



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Thesis Manual 2017-2018

University of Amsterdam
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Introduction

Academic writing ability is one of the skills that receives full attention during a university study. By writing papers, essays, reports etc. you will learn skills that will be of great importance later in your career: constructing, developing and writing a clear and systematic research report at an academic level. Writing an academic paper is also a way of increasing one's knowledge in a particular field within the academic programme, and a way of communicating this knowledge to others. Writing a thesis is the final process in achieving a Master's degree and the ultimate testimony of a completed study in Political Science. Writing a thesis is, with good reason, experienced as being the most important, most challenging and for many students also the most difficult part of the study.

Part I of the thesis manual contains the rules and procedures that apply to writing a master's thesis for Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. Part II contains the learning objectives, choice of topic and instructions on lay-out and assessment criteria. This manual is meant for students who are (or will be) writing their theses and their supervisors.

Part 1 – Rules and procedures

1. RESEARCH PROJECTS

The thesis is written within the framework of a research project. Each project can accommodate ten participants. Students are free to choose their project (provided that there is place); the specialisation does not restrict the choice. The thesis must relate not only to the topic of the research project but also to the specialisation. Political Science students choose their research project after visiting the thesis market in November, where the supervisors present their projects in the form of a simple poster presentation. The study adviser and the programme manager organise the thesis market and course registration.

In the course manual of each research project students can find the agreements made regarding supervision, the choice of literature, feedback and interim deadlines.

Each research project has its own theme and supervisor. All research projects have the same basic structure. Each project is divided in a period of two months for the research design and a period of three months for the thesis. During the research design period there will be weekly meetings and peer review. The student can only make a start with the thesis after the supervisor has approved the research design. The supervisor will inform the students at the beginning of the research project about supervision, peer review, interim deadlines and feedback in the research design period and the thesis period. Research design and methodology are an integral part of the research project. In March, students are expected to participate in additional method classes, selected on the basis of their preliminary topic and research question(s) with the approval of their Research Project instructor

2. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Students who are going to write a thesis (not only within a project but also on an individual basis) must meet the entry requirements. They have to have completed the specialisation course and Transnational Politics and at least one master elective. Participation and guidance in a research project is only possible if students have a valid and correct enrolment at the UvA. Grades cannot be registered and diplomas cannot be applied for if the above-mentioned is not in order.

3. DEADLINE

The master thesis is written within a period of five months after the commencement of the research project. The thesis deadline for the research projects in the academic year 2017-2018 is 26 January for first semester RP's and **22 June 2018** for second semester RP's. The right to supervision expires after this deadline. The student must submit a thesis on the above-mentioned deadline, otherwise this will result in a 'fail' and losing the right to rewrite the thesis during the rewrite period.

It is not possible to rewrite a thesis that has been passed in order to achieve a higher grade. It is not possible to apply for an extension of the thesis deadline because of work or an internship.

In the case of exceptional circumstances, such as a chronic disease or a disability, the student needs to contact the student adviser before the start of the research project to discuss the situation. The student needs to bring an official diagnosis of the chronic disease or disability. In case of exceptional circumstances, such as an illness during the research project, the student also needs to contact the student adviser as soon as possible.

4. REWRITE PERIOD

If a thesis fails to meet the minimum criteria for a pass, the supervisor will decide whether the thesis can be sufficiently improved within the rewrite period, i.e. by 31 March (first semester RP) or **31 August** (second semester RP). The opportunity to rewrite is given only once. The tempo in which one has worked is one of the explicit assessment criteria and therefore rewriting will affect the final grade. If by the end of the rewrite period, the thesis is still unsatisfactory, or if the student has been denied the rewrite period, the student will fail the project. The student must then take part in a new research project in the following academic year.

5. SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Submission: The student uploads a pdf version of the thesis to Blackboard and hands in the thesis to the supervisor not only digitally but also two hard copies (one for the second reader). The digital version will be used to check for plagiarism by Blackboard's Ephorus software.

