

Guidelines for MA theses supervised by lecturers of the Group for Research in PR and Communication of Technology: Objectives, requirements, topics, and workflow

Effective as of January 2020

1. Scope and requirements of the master thesis

- A master thesis covers 30 credit points. This equals a work load of about 900 hours and 90 - 110 pages of written text (benchmark, without appendix and bibliography).
- By writing the master thesis, you should demonstrate that you are able to solve a problem **on your own**, based on theory and **with empirical methods** within a given time period on the basis of the current international state of research.
- To give you the possibility to prove your scientific skills, an empirical part needs to be included. Your research design and methods do not have to be “quantitative” – qualitative research methods can also be a reasonable approach. In detail, the following requirements have to be met (these are only benchmarks; modifications due to decisions concerning content or methods can be appropriate or even necessary):
 - 8 to 12 semi-structured interviews have to be designed and carried out self-sufficiently
 - At least 100 answered questionnaires of a (partly) standardized survey
 - 400 to 500 coded units of analysis (e.g., news articles) of a content analysis (a codebook of medium complexity with about 30 variables)
 - At least 160 participants of experimental studies (min. 4 treatments)
 - All other methods and research designs are possible, e.g. observation studies, meta-analysis, secondary analysis, analysis of documents, social media analysis, etc.
- A Master thesis needs to meet all formal regulations of scientific work. For formatting of citation and literature references, we recommend the APA citation

style which is set up by the American Psychological Association (APA) (see this website <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>; or the APA manual in the library). In addition, follow the layout guidelines of the Institute.

- Your Master thesis can be submitted in German or English.
- For the grading of your thesis reviewers will take theoretical and/or methodological innovations (e.g. extent or creation of theories/models, innovative research designs, analysis of not yet empirically investigated scopes) into account, but also the correct and solid use and classification of relevant literature and appropriate implementation of the empirical part, including a clear connection of your own empirical investigation to the international state of research (inter alia with relevant derived research questions and hypothesis).
- Master theses can explicitly contain applied research, which means scientific studies are conducted based on a contract with a company or other organizations according to a certain model or theoretical approach. Thus, scientifically gained findings can eventually be transferred into professional fields of application. In this case the above mentioned requirements also need to be met.
- External partners (companies, administration and organizations) are possible – as source of ideas, partners for cooperation or financiers. But you should be aware of the higher related effort (need for coordination!) and potential conflicts of interests between the university and companies.
- The supervision of a thesis during a stay abroad is only possible in exceptional cases. If necessary, please clarify this in advance with the Head of Department.
- Group work is optional. The maximum number of team members is three students. The necessity to work as a group must be given in the particular case by the topic or an especially complex approach.

2. Process – from finding a topic to the defense

If you want to write a master thesis at the Group for Research in PR and Communication of Technology note the following phases and aspects:

Finding a topic and initiating the discussion

- Fields of research in which a master thesis can be written are listed at the homepage of the department. In particular, those are: public relations research, strategic communication, risk and crisis communication, international communication, and communication of/with technology (including online communication). Other topics are possible, too, if they fit the research competences of the members of our department. Choose one of these research fields and approach Dr. Andreas Schwarz or the staff in the department. As of 01/2020 these are: Tatjana Faj, Laura Martin and Elisabeth Wagner-Olfermann (on parental leave).

- You will be invited for the respective consultation hour to discuss possible topics – preferably you have developed specific ideas in preparation – and the organizational process. Dr. Andreas Schwarz will be the first reviewer. When the thesis is officially registered, the department decides who is going to be the second reviewer of your thesis. At this point it is decided whether the first or second reviewer will assume supervision. Please note, that you have one primary supervisor who will be your main contact person and that you should make all further arrangements with this supervisor.

