

## Guidance for Academic Thesis Development and Writing at the CSM

This information sheet applies to bachelor and master theses.

MBA students can find information on the e-learning platform in the MBA master thesis module.

### 1 First steps towards finding a supervisor and topic

- Our institute is always happy to supervise students interested in topics of sustainability management and entrepreneurship. If you have your own ideas for a topic, please cross-check with the research areas of the current CSM teaching staff. The topic should in the ideal case be related to their expertise.
- Only staff that is actively teaching courses can supervise theses. Apart from the professors, all teaching staff can supervise bachelor theses, only post-doctoral staff can supervise master theses. Pre-doctoral staff can take an informal advisory role here.
- You have several options:
  - If you lack an idea, teaching staff can indicate specific topics or fields on their webpage. The study dean's office also collects topics from teaching staff from time to time. However, supervision for a pre-existing topic cannot be guaranteed.
  - If you have an idea, please approach the teaching staff with ideas for your topic.
- Search for the 2<sup>nd</sup> supervisor, who can but should ideally not belong to the same professorship and institute for reasons of quality assurance, when you are in the finalisation stage of your thesis proposal. The Faculty of Sustainability and Faculty of Management and Technology have many researchers in the area of sustainability management.
- Please note that all theses at the CSM must be written in English for internalisation purposes.

### 2 Preparing your proposal

- Prepare a one-pager of your topic to approach your desired supervisor that briefly states the research topic, research gap and question, and intended theoretical/conceptual and methodological approach. In case you have several ideas, discuss them with the supervisor first.
- After you have received an expression of interest and feedback, prepare the full proposal of 3-6 pages. You should gain an overview over the literature first:
  - Survey the literature to spot existing approaches and gaps. Review the **international academic** literature (also class reading lists) and recent issues of relevant journals.
  - Make use of multiple libraries (e.g. Leuphana University and University of Hamburg) and databases (e.g. Scopus and Google Scholar).
  - Read a recent textbook on the topic, a recent handbook article, or an introductory or review article.
  - To support practical relevance, search online newspaper archives as well.
  - You can use citation management software (e.g. Citavi) to organise your literature sources and even your quotations (with page number). This can save time when writing and compiling your references.
- Next, formulate your topic very precisely, so that it leads to the key research question (ideally only one key question). When formulating the question (as a question and not as statement) keep in mind that you will be writing an analytical piece and not a descriptive work.

- The proposal should contain the following elements:
  - Explanation of topic and scope
  - Academic and practical justification and explanation of the central research question
  - Planned theoretical/conceptual and methodological approach to answering the question
  - Key literature for the thesis
  - Preliminary outline
  - Provisional timeline
- Meet with your supervisor to discuss your thesis proposal, which will have to be overhauled after discussion in most cases (sometimes more than once).
- You can begin your thesis and register it at the Student Services and you can begin your work **only if both supervisors explicitly agree to the proposal**.

### 3 Writing your thesis

- You can consult your supervisor in case of difficulties. However, you should establish agreement about the extent of the feedback beforehand.
- For **empirical work** based on surveys or interviews, design your empirical strategy and questionnaire or interview questions, and discuss these aspects with your supervisor **at an early stage and before you start data collection**.
- Analyse your data after consulting the appropriate literature and/or talking with an advisor at the Leuphana Center for Methods.
- Write a first **draft** of the thesis.
  - It can help to write an outline that clearly shows the development of your thesis, which should maintain a continuous “thread”, a consistent narrative.
  - You should have a heading or sub-heading every 2-3 pages in your text that structures your overarching narrative.
  - Adopt an analytical rather than descriptive style (i.e. explaining how/why things work, relating them to each other and identifying patterns rather than simply describing what things are)
  - Do not exceed the maximum number of pages: Remember that quality is more important than quantity!
- Plan some time to give your draft “a rest” so that you can see it in a new light and revise it (1-2 weeks if possible). Then, turn your initial draft into a final draft and then carefully proofread your work (checking formal aspects).
- Submit the thesis to Student Services ([www.leuphana.de/college/studium/pruefungen.html](http://www.leuphana.de/college/studium/pruefungen.html)).
- Academic work at the CSM is evaluated based on the following criteria:
  - Does your work address the topic in a comprehensive manner?
  - Does the structure of your work show a clear and balanced development of the thesis?
  - Do you treat the literature in its breadth and depth? Is it well integrated in the text?
  - Is your argumentation clear and logical, and based on sound scientific analysis?
  - Does your work show independent thinking in analysis and argumentation? Is there an innovative use of concepts?

