

**School of Business, Economics and Society**  
**Chair of International Business, Society and Sustainability**

## **Guide to the Preparation of thesis at the IBSS Chair**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. General information .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Requirements for academic papers .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.1 Structure and components in academic writing .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.2 Structure .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Thesis: .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4.1 Bachelor and Master Thesis .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4.2 Exposé .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Formatting and formal requirements .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. Notes on the preparation of Bachelor's and Master's theses .....</b>	<b>12</b>

## 1. Introduction

This information sheet describes the guidelines for the preparation and design of written assignments at the Chair of International Business, Society and Sustainability. The information sheet serves as a general guide. Deviations from the regulations can be agreed with supervisors as part of the supervision.

## 2. General information

There are no special requirements for writing a thesis at our chair, but we particularly recommend the students to attend the qualitative methods course and visiting some of the courses that are offered by the Chair.

If you are interested in writing your thesis at our department, please note the following information:

- Please choose your topic independently and approach the desired supervisor directly.
- Please note that preference will be given to students who have already successfully attended courses at our department.
- It is required that you attend at least one of the colloquia organized by the chair.

It is desirable that students choose topics for which they have already acquired in-depth knowledge by attending previous modules. In any case, the students should make sure that the chosen topic is limited in such a way that can be completed within the deadlines.

**Bachelor's students** must submit their final thesis at the latest **nine weeks** after the formal acceptance of their submitted topic and **Master's students six months** after their registration. In justified exceptional cases, for example if the thesis is written in cooperation with an external organization, the working time can be extended by a maximum of nine weeks. An exposé must be written before writing the Bachelor's or Master's thesis.

### 3. Requirements for academic papers

Various forms of written texts must be produced during the Bachelor or Master program: Exposé, term papers or seminar papers, essays and then a Bachelor's or Master's thesis at the end of the program. The general principles of academic work and writing apply to all forms of written work.

#### 3.1 *Structure and components in academic writing*

As a rule, every academic paper contains an introduction, a theory section, a section on the method(s) used, a section with the empirical findings and the analysis, a discussion and conclusion, and a list of references.

**Introduction:** Here you explain what your central question is (research question(s)), which thematic aspect you are focusing on and why you have chosen this topic (justification for case selection). In this section, you should also convincingly explain the relevance of the topic from a scientific and/or societal perspective. In the introduction, you should also briefly present the methodological approach and the structure of your thesis.

**Theory/State of the art:** On the one hand, this section serves to present and discuss the theoretical concepts and mechanisms on which the work is based. On the other hand, it contains an analysis of the current state of the art, which was determined based on a literature search (if necessary, via scientific databases such as Google scholar, Scopus etc.). In the theoretical part, the development of the research question is shown based on existing theoretical approaches and the foundation is laid for the specific questions, the analytical framework and/or the research-guiding assumptions or hypotheses. Central terms and their specific definitions are also clarified as part of the theoretical section. The presentation and discussion of theoretical approaches should be orientated towards the specific research question of the thesis and only be elaborated to the extent that it is relevant to the research question and the research interest. In addition, this section should describe the current state of research on the issue addressed in the thesis. To

do this, please develop a structured description of the relevant research, and evaluate the selected works in the light of your research question. In this section, it should become clear which parts of the research question have already been well researched and which aspects require further empirical research or theoretical/conceptual inquiry (identification of research gaps).

**The following websites may be helpful for you to conduct your literature research:**

- Directory of Open Access Journals: <https://www.doaj.org/>
- FAU Library: <https://ub.fau.de/>
- Gateway Bavaria: <https://opacplus.bib-bvb.de/>
- Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.com/>
- SCOPUS: <https://www.scopus.com/search/form.uri?display=basic#basic>
- Springer (publisher): <http://link.springer.com/>
- Scielo (specially for literature in Spanish and Portuguese): <https://www.scielo.org/>

**Methods section:** In this section you should explain which method(s) you have chosen for the preparation of your thesis and briefly explain why you find these method(s) appropriate for investigating the research question described. The triangulation of data from different sources often helps to obtain robust and multi-layered findings (e.g. a combination of interviews, document analysis and notes from participant observation). Please describe how you applied the method(s) and how you proceeded. For example, criteria for case selection or for a comparative study should be outlined. If you conducted interviews, please describe how you selected your interviewees, which ethical standards were considered (e.g. information about your research project, prior consent of the interviewees to record the interview, anonymization of the interview data), and how the data was analyzed. Please also include an interview guide and the transcribed interviews in an appendix. In general, interviews should be recorded and transcribed. If individual interviewees do not wish to record the conversation, for example because it concerns a sensitive topic, notes from the interviews can also be written down and referred to in the paper. Please also explain your approach in relation to other methods used (e.g. survey,

participant observation, participatory methods, systematic document analysis).

