



Guidelines for master's theses

Possible topics:

- Empirical work with own data analysis
- Processing of a case study (in cooperation with a company)
- Literature work on topics selected by Prof. Beckmann

Registration:

by e-mail to [Ms. Knöpfli](#)

University of Basel
Faculty of Business and Economics
Chair of Human Resources and Organization
Prof. Dr. Michael Beckmann



Guidelines for master's theses

Chair of Human Resources and Organization

General information

Usually, possible topics are developed together with the students and checked for feasibility. It is important that the students decide on a topic that interests them and motivates them to work on it for several weeks. Since January 2020, students are encouraged to provide substantial input themselves, e.g. by doing their own empirical work or working on a case study in cooperation with a company.

If you would like to write a master's thesis at the chair of Human Resources and Organization, you can contact [Ms. Knöpfli](#) with a topic request and desired start date. **Please attach your current grade transcript from your master's degree as well as your bachelor's degree transcript** to your email to Ms. Knöpfli. The latter will help us to better assess your background and to find a suitable topic for your thesis. Subsequently, your application and topic request will be processed internally.

A detailed overview for a master's thesis at the chair of Human Resources and Organization can be found in this guide. In addition, topics for master's theses can be found.

Your master's thesis at our chair

In your master's thesis, you will work independently on a relevant problem from the field of personnel and organizational economics or related areas. The thesis consists of the following components:

- Discussion of relevant economic theories
- Derivation of hypotheses about expected relationships from the theory
- Summary and critical evaluation of previous empirical literature
- *Empirical testing of the hypotheses / case study*
- Critical assessment of previous analyses and your own analysis
- Implications and recommendations for action for employees, politics, trade unions or companies

First, you need to decide on a format:

- Empirical work
- Case study
- Literature work

Then you have to clarify your decision with the professor. In the following, we will go into detail about the structure and content of your paper.

Structure of your master's thesis

Introduction

In the introduction, you formulate the concrete question that is to be answered by the thesis. If necessary, the chosen topic is narrowed down further. You also motivate and justify why the question is interesting and relevant. Furthermore, you define and explain important terms. At the end of the introduction, you briefly explain the structure of the rest of the paper.

Theoretical foundations

In this chapter you explain and discuss relevant basics from economic theory. What does the theory say about your research question? How does it define the relevant terms or facts? What predictions does the theory make regarding the behavior of the actors involved? What relationships are expected from the theory's point of view?

In this part it is important not only to present the theories in general, but also to apply them to your specific question. It should be worked out which correlations are expected concretely for your question.

At the end of this chapter, you will derive concrete hypotheses that you will subsequently test empirically. These hypotheses should relate specifically to your concrete research question.

State of the empirical literature

In this chapter, you provide a brief overview of the empirical literature to date and summarize the key findings. The goal is not to discuss each study individually in detail. Rather, the goal is to structure the literature to date, extract the key findings, critique the literature, and identify open questions. For example, discuss similar studies as a block, e.g., summarize studies that use the same methodological approach, refer to the same country, or show similar results. However, it is still important to cite each study correctly. For each block of studies, describe the main results, critically discuss the methodology used, and elaborate on open methodological or substantive questions. Also address important differences between different blocks of studies.

In general, it is not sufficient to discuss only a few studies from a large literature. The goal is to present the state of knowledge of the literature to date. Limitations in the selection of literature discussed must be coherently justified.

If you are writing an empirical master's thesis:

At the conclusion of this chapter, you will distinguish your own work from the previous literature. What do you do differently from previous studies? What is new? What open question(s) are you addressing? What methodological differences do you make?

If you are working on a case study:

At the end of this chapter, you will delineate your own work from the previous literature and case studies. How do you add to the body of research knowledge with your case? Exactly what open question(s) do you address in your Case? What is your approach? How does your research question relate to the company you are working with?

