

MSc thesis International Finance and Trade

The administrative rules (enrolment, entry requirements, etc) for writing the MSc thesis, in short thesis, are specified in the Course Catalogue ([MSc Thesis International Finance and Trade](#)) as well in the information site for students ([Thesis - Students Economics and Business - University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#)). Thesis supervisors cannot influence these rules such that it is in the student's interest to ensure that he/she fulfils all the relevant provisions. In particular, students that do not fulfil the prerequisites will not be supervised (this is Faculty policy and thus the lecturers are not allowed to deviate from this guideline). Note that the evaluation of the question whether or not the required 20 EC are obtained takes place after the administration has obtained all grades of all exams and resit exams that took place before the end of the first week of block 5. Again, lecturers are bound by the rules of the faculty and cannot deviate from the formal requirements.

Students need to formally and explicitly enrol for the thesis (see the aforementioned information site for students). The thesis at our Faculty is, from an administrative point of view, treated as a course. Hence, there is a "first exam" as well as a "resit exam" and that means that there is a first round for submissions and a second round for submissions (there is no exam in the sense of a public defence, etc). Please consult the aforementioned website from the Course Catalogue on the precise timing of the various submission dates for the thesis. If students do not submit in the first exam round but only in the resit round, they will not have a further resit (i.e. no further chance to submit) in the same academic year. Hence, if the student submits the thesis in the resit round of the academic year 2021-2022 and the thesis is of insufficient level, the student will need to submit a revised version in the academic year 2022-2023 (and obviously stay enrolled in the university). Submitting the thesis at the resit or in the next academic year does not prevent the student from achieving a high mark, i.e. there are no ceilings as to the maximum grade for submissions after the first round.

The "exam" is set at the 15th of July and the "resit" is set at the 15th of August of the academic year in question. Students that are not able or not willing to submit the final version of the thesis on the 15th of July do not have to take any action on the 15th of July and **thus certainly should not upload any preliminary text on the 15th of July**. These students then will receive automatically an "NAP" for the "first exam round" of the 15th of July. Whether or not this "NAP" allows the student to obtain a "cum laude" can be found on [Cum Laude - Students Economics and Business - University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#).

Students who want to write their thesis on the basis of an internship should first examine under which conditions this is possible (see the aforementioned information site for students). Obviously, they should contact the track coordinator before making detailed plans with the institution involved. After all, the thesis topic must be suitable for a thesis within the track International Finance and Trade.

For the track International Finance and Trade, there are a number of additional requirements and guidelines, as written down in this document. The intention of the text below is to guide the student towards writing an excellent thesis.

General objectives of the thesis

The MSc thesis is an academic text that reports on scientific research that has been carried out by the student. It should demonstrate that the student is able to address a relevant research question in a motivated and verifiable manner in which process he/she will be guided by a (thesis) supervisor. Writing a thesis requires discipline, determination, and is very time consuming. The thesis should be original, which obviously is not the same as for instance developing a new economic theory (the latter is the goal of the PhD-thesis). It typically means that the student analyses a topic on the basis of existing material without it being a copy of existing work (e.g. by extending the estimation period, by including new variables, presenting a discussion on the applicability of an argument for a different country, etc). It should be clear what the student's own contribution is and what is taken from the

literature. Theses that fail to comply with such minimum standards will not yield a pass and in the worst case can even be seen as an attempt to commit fraud.

An empirical/econometric application may but must not be included. For some topics, including an econometric application is obviously required (e.g. “The real appreciation problem in the Economic and Monetary Union” cannot be studied without an empirical verification unless the author extends a theoretical model or examines how real appreciation is to be measured from a purely methodological point of view). However, there are ample topics that can be covered within a high-quality literature survey (e.g. “The current state and shortcomings in modelling approaches to economic concentration”). Other topics simply cannot be supported by regression analyses (e.g. “The merits and demerits of various proposals to stimulate research into malaria vaccines”). The student should be aware that empirical applications may look easy but that they are not and that they require a substantial amount of prior thinking on the required data, the availability of and treatment of data, the use of specific techniques and variables (two recent examples of weak designs: claiming that an estimate is significant without having examined the characteristics of the error term, estimating a definition obviously gives an R^2 close to unity but really makes no sense, ...).

Suggestions on writing academic texts can be found in a file that can be downloaded from [Dr. D.J.M. \(Dirk\) Veestraeten - University of Amsterdam \(uva.nl\)](#): please read that document carefully and, of course, apply its suggestions.

