

# How to write a Master's Thesis

PhDr. Ing. Antonín Pavlíček, Ph.D.

# PREPARATION

- Students learning how to write a Master's Thesis should first focus on a **central thesis question** - it must be presented and subsequently answered.
- A Master's Thesis will be **the most prominent** piece of your graduate work, and a thesis question forms the spine of this work.
- **KEEP IN MIND:** your Master's Thesis **WILL BE PUBLIC** and **GOOGLEble** for the rest of your life!!!

# Choose the topic

- Think about what interests you.
- You will spend a lot of time working on this project, so it is imperative that you **choose a topic that you are truly interested in**, something that you will not grow bored of after a short period of time.
- Try thinking about your **favorite subject** of study or work - it may be a particular author, theory, time period, etc. Imagine how you might further the study of that subject.
- If you are having trouble thinking about your academic interests, you might consider skimming through papers you wrote for your graduate courses and see if there is any apparent topic that you tend to gravitate towards.
- Consider also practical topics - perhaps ones related to your job.
- Be sure, you pick the topic, where you have enough data!!!

# Choose your thesis main question.

- Carefully consider **questions** for your Master's thesis that will generate important research and answers.
- In your Master's thesis, you must answer the thesis question with conviction and clarity in the written presentation submitted to complete a Master's degree.
- Make sure that your question and the answers provided will provide **original content** to the body of research in existence.
- A judicious question will also keep research focused, organized, and interesting.

# Conduct your research

- In order to answer the central question of your Master's thesis, you'll need to conduct the research necessary.
- **Read** the texts, conduct the **experiments**, do what you have to do to answer your thesis question.
- This will allow you to see if your project is worth moving forward with, or if there are some inherent problems that you may need to work out.

# Choose your supervisor

- It is important to choose supervisor members with whom you get along, who have enough time in his schedule to dedicate to your project, and whose area of expertise is relevant to the work you propose to do.

**WORK ON THESIS**

# Complete a literature review.

- Review the literature and research currently available that is relevant to your Master's thesis.
- This review of the literature must be exhaustive to ensure that your Master's thesis will be important and not be redundant.
- It is important that your thesis idea be original and relevant. In order to ensure this is the case, you need to be aware of the context of your research, what other people have said on the subject, and what the general opinion of your topic is.

# Choose your primary sources

- Primary sources are those that are written by the person who created the idea/story/theory/experiment/etc
- They are the important factual base that you will use in your Master's thesis, especially if you are writing an analytical thesis.
- For example, a novel written by Ernest Hemingway or a scientific journal article in which new results are documented for the first time would both be considered primary sources.

# Choose your secondary sources

- Secondary sources are sources that are written *about* primary sources.
- They are important to include in your Master's thesis because you'll need to demonstrate that you have a solid understanding of the critical context of your topic and that you understand what the major scholars in your field have to say about the subject.
- For example, a book written about Ernest Hemingway's novel or a scientific journal article examining the findings of someone else's experiment would both be considered secondary sources.

# Manage your citations

- Depending upon your field, you might front-load most of your research into an early chapter of the thesis, or you might include sources throughout the entirety of the document. Either way, you're likely to need to keep track of many different citations. You need to keep track of your citations as you write, rather than trying to add them after you are finished writing.
- Use the in-text citation format appropriate to your discipline. The most common formats are
  - Harvard and APA - author-date citation style
  - Chicago - consecutively numbered markers in the text, which refer to bibliographic citations, in footnotes.
  - Czech Technical Norm - numbered sources (alphabetically ordered)

<http://guides.lib.monash.edu/citing-referencing/apa>

- Consider using a citation management software such as EndNote, Mendeley, or Zotero. These will enable you to insert and move citations within your word processor program and will automatically populate a works cited or reference page for you.
- At least use MS Office Reference tool!

# Qualitative or Quantitative?

- Qualitative. This type of thesis involves completing a project that is exploratory, analytical, or creative in some way. Usually students in the humanities will complete this kind of thesis.
- Quantitative. This type of thesis involves conducting experiments, measuring data, and recording results. Students in the sciences usually complete this kind of thesis.

# Nail down your thesis idea

- Prepare a clear statement of the central thesis question that you intend to answer with your research.
- Being able to state your thesis explicitly and clearly is important.
- **If you struggle stating the question, you might need to rethink your project altogether.**

# Prepare an outline

- The outline will be beneficial to you to "see where you're going" as you move forward in your project, but also to give your supervisor an idea of what you want to accomplish and how you plan to do so.

# Structure of the thesis

- Title page
- Signature page (with the completed signatures of your advising committee - usually attained at the defense, or after the project is deemed *complete*)
- Abstract - this is a short (one paragraph or so) description/summary of the work completed in your thesis
- Table of Contents (with page numbers)
- Introduction
- Body of paper
- Conclusion
- Works Cited or Bibliography
- Any necessary appendices or endnotes

# Milestones

- Make a schedule.
- Write a little every day.
- Try the Pomodoro Technique.
- Start with practical part - research/project.
- Incorporate the review of literature.
- Compare your draft with your university's requirements.
- Proof-read the entire thesis for correctness.
- Submit your thesis ([isis.vse.cz](http://isis.vse.cz))

# Questions

- Wikipedia as a source?
- Referencing?