# GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR MASTER’S THESES (30 CR)

**Master’s thesis**

The requirements for a master’s degree include a written master’s thesis, usually consisting of an empirical section and its critical examination using literature related to the research topic. The thesis may also be based solely on literature or other scientific source material. The overall scope of a master’s thesis is 30 credits, which means that it can be completed in one term when working full-time (approximately four to five months of work, some 20 to 40 pages and 40 to 50 sources). The thesis must be analytical and focused on the topic, primarily following the style requirements for academic articles. Furthermore, the thesis must observe a consistent system of referencing, on which degree programmes will provide detailed instructions. Even if a master’s thesis is part of a larger research project, students must ensure when devising the master’s thesis plan that it will be possible to complete the thesis in accordance with the scope described in these instructions.

Master’s theses are academic papers primarily intended to familiarise students with research work within a reasonable timeframe. For this reason, a thesis with results that prove inadequate for reasons unrelated to the writer can nevertheless be approved if the empirical section is completed as planned, the use of material is appropriate, and the scientific approach used in the reporting is acceptable. Master’s theses must be planned and written in observance of the principles of research ethics, which should be ensured already at the planning stage. Further information on the research ethics principles of the University of Helsinki is available here: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/research/research-environment/research-ethics>.

The master’s thesis can be written independently or by participating in groupwork or a broader research project. The work must include independent input by the student that can be clearly demonstrated and assessed, and the thesis itself must be independently written. If a degree programme has made a separate decision on the matter, the master’s thesis can be written as pairwork with a fellow student. Further information on this is available in the degree programme instructions (https://guide.student.helsinki.fi/en). The thesis must be written in a language specified in the language guidelines of the University of Helsinki (Rector’s Decision 45/2016, 27 April 2016). As a rule, students whose native language is Finnish or Swedish write their master’s thesis in their native language, but they can also write it in English. Those completing an English-language master’s degree must, without exception, write their master’s thesis in English. The language of the thesis will be recorded in the master’s thesis plan, to be approved as part of the plan.

Students can begin writing their thesis and gain approval for their master’s thesis plan only after being admitted to a master’s programme. At least one supervisor must be appointed to the thesis. Detailed requirements concerning the selection of thesis topics and supervisors are provided by the degree programmes.

The degree programmes have one or more members of their teaching and research staff serving as coordinators for master’s theses and their assessment. Details on the student’s coordinator, as well as instructions on thesis layout, drafting a research plan and the system of referencing are provided in programme-specific instructions. These specific instructions are available in the instructions for students under the student’s personal degree programme (https://guide.student.helsinki.fi/en).

**Master’s thesis plan**

Before starting to write their master’s thesis, students must always draft a separate written thesis plan. The plan will be signed by the degree programme coordinator, the student and the supervisor(s). The plan will be processed and archived in a manner separately determined by the degree programme. Details recorded in the plan include the objectives and implementation of the thesis, the supervisors and progress of work under supervision, the role of the supervisor(s), a detailed schedule for the thesis, the language of the thesis and the duration of the supervisory relationship. LINK to the master’s thesis plan

By signing the plan, the degree programme coordinator approves the thesis topic and confirms that the research equipment and work facilities needed for the work will be at the student’s disposal. Furthermore, the coordinator approves the thesis supervisor(s). Supervisors must hold at least a doctoral degree or equivalent qualifications.

The validity of the master’s thesis plan will also be determined in the plan. If the plan expires before the student has submitted his/her thesis for examination, the plan must be submitted again for approval by the supervisors and the coordinator. Short extensions to the deadline may be agreed upon with the coordinator for the purposes of, for example, adding final touches to the writing. The validity must be determined in such a manner that the student has a reasonable time to acquire material for the thesis, conduct the necessary analyses and write the actual thesis.

If the topic or supervisor of the master’s thesis changes, or the student’s/supervisor’s personal situation changes so that the thesis cannot be completed in accordance with the original master’s thesis plan, the student must update the plan. If the recorded term of the plan expires and no new plan has been approved, the supervisor is no longer obligated to carry on with his/her supervisory responsibilities. An agreement on the access rights to material collected by the student will be recorded in the master’s thesis plan. Approved master’s thesis plans are archived by the degree programmes. The original plan form will be given to the student.

**Master’s thesis abstract**

Master’s theses must be accompanied by a separate abstract. The abstract must be written in the language of the thesis, in addition to which it is recommended to write an English-language version of the abstract. Students whose native language is Finnish or Swedish and who write their thesis in English or another language must also write an abstract in their native language, and translate the title of the thesis into their native language. The abstract must include keywords describing the content of the thesis. The abstract must be written on the University’s abstract form.

When writing the abstract, the author must assume that the readers have a general understanding of the topic. However, the abstract must be understandable to readers when read independently of the thesis. The abstract must also be written in full sentences, not as a list of subheadings. The abstract should not include references, quotations, information or claims not included in the thesis itself.

The abstract should indicate, among other things, the purpose and objectives of the thesis, the research method and materials used, central research results and related conclusions, as well as the potential need for further research. The thesis supervisor(s) must also be stated in the abstract form.

Master’s theses are public documents. The actual thesis to be assessed must include no information intended to remain confidential under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) (e.g., business or professional secrets). Such information, if any, must be included only in the background material of the thesis. The examiners of the thesis are bound by confidentiality if they choose to access this information. Assessment of the thesis, however, is based on its public content.

