

# **MSc Business Administration**

## **Thesis Guidelines Semester 2 2021-2022**

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# 1. Introduction

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This document provides general guidelines for writing a Master's thesis for the MSc in Business Administration at the Amsterdam Business School. The document will cover the process of writing a master thesis and will provide answers to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of a master thesis?
- What are the admission criteria for the master thesis?
- What can be expected of a supervisor?
- Which steps should you undertake in the process of writing a master thesis?
- What constitutes a master thesis?
- What is the typical structure of a master thesis?
- What should you take into account when formatting a master thesis?

The main purpose of a Master's thesis is to train you to independently conduct original research. Thus, you decide on a research question to be studied and on how to approach the project. A thesis should contribute something new to our existing academic knowledge within your field of interest. Writing a master thesis will push you to make the most of your intellectual abilities. Many students like this challenge, but at the same time a Master's thesis also requires much more discipline to finish on time than a regular course, since success very much depends on your own initiative. The process of writing a master thesis also provides students with knowledge of advanced research methodologies and how to structure and report their ideas. The insights gained while writing a master thesis are useful for both an academic career and a career within a business organization, as the academic skills needed to do sound research are also important for solving problems that companies may face.

In short, a master thesis:

- is a piece of original work;
- should make a contribution to existing knowledge;
- requires you to work on your own initiative;
- represents a substantial part of the MSc. programme
- calls for discipline and determination

Note that this document is a practical guideline and *does not* replace in any way the formal thesis rules and regulations as laid down in the Teaching and Examination Regulations (Onderwijs- en Examenregeling, or OER).

Other info and advice for writing a thesis can be found at:

<https://student.uva.nl/eco/content/az/thesis/thesis.html>

## 2. Organization, admission process, and admission criteria

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### 2.1 Planning

The curriculum of the MSc. programme is organised to give you optimal support in writing your thesis. You follow different courses during the thesis process, each of which addresses a different aspect of a sound academic thesis:

- The ‘Thesis Proposal’ course of your track, in period 3;
- Followed by the ‘Master’s Thesis’ course of your track, in semester 2 (period, 4, 5 and 6).  
The thesis proposal course must be passed before a student can start with the thesis research project.

Simultaneous to these two main thesis courses, there are several additional courses:

- One ‘Thesis Methods Workshop’, in period 4
- One ‘Thesis Analysis Workshop’, in period 5
- Next to the courses, students have access to the online “skills lab” course on Canvas to learn method and analysis skills that are not taught in the workshops.

For students who wish to write their thesis in semester 1 of 2021/2022 (june 2021 – Jan 2022), the thesis process is organized as follows:

Block	Month	Courses	Thesis process	Deadlines and submissions (students)
B2	Dec		Thesis supervision survey	Apply for supervision
	Dec		Allocation of supervisors	
B3	Jan-Feb	“Thesis Proposal” course	1st contact with supervisor	
	11 Feb 2022	deadlines		Submit thesis proposal
	(18 Mar 2022)			(Resubmit thesis proposal )
B4	Feb-Mar	“Method Workshop”	Detailed literature review + Detailed research design	
B5	Apr-May	“Data Analysis Workshop”	Data collection + Data analysis	
B6	24 Jun 2022	deadlines	End of supervision	Submit final thesis
	(26 Aug 2022)			(Resubmit final thesis)

*Table 2.1: Planning for students who will write their thesis in semester2*

Please note that supervision officially ends after the first final thesis deadline. If you fail to submit your thesis at the first deadline, you are expected to independently finish the thesis and submit it before for the second deadline.

## **2.2 Admission requirements**

You can register for the Master's Thesis course in SIS conditionally. The registration for the thesis will be made official once the admission criteria have been met. To start the thesis and to retain the right to be supervised, you must meet three criteria:

1. A pass grade for the 'Theories of...' course of your track
2. A pass grade for at least one of the two core courses of your track (specialism)
3. A pass grade for the 'Thesis Proposal' course of your track

Whether you meet these criteria will be assessed at the end of the 'thesis proposal' course, which will be after the start of the master's thesis course. Therefore, you are enrolled *conditionally* to the master's thesis course and will automatically be deregistered from the course if you do not meet the three criteria above after the results are known. You will have to re-enrol in the master's thesis course in the following semester.

## **2.3 Admission process**

To participate in the master thesis course, you have to perform three actions:

1. Register for the 'Thesis Proposal' course of your track in SiS
2. Register for the 'Master's Thesis' course of your track in SiS
3. Fill out the 'thesis topics survey' that will be sent to each student, to apply for a supervisor.