Exposé and application process

- A **short exposé** needs to be handed in after the initial discussion. It covers the main points concerning topic selection and the empirical approach on five to ten pages. It should be informative about the subsequent aspects:
 1. Cover page with contact details and title of thesis.
 2. Research objective: It should clarify the relevance of the topic, the objectives and limitations of the thesis as well as the research question.
 3. Theoretical framework/state of research: it should explain shortly on which theoretical framework the research question is built and how the topic relates to the international state of research.
 4. Methods/empirical approach: the intended (empirical) approach to answer the research question should be described briefly (e.g., research design). Explanations should offer an estimation of the work load for the empirical investigation.
 5. Work schedule: the work schedule should include essential milestones (begin of work, planned submission date) as well as the most important dates of your empirical project (development of instruments, field phase).
 6. Bibliography
- The short exposé should be negotiated with the supervisor until a final agreement is found. Therefore multiple cycles of correction and improvement might be necessary until the exposé is in its final form. Note that the exposé needs to be handed in not later than approx. **6 weeks after the initial discussion** with the supervisor took place and has to lead to the registration of your master thesis. Otherwise the agreed topic can usually not be supervised anymore.
- The following criteria are applied for the evaluation of your short exposé:
 1. Proximity of content and methods to the fields of research in the Group for Research in PR and Communication of Technology,

2. Implementation of formal requirements of the exposé (see below) and the master thesis in general,
 3. Scientific relevance and conciseness of the topic/research question and quality of content of the proposed project.
- After the short exposé is accepted, the master thesis must be **registered** at the examination office. A therefore required form (application of master thesis) can be found on the website of the Institute of Media and Communication Science or the Department of Economic Sciences and Media. From the day you register, you have six months to submit your thesis. You will receive an email from the Examination Office informing you about the deadline.

Master colloquium and processing phase

- With registration of the master thesis you are obliged to attend the appointments for **master colloquia** of the Group for Research in PR and Communication of Technology. Usually the master colloquium takes place once a month. The dates are announced in time via mail by the secretary's office. Personal attendance is expected. If you cannot attend a session you need to specify the reasons and give notice in written form to the secretary's office (philipp.jahn@tu-ilmenau.de).
- The master colloquium offers a space to discuss arising problems and questions in plenary during the processing phase. Please prepare a short (8 – 10 minutes) PowerPoint presentation for this purpose including the current status of your thesis and existing questions and problems. Upload your presentation to the moodle course "MA colloquium" one day before the colloquium. You will receive the password for enrollment with the invitation e-mail. If you are right at the beginning of work or do not have urgent questions, you might shortly explain the current status of your thesis without a formal presentation.
- The language of presentation in all colloquia is English.
- Besides the master colloquia you have the possibility to arrange a **consultation** with your supervisor (requests to the supervisor should be placed adequately ahead of time). Consultations offer you the chance to discuss the structure, research tools, strategies of evaluation, the detailed formulation of the research question, and other relevant aspects. Before the empirical work starts (contact with experts from economy, politics, PR, journalism, etc.) or the investigation is launched (with questionnaires or any other instruments) the precise procedure needs to be coordinated with your supervisor. Note that a pre-correction or review of single parts or chapters by members of the department is not possible due to examination considerations.
- If external partners (companies, administrations, organizations) or participants of the study express concerns in connection with anonymization of data or discretion

of information and/or results, it is possible to keep the master thesis confidential (not published or available for readers).

- Concerning plagiarism, students are asked to examine their master thesis themselves prior to submission – which means a literal adoption from sources without identifying them as such. For a **plagiarism check**, you can send your thesis to tatjana.faj.tui@analysis.urkund.com **before** submitting it. Remember to allow some time for clarifying contradictions before the official submission. Even in a small amount, plagiarism leads to the disqualification of the thesis (graded with 5.0 “failed”).

