

Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's thesis: Intended learning outcomes, assessed areas, grading scale and criteria for each grade

Master's thesis (30 cr)

Thesis description:

A master's thesis is an academic study included in a second-cycle degree and intended to familiarise students with conducting social science research. The length of a master's thesis is 50–70 pages.

Learning outcomes:

After completing the thesis, students will be able to

- Choose a justified research topic in the field of social sciences, compose a research question, design a study and implement the different phases of a research process
- Appropriately utilise previous research, concepts, theories and material available in their field in accordance with research ethics and good scientific practice
- Generate results and clarify their relationship to previous research
- Assess their own research critically
- Create a clear and logical thesis structure and produce good, grammatically correct academic writing

Master's thesis assessment criteria at the University of Helsinki and specifications to them at the Faculty of Social Sciences

1. Research topic and purpose

- Justifying the research topic and its scientific and social significance
- Defining the research topic sensibly with regard to the purpose and scope of the study
- Defining a clear research problem

2. Knowledge of the research field and related theories as well as use of literature

- Using research literature critically and analytically to justify and solve the research problem
- Selecting theories, concepts and literature relevant to the research topic
- Using previous research relevant to the research topic
- Identifying connections and relationships in the field of study and the relevant literature

3. Material, acquisition of material and analyses

- Selecting provided or self-acquired material that is of high quality and suitable for addressing the research problem and critically assessing the methods used to collect the material
- Describing and justifying the method of analysis comprehensively
- Ensuring that the research problem, material and analysis method are compatible
- Using methods in a critical and evaluative way
- Performing consistent, accurate and thorough analysis
- Considering research ethics
- In the case of a theoretical study, clearly defining the research question and literature, and specifically distinguishing between the research material and reference literature

4. Research results and reporting

- Addressing the research question in the results
- Reporting the results clearly and logically
- Illustrating the relationship between the images, diagrams and the text
- Specifying the relationship between the research results and previous research

5. Discussion of the results and presentation of conclusions

- Basing the conclusions on the results
- Drawing thorough, reliable and insightful conclusions
- Examining the research process and results critically and thoroughly
- Presenting new research problems and considering opportunities for application

6. Structure, clarity and general polish of the thesis

- Using a clear structure
- Mastering academic prose and using grammatically correct language
- Distinguishing between the author's own interpretations and the information presented in sources as well as incorporating these two elements clearly and seamlessly
- Using references logically and appropriately
- Using an appropriate layout and suitable appendices

The final grade awarded for a master's thesis is not entirely based on the average of the different areas assessed. Some areas may not be applicable or may merit more attention and thereby affect the weighting of the assessment.

The grading scale for a master's thesis included in a second-cycle degree from the University of Helsinki and criteria for each grade by the Faculty of Social Sciences

Thesis grading scale:

The learning outcomes set for master's theses are described in the curriculum of the relevant degree programme, which is approved by the Faculty Council. Master's theses are graded on the following scale: 5 = Excellent, 4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Satisfactory, 1 = Passable, 0 = Fail.

5 (Excellent): The thesis is of an exceptionally high quality and demonstrates the author's academic maturity, critical thinking skills and thorough familiarity with the topic. The author frames the topic and justifies his or her perspective appropriately based on a diverse selection of relevant research. The author formulates the research problem skilfully on the basis of previous research and theories. The author provides an excellent description of the material and methods. He or she presents an analytical justification for their use, which is flawless and insightful with regard to the framing of the research question and shows that the author understands the consequences of his or her choices. The author presents a clear analysis of the results and conclusions. The thesis includes argumentative conclusions, which link the discussion of the results to previous research. The thesis constitutes a coherent and consistent whole and demonstrates independent and progressive effort. The author identifies and insightfully discusses any ethical issues.

4 (Very Good): The thesis is of a very high quality and demonstrates the author's all-round familiarity with the topic. The author adopts a critical and independent perspective. The author frames the research problem sensibly on the basis of a carefully selected theoretical framework and relevant research. The author provides an appropriate description of any material and methods, presents an analytical justification for their use and applies them correctly. The thesis covers all essential issues in a logical order and constitutes a clear and consistent whole.

3 (Good): The thesis constitutes a sound and sensible whole and includes diverse research relevant to the framing of the research problem. The research problem is based on a theoretical background. The author presents a sufficient description of any material and methods, which are suitable for solving the research problem. The implementation and reporting of the different sections of the thesis show that the student has mastered the steps required to complete a research project. The implementation of specific areas may be inconsistent. The thesis does not include significant defects related to content, implementation or form.

2 (Satisfactory): The thesis includes the components required for a successful research process, and the author handles these logically. The thesis

constitutes a comprehensible whole. While the author adopts a sensible perspective, the thesis contains some practical defects relevant to solving the research problem. However, the student completes the different steps required to address the research problem. The author describes the framing of the research question, the relevant concepts, the selected research literature and any material and methods. However, the grounds for using these to address the research problem are weak in some key respects. The thesis includes defects or deficiencies related to content, implementation or form.

- 1 (Passable): The thesis covers some essential issues in a somewhat logical order. The student noticeably aspires to conclude an academic thesis, but the practical implementation is deficient. The phases designed to address the research problem are disconnected or somewhat deficient, and the argumentation is unclear. The framing of the research question is insufficiently linked to the reference literature, and the selected concepts are unsuitable for solving the research problem. The author provides an insubstantial description of any material and methods and clearly struggles with solving the research problem.
- 0 (Failed): The thesis is fragmented and illogical and does not constitute a whole. The research problem, selection of concepts and the choices made to address the research problem are unclear. The author does not present reference literature relevant to the topic or only presents a random selection of irrelevant literature. The structure of the research report and the use of references are clearly defective. Overall, the thesis represents a style of text other than an academic thesis because it includes major defects or deficiencies related to content, implementation or form.

Additional information (not to be included in the published grading scale):

Grade 5: *laudatur* and strong *eximia cum laude approbatur*

Grade 4: weak *eximia cum laude approbatur* and strong *magna cum laude approbatur*

Grade 3: weak *magna cum laude approbatur* and nearly all instances of *cum laude approbatur*

Grade 2: the weakest instances of *cum laude approbatur*, and *non sine laude approbatur*

Grade 1: *lubenter approbatur* and *approbatur*, excluding the lowest scores

The previously accepted *approbatur* grades that barely passed will no longer be accepted. According to the Faculty's master's thesis working group's statement in the spring, the previous written description of the grade *approbatur* refers to a body of work that can hardly be considered an academic thesis.

Grade 0: The weakest instances of *approbatur* and *improbatur*