The correct course code of the thesis courses for each track can be found in the course catalogue. Make sure you register for the thesis courses for the semester in which you plan to start writing your thesis. For more information on course registration, please check:

<http://student.uva.nl/eco/az/item/course-and-exam-registration.html>.

### 3. The role of a supervisor

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During your thesis journey, you will get the help of a supervisor. The role of your supervisor is to offer guidance on theoretical and methodological issues and to provide critical feedback, encouragement, and support.

Students can expect to have six feedback moments while writing a master thesis. Ideally, these six meetings will follow the thesis chapters:

1. Thesis (proposal) meeting 1: first ideas literature gap and research question.
2. Thesis (proposal) meeting 2: Feedback on the final thesis proposal (pass or fail)
3. Thesis meeting 3: Theoretical framework. Feedback on the literature review, theoretical framework model and/or hypotheses.
4. Thesis meeting 4: Data collection. Feedback on research design and method.
5. Thesis meeting 5: Analysis. Feedback on data analysis and results.
6. Thesis Meeting 6: Draft version. Feedback on the adjusted parts in the thesis and the conclusions and discussion section.

Plan the meetings with your supervisor carefully and use the time you spend with your supervisor efficiently. In principle, your supervisor will only meet with you on the basis of written input that you submitted (i.e. drafts of chapters of your thesis).

You can expect your supervisor to have read the written materials that you submitted before the meeting. During the meetings with your supervisor, you will normally get suggestions to make changes to the material you submitted. Please note that you cannot expect your supervisor to comment on the same chapters of the thesis more than twice.

When you contact your supervisor, you can expect a reaction within five working days, and you can expect to get an appointment within ten working days, unless other arrangements have been made.

Make sure that you make clear arrangements with your supervisor how to manage this process. If you deviate from your own planning, make sure to reschedule in time as the deadline will not move along with you. If circumstances prevent you from following the planning, make sure you notify your supervisor in time. If you foresee that you cannot make the final deadlines make sure to notify a study advisor in time, they can help you resolve the problems or, if necessary, to prolong the deadlines. See also paragraph 4.7.

#### 3.1 Thesis assessment

Your supervisor will judge:

- 1) your thesis proposal, and
- 2) your final thesis.

The supervisor will evaluate the final thesis proposal that is written during the thesis proposal course. The supervisor will give a pass/fail judgement, indicating whether you found 1) a research gap in your field of interest and a relevant research question, and 2) whether that question can be researched and answered within the remaining timeframe of the thesis course.

If the proposal does not get a pass, you can rewrite it for the resit deadline (see table 1.1) based on the supervisor's feedback. In the unlikely event that the resit proposal also results in a fail, the supervision stops and you will need to retake the thesis proposal course in the next semester. This also means your thesis is delayed with a semester.

The final thesis will be assessed by both the thesis supervisor and a *second* reader, who will be assigned by the track coordinator. The role of this second reader is to provide an independent opinion on the quality of your work. The second reader will discuss this with the primary supervisor and together they will assign a grade to your work, based on the grading grid.

## 4. Thesis process

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### 4.1 How to get started/choice of a topic

The hardest part of the thesis process may be identifying a topic and, especially, a good research question. Given the large amount of time you are going to spend writing your master thesis, make sure that you choose a topic that interests you. Also, it must be feasible given the time and resources available to study this particular topic. There should be enough literature to provide a starting point for your research, and you need to consider the availability and accessibility of data.

#### *How to find a topic?*

First try to identify a topic that personally interests you and then narrow it down to possible research questions. Note that a good topic for a master thesis needs to reflect a gap in the current knowledge of business literature.

To find a topic of interest and a potential research question, consider the following questions:

1. What are the research areas of the faculty members that teach in your track? (Your track will offer a list of possible research topics that faculty members are interested in, otherwise you can consult their webpages.) What might be open research questions in these research areas? Linking up to the ongoing research of ABS faculty is generally the best way to make sure that you can quickly find a good topic for your thesis.
2. What kind of assignments did you do in previous courses? Did you come up with some interesting topics or unresolved issues?
3. Have you recently read any newspaper articles that suggested topics that would be interesting to study scientifically?
4. What kind of thesis is more appealing to you? Do you want to do an in-depth case study? Do you want to analyse data for a large set of listed companies? Do you want to design a survey? Or an experiment?
5. Do you want to write a thesis that relates to your future profession? Would you like your thesis topic or the specific methodological skills you acquire while writing a thesis to be a part of your job market portfolio? Do you see any on-the-job research opportunities?