Optional: Empirical analysis

In this section, you describe your own empirical analysis and results. It is divided into the following subsections:

a. Data

Here, briefly describe the data you use and the relevant variables, especially those you constructed yourself. Limit yourself to what is relevant to your specific research question.

b. Used sample

Describe the sample you use here. Explain and justify which individuals or observations you use and why you exclude observations, if any. Document how the sample size changes through each selection step compared to the raw data and what the final sample size used is. In this context, also discuss whether and, if so, how your sample selection might affect the representativeness, significance, and interpretation of your results.

c. Descriptive analysis

Present, explain, and discuss relevant descriptive statistics. The purpose of these is twofold: One is to provide a first look at the data in light of the hypotheses derived from the theory. Is there evidence for or against the validity of the hypotheses? Second, to illustrate the selection or endogeneity problem. For example, if the question of the influence of variable V on variable Y is to be investigated, descriptive statistics should show how individuals with different expressions in variable V of interest differ in terms of their characteristics. This provides information about systematic differences and thus potentially important control variables for the econometric analysis.

d. Methodological approach

In this section, explain and justify your estimation approach and methodological procedure. At a minimum, regression analyses (OLS/Probit/Logit depending on the type of dependent variable) using robust standard errors are expected. For probit and logit models, marginal effects are expected to be output and interpreted. Advanced methods have a positive impact on grades, but are not mandatory even for good grades. Explain and justify your choice of dependent and explanatory variables. In particular, the rationale for each control variable is very important. Discuss why or under what conditions the chosen estimation models are suitable to answer the research question of the paper and in particular to test the validity of the derived hypotheses. Also discuss self-critically any potential problems or limitations of the analysis that cannot be solved with the available data. In particular, discuss the assumptions required for your chosen method and their validity in the context of your specific research question and data.

e. Results

Document, describe, discuss, and interpret the results of your analyses here. In particular, address in detail whether the results confirm or refute the hypotheses you derived. If your results contradict theory, discuss possible explanations for your results.

Optional: Case study

In this section, you will describe your own case and findings. It is divided into the following subsections:

a. Company

Describe briefly with which company you cooperate and clarify the relevance of the cooperation. Limit yourself to what is relevant to your specific question.

b. Implementation

Describe here exactly how you proceed in the processing of the case. It must be clear to the supervisor of your work how you have processed individual steps and how you link them to your question. Justify your approach in detail. In this context, also discuss whether and, if so, how your case might affect the representativeness, significance, and interpretation of your results.

c. Methodological approaches

Describe whether and, if so, which methodological approaches you use for your case. What tools do you use to conduct your Case? Why? Discuss possible advantages and disadvantages of your approach. If you were to conduct regression analyses, it is expected that, at a minimum, regression analyses (OLS/Probit/Logit depending on the nature of the dependent variable) using robust standard errors will be used. For the remainder of the course, follow the structure for empirical analyses (see Optional: Empirical Analysis above).

d. Results

Document, describe, discuss, and interpret the results of your analyses here. In particular, address in detail whether the results confirm or refute the hypotheses you derived. If your results contradict theory, discuss possible explanations for your results.

Summary

In the last chapter, you summarize the results of your work once again. In addition, you will critically review your work and address possible problems and limitations. Furthermore, you refer again to the previous literature and classify your work. Finally, you draw a conclusion: What can be learned from your study? What are the implications of your findings?

Format and size of the thesis

As a guideline: **45 - max. 50 pages** (excluding appendices, table of contents and other indexes). Please include important graphs and tables in the main text. Detailed results can be included in the appendix. [It is important to adhere to this guideline.](#)

For more information on the guidelines for the formal design of scientific papers, please click [here](#).

Grading

The main emphasis in the grading of the master's thesis, if you choose to do so, will be on your empirical analysis or the execution and processing of the case. Significant deficiencies in the theory or literature sections will result in substantial grade deductions, as these are minimum standards and all students should be able to adequately address these sections.

Data

Due to the relatively short turnaround time, students are discouraged from conducting their own surveys. There are numerous readily available and suitable data for a variety of questions. Prof. Michael Beckmann will advise you on suitable and available data and assist you in accessing data.

The following data sets, for example, are very suitable for master's theses:

[Schweizerische Arbeitskräfteerhebung \(SAKE\)](#)

[Deutsches Sozioökonomisches Panel \(SOEP\)](#)

Supervision during the writing of the thesis

During the writing of the master's thesis, Prof. Michael Beckmann is available for feedback and advice by appointment.

Topics

- Digital transformation in the organization
- GIG Economy
- Gender equality
- Diversity and discrimination management
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning in organizations
- Motivation and engagement at the workplace
- CSR in the organization