

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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1. Introduction

This document describes the guidelines for the preparation and design of written assignments at the Chair of International Business, Society and Sustainability. It serves as a general guide, and deviations from the regulations can be agreed upon with supervisors as part of the supervision agreement.

2. General information

To be eligible to write their thesis at the Chair of International Business, Society and Sustainability, students must have taken at least one course offered by our chair (the courses offered can be found on our website). We also particularly recommend attending a qualitative methods course, as it will provide a strong methodological foundation for the research process.

Thesis topics should be selected by the student and proposed to us using the application form available on StudOn. The topics must align with the chair's research areas, such as business and human rights, sustainability governance, and political ecology, and students are encouraged to think carefully about their research question and the methodology they intend to use before submitting their proposal. It is desirable that students choose topics for which they have already acquired in-depth knowledge through previously attended courses, and they should ensure that the scope of the topic is manageable within the given timeframe. Moreover, the chair has a strong focus on qualitative methods and particularly encourages theses that incorporate empirical data collection, such as interviews, discourse analysis, document analysis, or participant observation.

Bachelor's students **must submit their final thesis within nine weeks of the formal registration** at the Examinations Office, while Master's students have **six months from the date of registration**. In justified cases, such as when the thesis is written in cooperation with an external organization, an extension of up to nine weeks may be granted upon request.

Attendance at colloquia organized by the chair is required as part of the supervision agreement.

3. Application process

Applications must be submitted exclusively by filling out the application form on our StudOn page within the application timeframe (check the website for the current dates and plan ahead). Please ensure you submit before the deadline, as late applications will not be considered. Applications sent by email will not be accepted.

Selected students will be contacted by their supervisor via email and must formally confirm their acceptance within two weeks. Rejected applicants will also be notified by email. If you have not received communication within three weeks after the application deadline, please wait until this period has passed before reaching out.

3.1 Evaluation Criteria

Applications are evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Topic quality:** Preference is given to students who develop coherent, well-thought-out, and interesting topics. We particularly recommend formulating a clear research question and considering the intended methodology before applying.
- **Courses at the chair:** At least one course at our chair is required; students who have attended multiple courses receive preference.
- **Sustainability relevance:** Applications must demonstrate clear reference to the chair's research areas (e.g., business and human rights, sustainability governance, political ecology). Topics without this connection will not be considered.
- **Language flexibility:** Some topics require supervision and writing in English only. Others may be completed in German or English, depending on the topic and supervisor. Please indicate in the application form whether you can work in English, German, or both.

3.2 Application timeframe

Specific dates depend on the semester (Winter or Summer) and chair availability. Check the chair's website or StudOn application page for current deadlines.

3.3 Application Form Guidelines

Prepare the following key information for the StudOn form:

- Motivation statement
- Thesis theme (working title + brief description)
- Proposed methodology
- Courses taken at our chair
- Relevant experiences/skills

It is particularly important to provide clear, specific content for *theme, motivation, and methodology* fields. These directly influence evaluation according to the criteria outlined above.

4. Guidelines for writing academic papers

Once your application is successful and supervision confirmed, the following sections provide detailed guidelines for academic writing, thesis structure, formatting requirements, and submission procedures to ensure your work meets our chair's standards.

4.1 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 research question(s) is, 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. You should additionally provide a brief presentation of the methodological approach and the overall structure of the 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, determined through 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 presented 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 within the theoretical section. The presentation and discussion of theoretical approaches should be oriented towards the specific research question of the thesis and elaborated only to the extent that it is relevant to the research question and research interest. In addition, this section should describe the current state of research on the issue addressed in the thesis. To do this, develop a structured description of the relevant literature and evaluate the selected works in 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, etc.), and how the data was analyzed. Please, also include an interview guide and the transcribed interviews in an appendix at the end of your thesis. 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.

4.2 Structure of the document

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 should follow APA (American Psychological Association), Harvard or Chicago referencing. Make sure you are consistent with the use of a single style.

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 software such as **Citavi**, **Endnote** or **Zotero**. We also recommend writing and storing 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/Declaration of Originality. This is followed by the date and signature (see templates on StudOn)

To sum up, 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
- Appendix, if applicable
- Affidavit (with signature)

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	2 copies for BA/MA theses and in electronic form on a USB stick (interview transcripts, coding scheme) to the examination office.	
Binding	na	Bound	

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

This final section provides essential practical guidance for successfully completing your thesis at our chair. It covers mandatory colloquium participation, exposé requirements, ethical standards, our supervision approach, and the submission process to ensure the success of your writing process.

Writing qualification theses demonstrates the ability to independently present a problem, analyze material and data, and critically examine a topic. Bachelor's and Master's theses differ primarily in scope and depth, but share identical requirements for basic academic techniques (structure, citation, methodology).

6.1 Colloquium Participation

As part of the supervision agreement, attendance at our chair's colloquium is mandatory. The colloquium provides an opportunity to present your thesis project, discuss your topic with fellow thesis students, receive feedback from our team, and gain insights on methodology, literature review, and other aspects of academic writing.

6.2 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?

6.3 About the supervision process

The supervision process is flexible and depends on the specific agreement between the supervisor and student, covering aspects such as:

- Frequency and format of meetings (in-person, online, or hybrid)
- Feedback timeline on exposé, drafts, and other deliverables
- Communication preferences (email, StudOn, etc.)
- Progress check-ins

6.4 Ethical considerations and good academic practice

To ensure that your thesis follows the standards for good academic practice and meets ethical requirements, please consult the related folder on StudOn. In case you conduct interviews for data collection, please make sure that you follow the requirements for informed consent, securely store all collected data, and ensure the pseudonymization of participants. A template for written informed consent can be found in the template folder on StudOn. In case of doubts regarding ethical matters or good academic practice, please consult your supervisor.

Regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence, it is permitted in a limited manner. However, students must document the tools employed, specifying their exact purpose and how they were used. This declaration must be included in the declaration of originality affidavit, available on StudOn.

6.5 Registration

The registration form is available on StudOn. It must be signed by the chair holder and then submitted to the Prüfungsamt (examination office). The form requires your

personal information, thesis title, and supervisor signature.

The title indicated on the registration form is final. Any changes require prior notification to your supervisor and an official letter to the Prüfungsamt, so avoid them if possible.

Upon registration, the Prüfungsamt will send written confirmation with your official submission deadline. The correction period after thesis submission is approximately 6 weeks.

Good luck!