- Is the thesis a piece of academic work conforming to the expectations regarding your academic level, e.g. bachelor's or master's degree student?
- Does the presentation of your work show care in formatting, language use, punctuation, citation style etc.?

## 4 Formal aspects of the thesis document

The look of your final text creates a first impression of your thesis and may also determine how it is read. Remember that a professional presentation creates “goodwill” among your readers.

### 1 Title page should contain the following information:

- Title of your thesis
- Your name, address, email and student ID number
- Type of work (e.g. master's thesis), names of your supervisors
- Date of submission

### 2 Formatting and page layout should not deviate too much from design norms

- Line spacing: 1.5
- Page margins: Regular (e.g. 2,5cm top, right, left and 2cm bottom are Word default)
- Fonts: 11-12 pts, common fonts are Times New Roman or Georgia (serif), and Calibri or Arial (sans-serif).

### 3 Length

- Unless the examination regulations specify otherwise, a bachelor thesis has 30-50 pages of content (without appendices), and a master thesis has 50-120 pages of content (without appendices).
- Do not attempt to reduce the length of the text by placing important text passages, figures or tables in the appendix. Instead, you should write concisely and to the point as length does not necessarily increase quality.
- In general, footnotes should not be used. Either the information is important – in which case it is an integral part of the text – or it is not – and has no place in your work.

### 4 Tables, figures and appendices

- Tables and figures that support important claims belong in the text. Tables, figures and other documents that would complicate or impede reading and are not extensively commented on in the text should be placed in an appendix. If you have more than one appendix, they should be numbered.
- Within figure images, use a sans serif font with a **legible** type size. When describing the table or figure, include a reference (for example: see Table 1).

### 5 Spelling and language

- Make sure that your text does not contain any language mistakes (spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalisation etc.). A minor number of mistakes may be acceptable, but massed mistakes indicate a lack of required effort.
- Consistently follow either British or American spelling rules, but not a mix of these.

### 7 Citations

- Every passage in your text that is derived from another person's work must be attributed to that person in an in-text citation referring the reader to your source (do not put the reference in a footnote). If you use someone's exact words, then you must put these in quotation marks followed by an in-text citation with a page number.

- Tables, graphs, images, etc. must also include a citation. If you have made, for example, a graph yourself, please *refrain from* citing yourself unnecessarily (no statements such as “Source: Own graph”).
- While there are a number of styles, please follow the **latest version of the widely-used APA Style** (<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples>):
  - In-text citations for direct quotations from someone else’s work: the quoted text is in quotation marks, followed by the author’s last name, the date of publication and the page number in parentheses. Example: “Not every improvement of eco-efficiency is equal to an improvement of environmental performance” (Strecker & Jacobsen, 2009, p.20).
  - In-text citations for referencing information or ideas from another person’s work: Do not use quotation marks, but do follow the passage with a citation, including the page number when appropriate. Example: (Weber & Schäffer, 2001).
  - If there are more than two authors to a work, name the first author and follow it with “et al.” (Latin et alii meaning “and others”). Example: (Müller et al., 2004, p.45.).