**Empirical findings and analysis:** In this section, the findings of your research should be presented. It is often helpful to start with a section providing background information on the topic, e.g. to describe the historical, social, political, or ecological context of the topic.

For better readability and understanding of your findings, it is helpful to divide this section into individual subsections. To ensure that the theoretical part is interlinked with the empirical analysis, it often makes sense to use the categories and concepts presented (in the introduction and state of the art) to support the structure of this section. Content should not only be referenced in this part, but also related to the research question. Arguments cannot simply be made but must be justified and substantiated (e.g. through interviews or reference to primary documents).

Tables, graphics, and visualizations can also be used in this section to present the main findings of the work systematically and concisely.

**Discussion:** The discussion and the conclusion can either be dealt with together in one section or written separately. The aim of this section is to discuss your research question again in the light of your own findings. You should also refer to existing theory and raise the question of how your work contributes to the existing state of the art. You can also critically reflect on the limitations and challenges in the process of writing your thesis. In the final section, the most important results and arguments are briefly presented, and you can give an outlook on further questions and/or possible implications for practice.

### **3.2 Structure**

Regarding the content structure criteria, term papers/seminar papers, BA and MA theses do not differ, only their scope varies. Only the synopsis differs in individual outline points. The individual elements of academic papers are briefly explained below.

**Title page or cover page:** Contains the following information in the order listed: name of the department, chair, degree program, module or course and semester, examination

number and lecturer, title/subtitle of the thesis and details of the author (surname, first name, matriculation number, address, e-mail or phone number).

**Table of contents/structure of the text:** The table of contents should include page numbers. It is recommended to use the so-called numerical outline system: 1 - 1.1 - 1.1.1, followed by section 2 and 3 etc. Please note that a sub-chapter 1.1 should always be followed by at least one further sub- chapter 1.2 (otherwise the subdivision should be omitted). In a 40-page paper, the text should be organized in no more than two or three stages. The main text body should also be structured by paragraphs that visually emphasize related lines of thought. Reader guidance can also be improved by sparingly emphasizing the terms central to the argument (in italics or bold). Work with format templates and an automatic table of contents so that you can carry out revisions without much effort. The bibliography, the list of abbreviations, the list of figures and/or tables and, if applicable, the appendix should also be included in the table of contents.

**Use of literature - citation and bibliography:** When writing academic texts, it is essential to cite sources. Indicate which arguments you have adopted verbatim or in spirit by citing the source. It is essential that you make clear in the text what you have taken from other authors. It should be recognizable from the way the text is formulated which ideas have been quoted and which ideas represent independent discussions. Even when describing the state of research, which naturally contains more quotations than a presentation of results, literal quotations should only be used for particularly concise passages. Paraphrase the quoted arguments and cite the relevant source. Second-hand quotations ("quoted from ...") should be avoided as far as possible by searching for and quoting the original source. In exceptional cases (inaccessible literature), second-hand citations can be cited according to the form given.

Caution is advised with internet sources. Internet sources should only be cited if the authors are clearly identifiable, and the content was obtained using methods that fulfil the rules of academic work. Using texts ("hausarbeiten.de") or pieces of text from the Internet without citing the source will be penalized as plagiarism. In the case of deception, the written work will not be accepted or result in the failure of the exam. Please hand in an

electronic version of the thesis (pdf by e-mail) with the printout, which will be checked for plagiarism using the relevant software.

**The citation style and bibliography** follow the so-called APA standard, i.e. the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2020: Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.), available at <https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition>, Download: 25.07.2023)

Here you will also find a free tutorial on the most important aspects of correct citation. Make sure that the bibliography is complete, and that all necessary information is included for all sources! Internet sources should be cited with the date of access if they are from a reputable source.

For dealing with literature in a systematic way, it is very helpful to use a software such as **citavi**, **endnote** or **Zotero**. We also recommend to write and store excerpts (short summaries) of the literature you have read, as this might help you to keep record of broader volumes of data.