### 4.2 The thesis proposal

Once a topic for your thesis is selected, the next step of the process is to write a research proposal. This will be done as part of the course 'Thesis Proposal'. Writing a proposal involves a substantial amount of serious work such as finding and reviewing relevant literature, identifying a specific gap in this literature, and formulating a specific research question that is both managerially as well as academically relevant. The key aim of a thesis proposal is to convince your thesis supervisor that the thesis you propose will meet the criteria for a master thesis, and that you will be able to deliver an interesting and relevant study within the available time.



Writing a thesis proposal, i.e. finding a research gap and a relevant research question *in time*, is one of the most difficult parts of the thesis. Make sure to free up all your time in the Thesis Proposal period to keep on working on your proposal. The lecturers of the thesis proposal course will help you with *how* to read academic journals and *how* to look for a gap, but they will not find the gap for you. Your supervisor is the one who will assess the final proposal. You will have contact once with your supervisor, so make sure to make the most of that contact. If you cannot find a good academic research question within the set time frame of the proposal course, you will have to do the thesis proposal course again one semester later, with a different supervisor and topic.

### 4.3 Academic journals

When you are reviewing the literature, a useful (but not exclusive) reference for finding quality academic journals, and therefore articles for your literature review, is the Amsterdam Business School Comprehensive Journal list. You can download this list called 'ABS 2019 journal list' on the ABS website (<http://abs.uva.nl/research/research-policy/research-policy.html>). Besides the names of the journals, this list indicates three pieces of information. First, 'A-journals' versus 'B-journals'. In general, A-journals are the top journals in the field and B-journals the second tier of high-quality peer reviewed journals. Second, the A and B classification is reflected in the 'impact factor'. This is a measure of how often the articles in the journals are cited as a reference in other academic articles. Third, the academic 'field' of the journal relates to the fields of each of the Business School section's specializations (for example ACC = Accountancy, HRM = Human Resource Management and M = marketing). You are not required to exclusively use articles from journals that are on this list. The list merely serves as a possible starting point for searching articles. First, these journals do not cover all possible research areas. Second, articles from journals that are not on this list are not necessarily of low quality. As a rule of thumb, articles that are peer reviewed by other academics meet the minimum quality requirements.

### 4.4 Searching for respondents

Students who will do quantitative research will have to find respondents for their questionnaires. Please take privacy and ethics into account when using databases that were not created for this purpose. Talk to your supervisor about the sources you could use to find and approach respondents. Do not under any circumstances send out general (spam) emails to faculty and fellow students through UvA mailing lists.

#### 4.4.1 EBEC approval

If your research collects data about human (or animal) participants, or uses such data collected in other research projects, you have to get approval from our Economics & Business Ethics Committee (EBEC) before you can start collecting your data. The committee checks whether you will deal properly with issues related to the privacy and ethical treatment of (vulnerable) respondents. You have to apply online for approval through the link below.

<https://www.creedexperiment.nl/EBEC/form1.php>

If you will not approach vulnerable respondents on an ethically challenging topic, you will get immediate online approval through an EBEC nr. However, if on any of the questions your research requires extra care regarding ethical issues, the Committee will have to review your data gathering plans and has to approve it first before you can gather your data. This process may take up to two weeks, so plan this well ahead!

You will have to publish your EBEC approval number on the title page of your thesis. Theses that are based on studies without EBEC approval will not be graded.

#### **4.5 Submission of a thesis**

The deadlines are indicated in table 1.1.

Students are entitled to supervision until the first submission deadline. Make sure that you make the most of your supervision process by sticking to the deadlines. In addition, stay enrolled for the MSc programme until the deadline concerned. Students who wish to take part in the official graduation ceremony of that semester must apply for their graduation no later than 31 January or 31 August.

There are only two dates that you can finish your thesis, the first deadline (end of January or end of June) and the resit date (half of March or half of August). The submission date is leading for your graduation, not the date that you receive the grade. You can immediately apply for your graduation and de-register from the MScBA program the moment you uploaded your thesis on Canvas at the deadline. These requests will be registered conditionally and executed only if the grade is sufficient and will be undone automatically in case of an insufficient grade. (see also 4.5.3)

##### *4.5.1 Format of a thesis*

When submitting the final version of a thesis, it should follow the correct format. Please check chapter 5 of this document for the information that should be provided on the cover page of the thesis, in the abstract, and in the references. Additionally, the students should consider the following elements:

- Page Numbering: Make sure the pages are numbered.
- Tables and Figures: Rely on the format of reputable academic journals. Tables and figures should be generally provided in the body of the text, but additional information and support materials should/might be provided in the appendix. All tables and figures should be numbered, and the text of a thesis should refer to each of the tables/figures provided.