Second reader: Each project group should have more than one second reader. The supervisor appoints the second readers in advance, if necessary with the assistance of the thesis coordinators. Second readers do not read or comment on any written drafts of the thesis; their task is to assess the final product. In the case of clearly insufficient or unstructured work the supervisor may decide not to pass the thesis on to a second reader.

Assessment procedure: After the supervisor and second reader have reached a joint final assessment of the thesis, the supervisor fills in the assessment form and hands it in to the student administration. The supervisor sends a copy of the assessment form to the student. For students who are making use of the rewrite period, a grade slip with the insufficient grade will be handed in to the administration on the first deadline. For students who have dropped out, a grade slip will be handed in with an NAP as result. If the student wishes, a concluding talk can be arranged. A thesis defense is not part of the procedure. However, each RP will organize at least one session near the end of the thesis writing trajectory where all students are expected to present their research results to their RP.. The supervisor and second reader have 15 weekdays to mark the thesis.

Graduation: The diploma application process will be initiated by the registrar. The registrar will check the grades and register a diploma application in SiS for all students who have 30 ECTS (Transnational Politics, specialisation module and two master electives). The student will receive an automatic SiS e-mail with the information that the registrar has applied for the diploma. See also [graduation](#) on the student website. The student has to submit a pdf version of the thesis to the student administration. If this is not taken care of in time, graduation is not possible.

The graduation ceremony will take place in September or October. The students and supervisors will be informed via e-mail about the graduation date and location.. See [graduation](#).

6. INDIVIDUAL THESIS

In the case of special circumstances a student can ask the Examinations Board's permission to write an individual thesis for 21 ECTS instead of taking part in a research project. The individual thesis can be combined with a research internship (see information research internship on student website) or an extra elective of 9 ECTS. Please note: this is a deviation from the regular programme and therefore requires a substantive motivation and approval from the Examinations Board. The rules and conditions in this manual also apply to an individual thesis, supplemented by the following procedure.

If, after reading the course catalogue texts and visiting the thesis market (only applicable for theses in the second semester), a student thinks that he/she has substantive grounds for writing an individual thesis, then he/she can make him/herself known to the thesis coordinator by **1 December** at the latest. If the student wishes to start writing an individual thesis at another moment in time or for a different reason, please contact the [study adviser](#). The thesis coordinator is the track coordinator of your specialisation.

If the thesis coordinator gives his/her approval for writing an individual thesis, then he/she can help find a suitable supervisor and in preparing the request for the Examinations Board. Once the student has found a supervisor and has received approval from the thesis coordinator, the student fills in the web form for a request for the Examinations Board, in which the thesis proposal is uploaded. The request form can be found on the student website A-Z by '[Examinations Board](#)'. The Examinations Board will consult the thesis coordinator and the supervisor before reaching a decision. The grade given on completion of the thesis can only be registered by the administration with permission given by the Examinations Board.

7. RULES REGARDING FRAUD

For papers and theses it is of great importance that a clear distinction can be made between the student's contribution to the assignment and what the student has extracted from other texts. Plagiarism means that one copies or paraphrases another person's work (texts, ideas, data, structure of argumentation etc.) and passes it off as one's own. The

student should ensure that all references and quotes are correctly and fully documented in order to prevent plagiarism. Also students cannot re-use their own earlier work, not even if it had not been graded at the time. Please see the rules on Plagiarism and Fraud on the website <http://student.uva.nl/mpolsc/az/item/plagiarism-and-fraud.html>

8. PUBLISHING THESES

The thesis is added to the UvA thesis repository. These theses are, in principle, public and therefore accessible for a third party. By way of exception the author may make an objection to this, in accordance with the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Science's policy.

Part 2 – Instructions for writing a thesis

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

One expects a Master of Science graduate to be capable of conducting research independently and creatively and to report on this in a scientifically sound manner. The writing of a thesis is more a component of than a consequence of the successful completion of the learning process. This implies that a number of essential skills must be improved upon, if not acquired. In general terms, the following are possible learning objectives:

- The formulating and defining of a research question and the independent setting up of a research design including a clear research strategy and time line.
- Independent conducting of social-scientific research that is focused on a specific problem, whereby one works according to sound methodological principles and research techniques in order to guarantee the relevance, reliability and validity of the research.
- The creative use of the theoretical insights relevant to the problem at hand.
- The ability to draw conclusions from one's own research, which generates new knowledge on the issues discussed.
- Clear, systematic and accountable reporting of the research and the research results, both during presentations and in written work
- To be able to translate the research results into a theoretical-scientific and practical-social meaning (and relevance).