**Appendix:** The appendix contains statistics, tables, overview charts, audiovisual materials, etc. that have not been integrated into the main text. Reference is made to them in the main text at the appropriate place (e.g. in brackets or in a footnote). The sources must also be referenced.

**Affidavit:** The last page contains the affidavit. This is followed by the date and signature (see templates in the appendix).



## 4. Bachelor and Master Thesis:

### 4.1 BA and MA

These differ only in terms of their scope, but not in terms of their general structure. The structure should follow the scheme below:

- Title page/cover page
- Abstract, if applicable: 150-200 words in German or English
- Text part:
  - Introduction
  - Theory section and state of research
  - Data and methods
  - Analysis section
  - Discussion
  - Conclusion
- Bibliography (according to APA)
- Appendix, if applicable
- Affidavit (with signature)

## 4.2 Exposé

The preparation of a written synopsis serves to thoroughly pre-structure a topic. It usually comprises two to four pages and takes the following points into account:

- Working title: Formulate the title as factually and precisely as possible so that it conveys concise information about the content of your work.
- Problem and research interest: In this section, you argue that a problem exists that should be analyzed using social science research. Why is my topic relevant?
- Guiding question and object of investigation: What does the thesis want to find out? The guiding question of your study will be the common thread running through the argumentation of the entire paper. Formulate the guiding question very specifically as a question. What is the subject of your research? You can also formulate several questions or one question with sub-questions.
- State of the art: What is the status of the discussion on your topic in the literature (books and articles)? What is/what are the research gaps?
- Research design and method: How will you approach the topic of the thesis? Which concepts and theories do you want to engage with? Which methods of empirical social research will you use?
- Time plan: What intermediate steps are necessary for the success of the final project? By when should they be completed?

## 5. Formatting and formal requirements

When formulating your work, please use gender-appropriate language. The table below summarizes the most important details:

	Exposé	BA Thesis	MA Thesis
Extent			
Page size	DINA4, printed on both sides		
Number of pages (excl. table of contents, list of figures, list of abbreviations, bibliography, appendix, title page and appendices)	2-5 pages	ca. 30 pages (ca. 12,000 words)	ca. 60 pages (ca. 22,000 words)
Formatting			
Page margins	right: 3 cm, left, bottom, top: 2 cm		
Please include page numbers			
Main text			
Font	Times New Roman or Calibri		
Font size	12		
Line spacing	1,5		
Paragraph	Justified text, hyphenation		
Headings	Numbered: (1 – 1.1 – 1.2 – 2 – 2.1 – 2.2 – 3 etc.)		
Quotes longer than 2 sentences			
Font	Times New Roman or Calibri		
Font size	10		
Line spacing	1		
Reference list			
Font	Times New Roman or Calibri		
Font size	10		
Line spacing	1		
Indent	Hanging 1,25 cm		
Submission			
Copies	Per email to the supervisor	Two Printout versions of the thesis and one USB stick (e.g. coding scheme, interview guideline, interview transcripts) are handed over to the examination office. One electronic copy of the thesis should be sent to the supervisor	
Binding	na	Bound	

## 6. Notes on the preparation of Bachelor's and Master's theses

The writing of qualification theses should demonstrate the ability to independently present a problem, analyze material and data and critically examine a topic. BA and MA theses differ primarily in the scope and depth of the issue to be addressed, but not in their requirements for handling the basic techniques of academic work. These requirements exist in particular regarding structure, form, text design, exact citation, methodical approach, handling of sources, appropriate annotations and bibliography. When writing the thesis, please note that the work is public, i.e. it can be viewed by third parties. In the case of cooperation with companies/institutes, publication can be excluded by a blocking note if this jeopardizes the protection of official secrecy. In such cases, this must be agreed before a co-operation agreement is concluded.

### **Ethical considerations and good academic practice**

For making sure that your thesis follows standards for good academic practice and ethical requirements, please consult our related folder on studon. In case that you conduct interviews for collecting data, please make sure that you follow requirements for informed consent and the anonymization of data. In the template folder on studon you can find a template for written informed consent of your interview partners. In case of doubts on ethical matters or good academic practices, please consult your supervisors.

### **Registration**

You can obtain the registration form on the website of our chair and on StudOn. The form must be submitted to the chair holder for signature and then handed in at the "Prüfungsamt" (examination office). Each student will receive a written notification by the "Prüfungsamt" that you are registered and informing you the final deadline to hand in the thesis. The correction time after submission of the thesis is approx. 6 weeks.

**Good luck!**