

Guidelines for writing a master's thesis

As part of the master's program of Sociology at the University of Potsdam, a master's thesis must be written. Depending on the study regulation, it has to amount to 24 or 30 ECTS/LP. You need to meet certain criteria in order to register your thesis. The formal guidelines for the master's program of Sociology can be found below.

The students are expected to work on a topic independently and in accordance with scientific standards. The skills to do that can be acquired in the colloquium for the writing of final theses of Prof. Dr. Verwiebe. There, you will have the opportunity to share and discuss your ideas and outline, though you cannot enroll in the colloquium on Puls.

Counselors and subject areas

Prof. Dr. Verwiebe, Dr. Nina-Sophie Fritsch and Dr. Lena Seewann are responsible for supervision.

A master's thesis written at the Chair of Inequality Research and Social Stratification Analysis can cover a wide range of topics and research designs. Among others, the following topics can be of interest:

Subject areas

- Poverty and deprivation
- Occupational biographies and career trajectories
- Gender and education
- Labor market, professions and social inequality
- Digitization
- Discrimination and social exclusion
- Mobility, migration and forced migration
- Religion and secularization
- Urban sociology and change
- Change of values and attitudes
- Welfare systems and politics
- Health
- Family, change of family structures

You should choose your topic yourself and ensure your counselor agrees with it. You can use either quantitative, qualitative or theoretical designs. Two and more students can write a master's thesis together only if responsibilities for each part are explicitly stated. The students are assessed individually. The work load increases with every additional student.

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used. Some examples are:

- Document analysis and case studies
- Using standardized data
- Internationally comparative data (e.g. survey data)
- Development and testing of measuring tools
- Longitudinal studies and temporal developments
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups
- Regional data
- Webscraping and Big Data analysis
- Image and video analysis

Please note: The chair can assist you if you are interested in conducting a secondary analysis of already existing survey data (e.g. micro-census, European Value Study, SOEP). Please contact the Chair's secretariat for more information.

Procedure

Once you have decided on both a subject area and a (rough) research question, please contact the secretariat (sozialstruktur@uni-potsdam.de) to make an appointment for a first meeting.

First meeting

In order to receive a binding confirmation and to hold a first meeting, you need to submit a written exposé of four to five pages. It should include a short summary of the research project, the research question, a preliminary table of contents and bibliography, a title page and, lastly, the anticipated schedule.

After receiving the binding confirmation and holding the first meeting, you can discuss your research topic, its realization and possible support more closely with your counselor (who is usually your first reviewer). The confirmation is limited to six months – approximately the time needed to finish a master's thesis. If you need more time, terms need to be arranged with your counselor.

Further procedure

- Agree upon the topic and the thesis' title with your counselor and choose a second reviewer in accord with your counselor.
- Let both reviewers sign the form *Verbindliche Mitteilung der Betreuer/Zweitgutachter für Bachelor- und Masterarbeiten*.
- Pass said form to Dr. Kletzin.
- Add your final topic/the title of your thesis to the form *Themenvergabebogen*.
- Both reviewers sign said form which the Chair for Inequality Research and Social Stratification Analysis then hands to Dr. Kletzin.
- The examination board approves the application by signing it.
- The research topic can be picked up timely at the examination office at Neues Palais – on to the registration.

Registration of the thesis at the examination office

Once the examination board has approved your application, you can register your thesis:

- When your research topic is approved, you need to register your thesis at the examination office within a week.
- If you miss the deadline, a new research topic needs to be approved.
- If you register your thesis in person at the examination office, the registration will be immediately recorded in the examination system.
- The due date will be determined and disclosed.
- The form *Themenvergabebogen* is handed back to the student including both registration date and submission deadline.

Final meeting

Three weeks prior to submission, you should meet your counselor to discuss the final version of your thesis. Afterwards, you can give your thesis its finishing touches. This mandatory final meeting is as important as the first meeting (see above).

