

Guide to Writing a Master Thesis in SEEP

Timeline

The SEEP Program allows you to write your thesis in the fourth semester. Since you only have one course left – the thesis colloquium – which usually takes place on three days during the semester, you can completely focus on writing your thesis for a whole semester. However, try to not postpone finding your topic or a supervisor, since you should try to already work on your thesis during the fourth semester.

The first two steps you need to take before you can start can vary in time, thus, it does not matter if you know who supervises you but don't have a topic or the other way around. Additionally, I cannot tell you how long each step will take since the time heavily depends on your topic, the availability of your supervisor, the agreement you have with your supervisor, data availability and method.

1. Finding a topic

There are various ways to find a topic for your master's thesis. You can either:

- » think about a topic yourself that you are particularly interested in
- » extend a seminar paper that you wrote in one of your courses (if your supervisor agrees),
- » find a paper you are particularly interested in and continue/extend the research,
- » find a supervisor first and ask him/her for any ideas,
- » look at the websites of departments with potential master thesis topics, or
- » find a topic through other organizations (most of the time they are announced on their website e.g. Arbeiterkammer...).

Keep in mind that your thesis should fill a gap in existing literature. Make your own contribution visible by dealing with a research question which has not yet been covered or extend existing research by adding a different time period, point of view, variable etc.

2. Finding a supervisor

Before finding a supervisor, you should have a rough idea about the area you are interested in or the method you intend to work with. This helps you in finding a supervisor, since you should look for someone who is either familiar with the topic or with the method. You can either approach your professors after class and ask about supervision in your field or even ask if they know someone in their institute who might be familiar with the research you intend to do.

Another opportunity to find a supervisor is the thesis fair, which is usually organized by your student reps and takes already place in the third semester. The fair is organized in a World Cafe style where researchers talk with students



about thesis topics. It is a great opportunity for you to start taking the thesis subject seriously and consider areas you would be interested in working on.

3. Literature overview

After finding a rough topic and a supervisor you should start digging into the existing literature. The literature overview is supposed to help you get a deeper understanding of your research area, get an idea for potential research questions, gaps in literature, available data and possible methods. The literature overview does not have to be an already developed literature review, however, it is of help if you already take notes. This makes writing the literature review a lot easier.

4. Research Question

Formulate a concise research question that you will answer in your thesis. Try not to be too broad.

5. Find/Collect your data

For answering your research question, you will most likely need data. From your initial literature review you should already know if there is data available or not. Most of the time, your supervisor also knows where to get the data from and can help you with that if you are not able to find anything. For some data you will need to file a request, which usually takes some time!! Other data is available online or not available at all.

Thus, if you want to collect primary data you should know your method first, since your method will influence your procedure. If you want to conduct an online survey, you can use lime-survey, which is provided by WU, however, your supervisor will need to sign you up for it.

6. Choose a method

As you know from your method courses, there is a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, you can choose from. The method depends on your research question and the data available. Be aware of the limitations of your data and the method and make sure to discuss them in your thesis.

7. Proposal

After digging into your topic, finding literature

and data on it, developing a rough research question and knowing the data you want to choose, it is time to start writing on your proposal. You will discuss your proposal with your supervisor, but you will also need it for the thesis colloquium. Try to be as precise as possible, focus on clarity but also try to already include parts of your literature review. This will really help you once you start writing.

It depends on the agreement with your supervisor, but I would suggest you to wait for his/her feedback before starting your analysis. However, during your "waiting time" you can already continue with your literature review. Timewise, I would suggest you already hand it in in February.

There will also be an official deadline for handing in your proposal from the SEEP program but it varies from year to year. Thus, it is best to talk to your student reps about the requirements and deadline for your cohort.

8. Empirical analysis

After finding a method and your data, it is time to continue with the empirical analysis. If you are doing quantitative research, you need to first prepare your data which usually takes longer than you expect – probably longer than the estimation itself! Keep that in mind! Once your data is ready, you can run regressions.

When focusing on qualitative research or using a mixed methods approach, you also have to prepare your data to further process it, using your chosen method. Be aware, that in depth analyses are time consuming as well. The empirical part of your master thesis is therefore probably the most time consuming one!

9. Writing

Finally your hard work and preparation pays off! Since you already wrote your proposal and part of your literature review, analyzed your data and found results to answer your research question it is time to write everything down.

Try not to forget to cite properly! Use the tool Zotero for citation if you write in a Word document. You can also use Latex if you have multiple formulas and tables.

10. Thesis Colloquium presentation

During the thesis colloquium you will need to present your thesis. Thus, by the time of the presentation – which will take place in June – your thesis should already be advanced, since you will present your research question, your findings, the method you used etc. The presentation will be held in front of your colleagues but also in front of some SEEP professors.

11. Handing in your thesis

Your thesis must be handed in on myLearn. After your supervisor registered you, you can upload the thesis in the tab “Theses”. Your work will run through a plagiarism check. You will get an E-Mail once your thesis has been graded.

Your thesis will most likely be the last grade you need to graduate. Once you get your grade you need to apply for your graduation documents. You will get an E-Mail (in 2-4 weeks) once you can get your documents at the Study Service Center at WU where you can also register for a graduation ceremony. Keep in mind to **bring a hard cover copy of your thesis**, otherwise you

will not get your graduation documents.

Extra Tips:

- » Try to continuously work on your thesis, otherwise it will take a lot of time to get into the topic again
- » Establish a clear agenda and schedule
- » Keep a research journal
- » Contact authors about their paper and the code they used. They are usually happy to help
- » You can book a room in the WU library for a whole semester when writing your master’s thesis
- » Look for possible funding. Ask your supervisor about scholarships or apply for an internship by a firm which supports your thesis
- » Keep the deadlines and the long waiting times for data, feedback, documents etc. in mind!

All information is for general guidance and is provided with no guarantee of completeness or accuracy.

Questions? Contact us!

Student Representation

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