##### *4.5.2 Procedures for submission*

Submit your Master's Thesis via the Canvas page that has been linked to the Master's Thesis course of your track. The submission tool will be opened two weeks before the deadline. Note that only the official submission deadline(s) are the official grading date(s) regardless of when you actually finished your thesis. Your thesis will be automatically checked for plagiarism. For detailed information on how to submit your thesis please check the following link: <https://student.uva.nl/eco/content/az/thesis/step-by-step-guide-to-submit-your-thesis/submit-your-thesis.html>

#### 4.5.3 Steps to graduate

You must stay enrolled for the MSc Business Administration at the UvA up to and including the deadline of the thesis course you are aiming for. In case you have finalized all other components of your 60EC curriculum, these are the last steps before graduating:

1. Hand in your thesis on Canvas before or on the deadline
2. Apply for your degree certificate (graduation) in the same month, after you have handed in your thesis. Your graduation date will be the last day of that month. Here you can find how to apply for your degree certificate:  
<http://student.uva.nl/eco/az/item/graduation-and-requesting-a-degree-certificate.html>
3. Terminate your enrolment in Studielink in the same month, after you have handed in your thesis and applied for your graduation:  
<http://student.uva.nl/eco/az/item/termination-of-enrolment.html>

Steps 2 and 3 can be done as soon as you handed in the final version of your thesis on Canvas and informed your supervisor. As this deadline is already at the end of the month you should quickly do steps 2 and 3 if you do not want to pay one-month tuition more than necessary. You do not have to wait until you receive a grade. In case your grade is insufficient the UvA will automatically undo your termination requests.

#### 4.6 Accessibility of the thesis and confidentiality

The digital version of the master thesis is made available publicly via the university Pierson Revesz library. Your thesis will be public for at least 7 years. If your data are confidential you can indicate this when you upload your thesis. As the thesis is a document that is in (large) part funded by public money, in principle it should be available to everyone. If there are pressing reasons not to publish it, you can indicate that at the upload-option. Another option is to make the name(s) in your thesis anonymous so that the knowledge is publicly available but the (company) data are not.

#### 4.7 Deviations from the normal thesis process

The norm is that you submit your final thesis at or before the first deadline. Any deviations from this may impact your grade:

- Theses that were graded with a sufficient grade (6 or higher) at the first deadline cannot be revised for a higher grade.
- Students that received an insufficient grade at the first deadline can rewrite their thesis before the resit deadline based on the feedback. An insufficient thesis can only be improved to *maximum of a 6*. Beware that students have no right to be supervised anymore in that period!
- If the student does not hand in a final thesis on the first deadline but will need extra time to finalize his/her thesis till the re-sit deadline, this can have consequences on the maximum grade, depending on the reason why the extra time is needed and how the process has been executed so far. Make sure to check in time with your supervisor what the consequences are of any deviation from the regular process.

- Students are not entitled to any supervision between the first and second deadline, except for the feedback after an insufficient grade. If the student needs more feedback after the first thesis deadline, the process may be delayed to the next 'thesis course' and the student will incur a delay of a full semester. So again, be really clear and transparent to your supervisor as soon as the process starts to deviate from the planned process.
- Students who do not hand in a final thesis or fail on the re-sit deadline will receive a NA and will be *automatically registered* for the following thesis course. Beware that the thesis grade can only be registered on the official deadline of the new thesis course, even if the thesis is finished earlier. Supervisors are assigned for one semester, and your supervisor might no longer be available. Always stay in touch with your supervisor and consult him/her when you make your plans.

#### *4.7.1 What to do when deviations occur?*

Students are responsible for their own process and pace. If you foresee a serious delay, please make sure you inform your supervisor and the study advisors timely to diminish the potential damage to your thesis process (and/or grade). The moment you realize that you cannot make a deadline, for whatever reason, or you feel the process is not running as smoothly as you would like, there are several options that you can consider to avoid the consequences of a delay. It is your responsibility to act and to act timely:

- Discuss first with your supervisor if it is related to the content or process of your thesis. Matters of a personal nature do not have to be shared with the supervisor.
- Turn to the study advisors with any problem you may be faced with that is not content-related; be it planning issues, language issues, supervisor issues, psychological issues or personal circumstances. They can help you with almost anything and if not, they can advise where and how to find that help. They could also advise you to turn to the board of examiners if you are entitled to an official delay of the thesis deadline. Make sure to inform your supervisor if any of these actions will lead to a change in the process or content of the thesis.
- If the delay is of your own choosing; e.g., internships, jobs, international trips, you should take the consequences of a delayed thesis into account (see above); So make sure to sign up for the thesis course in the period when you will actually write the thesis and the thesis supervisor has reserved time for your project.