**Duties and obligations of the supervisor and the student**

Responsibility for the progress of the work rests primarily with the student, who is expected to stay in regular contact with the supervisor. The supervisor must read the various versions of the thesis manuscript, provide feedback, offer advice on academic writing and correct factual errors. The supervisor is also responsible for providing help in the planning stage, as well as steering the experimental stage, the acquisition of material and the use of methods. The duties of the supervisor do not, however, include carrying out analyses or determinations on behalf of the student. After the student’s plan has been approved, he/she has committed to cooperating with the supervisor according to the agreed schedule. The student must discuss and agree on the stages of the work and responsibilities related to the process with the supervisor(s). These will be recorded in the master’s thesis plan.

**Examination of the master’s thesis**

Students must submit their completed master’s thesis for examination by storing the thesis in a digital system in accordance with instructions provided by the Faculty. Students must have a valid right to pursue a master’s degree in the relevant degree programme. In addition, students must be registered as attending students at the University for the term during which the thesis is to be approved and graded.

The degree programme coordinator will appoint two examiners for the thesis. The minimum requirement for thesis examiners is a doctoral degree or equivalent qualifications. In addition, the disqualification of examiners is governed by sections 27 and 28 of the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003). In order to consistently apply the grading scale, among other reasons, it is recommended that at least one of the examiners is from the student’s Faculty or degree programme. Examiners must complete the thesis assessment through a digital system.

Examiners base their assessment on the sections included in the assessment matrix (link to the assessment matrix). The assessment statement may be written in Finnish, Swedish or English. For those students whose native language is not Finnish or Swedish, the examiners must write their assessment in English. When writing their assessment, the examiners should ensure that its contents correspond with the proposed grade. Assessments must be stored in the digital system within a month after the examiners have received the thesis for assessment.

**Examination of master’s theses in the University’s plagiarism recognition system**

All master’s theses submitted for examination will be examined by the plagiarism recognition system at the time of submission. The coordinator appointed by the degree programme must review the report from the plagiarism recognition system and, when necessary, discuss it with the student. The student must be provided with an opportunity to review the report no later than when a grade proposal is submitted.

After the master’s thesis has been examined, the related report from the plagiarism recognition system becomes public. If the student requests the suspension of the assessment process of his/her master’s thesis, the related report will not yet be made public. All suspicions of cheating related to master’s theses will be investigated in accordance with the University’s internal procedure. Unexamined theses and related plagiarism reports will become public after a decision has been made on the matter.

**Master’s thesis assessment and grading criteria**

In their statements, the master’s thesis examiners will assess areas 1 to 6, while the supervisor will assess area 7. When examining master’s theses, the following aspects are considered:

1. **Research topic and purpose:** Justified significance of the thesis topic, insightful selection and framing of the topic, clarity of the research task and objective, research question or theme, consideration of research ethics
2. **Knowledge of the research field and related theories as well as use of literature:** Familiarity with research and literature related to the topic, relevance of the research perspective and concepts to the problem discussed, versatile use of source literature, source criticism, as well as use of original scientific sources, analytical examination of perspectives found in the literature and creation of syntheses
3. **Material, acquisition of material and analyses:** Methods suitable to the research task, comprehensive description of the methods (strategy, data acquisition and analysis), adequacy of research material and its relevance to the research task and analysis methods, description of material, critical and evaluative use of methods, consideration of research ethics
4. **Research results and reporting:** The results answer the research questions/hypotheses, logical nature and clarity of result reporting, illustration of results: the relation of images, diagrams and tables to the text
5. **Examination of results (discussion) and conclusions:** Setting the research results in context with prior research, presentation of new research problems, consideration of application opportunities, assessment of reliability in accordance with the research approach, consideration of research ethics, critical and thorough assessment of the research process and results, thoroughness, reliability and insightfulness of conclusions, conclusions based on the research results
6. **Structure, clarity and polishing of the thesis:** Clear structure appropriate for the research approach, command of academic prose style (varies according to the research approach), clear and smooth separation and integration of interpretations made by the author and the data presented in source material, clear and grammatically correct language, appropriate and consistent use of referencing, clarity and accuracy of the bibliography, correct layout
7. **Conduct of work during the thesis process:** Open-mindedness and independence, internalisation of methods and creativity in solving problems, writing the thesis within the agreed schedule

Master’s theses are graded on a scale of 0 to 5. Grading criteria are described in a separate assessment matrix. The examiners must draft their statements so that they consider all the main points of the thesis and include sufficient justification for the proposed grade.

**Pedagogical master’s theses**

Students who are completing studies required to qualify as a subject teacher may write a pedagogical master’s thesis focused on themes such as research concerned with pupils, students, teachers or subject teacher students, or the production and testing of teaching material/methods in school or university studies. Pedagogical master’s theses must observe the Faculty’s general guidelines on master’s theses. The coordinator must ensure that students writing a pedagogical thesis will also be provided pedagogical supervision. It is advisable to include at least one examiner with experience in pedagogical master’s theses or training in pedagogy in the thesis assessment process.

**Master’s thesis processing**

Decisions on approving master’s theses and their grading are made by the Faculty Council. If expert examiners have differing views on the grade, the coordinator will make a reasoned grade proposal. The student will be notified of the grade proposal approximately a week before the Faculty Council meeting where the decision on approving the thesis and the grade will be made.

The student may submit a written request for the suspension of the grading process before the Faculty Council decides on the grade. This will cancel grading procedures. Relaunching of the grading process requires that the thesis be submitted as a new work to be assessed by expert examiners.
A student dissatisfied with the Faculty Council’s grading decision may appeal to the Academic Appeals Board in accordance with section 56 of the Regulations on Degrees and the Protection of Students’ Rights.

**Maturity test**

The requirements for a master’s degree include a written maturity test, which is intended to demonstrate familiarity with the topic and content of the master’s thesis. Details on organising and completing the maturity test are separately announced in degree programme instructions.