## 8 References section

- The References section at the end of your text contains bibliographic details of all the sources cited in your text following the APA Style. They are listed in alphabetical order by lead author. Do not subdivide your references into books, journals, legal texts etc. Primary data are not a reference and should be listed in the methodology section.
- As a general rule, all citations should allow the reader to unambiguously identify and locate the sources you have used in your work.
- **It is mandatory to include all available DOI (Digital Object Identifiers) for journal articles and ISBNs for books.** Do not put a period after a DOI or URL because it may interfere with link functionality.
- Consult APA Guide and use style templates (e.g. Citavi) when in doubt how to cite. Citavi can fetch and auto-complete publication details from DOIs and ISBNs. The APA Style guidelines for references are as follows:
  - **Journal articles:** Last name, Initial of first names (Year). Title of article: Subtitle. *Journal, Volume*(Issue), Page range. DOI address

Example: Donaldson, T. & Preston, L.E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation: concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65-91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/258887>  
 Note: Volume and issue number are given in the language of the source text.

- **Books:** Last name, Initial of first names (Year). *Title: Subtitle* (Edition, if not the first). Publisher.

Example: Freeman, R.E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pitman.  
 Note: The edition is given in the language of the source text.

- **Chapter in edited books:** Last name, Initial of first names (Year). Title of the chapter. In: Last name, Initial of first name (Ed. or Eds. if multiple), *Title of the edited book* (Page range). Publisher.

Example: Lüdeke-Freund, F., Bohnsack, R., Breuer, H. & Massa, L. (2019). Research on Sustainable Business Model Patterns: Status quo, Methodological Issues, and a Research Agenda. In: Aagaard, A. (Ed.), *Sustainable Business Models – Innovation, Implementation and Success* (pp.25-60). Palgrave Studies in Sustainable Business in Association with Future Earth. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93275-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93275-0_2)

- **Newspaper articles:** Last name, Initial of first name (Year, Date). Title of the article, *Newspaper*, link

Example: Abboud, L. (2019, September 25). British farmers face uncertainty despite ‘green Brexit’ promises. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/6e159a24-be7d-11e9-938178bab8a70848>

- **Theses and dissertations:** Last name, Initial of first names (Year). *Title: Subtitle* (Publication number) [Type of thesis, academic institution]. Publishing repository. Link.

Example: Kabir, J. M. (2016). *Factors influencing customer satisfaction at a fast food hamburger chain: The relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty* (Publication No. 10169573) [Doctoral dissertation, Wilmington University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1834002595>

- **Webpage:** Last name, Initial of first name (or organization) (Year, Date). *Title: Subtitle*. Retrieval date, from online address.

Example: Umweltbundesamt (2019, September 27). *Klimaschutz in Unternehmen: Diskussion zu*

*Klimamanagement*. Retrieved October 7, 2019, from <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/themen/klimaschutz-in-unternehmen-diskussion-zu>

## 9 Figures, tables and abbreviations

Separate lists of figures, tables and abbreviations follow the table of contents.

## 10 Statutory declaration

You must conclude your thesis with a signed statutory declaration...

- that all the contained work has been conducted by you independently,
- that all sections that contain the work of others have been marked with an appropriate reference,
- that none of the work declared as your own has been produced by AI such as ChatGPT. However, you can use AI as a support tool. In this case, you must a) declare all parts of your work that have been supported through automated tools (e.g. AI tools), b) declare that these parts have been disclosed as such and c) independently revised by you for factual correctness and suitability.

## 5 Thesis colloquium

- After both supervisors have marked the thesis with at least a “satisfactory” mark (4,0) and a deviation smaller than two grades between them, you will be admitted to the colloquium. This process takes at least 4-6 weeks from submission, but may also take longer depending on the individual circumstances of the supervisors.
- The colloquium cannot be conducted without admission from student services, who have to send the colloquium protocol to the 1<sup>st</sup> supervisor beforehand.
- The colloquium lasts for approximately 30 minutes and is intended to test your understanding and reflection on the topic. You should prepare a presentation that runs for 10-15 minutes. This must not be exceeded at all.
- The presentation should not merely repeat the thesis, but emphasise its findings and discuss their implications.
- Afterwards, the supervisors will ask questions based on the thesis and your presentation. Prepare to reflect on shortcomings and implications of your thesis.
- The supervisors will then deliberate on your presentation and answers to their questions and decide on a mark, which will contribute 20% to your total mark.
- Congratulations, you have now finished your bachelor thesis!

**We wish you good luck and all the best with the work on your thesis!**