2. CHOICE OF THESIS TOPIC

All research projects are, in principle, open to students from each specialisation. It is the responsibility of students to choose a project that is of relevance to their specialisation.

It is recommended that the student starts thinking about a thesis topic well before actually making a start with the thesis. An important first step in getting acquainted with a topic is to read the course catalogue texts of the research projects and to visit the thesis market in November. The student needs to find a thesis topic that relates to the subject matter of the research project. After choosing and being assigned to a research project, the student will use the first eight weeks of the project to formulate a sound research proposal.

3. CONTENT AND STRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS

Next to choosing the topic and determining the research question, it is wise to think about the requirements that an (approved) thesis has to meet. Talk with the supervisor about the requirements and your expectations and do read this manual and the course manual of the research project thoroughly. It is also a good idea to ask your supervisor for an example of a good Political Science master thesis. Incidentally, all theses can be found in the UvA thesis repository: [Scripties Online](#)

3.1 OUTLINE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

In the research project course manual the student will find the agreements made regarding the thesis proposals, supervision and deadlines. At least one appointment will be made in which the thesis proposal will be discussed for approval.

A thesis proposal contains:

- Working title.
- Description of the topic and the objective of the thesis including a motivation and details of the scientific and social relevance.
- A (preliminary) formulation of the research question.
- Theoretical framework.
- Concise design of the research to be carried out (nature of the data to be collected, the data sources, method(s) used).
- Approximate and well-reasoned preliminary table of contents.
- Preliminary bibliography (reference literature).
- Time schedule (define research time and writing time. Make sure to reserve a sufficient amount of time for the writing process).

It must be clear what the objective of the thesis is: which topic is being addressed and why this is worth addressing.

- The research question must be obviously related to the objective of the thesis and must be clearly formulated. The research question forms a further specification of the topic; it indicates what will subsequently be discussed. The research question generally consists of a main question and a series of questions derived from the main question, operational sub questions. These questions must be posed in such a manner that answering them within the framework of the thesis is possible.
- On the one hand special attention must be paid to framing the topic and the research question, on the other hand also to the broader framework in which these must be placed. For this reason it's important to be well informed on research that has already been conducted on the chosen topic (or a similar or related topic). This can be found for instance, in recent volumes of the principal journals. It must be apparent from the thesis how the research relates to the results of research that has already been carried out.

3.2 MAKING USE OF THEORY

The author should be able to demonstrate being up to date on important political (and other social-scientific) theories that relate to the topic of the thesis.

Theories are for instance used for:

- a. Placing the research in a broader scientific debate.
- b. Defining central concepts in the research and describing the interconnection/relationships between the concepts.
- c. Making a motivated choice of research design and method(s) of data collection and data analysis within the research.

- d. Development and formulation of a hypothesis.
- e. Organising and interpreting the research results.

In all cases the theories should be clear and conveyed with insight, whereby theoretical choices are also justified.

3.3 QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH

The thesis is always founded on research in a broader sense. In the case of theses with a strong theoretical character, the research is usually limited to a literature study. In this case relatively high demands are made on the thoroughness and originality of the study and the care and creativity with which the literature has been processed. Also in this case it's important to ascertain in which manner the theories that have been discussed are used or could be used in empirical research (for verification purposes or otherwise).

Most theses are also based on one's own empirical research, in the form of for instance document study, interviews, a questionnaire, observations or a combination of these. In this case one should take a well thought-out research design as a starting point and careful attention should be paid to:

- a. The translation of theoretical insights and ideas into research steps (operationalisation of concepts, problems of validity and reliability).
- b. The nature of the empirical material (definition and delineation of the research population, selection of cases, representativeness of the data).
- c. The type of research techniques. The choices made should be as well-justified as possible.
- d. The ability to relate theory and empirical results in drawing findings and commenting on the character and significance of these findings.