ALWAYS discuss delays with your supervisor, also when the delay will be of a more structural nature, and make sure to discuss a revised process to finish the thesis at a different time/pace and the consequences it will have. If you do not inform the supervisor, we cannot guarantee that s/he will be available at the time that you are ready again to move on and that may cause even more delays.

## 5. Criteria for a master thesis

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### 5.1 Quantitative criteria

A master thesis is 12 credit points, which implies that are expected to spend a total of 12 x 28 hours = 336 hours on writing your thesis, which comes in addition to writing the thesis proposal and the method and analysis workshops.

A master thesis should be between 40-60 double spaced pages, or 12.000 to 18.000 words. This is excluding references and appendices. You may deviate from some of the quantitative criteria given the permission of their supervisor.

### 5.2 Qualitative criteria

A master thesis should be written in English.

A master thesis is a piece of academic work and therefore should be relevant to the academic community. The ideas and findings of the thesis should be linked to the relevant academic literature and contribute to the current level of scientific knowledge. Students should aim to produce work of a publishable standard.

*Research contribution* – You can provide a new way of looking at an old problem, exploit a new source of data, provide a new (critical) perspective on existing knowledge via a detailed and thorough analysis of the literature, deepen existing knowledge or design new research instruments or measures. Requiring a distinct research contribution has several practical implications for the way you approach your thesis that should be stressed at this stage. A master thesis should be a student's own work. Therefore working in groups is not allowed. In certain circumstances, students can cooperate in gathering data. However, the theses that use this data should have a distinct research contribution and focus. The candidate needs to clearly demonstrate independent critical abilities and a comprehensive knowledge of their chosen field, methodology and methods. No textual parts can be the same. It is also not allowed to use parts of work from a bachelor thesis or any other work/assignment submitted for grading at the University of Amsterdam or your home institution.

*Argumentation* – You have to provide detailed and convincing argumentation and support for the claims you make in your thesis. Rely on existing literature and provide a clear structure and a line of argument. Value judgements and personal opinions are not the substitutes for argumentative reasoning.

#### ***Specific qualitative criteria for theses primarily using quantitative methods:***

*Generalizability of results (external validity)* – If your thesis is informed by positivistic methodologies using primarily quantitative methods, your results should be statistically generalizable. Would the same results be replicated in another sample?

*Internal validity* – One of the major difficulties of empirical research using quantitative methods is to show that the findings can really be attributed to causality between the dependent and the independent variables. Consider for example a research in which you

analyze the effect of the quality of accounting standards on the quality of financial statements. You employ a multi-country design to have a variation in accounting rules and find a positive relation between the quality of accounting standards and reporting quality. But is it due to the effect of accounting standards? Can it be that the countries with high level of investor protection, auditing and enforcement introduce high quality standards? In this case the observed positive association may be explained by the effect of enforcement and auditing on reporting quality and not by the accounting standards per se. Or can it be that companies having good corporate governance systems care about their financial reports and therefore apply high quality reporting standards? Your research design should rule out alternative potential explanations for the observed relationship (or at least discuss why the issues cannot be resolved empirically or do not pose a problem for your findings).

*Reliability* – An instrument’s ability to yield comparable results across similar situations. Will other researchers be able to obtain same results if they replicate the analysis of your master thesis?

*Objectivity* – The research process and inquiry should be value free and methods should be structured to ensure objectivity and lack of bias.

***Specific qualitative criteria for theses primarily using qualitative methods:***

While it is often argued that all research must have “truth value”, “applicability”, “consistency”, and “neutrality” in order to be considered worthwhile, the nature of knowledge within the quantitative paradigm is different from the knowledge in the qualitative paradigm. Consequently, each paradigm requires paradigm-specific criteria for addressing “rigour” (in the quantitative paradigm) or “trustworthiness” (in the qualitative paradigm). The criteria below provide a guide to *some* of the key criteria students should pay attention to if they are working in the qualitative paradigm. The criteria focus in particular on demonstrating the trustworthiness and rigour of qualitative studies given the need for research to demonstrate ‘trustworthiness’ (a term often used in place of ‘validity’ in the qualitative researcher’s lexicon), in the sense of being able to demonstrate *both* rigour (process) and relevance (end product).

*Credibility* – This concept replaces the idea of *internal validity*, by which researchers seek to establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of their findings. Instead, it focuses on the degree to which findings make sense. For instance, qualitative researchers can use ‘member checks’. Here participants are given their interview transcripts and the research reports so they can agree/disagree with the researcher’s findings. In addition, credibility is built up through prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observation and triangulation of data.

