

# Guidelines for the Preparation of a Thesis

Prof. Anne Brenøe

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## 1 Application procedure

**How to send the application** If you are interested in writing a thesis with me, please follow the following instructions. First, make sure you have taken the required courses (listed below). Second, have a look at the thesis topics I have available on my website. Third, send me an email in English with your CV and up to date grade transcript. In the email, I expect you to write (i) which topic(s) you would be interested in writing about, (ii) the earliest start date you would like, and (iii) which of the courses you have taken that meet the course requirements. I will answer you within two weeks, telling you whether I still have capacity and potentially ask you some clarifying questions.

**Course Requirements** You need to have taken at least one course during your current level of studies (at the BA level if you are a BA students and at the MA level if you are an MA student) that is about **causal inference**. At the BA level, this would four instance be *Intermediate Econometrics* or the BA seminar I teach. At the MA level, it would for instance be the econometrics course *Econometrics for Policy Analysts* taught by David Yanagizawa-Drott.

## 2 Writing Your Thesis

### 2.1 Supervisor

I will typically assign an assistant to help me supervise the thesis. Students should contact this advisor when they have major questions. However, it is expected of you to deal with the thesis in an autonomous fashion.

### 2.2 Layout of Your Thesis

The thesis should be written like current research papers in economics, probably more in the style of a working paper, providing more detail than the final published version. These do not include things that are sometimes seen in BA or MA theses, such as lists of tables, lists of figures, or tables of contents. Please do not include such things either. It must be written in English. General format: 1.5 line spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font (or similar) and margins of 1.5 inches on the top, bottom, and sides. Length of text: **maximum 40 pages** including the main tables and figures. Whether you have enough material is a question of content, not a question of the number of words. You are on the right track if you find it

difficult to shorten your paper to the page limit (i.e., you should have enough substantive material to make it such).

## 2.3 Structure of your thesis

Below, I outline the generic sketch of the structure of your thesis. I cannot stress enough how important the writing is. When you read academic articles for your thesis work, please pay close attention to their writing and structure. In particular, students almost always have difficulties writing the introduction. Read the introduction to at least three of the (well-published) key papers you cite **very** carefully and analyze the purpose of each paragraph. This will help you write an effective introduction.

As part of your thesis work, **I require that you read the IZA discussion paper No. 16276** “Writing Tips for Crafting Effective Economics Research Papers – 2023-2024 Edition” by Plamen Nikolov.

1. Include an **abstract** of 150 or fewer words

### 2. Introduction

- (a) The introduction should convey everything the reader needs to know, in particular: What is the question? What is the answer? How did you get the answer? The reader should need to read the rest of your paper in only two cases: (i) (s)he wants to check you did everything correctly, (ii) (s)he is interested in further details of exactly how you carried out the research.
- (b) Structure of the introduction (follow these steps precisely):
- i. Begin with the motivation. What is the context of your research? This will take one paragraph, around half a page.
  - ii. State the research question clearly (it ends with a question mark!).
    - Good example: “What is the effect on unemployment of raising the minimum wage to 15\$ per hour in Mississippi?”
    - Bad example: “I explore the topic of minimum wage and unemployment”.
  - iii. State the answer clearly.
    - Good example: “Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour will increase the unemployment rate by 20% for individuals below 25 years, by 5% for individuals above 25 years of age. These effects are concentrated among the less highly educated population, with unemployment for individuals without a college degree estimated to increase by an additional 10% compared to those with a college degree”.
    - Bad example: “Raising the minimum wage will tend to increase unemployment, especially amongst some age groups and specific demographics.”
  - iv. Explain how you found the answer: What are the data, what are the methods, what is the intuition of the model (if you have these parts). This part takes up most of the space of your introduction.
  - v. Explain implications for policy.
  - vi. Relate your work to the literature.

- This is a part of the introduction section. Do not include the literature review as a separate section. It should be a part of the flow. However, sometimes a separate literature section can be justified.
  - The literature paragraph(s) should not simply be a list of related papers. Instead, for each paper, it should explain clearly how it contributes to the research question, or why it partially answers the research question but stops short of providing a full answer.
3. The **body** of the paper can comprise multiple sections (in the case of experiments, for instance, there will typically be one section on the design and one or more sections on analysis).
  4. **Conclusion.** This can be very short (e.g., half a page or one page). Typically, you restate the research question and the main findings. Then you outline some limitations of your work and scope for further research.
  5. You may include **Appendices** with supplementary material.
  6. You have to include a **declaration of authorship**. You can find the form online.

## Tips

- Write the first page of the introduction (which contains the context and the question) first. A danger in writing papers is that one can get lost in the vast amount of detail. If you know exactly what your research question is, you are much more likely to stay focused on the main task. Also do the literature review early on. You can always update the introduction later on (and might be necessary depending on how your analysis progresses).
- Except for the part regarding context, question, and literature review, write the introduction last. The introduction is a summary of all the work you have done, which you can only do once you know exactly what that is, and what answers you have obtained.
- Keep an automatic security copy of your work (e.g., One Drive, time machine, etc.)
- Use an automatic reference management tool. If you are writing in LaTeX, you can use bibtex. The reference list at the end of the paper needs to include all papers you cite, and all papers you include there need to be cited in the main text. Reference management software does that for you automatically and error-free.
- Through UZH, you have access to the premium version of Overleaf. I highly recommend you to write your thesis in Overleaf. I recommend you to save Overleaf as an app in Dropbox such that you have a backup of your work.
- Zotero works very well as a reference management tool and can be linked to Overleaf.

## 2.4 Evaluation criteria

The thesis will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Focus: Each paragraph of the thesis should be focused on the stated research topic.

2. Literature: Students should show that they have understood and selected the most relevant literature for the thesis topic.
3. Methods: Students should demonstrate that they can correctly apply the empirical and/theoretical methods that they were taught during their studies. They should explain how they use those methods. They should be critical: why are those methods best adapted to answer the research question at hand? What are their limitations?
4. Argument and interpretations: The students should develop an independent, structured, innovative argument and interpret their results in a logical and coherent way. We expect an analysis that goes beyond a simple literature summary or overview of existing statistics.
5. Formal quality of the thesis: standardized layout and bibliography, spelling, grammar, citations.
6. Language: The language of the thesis should be appropriate and professional (for more details, see the IZA discussion paper No. 16276).