3.4 CONCLUSION(S)

After reporting and analysing the results of the research, conclusions follow in which the research results are interpreted by relating them to the research question and to the theory that has been used. The questions asked in the formulation of the research question are answered explicitly. If hypotheses have been formulated, then one must indicate to what degree the research results confirm or reject these and why. Likewise the following questions must be answered:

- To what extent can the research results be generalised to cases other than the one being examined or to theory?
- What do the research results reveal about the theory?
- How do the research results relate to the findings and conclusions of other authors? In what way are these results similar, in what way do they differ and how can this be interpreted or substantiated?
- What does the research add to the existing knowledge concerning the topic?
- What practical implications does the research have?

Also it is sometimes important – depending on the objective of the thesis – to give an answer to (one of) the following questions:

- What does the research say about the adequacy of the methods used and the choice of the empirical material? Can methodological recommendations for future research be derived from the research? What improvements can be made in the future?
- Based on the research, which recommendations for policy making can be made?
- What predictions can be made based on the research?

3.5 REPORTING

The following aspects concerning the requirements for the reporting can be distinguished:

1. construction of the line of reasoning, 2. structure of the thesis, 3. stylistic qualities, 4. layout and presentation and 5. length of the thesis.

3.5.1 Construction of the line of reasoning

One should aim at a systematically constructed line of reasoning. There must be an obvious connection between problem, theory and empirical data. The thesis should have a clear line of argumentation, with an explicit line of thought and a clear transition from one chapter to the next and between paragraphs. Conclusions should be a logical result of the preceding argumentation.

3.5.2 Structure of the thesis

The clarity of the line of reasoning is furthered by clear organization, including a good division into chapters and paragraphs. The thesis should however encompass:

- A title page with:
 - Title and possible subtitle
 - Name of the author
 - Names of the supervisor and second reader
 - Month and year of completion
 - ‘Master thesis Political Science’ and specialisation
- (Optional) a short summary (maximum 2 pages), preceding the thesis
- A table of contents.
- An introduction including the objective and topic of the thesis and the formulation of the research question.
- A theoretical framework.
- A chapter on research design in which the methods employed are described and justified as part of the overall design. This should also include explicit reflection on ethical issues raised by the proposed research.
- One or more chapters in which the research results are reported and analysed.
- A conclusion in which the research results are summarised and theoretically interpreted, the questions resulting from the research question are answered and (if desired) in which recommendations and predictions are made.
- Literature and reference sources (Harvard style).
- A list of consulted literature and sources.
- One or more appendices (optional).

3.5.3 Stylistic qualities

It's important to pay careful attention to language. The thesis should be written in good English. A good division into paragraphs promotes the legibility and the clarity of the line of reasoning. Sentences must be grammatically correct (not telegram style) and must be well connected. Unnecessary repetition and irrelevant elaborations must be avoided. Technical jargon can be meaningful and even necessary, but only if it serves the purpose of the content and is clarified in the thesis. Do not depend too much on other authors; aim at establishing an independent line of reasoning written in your own style.

3.5.4 Layout and presentation

Included in the requirements for the layout and presentation are:

- A legible, functional and consistent layout (lettering)
- Use of 1,5 spacing between the lines and moderately wide margins
- Numbering of pages
- Consistent typography with regards to chapter- and paragraph titles
- No spelling- or typing mistakes
- Correct punctuation
- A functional and clear reproduction of diagrams, tables and graphs

3.5.5 Length of the thesis

The length of the thesis should be between 40 to 60 pages (i.e. 16,000 and 24,000 words) pure text (i.e. excluding notes, bibliography and any appendices). The student may deviate from this with permission of the supervisor.

3.6 REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

For information about references and making a bibliography see the bachelor handbook academic skills. An explanation of the Harvard style of reference can be found here: <http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/harvard>.

4. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA THESES

The criteria used for assessing the thesis are as follows:

- Formulation of the research question: clarity and accuracy, originality, explanation and delineation; how is the research question operationalised?
- Construction of the line of reasoning: systematic elaboration of the research question, logical consistency, the connection and continuity among the thesis components, a clear line of argument, and well-founded conclusions.
- Knowledge of the topic of the thesis demonstrated by, for instance, the extent to which and the manner in which one has made use of relevant literature.
- Insight from the perspective of the academic discipline (political science): to what degree and how theories within the discipline are used, justification of theoretical principles, description and implementation of

theoretical concepts (consistency in use, in keeping with the accepted meaning unless there are convincing arguments to do otherwise).

- Quality of the research: manner of collecting material (operationalisation of concepts, research techniques, choice of empirical field), justification of method(s) used and the choices made therein, analysis of the data.
- Verifiability: accurate references and quotation of one's sources, well indicated quotations, footnotes, bibliography, and accountability of any calculations.
- Language: precision, clarity, legibility
- Presentation: layout, spelling, punctuation, orderly lay-out (table of contents, etc.), titles of chapters and paragraphs etc.

Criteria for the assessment of the RP process are amongst others:

- Degree of independence in above-mentioned points.
- Degree of creativity in above-mentioned points.
- Your input in the research project, such as peer review and presentations.
- Communication.
- Passing your deadlines.

MSc Political Science and MSc Conflict Resolutions and Governance,
Thesis Assessment Form, 2017

Name student: Click here to enter text.	Student number: Click here to enter text.
Master's programme/specialisation: Choose an item.	
Course code: Click here to enter text.	Date thesis submission: Please enter date
ECTS: <input type="checkbox"/> 30 (<i>research project</i>) / <input type="checkbox"/> 21 (<i>individual thesis</i>)	
Thesis title: Click here to enter text.	
Grade: Click here to enter final grade.	Checked in Ephorus: <input type="checkbox"/>
Name supervisor: Click here to enter text.	Name second reader: Click here to enter text.
Signature supervisor:	Signature second reader:

The final grade consists of the process grade (20%) and the thesis grade (80%). Please determine each grade separately hereafter. Note: an insufficient thesis grade cannot be compensated by the process grade.

Process:

The process grade is awarded by the supervisor only and reflects the extent of independent working and the quality of participation in the research project (the latter will be neglected for individual thesis projects). The process grade is adjusted downward in case of a resit.

A. Independent working: measure of independence, amount of guidance needed					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

B. Participation: quality of participation in and contribution to RP					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

C. Use of resit:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of resit opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass after first attempt

Overall process grade (20% of final grade):	Please enter grade here.
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Thesis:

The thesis is evaluated jointly by the supervisor and the second reader on the basis of seven aspects. Each aspect receives a score of: Insufficient, Sufficient, Satisfactory, Good, Very good or Excellent (for further guidance on what to expect for each score, see Appendix Thesis Evaluation). There is room for explanation below the scores for each aspect. Important: if one or more aspects are judged as *Insufficient**, the thesis *cannot pass* and needs to be remedied. When most aspects are evaluated as 'Very good' or 'Excellent', a grade above 8 can be awarded. But note: to award an 8 or higher ('cum laude'), the thesis must have been based on independent working (process-criterion A. above) and must not have made use of the resit opportunity (process-criterion C. above). In general, for the final thesis grade, judgement should supplement arithmetic.

1. Research question(s): Clarity, originality, motivation and relevance					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

2. Literature review: Adequate choice of literature; clarity, depth and comprehensiveness of review					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

3. Arguments and claims: Clarity, creativity and consistency throughout the thesis					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

4. Research design: Clarity, adequateness, and quality of design and method(s)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

5. Research execution: Quality of (primary) sources/data, analysis and presentation					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

6. Conclusions: Answer to research question, discussion of limitations and implication					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent

Please explain here

7. Writing, readability, style, formal requirements (including list of references)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient*	<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent
Please explain here					

For a grade above 8 (if most aspects above scored as 'Very good' or 'Excellent', including Independent working and no use of re-sit), please explain which elements of the thesis are of exceptional quality:
Please explain here

Further remarks:
Optional

Thesis grade (80% of final grade):	Please enter grade here
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