

Infosheet on the Supervision & Evaluation of CLEWS Master's Theses

M.Sc. Climate, Earth, Water, Sustainability | June 2026

1. CLEWS Study and Examination Regulations

- 1) Once a student has successfully completed at least 75% of the total credits required for the program (minimum 72 CP), they are entitled to be assigned a Master's thesis topic.
- 2) The CLEWS Master's thesis, including the defense, is worth a total of 30 CP.
- 3) The thesis must be written in English and include a German abstract.
- 4) The thesis must not exceed 90 pages, including all content necessary to understand the work. There is no minimum page requirement. A separate supplementary annex may be included for additional material.

The thesis corresponds to a **workload of 900 hours** (30 CP à 30h). This equates to **six months of full-time work** (approximately 35h/week). A one-month extension is only possible if a justified request is submitted and approved by the CLEWS Examination Office.

2. Grading Procedure

- The thesis must be assessed and graded by both examiners within **six weeks**.
- The examiners **evaluate the work in writing** and provide reasons for the awarded grades. The final thesis grade is the arithmetic mean of both.
- If the grade difference exceeds 2.0, or if one of the marks is lower than "adequate", a third examiner will be appointed by the examination board. If two of the three examiners assess the thesis as "insufficient / failed" (5.0), the final grade of the thesis is 5.0. A failed Master's thesis may only be repeated once.
- The **written part** of the thesis accounts for **75%** of the grade, the **defence** for the remaining 25%.

*The following points on thesis supervision and evaluation **do not constitute binding regulations, but rather provide guidance and good-practice recommendations**, particularly for supervisors who are new to supervising Master's theses or who wish to harmonize their practices with the CLEWS program. We recognize that there are different academic cultures, supervisory styles, and philosophies.*

3. Recommendations for Supervision

Supervision practices **may vary considerably** between disciplines, research groups, and supervisors. Students may also have **different needs** regarding supervision. Nevertheless, **some general recommendations and examples** may help ensure transparency and a supportive supervision process:

- Supervisors carry responsibility for ensuring that the **thesis topic and scope are feasible** within the intended timeframe and workload, and that students are aware of formal requirements and organizational procedures.
- Before the official thesis registration, a **detailed discussion** between supervisor and student is recommended to **clarify expectations**, working modes, meeting frequency, timeline, and the general supervisory process within the research group.
- Regular **communication throughout the thesis process** is generally considered beneficial, particularly with the main supervisor. Such communication supports the academic learning process and helps students make steady progress during their thesis work.
- **Timely feedback and reasonable availability** of supervisors are important. Delays in resolving methodological, organizational, or scientific questions can significantly affect the student's progress and the feasibility of completing the thesis within the intended timeframe.
- Rather than extensively editing or rewriting drafts, feedback focusing on scientific clarity, argumentation, structure, and comprehensibility from a reader's perspective is encouraged. However, the degree and form of supervisory involvement may vary considerably, particularly in collaborative research settings.
- Responsibility for meeting the formal requirements, deadlines, and submission completeness remains with the student.

4. Interpretation of the Grading Scale

Very good (1.0)	Outstanding work that fulfills the criteria to an exceptional degree and leaves an excellent overall scientific impression.
Good (2.0)	Clearly above-average work that is presentable as “good performance” in terms of scientific quality, methodology, independence, and presentation.
Satisfactory (3.0)	Work that fulfills the essential objectives to a “satisfactory degree” but shows noticeable weaknesses in some aspects.
Sufficient (4.0)	Work that still meets the minimum academic requirements despite deviating from the expectations in several respects and showing clear weaknesses.
Insufficient (Fail) (5.0)	Work that fails to meet essential academic requirements to a degree that does not justify awarding the Master’s degree.

(Grades according to the University of Potsdam grading scheme also include intermediate grades such as 1.3, 1.7, etc.)

5. Guidance for Assessing a Thesis

In addition to the general interpretation of grades, the assessment criteria form the core of thesis evaluation. The following table presents an example criteria catalog for structuring the assessment of CLEWS Master’s theses. **The list is neither exhaustive nor mandatory** and should not be understood as a rigid checklist. It is only one of many.

Criteria	Specification
Research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear, focused, specific, and analytically formulated - Relevant to climate, earth, water, or sustainability science - Clear connection to the current state of research ("state of the art") - Adequately addressed and answered in the conclusions - ...
Research concept & Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate scope and level of difficulty - Coherent and appropriate research design with suitable and correctly applied methods - Transparent handling of data, assumptions, and uncertainties - Reproducibility and methodological rigor - ...
Structure & Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Logical and coherent structure - Meaningful chapter organization and headings - Coherent progression from introduction to conclusion - ...
Content & Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient depth and completeness - Empirical and/or theoretical claims adequately substantiated - Coherent line of argumentation and independent scientific reasoning - Critical discussion of results, limitations, and uncertainties - ...
Sources & Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate integration of relevant literature and sources - Complete and correct referencing and bibliography - Transparent and responsible use of digital and AI-supported tools - ...
Language, Figures & Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear, concise, and academically appropriate language - Correct use and definition of technical terms - Readable, well-designed figures and tables, clear captions, labeled axes, units, and references - Consistent formatting and layout, including bibliography and references - ...
Overall Impression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coherence between research question, methods, results, and conclusions - Degree of independence in developing and executing the research with overall scientific maturity - Compliance with formal requirements and expected scope - ...