACADEMIC DEBATE ON THE ISSUE	☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Is the academic relevance of the research clearly stated? Is the research adequately positioned within the academic debate? Are the sources relevant, representative and of sufficient academic quality? Are the sources discussed adequately and critically? Have any essential perspectives been left out? Comments:	
3. THEORETICAL CONTEXT	☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Are the chosen theories and/or analytical concepts pertinent to the research question? Are the main concepts/terms clearly defined? Comments:	
4. METHOD	☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Is the choice for the research method sufficiently justified? Are the research methods used adequate to address the statement of the problem? Are they used in the correct manner? Is the method used to collect data described and justified in detail? Comments:	
5. ANALYSIS	☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Does the research display sufficient analytical depth? Has the student sufficiently and adequately utilised his/her academic knowledge of the subject? Is there a good balance between description and analysis? Is there enough cross-referencing between the student's own empirical research results and the literature/theory? Comments:	

6. CONCLUSION ☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good

Does the conclusion answer the main question? Is the conclusion more than just a summary? Do the references to the sources synthesize the knowledge? Does the student reflect critically on his/her own approach? Does the paper make suggestions for further research?

Comments

7. USE OF SOURCES & CITATION OF SOURCES ☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good

Is the difference between the student's own analysis and the analysis of others clearly apparent? Is the citation of sources adequate and accurate? Are the references used correctly? Does the student approach the literature and other sources critically?

Comments:

8. STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT ☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good

Is the information presented in a logical order (for example: introduction/theoretical context, question, method, results, discussion)? Is there a clear division into chapters and paragraphs? Is the argumentation clear and coherent? Are the paragraphs and sections coherent and sufficiently limited in scope?

Comments:

9. COMPOSITION & STYLE ☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good

Is the paper legible and easy to understand? Is the specialist terminology used carefully and accurately? Is the text written in the student's own words, or does it stay too close to the original sources? Does the student avoid repetition, complex and unwieldy language or vague sentences? Does the student make strategic use of interesting examples?

Comments:

10. INITIATIVE (to be filled in by supervisor) ☐ unsatisfactory ☐ satisfactory ☐ good
Has the student carefully utilised the feedback provided? Did the student respect agreements and deadlines? Did the student need much help during the process? If so, on which points (ex.: formulating a research question, familiarisation with the literature, structure of the argument, composition.)?
11. OTHER
Use this space to add comments on aspects, such as the innovative quality of the research, the social relevance of the thesis, etc.
FINAL EVALUATION
SUGGESTION FOR NUMERIC GRADE:

Assessment Research MA Thesis

Descriptors:

- a grade will usually be assigned for a combination of reasons and the final grade is based therefore on the overall impression rather than on isolated features

- the main categories are represented below; a thesis which is judged to fall between two categories may be given a 'half' grade, as in 5.5, 6.5, 7.5, 8.5, 9.5.

Deficient (5):
The thesis does not have a central research question. It shows poor knowledge of the scholarly context and little evidence of independent thought. The research is superficial, unsystematic, and shows little effort. The argument lacks structure and the writing is vague or incorrect (the expression is poor at best, incoherent at worst.) It makes inadequate use of primary and secondary sources. The presentation does not meet professional standards.

Pass (6)
The thesis has a central question and attempts to answer it. It shows knowledge of the academic context and evidence of independent research in the relevant field using appropriate methods. At the same time, its analysis of the issues involved in the question is limited and it demonstrates a limited grasp of the academic context. The selection and understanding of primary evidence and the secondary discussion is haphazard. The argument shows considerable degree of irrelevance and the structure is weak. The writing falls short of correctness and clarity; the presentation of sources is not up to professional standards.

Good (7)
The thesis formulates and attempts to answer a central research question in a satisfactory way. It demonstrates a good basic understanding of the topic and of its complexities. It shows a good knowledge of the relevant academic context. It demonstrates solid coverage of the relevant secondary and primary sources, using appropriate methods. The presentation and discussion of sources is generally professional. The language is correct and the main points are made explicitly and in a structured way. However, the analysis may be derivative and lacking in discrimination. It exhibits some problems of relevance and structure. The evidence presented does not fully support conclusions, and it lacks detail and nuance. Expression may exhibit some deficiencies. It shows little evidence of independent thought or of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Very good (8):
The thesis formulates a research question clearly and provides a convincing answer to it. It demonstrates a sound understanding of the topic and the issues involved in it. It shows a broad understanding of the academic context. It demonstrates extensive independent research using appropriate methods. It is coherently structured and argued. The conclusions are supported by detailed evidence. It is well expressed. The analyses are more solid than original. There is limited evidence of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Excellent (9):
The central question is very clearly formulated. It is very clearly situated in the relevant scholarly discussions and the writer shows an above average level of familiarity with the relevant scholarly context. It addresses all aspects of the topic and demonstrates careful and systematic research in appropriately selected sources. It demonstrates critical reflection on methods and theories. It shows evidence of independent thought, knowledge of the field, and high-level insight and powers of analysis. The argument is balanced and well-structured and effectively expressed, with specific, detailed and accurate use of evidence. It is scrupulous in citation of primary and secondary sources and in adherence to bibliographic conventions.

Outstanding (10):
The question is innovative and sharply formulated. It is shown to have considerable relevance for the scholarly discussions in the field. The thesis demonstrates a full command of the topic and the debates in the field. It shows evidence of original and independent thought but also of systematic, broad-ranging and thorough research in the field using appropriate methods. It shows exceptional insight and powers of analysis which fully reflects the complexity of the topic. It demonstrates an engagement with and critical approach to the scholarly debate. The argumentation is thorough, the examples always precise and relevant, the selection and synthesis of secondary literature polished. The handling of bibliography and footnoting is up to professional standard and the style is precise, correct, and highly readable. It is of a publishable standard.

Contract MA Thesis Supervision

Thesis title:

Student:

Thesis supervisor:

In order to ensure the successful completion of the master's thesis, both the student and supervisor agree to the following:

1) that the student
   a) bears ultimate responsibility for his/her thesis;
   b) must work independently and demonstrate initiative;
   c) must keep all appointments, and meet all deadlines and other agreements made by his/her supervisor;
   d) must implement his/her supervisor's advice and feedback in the final version of his/her thesis;
   e) is responsible for correcting all language mistakes (your supervisor will not correct your English for you);
   f) must abide by all university regulations and thesis guidelines;

2) that the thesis supervisor
   g) must maintain close contact with the student during the researching and writing of the thesis (including answering questions in a timely manner, replying to e-mails, holding regular appointments, and offering constructive advice);
   h) will read and offer feedback on the student's research proposal;
   i) will read and offer feedback on one version of each chapter (including the introduction and conclusion);
   j) will read and offer feedback on one complete first draft of the thesis;
   k) will strive to offer the student useful tips and advice while researching and writing the thesis;
   l) bears responsibility for grading the final version of the thesis within ten workdays (including contacting a second reader and turning in the final grade to the secretariat).

The thesis supervision will last from _____ until _____. (Please note that thesis supervision is only offered within the academic year in which the student follows the rest of the one-year master program.

There is *no* thesis supervision in class-free—'onderwijsvrije'—periods, including in July and August.

_____ _____

Date and signature student Date and signature supervisor