*Transferability* – Transferability replaces the concept of *external validity*. Instead of aiming for random sampling and probabilistic reasoning, qualitative researchers are encouraged to provide a detailed portrait of the setting in which the research is conducted. The aim here is to give readers enough information for them to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings.

*Dependability* – This concept replaces the idea of *reliability*. Researchers should, as far as possible, provide an audit trail (the documentation of data, methods and decisions about the research) which can be laid open to external scrutiny.

*Confirmability* – Confirmability, replacing the concept of *objectivity*, also invokes auditing as a means to demonstrate quality. For example, the researcher can offer a self-critical reflexive analysis of the methodology used in the research. In addition, techniques such as triangulation (of data, researcher, context) can be useful, albeit not necessary, tools of confirmability.

Some words of caution: All research approaches have their own relative merits and drawbacks. Quantitative research will require some knowledge of statistical procedures or the willingness to acquire such knowledge (e.g., multivariate regression analysis). Qualitative research is not an easy alternative. Even if you don't like statistics, you will still need to understand them in order to criticise and compare other studies for your literature review.

Regardless of which method you choose, you will need to engage in a full critical discussion of why a particular research method best suits your research project. If you are performing research based on interviews, what kind of in-depth knowledge can you obtain from the interviewees that otherwise could not be traced in archival data? Why do you believe that the case of the company/organisation that you use for your research is of interest and has the potential to produce findings that may be theoretically generalizable? Regardless of the type of analysis you choose you should describe and explain each element of the study that was carried out. In qualitative studies, you will need to explain the process by which ideas were developed in your analysis and to include transcripts of interviews as Appendices to your thesis. In quantitative research you will need to provide justification for the choice and selection of the chosen model and variables.

Be careful in collecting and managing the data for your research. You are likely to be asked by your supervisor to present the raw and/or structured data: interview transcripts, answers to the questionnaire, data obtained from financial statements and databanks, sheets containing answers of the interview participants etc.

## 6. Research ethics

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Your research should adhere UvA FEB guidelines regarding fraud and plagiarism. An automatic plagiarism check is run on every submission. You can find more information about the guidelines here:

- <https://student.uva.nl/en/content/az/plagiarism-and-fraud/plagiarism-and-fraud.html>
- [https://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/feb/economie-en-bedrijfskunde-bachelors-en-masters/a-z-engels-sia/teaching-and-examination-regulations/2020-2021-en-oer/201120-uva\\_bsc\\_brochure\\_regels-en-richtlijnen-a5-2020-2021\\_en\\_digi.pdf](https://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/feb/economie-en-bedrijfskunde-bachelors-en-masters/a-z-engels-sia/teaching-and-examination-regulations/2020-2021-en-oer/201120-uva_bsc_brochure_regels-en-richtlijnen-a5-2020-2021_en_digi.pdf)

In addition, your research should adhere to industry standards regarding research ethics. The text below is adapted from the Research Ethics guidelines of Journal of Consumer Research (<https://consumerresearcher.com/research-ethics>), and applies to your thesis.

“We expect all submissions to include data that are honestly and accurately reported according to the accepted best practices of scholarly publishing. You are expected to provide an explanation of any efforts that may constitute selective reporting (e.g., reporting only a subset of the measures collected, failing to disclose results that contradict the main thrust of the paper).

Upon submission and after publication you are required to include a full disclosure of the methods used in your research. This entails providing the information noted below. Information can be presented in the manuscript or in an appendix.

**Data Collection Instruments:** For questionnaires: you must provide either in an appendix all original questionnaires presented to respondents. If questionnaires were generated by an online survey platform (e.g., Qualtrics), the electronic repositories should include the original generating file (e.g., the .qsf file). For qualitative data: describe fieldwork, observation or interview procedures (e.g., types of questions) and how these evolved, as well as description of how data were captured (field notes, audio recording, photographs, etc.). If automated web crawling algorithms or other automated procedures of digital data capture are employed, details should be provided in an appendix.

**Sample (of respondents, data, studies, documents, events):** For primary research involving human subjects, you must indicate: 1) the method of recruitment/selection (e.g., subject pool, online panel, snowball, compensation; 2) the sample sizes used in all studies and how sample sizes were determined; and 3) the number of excluded participants, the exclusion criteria, and their justification.

For meta-analyses, identify databases used, journals searched, publication date ranges, procedures used to contact researchers regarding unpublished studies and evidence of publication bias).

For *all* types of research, data inclusion criteria, stop rules (which may include theoretical saturation) should be described, along with the criteria used to select sample or research



sites. In addition, sample characteristics and other sample-related factors relevant to the research context should be provided.