Structure

At the end of the Research Seminar, the student has finished writing a preliminary version of the research question, the table of contents, introduction, literature review, and the list of references. In the thesis, the student expands the literature review and moves to theoretically/empirically answering the research question. A typical structure of the thesis would be: title page, table of contents, introduction, literature review (but please give it a more exciting title than “literature review”) and discussion of the required background (e.g. recent economic performance of Ireland if the thesis examines FDI in Ireland), the theoretical/empirical analysis, conclusions, references, and appendices (if any). The analysis part forms the main body of your thesis in which the student describes the data (if any), model, argumentation, estimation method and choice that are made in the regression analysis (if any) and derives the results and conclusions. The analysis part should also obviously form a “substantial” part of the thesis, i.e. the thesis should be “appropriately” balanced.

Layout and size

The thesis should comprise between 10000 and 15000 words, i.e. about 35 to 45 pages (font size 12). Writing the thesis is also an exercise in treating a topic in sufficient depth within a limited number of words. Students can deviate from these numbers only after explicit and prior agreement from the thesis supervisor. These numbers apply to everything in the thesis (text, footnotes, appendices, reference list, endnotes, etc). Students will be asked to reduce the size of the thesis if they fail to respect the aforementioned upper limit. This practice follows the University’s guiding principle of equal treatment since writing 20000 words obviously allows for a deeper treatment of the topic and would be inappropriate towards those that have respected the upper limit of 15000.

The first page of the thesis should specify the name of the student, the title of the thesis, the university in question (University of Amsterdam), the school (Amsterdam School of Economics), the study programme (MSc Economics), the track, the name of the thesis supervisor, the name of the second reader and the date. As the thesis will be made available on the internet and thus can be seen by the entire populace of this planet and beyond, specifying the student’s home address or email address on the first page is maybe not a wise thing to do.

On the second page of the thesis, the student is required to formally state that he/she presents original work (“the Statement of Originality”). More details can be found via the aforementioned information site for students.

Writing and receiving comments on the thesis

It is advisable to hand in a first version of each chapter when that chapter is ready (around the date that you specify in the preliminary table of contents). The supervisor then comments on this text and the student and thesis supervisor then can discuss the comments that are not clear and elaborate on other potential problems, extensions, etc. This gives the thesis supervisor the opportunity to give timely feedback and avoid at an early stage that the student may move in the wrong direction (e.g. chapters that are way too long, a research design that actually does not allow answering the research question, etc). The text that the student hands in should be the best that the student can produce: the chapter in question should be complete such that the supervisor does not have to start guessing whether the author will or will not include this or that. The student should also always include the complete table of contents, all references and use page numbers. Supervisors cannot be expected to read through materials of which, for instance, the language and the numbering of tables have not been checked. Incomplete and/or inferior chapters will be immediately returned to the author and will also negatively impact upon the final mark for the thesis (see below: the “process” enters into the determination of the final mark for the thesis). The better each submission is, the more time the thesis supervisor can spend on evaluating and commenting upon the important parts of the thesis (given the limited time that is allocated for supervision), the better the comments and ultimately the better the quality of the thesis will be and obviously the higher the final grade will be.

Penultimate (99%) version

Having discussed the individual chapters, this 99% version is the first complete draft. It is the best version that the student can produce. The thesis supervisor will read it and give the student additional comments for improvements for instance regarding the coherence of the various chapters, the flow of the thesis, etc. After this last round, the student has to hand in the final version of the thesis. This means that he/she submits an electronic copy to the supervisor and also uploads the thesis via *Canvas* (where it automatically will be checked upon plagiarism).

Data file

If the student performs an empirical analysis, the student has to submit a file when he/she submits the final version of the thesis that documents the construction of the data (this file is to be sent by email to the supervisor, i.e. should not be uploaded in *Canvas*). This is to stimulate students to carefully keep track of all steps taken in the empirical analysis, organise the data in a conveniently arranged way, both of which are extremely important in empirical research, and to enable others to reproduce the regression results. This procedure is actually akin to publishing the thesis in an academic journal for which one has to make the data file available on the Internet: it should be self-contained and easy to understand for outsiders. The file should be in Excel format, readable in Microsoft Office, and contains:

- Worksheet GeneralInfo: title, author, date, and other general information, references to data sources, definitions, and so on.
- Worksheet RawData: here we find put the raw data.
- Worksheet DerivedData (possibly spread over multiple sheets): values derived from the raw data, that is, values of the variables that are used in a regression analysis, for example. Using the variable definitions given in the thesis and the raw data, the supervisor should be able to derive the values in order to check them.
 - If the student performs the data transformations in Excel, the student should use formulas were possible (copy-paste is ad hoc and error-prone and should be avoided).
 - If the student has used Stata or Eviews or so for the data transformations, he/she should add to the Excel data file the Stata/Eviews files that describe the process from the raw data to the derived values (think of *.do and *.dta files for Stata and *.prg and *.wfl files for Eviews).

