

# Guidelines on writing a Bachelor or Master thesis

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## General remarks

- Great that you are interested in writing a Bachelor or Master thesis at my chair!
- Please read these guidelines carefully to ensure a smooth process and to increase the chances of a mutually satisfactory outcome.<sup>1</sup>
- Please read all the official university documents as well. It is your job to ensure that you follow all the rules and stick to the deadlines.
- I supervise Bachelor/Master theses in development economics, political economics, and public economics.
- I do not reject students based on their grades or the number of other supervisees.
- I teach Bachelor and Master courses in the economics and the international affairs programs. Ideally you have taken one of these courses. Otherwise, please explain why you would like to write your thesis at my chair and why you are well prepared to do so.
- There are three possible types of theses:
  1. Empirical (i.e., econometric/quantitative) analysis of an interesting and relevant question. This type is strongly recommended for all students.
  2. Extension of a formal theoretical model. This type is an alternative for strong students.
  3. Discussion of a policy-relevant topic based on a thorough literature review. This type is an alternative for Bachelor (but not Master) students. It does not regularly lead to high grades as it is difficult to make a substantial contribution beyond the previous literature.
- I recommend writing your thesis in English. Bachelor (but not Master) students can also write in German.

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<sup>1</sup>These guidelines are relevant if and only if you consider writing a Bachelor/Master thesis at my chair. Other professors may have different ideas and procedures.

## Research proposal

- I do not “offer” topics. You have to develop your own idea(s) and write a research proposal of 3–5 pages.
- If you are uncertain about the potential suitability of a topic, you can send me an email before drafting the proposal.
- The proposal should include:
  1. Research question and a short motivation why it is interesting and relevant.
  2. Short overview of the relevant literature and how your thesis would contribute to it.<sup>2</sup>
  3. Data sources, data description, and data processing (if applicable).
  4. Methodology, e.g., empirical specification.
  5. Prospective structure of the thesis.
- You should submit your proposal, your current grade transcript and a short CV to roland.hodler@unisg.ch.
- I may ask you to revise your proposal (based on my comments).
- If your original or revised proposal is appropriate (in its current form or after some modifications), we will schedule a meeting – typically on a Monday afternoon.
- You should bring the registration form for Bachelor/Master theses to this meeting for signature. The title of your thesis will be jointly determined.
- Use this meeting to ask all your open questions related to your thesis.

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<sup>2</sup>Many students underestimate the quality differences across academic journals and some get sidetracked when building on articles published in low-quality journals. I recommend focusing on the following journals:

- Top-5 journals: American Economic Review, Econometrica, Journal of Political Economy, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Review of Economic Studies.
- Some other good general-interest journals: *Economica*, *Economic Inquiry*, *Economic Journal*, *European Economic Review*, *International Economic Review*, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, *Review of Economics and Statistics*.
- Some good journals for development economics: *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, *Journal of Economic Growth*, *World Bank Economic Review*, *World Development*.
- Some good journals for political and public economics: *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, *American Political Science Review*, *European Journal of Political Economy*, *International Tax and Public Finance*, *Journal of Public Economics*, *Public Choice*.
- Good non-technical journals: *Journal of Economic Literature*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.
- Best working paper series: CEPR, NBER.

## Grading

- You should send your thesis (in pdf) as well as your data and do files (preferably in Stata format) to roland.hodler@unisg.ch when you submit your thesis.
- I care about academic honesty and correct quotation (see “Fact sheet: Quotation and plagiarism” on StudentWeb). Plagiarism and ghostwriting are the worst academic crimes and deserve severe punishment!
- I care about your answer to your research question and your contribution to the literature, not about all vaguely related things you have read or thought while writing your thesis.
- I care about the quality of your argument(s) and your empirical/theoretical analysis. Thereby, I also care about you noticing the strengths and weaknesses of your approach.
- I care about intersubjective validity. For example, in case of an empirical analysis, your thesis should be explicit about how you constructed your dataset and what regressions you ran.
- I care about the readability and structure of your thesis.
- I do *not* care which reference style you choose as long as you apply it consistently.
- I do *not* care about the length of your thesis and will never misinterpret quantity as a sign of quality. By the way, John Nash got the Noble prize for his PhD thesis of 28 pages.