Writing the master's thesis

Formal Guidelines

Master of Sociology (study regulation starting winter semester 2014/15)

„(1) Once the student has attained 90 ECTS/LP, she or he is entitled to the immediate allocation of a topic for her or his master's thesis. Should the appointment of ECTS/LP be delayed, it is sufficient to both have attained 60 ECTS/LP and be enrolled in examinations that according to § 9 Abs. 4 or Abs. 5 BAMA-O total another 30 ECTS/LP. (2) The master's thesis and its disputation amount to 30 ECTS/LP. It has to be finished within six months and 90 pages DIN A4 should not be exceeded. Furthermore, § 30 BAMA-O applies.“ translated and paraphrased from: Auszug aus den Amtlichen Bekanntmachungen Nr. 16 vom 11.9.2014 – pp. 1221 - 1242.

Master of Sociology (study regulation starting winter semester 2020/21)

„(1) The master's thesis and its disputation amount to 24 ECTS/LP. (2) Once the student has attained 72 ECTS/LP, she or he is entitled to the immediate allocation of a topic for her or his master's thesis.“ translated and paraphrased from: Auszug aus den Amtlichen Bekanntmachungen Nr. 13 vom 21.7.2020 – pp. 687 - 692.

Remember to adhere to the Chair's citation guidelines. All theses are checked for plagiarism through the software Turn-it-In. The screening for plagiarism follows the corresponding guidelines of the University of Potsdam from October 20, 2010.

A **statement of authorship** has to be included in every university work and has to be signed by the student. You can find further information (e.g. regarding team work) in your study and examination regulations. With this statement the student affirms that she or he has acted in scientifically correct manner, has written the thesis independently and only used the references listed in the bibliography. More information can be found in the plagiarism guidelines (abridged version in English).

Whilst you are writing your thesis, **regular consultations** with your counselor are mandatory (every four to eight weeks). The **final meeting** is held three weeks prior to submission – this way final recommendations can still be included.

Submission of the master’s thesis

The thesis is to be **handed in both timely and threefold** bound as a hardcover (either at the examination’s office during office hours or via mail – the stamped date counts). Further it is to be handed in on an electronic medium (e.g. CD, USB stick) both in word and PDF format. If the thesis is written in any other language than German (for which the consent of both reviewers is needed), a short summary in German is to be included. Due to the pandemic, the master’s thesis can be handed in solely electronically at the moment (at the examination’s office).

Evaluation of the master’s thesis

The master’s thesis will be evaluated within six weeks. The following content-related and formal criteria are referenced in evaluation.

Content-related criteria	Formal criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phrasing a clear research question - Accomplishing the goal of the thesis (answering the research question) - Independence (developing and arguing for a distinct position) - Good structure, straight reasoning (common thread) - Proper use of professional terminology and sound choice of sources - Quality of empirical and theoretical research (knowledge and use of methods, analysis and interpretation of findings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completeness (title page, table of contents, bibliography, if applicable a list of tables, illustrations and an appendix) - Clarity (general structure, structure of chapters) - Linguistic and orthographic accuracy - Proper use of sources - Adhering to the citation guidelines

Assessment of the master’s thesis

The examination office forwards your thesis to your reviewers. They examine the thesis, grade it and provide written explanations and feedback. The first reviewer is usually the counselor. If the second reviewer approves of the first assessment, she or he will sign it. If both assessments differ by more than 2.0 or if one assessment is worse than 4.0, a third reviewer is assigned by the examination board.

Disputation/Thesis defense

Once your thesis has been assessed, you and your reviewers will find a date for the thesis defense. The defense usually lasts 45-60 minutes. At first, you have of 10-15 minutes to present your findings. Preparing a presentation is recommended. Afterwards, the reviewers will ask questions about the thesis. We recommend going through both the reviewers' written feedback and the following points of your thesis beforehand: 1. research question and relevance 2. method 3. findings 4. implications of the findings. Afterward, your grade will be added in Puls by the examination office once they receive the minutes of examination.

Tips and helpful links:

- Information about how to work academically (from generating ideas to research, citation etc.) can be found on the website of the [central study board](#)
- Please use the [University Library](#) for your research
- Relevant documents can be found at the [examination office of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences](#)