Note that these are just guidelines. For each specific case, it might be better to somewhat deviate from them. In the end, it should be clear and easy for the thesis supervisor to check and reproduce the results that the thesis claims to have obtained.

Grading

The grading of the thesis will be based on the process (independence of the student, attitude of the student, etc) and obviously the quality of the submitted final version. There is no thesis defence. The grade for the thesis is based on:

- Final version of the thesis. The thesis supervisor and the second reader will focus on the statement of the research problem, structure of the text, originality, choice and processing of the existing literature and research methods, quality of the analysis, quality of the conclusion, use of language, and technical presentation. Of particular importance are:
 - Text structure: that is, a logical ordering of chapters, of sections in chapters, of paragraphs in sections, and of sentences in paragraphs. Avoid using information before one has explained it and thus present clear definitions of all (technical) terms at an early stage in the thesis. Getting a good structure is difficult and requires substantial trial and error. This stage should not be underestimated as the thesis should guide the reader in a logical manner from the introduction to the research question to the answering of that question.
 - Quality of the analysis: one can use a theoretical model, econometric analysis, or descriptive analysis, for instance. Developing a theoretical model or doing a sophisticated data analysis is difficult, but can result in a very high grade. This also indicates that these are not necessary for passing. A convincing literature review in which the author shows his/her ability to apply the relevant concepts of economic theory, capture the main ideas, pitfalls and shortcomings can also give a high grade if performed very well. Moreover, it may be superior to an empirical analysis that is unconvincing or from which it becomes clear that the author is not entirely mastering the techniques and design.
- Attitude of the student during his/her work, such as independence and pace of work, quality of intermediate versions, and how suggestions have been handled. Students obviously can disregard suggestions, but always saying “no” is not signalling a (self-)critical attitude and drive to improve the quality of the thesis.
 - By independence we mean that we highly appreciate it if the student comes up with his/her own research questions and design, own suggestions for a model, interesting case studies, and so forth, but that does not mean that students should avoid help from their thesis supervisor and/or that thesis supervisors do not want to give input and feedback in this stage. It is natural that students need some guidance, so they should not hesitate to contact their thesis supervisor. For instance, designing an empirical model is far from easy and full of potential pitfalls that are sometimes obvious to those that are already somewhat longer active in academic research. The thesis supervisors perfectly know that and their job is to assist students in improving models and getting around such pitfalls. So, high-level questions, uncertainties, etc are welcome. However, a passive approach of “please tell me what I should do” or asking things that could have been answered easily by a quick look at the literature both do really not give a good impression. Students that somehow get stuck whilst writing the thesis should immediately contact their thesis supervisor since a lack in progress is known to be demotivating.
 - Pace of work includes taking more time than normally needed for completing the thesis. More specifically, if students need more time than usual and/or seriously violate the time schedule set up initially, the thesis grade will be lower, unless the thesis supervisor is convinced that there were compelling reasons for the delay. In the thesis set-up and paper for the Research Seminar, students will have to specify at which date the chapters in question will be ready. These dates are broad guidelines, but obviously it is in the student’s interest to realistically set them and respect them (if possible).
 - The quality of the intermediate versions plays a role in the sense that submitting texts that display a lack of serious effort and require extensive comments and revisions harm the final grade. Students will obviously receive many comments and critiques (with the

constructive view of lifting the thesis to a higher level), but it is clear that the need to give many comments and critiques on a chapter of debatable quality does not convey a good impression. This obviously also does not mean that we expect perfection in intermediate versions.

Taking more time than expected

The section on the determination of the final grade indicated that taking “too much time” for the thesis is to be avoided and is not seen as pointing to a good research attitude. Of course, the thesis supervisor realises that it is not easy to plan and execute a thesis (e.g. the collection of data may take more time than expected). Students are advised to inform the thesis supervisor if they are likely to miss a deadline. In the case of unreasonable delays and substandard communication, the supervisor may end supervision. If the student then still wants to obtain a sufficient grade for the thesis, he/she has to start with a new research topic and thus write a completely new thesis.