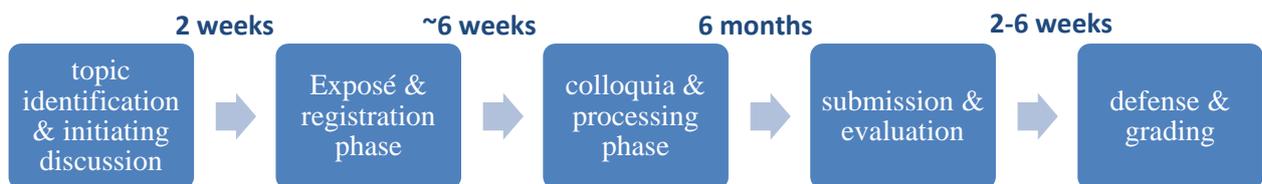
Submission und evaluation

- An **extension of the processing phase** is possible in particular cases. However, you should have convincing reasons – e.g. sickness or delays that are not self-caused (e.g. slow return of questionnaires, problems with the appointment of interviews, inaccessibility of research material etc.). The reasons are to be outlined briefly in a request dedicated to the chairman of the examination board. The request form can be handed in to the first supervisor, who will check the request and forward it to the examination board. Requests of extension should be filed four to six weeks prior to the submission date.
- To complete your thesis submission, you need to deliver the following documents to the examination office:
 - Three printed copies of the thesis with hard cover (do not forget the abstract in German **and** English language)
 - Signed declaration of autonomy in every copy
 - Memory stick (or similar) with the digital version of the thesis and the digital appendix (pdf or word-Document, SPSS data files, etc.)
 - Printed confirmation mail from the university library concerning the upload of the abstract of the thesis <http://www.tu-ilmeneau.de/ilmedia/hsb/>.
- The evaluation is carried out using the evaluation scheme in the appendix. Please note that the named evaluation categories do not respond to a grading scale. In particular they are not equal to grades. Remarkably good as well as poor performances in single categories can influence the overall impression of the thesis tremendously. Thus, it is in general not possible to calculate an average value based on the evaluation and derive a final grade from this average. The single dimensions serve for a better understanding in which regard good or poor performances are submitted.
- When preparing the defense, especially the remarks of the reviewers as stated in their previously submitted reviews should be taken into account.

Defense and grading

- Four to six weeks after submission of the master thesis the oral defense takes place, which lasts 30 minutes and consists of two parts.
- Part 1: presentation of the master thesis: You should respond to the criticism of your supervisors supported by a PowerPoint presentation. Please keep the description of the master thesis brief and concentrate on the critical comments you will receive in the reviews (max. 15 minutes!).
- Part 2: Discussion – the supervisors ask you additional questions related to your thesis and/or to your presentation (ca. 15 minutes).
- At the end of the defense you will be graded for the presentation and receive your final grade. The final grade consists equally of three grades: 1. grade of the first review, 2. grade of the second review, 3. grade for the oral defense.

The chart below summarizes the process and the planned time periods:



3. Appendix: grading scheme

Dimension	Criteria	--	-	+/-	+	++
(1) Research Question	Research question and goals are clearly presented					
	Relevance of the topic is clearly presented					
	Claim and scope of the formulated objectives are appropriate (no divergence from the agreed objectives)					
	<i>Comments:</i>					
(2) Theory	Literature review of the topic is up-to-date and has a good structure					
	Theoretical parts are relevant for the topic and presented precisely and correctly					
	Research questions and hypotheses are derived clearly from theory and/or literature review					
	<i>Comments:</i>					
(3) Method	Operationalization is based on the literature review and on theory					
	Appropriate data base					
	Methodological steps (data collection, design, sample) are correct and accurate					
	Presentation of methodological steps is transparent, so that the study could be replicated					
	Methodological limitations and weaknesses are discussed					
	<i>Comments:</i>					
(4) Findings	Presentation of findings is well structured					
	Data analysis is correct					
	Findings are appropriately presented in tables or diagrams					
	Appropriate interpretation of the findings					
	Important steps are summed up/an innovative and interesting outlook for further questions is given					
	<i>Comments:</i>					
(5) Formal requirements	Paper is clearly structured					
	Quotation and bibliography are correct					
	Abstract is correct					
	Text is well written					
	Orthography and grammar are correct					
	Layout is adequate					
	<i>Comments:</i>					