

Guidelines for BA and MA Theses

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The following aims to give students some guidance when thinking about writing a BA or MA thesis under my supervision. You can find general guidelines by the Department of Economics here.

1 Topic and process

I am happy to supervise (BA and MA) theses with a focus on microeconomic theory and behavioral economics. I expect you to write your thesis in English. In terms of methods, I generally supervise theoretical or experimental theses. If you have an applied question in mind, I'm probably not the right person to supervise your thesis. If you think there may be a fit and you would like to write your thesis under my supervision, please send me an email with your CV, current transcript of grades, and a brief outline of your idea. If you don't have an idea, please indicate what topic(s) would be of interest to you.

Typically, we will then try to agree broadly on the topic via email before we meet in person (or have a call) to agree on three key points. First, the specific research question and (more broadly) the method you want to employ to study the question. Second, the submission date. Third, a date for a half-way meeting, at which we discuss your progress and I give you feedback on some parts of the thesis you have already prepared.

After you submit the written thesis, you will receive your written grade together with written feedback within two weeks (except if I am on vacation at the time). The oral evaluation will then take place no later than one month after the written grade is communicated.

2 Evaluation

I evaluate BA and MA theses along the same dimensions, while the grading takes into account whether it is a BA or MA thesis. The final grade consists of a written and an oral component. Both component grades are awarded in quarter-grade steps; the weighted final grade is then rounded to the nearest half grade (standard rounding). It is not necessary to pass both components independently.

Written thesis (60%)

For the written thesis, I consider the following dimensions:

Research Question: A clear and well-articulated research question should be posed and answered.

Literature Review: A thorough literature review shows a good understanding of the literature and allows you to place your research in the context of the literature.

Research method: Theoretical work should feature (1) an economic motivation, (2) a model, (3) statements of the results, (4) proofs (or numerical analysis) that establish the results, (5) an economic discussion of the results. Experimental work should feature (1) an economic motivation, (2) formulate the hypotheses, (3) describe potential mechanisms, (4) describe the design, (5) address practical issues such as sample size and what analysis will be necessary.

Presentation of the thesis: Clear and accessible structure and formatting, good writing and appropriate style, consistent citation style.

The more original work your thesis contains, the higher the chance of getting an excellent grade. You can also do a deep-dive into 1–2 particularly relevant papers by other authors, offer a careful discussion and thus show your understanding of the topic at hand. This may still allow for a good grade, but it lowers your chances of getting an excellent grade.

Try to keep your thesis as concise as possible. This is harder than writing a long and verbose thesis and thus allows you to showcase your skill. While there is no hard limit, I suggest you have a length of at most 30 pages in mind when planning and writing the thesis.

Oral evaluation (40%)

The oral evaluation serves as the primary means of verifying that the written thesis reflects your individual understanding and performance. It consists of a 10-minute presentation followed by a 20-minute discussion, conducted in the same language as the written thesis. A second person will be present to take the minutes. Slides are not required but recommended, notes are permitted, and the time limit is strictly enforced.

The presentation should present the thesis as submitted. The 10 minutes are best used to convey the research question, approach, and key results clearly. You should, however, be prepared to discuss the written feedback during the discussion. I consider the following dimensions:

Presentation quality: Clear and well-structured presentation of the thesis within the time limit.

Mastery of the thesis: You can explain your model, results, and reasoning in detail, and answer specific questions about your own work (e.g. proof steps, design choices, key assumptions).

Critical reflection: You can identify limitations of your own work, discuss alternative approaches, and engage constructively with critique.

3 Use of AI tools

LLMs and other AI tools may be used when writing the thesis. You must disclose their use in a dedicated section at the end of the thesis, similar in spirit to the “Selbständigkeitserklärung”. This section should describe which tools were used, in which parts of the thesis, and in what way. If you did not use any AI tools, please state this explicitly. Detailed logs or transcripts of prompts are not required. The oral evaluation serves as the primary means of verifying that the written thesis reflects your individual understanding and performance.

4 Further information

- There are different ways to structure your thesis. Typically, I would expect: title page, abstract, introduction, main text (potentially with subsections), conclusion, references, appendix, declaration of independent work (“Selbständigkeitserklärung”), declaration of AI tool use (see the section on Use of AI tools).
- There is a collection of FAQ on the department’s website which may be useful.
- I recommend using \LaTeX to write your thesis, especially if you write a theoretical thesis. Overleaf is a convenient browser-based editor that requires no local installation and is a good starting point.
- Here’s a potentially useful document on economic writing style.