

Guide for the Master of Science thesis of the Department of Management & Technology

This document provides the Department of Management & Technology's guidelines for writing a Master of Science thesis. This means working with a supervisor that is a member of this department. These guidelines are intended to help students identify and take the necessary steps for writing a thesis, which is the finishing line in a student's career. For further details, please consult the "[Thesis and Graduation Session](#)" page of the Guide to the university (with special reference to [the new rules for sessions starting July 2017](#)) and the indications provided by the Directors of the various Master of Science programs.

A. BASIC RULES

- Students should start thinking about the topic of their thesis and how to plan their work around the end of the first year of the program. The initial step is to submit a thesis project to a possible supervisor who, after approving the project, will be in charge of tutoring the student in all the subsequent stages.
- Writing a thesis requires on average four months of full-time work, a "Research thesis" takes longer. This does not include the time used to elaborate the project and look for a supervisor.
- The thesis is written in Italian or English according to the rules of the Master of Science program in which the student is enrolled.
- A typical Master of Science thesis is approximately 50-page long (or about 18,000 words)
- There are two types of theses: (1) "Research thesis": earns from 0 to 8 points. (2) "Thesis": from 0 to 5. It is important for students to immediately make up their mind about the type of thesis they want to pick.
- Any thesis must be an original work written by the student.

B. RECOMMENDED STEPS

1. IDENTIFY A TOPIC: Ideas may arise from many sources (i.e., topics discussed in classes, case studies and assignments, articles read on academic or practitioner journals, stories in the news, blogs or social media, personal contact with firms and managers, issues one has become familiar with during internships...). Here it is important to find ideas that are current and relevant to modern firms, with clear managerial and/or theoretical implications.
2. DEFINE A RESEARCH QUESTION: after choosing a topic, it is important to think of a research question, i.e. something that is not already known about the topic and seems to deserve investigation. To develop an interesting research question, it is useful to:
 - 2.1. Explore the state of the art of the literature (i.e. what is already known), both in academic research (books or journal articles, which one can access through the internet or datasets that are made available to Bocconi students through the Library website) and in popular sources (newspapers, magazines, newsletters).
 - 2.2. Map the existing positions and perspectives taken on the topic and try and develop your own, in a way that is relevant and original.
 - 2.3. Write a one-page thesis project (see Appendix), identify a professor who specializes in the topic (using the Department's web page for [Theses/Final Papers guidance](#)), and send the project to him/her; you may also contact a professor that you met in courses that are related to your topic.
 - 2.4. If the professors you identified are not available, please contact the member of the Department's thesis orientation team for your subject area (Organization, Strategy, Innovation & Technology);

these professors help students identify supervisors who may be available, within the limits of the supervisors' workload and the areas that are covered by the Department.

- 2.5. As soon as students agree a project with a supervisor, they should register the (provisional) title of the thesis in the "Final Paper Title submission" section of the Graduation - Application Procedure of you@B; this step is necessary to start the formal process and confirm that the project has been approved. Important: students must register the title **within ten days from receiving the supervisor's approval**; if they fail to do so, professors do not have any obligations towards the student and can take up other projects. The provisional title can be modified in accordance with the developments of the project before finalizing the thesis.
- 2.6. Students and supervisors agree the appropriate ways of organizing the activities of the project. Students are expected to update supervisors regularly and communicate promptly any change in the project schedule.
- 2.7. The Department's contact secretary for administrative assistance in the procedures is Mrs. Paola Rotelli (paola.rotelli@unibocconi.it).

C. THE SUPERVISOR'S DUTIES

The role of the supervisor is to:

- a) Assist students in identifying a topic.
- b) Help them think critically about the topic and develop the research question.
- c) Define the boundaries of the research.
- d) Suggest appropriate methodologies for conducting the research.
- e) Approve the project (including an expected table of the contents and a research plan).
- f) Identify research objectives that are actually doable.
- g) Evaluate the final results.

It is important that, no matter how the work has been organized, students deliver a final version of the thesis to the supervisor in reasonable advance of the final deadline for graduating, so that the supervisor is given the time to establish whether the thesis is at least adequate and that no problems arise that could prevent the supervisor to grant the necessary final approval.

D. FINAL DEFENSE

The Master of Science thesis is defended by students in front of a Commission. Preparation is crucial for this final step. During the defense, students should present:

- What they intended to investigate (topic and research question).
- What methods they used (e.g. interviews, surveys, archival data, etc.).
- What important results have been found.
- What are the general conclusions and the managerial implications that can be drawn.

An effective defense in front of the Commission contributes to the evaluation of thesis. Tips:

- Show that you "own" the project and have achieved a familiarity with the issues, the methods and theories involved (as opposed to a boilerplate speech);
- Find relevant and appealing examples, from your dataset or case studies, or from stories in the news.