**Data Collection Procedures:** Provide details about the types of data collected and rationale. Provide details about participants'/researchers' activities in the process of data collection (e.g., study protocol). Describe data collection context and location, stimuli shown to respondents, and the order in which measures/data were collected. If secondary data sources are used, indicate source(s) and time-periods involved. If automated digital data capture is employed, procedures should be rendered as transparent as possible.

**Context:** For lab studies: describe all experimental conditions/manipulations, scenarios, vignettes. For field studies: describe the consumer setting, context rationale, and relevant contextual factors. For ethnography/cultural approaches: describe the choice of context, relevant contextual details, and the theoretical rationale for selecting this context.

**Post-Data Screening:** Describe the method used to screen data after collection (e.g., outliers, attention screens, comprehension screens), cutoffs for screening measures, distribution of eliminated individuals across conditions.

**Data Description:** Report descriptive characteristics (e.g., N's, means, standard deviations), transformations, correlations, intercoder reliabilities, scale reliabilities, final items/items deleted. The number and length of depth interviews should be reported. If formal field notes exist, the size of the corpus should be mentioned. Similarly, photographic evidence should be described in terms of numbers of images. The nature and number of websites, message boards, gaming sites, message threads, and units of social media should be reported. Treatment of missing data should be reported as well.

**Maintaining Participants' Rights:** For primary research, indicate how participants' rights were safeguarded (i.e., by EBEC approval). Describe procedures for managing/archiving data, anonymization and de-identification of data, and procedures for ensuring data security.

### **Data Analysis Transparency Guidelines**

You must provide the information noted below. Information can be presented in the manuscript or in an appendix.

**ANOVA:** Describe the study design, factors, factor levels, whether factors are between or within subjects, cell sizes, covariates and their significance, and results if covariates are not included. Report full ANOVA table and effect sizes.

**Regression:** Indicate which variables are included, in which order. Report regression coefficients (with confidence limits) or standard errors. Specify whether coefficients are standardized or not. In moderated regressions, note which variables are continuous, if variables are centered or standardized, and which values are used to define high and low levels (e.g.,  $\pm 1$  SD).

**Exploratory Factor Analysis:** Clarify use of EFA or PCA, the method of rotation, eigenvalues/% variance accounted for, and standardized factor loadings, correlation matrix of all final scale items, factor correlations (if an oblique method of rotation is used) and items removed through purification.

**Structural Equation Modeling and Confirmatory Factor Analysis:** Describe the model, estimation method (e.g., maximum likelihood), omnibus fit statistics (e.g., Chi-square, df, RMSEA, CFI, Tucker-Lewis Index or Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index, Standardized RMR), parameter estimates, standard errors (z values) for all (including insignificant) paths (in Figure or Table). Describe model modifications made to achieve satisfactory fit.

**Meta-Analysis:** Indicate how variables were chosen for inclusion and exclusion. Report effect sizes and bases (e.g., means, binary data, correlations, risk ratios). Describe whether fixed vs. random effects models are used. Describe procedures for identifying and quantifying heterogeneity. Report confidence or credibility intervals, procedures used to account for small samples or unequal group numbers, methods for weighting study results; description of transformations and model fit (if using Bayesian analysis).

**Qualitative Interpretation:** Describe the analytical procedures used (process by which themes, interpretations, and/or frameworks were developed, usually referencing a particular paradigm or approach — e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology, discourse analysis, abduction, extended-case method, analytic case method, analytic framework, etc.). Describe unit of analysis or types of cases. Describe how data interpretation evolved over time. Describe procedures used to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, verisimilitude, and theoretical generalizability of interpretation (e.g., member checks, negative cases, triangulation, immersion in context, etc.).

**Estimation Details:** Identify the algorithms used (e.g., GMM, 2SLS, ML, EM, MCMC, HMC, VB), estimator characteristics, convergence criteria, run-times, machine learning packages employed (e.g., R or Python packages, their web locations, access versions).

**Simulation Studies:** For papers with custom programming or models, describe various scenarios with parameters both similar to and different from the ones estimated in the paper. Report full details regarding parameter recovery and code correctness.

**Analytical Models:** Describe robustness checks: assumptions, models explored, distributions.

### Providing Data upon Submission

Upon submission, the data used in the research must be made accessible to the supervisor.”

(Journal of Consumer Research, 2021)

## 7. Structure of a master thesis

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Your master thesis should be structured like a research article, such as the ones you encounter while reading literature for your thesis. Additionally, some guidelines in respect of information present on the front sheet of a thesis should be obeyed (refer to the information below). Typically, a master thesis consists of the following elements: (1) title and title page, (2) statement of originality, (3) table of contents; (4) abstract; (5) introduction; (6) literature review (including theoretical framework and/or hypotheses); (7) data and method; (8) results; (9) discussion and conclusions, (10) references and (11) appendices. These elements can appear either in the form of separate sections/chapters or can be merged depending on the presentation format and type of research you carry out.

### *Title page*

The title should describe the content of the thesis accurately and concisely without being too vague or lengthy. In addition to the title, the title page should contain the following information in accordance with faculty guidelines:

- Full name of author
- Student number
- Date of submission and version being submitted (first draft/final)
- The qualification for which you are studying (e.g. MSc. in Business Administration – Strategy Track)
- The name of the institution (e.g., ABS, UvA)
- The EBEC approval number (see paragraph 4.4)
- Name of first (and, if known, second) supervisor

### *Statement of Originality*

In your thesis you will have to include a Statement of Originality confirming that you have written the contents of your thesis yourself.

<b>Statement of originality</b>
This document is written by Student [ <i>fill out your Given name and your Surname</i> ] who declares to take full responsibility for the contents of this document.
I declare that the text and the work presented in this document is original and that no sources other than those mentioned in the text and its references have been used in creating it.
The Faculty of Economics and Business is responsible solely for the supervision of completion of the work, not for the contents.

### *Table of contents*

Following the title page, you provide the table of contents using page numbers, listing all chapter/section/sub-section headings, bibliography, appendices etc. Table of contents should be accompanied by a list of tables and figures and (if desired) acknowledgements.

### *Abstract*

The abstract is a short summary of the thesis, no more than one page long. Maximum word count is 250. In the abstract you outline the research topic/question, background, methodology and research contribution/findings. You can use the abstracts of the journal articles in your literature review as examples.

### *Introduction*

The introduction should “set the scene” for your thesis. This is the place where you should “sell” your work and encourage the reader to continue. Explain your research question and motivation. What research question is going to be answered in your thesis? Why is the topic of your thesis important and interesting for a reader? Provide a very short description of the current state of literature with regard to the answer to the research question (including key articles as appropriate). State your method(s) of investigation providing details of sample and research method applied. In some circumstances it is necessary to provide a justification of your research methodology in the introduction. The introduction should end outlining the structure of the thesis.

### *Literature review*

The literature review provides the detailed (theoretical) background for your empirical study. It should lead to a development of key research questions or, where relevant, hypotheses. Cover key papers in the area of your analysis. Before writing your literature review, think of a clear and logically integrated structure. How are the articles related to each other? What classification of previous research best suits your research question? When referring to articles provide a critical discussion, contrasting existing literature and identify the possible explanations for different findings (for example, use of noisy proxies for some underlying phenomena, different data samples and/or time periods).

### *Data and method*

You should start with a description of the data. Regardless of the type of empirical research you perform, every step you undertake should be explained in detail to make it possible to track and, in certain cases, replicate your findings. If using quantitative methods, explain what variables you choose, how they are measured, your data source(s), how the data is collected, what your sample is and why you choose it.

### *Results*

For quantitative theses, you may want to present some descriptive statistics for your data (for example mean, median, variance, min., max., number of observations). Provide some comments on the distribution of your data. The empirical part of your thesis should also explain the model specification or tests you use to assess statistical significance of your findings. After that you can analyse the data explaining what you are doing (and why).

For primarily qualitative theses, you may have identified key inter-related themes. You need to write these in a coherent, convincing manner supported with interviewee quotations where relevant. You need to aim to produce a rich, contextually bound, and theoretically informed narrative that illustrates the depth of your analysis. Mere description will not suffice; you

need to integrate large amounts of qualitative data into a convincing, coherent narrative. This requires a careful craft-like process of analysis.

#### *Discussion (of results)*

Discuss the significance of your findings. What is the answer to your research question? How does your theory / concept(s) relate to your data analysis? If you find you are unable to answer your research question satisfactorily, why was this? Have you proved/lent support to a particular theory, or corroborated some prior research? What are the implications for real-world practice and/or policy? Is further research necessary to resolve the issues you have raised? If so, what exactly is required? Note that this is a crucial part of your thesis as it demonstrates your ability to think deeply about your findings and place them in context.

#### *Conclusions*

Do not try to say anything new in this section. Summarize your research question, approach, arguments, results, and discussion. Once again, highlight your research contribution(s). You could also give recommendations for further research based on what you found in your own study.

#### *References / bibliography*

Consistent in-text referencing of all sources is required, as well as a full bibliography reference list at the end. APA style referencing is preferred.

**GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR THESIS!**