

The processes of writing a thesis (Bachelor/Master)

Preliminary note

In a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral thesis, you should demonstrate the ability to: handle the methodological tools of media cultural studies/media cultural research; evaluate sources independently; and link your material to theoretical frameworks.

The research process already includes the identification of an appropriate topic, problem or research field, for which you develop a suitable question and formulate a thesis. See Guidelines: "[Research Questions and Hypotheses](#)".

For preliminary discussion of a possible Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral thesis, regular and active participation in the colloquium is required in the semester prior to registration of the thesis and is optional during the writing phase. In the colloquium, two presentations, each up to 10 minutes long and followed by discussion, should be given: each of the presentations should deal with one of the steps to the thesis (see Guidelines: "[Steps to the Thesis](#)"). For each presentation, a research question and thesis should be formulated and submitted in written form to the instructor up to two days before the session.

The Guidelines "[Steps to the Thesis](#)" schematically presents the individual milestones in the preparation of a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral thesis and describes the research process. Please also refer to the Guidelines on "[Grading Criteria](#)" of a final thesis.

1. The research process

1.1 Development of a research question and hypothesis

The research question defines the framework of the paper. It is important that the question can actually be answered in the work. The research question defines the spatial/cultural and temporal dimension of the project.

Furthermore, the research question identifies the primary sources of the work, i.e. the object or phenomenon to be investigated. The research question should be formulated as a question that has more than one possible answer. During the research process, the research question usually changes. This is a sign that you are making progress in your research.

The thesis is an answer to your research question. It must be debatable and cannot be a matter of course. In addition, it determines the argumentation of the paper and has a formative effect on the outline.

Developing a meaningful research question and a disputable thesis are central to giving grades (see Guidelines: "[Grading Criteria](#)"). Therefore, be sure to follow the guidelines for formulating a research question and thesis (see Guidelines: "[Research questions and hypotheses](#)").

1.2 Mind map with key concepts

In order to be able to work on a research area in a meaningful way, one must identify the central concepts that belong to the research question. These terms guide the research on the one hand and on the other hand, they emerge from the already existing literature on the topic.

The mind map refers to the graphical representation of the key concepts of the thesis, in which an initial hierarchization of the terms takes place. You should ask yourself the following questions when creating the mind map for your thesis: How are the terms related to each other? Which terms do I think are central to my topic? Which ones are more peripheral? At the center of the mind map is not the research question, but rather the essence of the topic expressed in as few words as possible.

1.3 Research Sources and Bibliography

The key concepts, which were worked out in the mind map, serve as search terms for the literature research. Accordingly, they have to be contextualized in the paper itself within the framework of extant research. The research is conducted through the University Library (UB) catalogue. In order to access the most current scholarship on your topic, you must search specialist journals (see Guidelines "[List of recommended journals in Media Cultural Studies](#)"). At the beginning of your research, you should directly access full texts (and not only titles) from the list of journals. Purposeful reading helps to determine whether a text is relevant to your topic. If the text has relevance, you should then answer the questions from the Guidelines "[Questions to pose when reading a scholarly text](#)".

Your bibliography should mainly comprise new sources (from the past 10 years) and classics (sources frequently cited in recent research) on your topic. This can be determined by paying attention to the footnotes, endnotes and references in recent research on one's own topic.

The bibliography should clearly indicate the (2-3) research approaches with which your work deals. The choice of sources determines the approaches. Possible approaches include, among others: Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory, Psychoanalysis, (Post-)Structuralism, New Criticism, Phenomenology, Formalism or Neo-formalism.

1.4 Outline

The development of the outline is based on an advanced mind map on your chosen topic. The outline should be guided primarily by the thesis. The outline should coherently and convincingly present an argument based on your distinctive thesis. Since this point is central to the grading, please refer to the Guidelines on "[Grading criteria](#)". Avoid the separation of theory and analysis in the outline. These should be interwoven in the argumentation.

2. Writing process

2.1 First page

The first page is the unifying element that links the research process with the writing process. As you can see, you have already taken many steps before you start writing.

When writing the first page, you should ask yourself how you want to introduce your topic. Often an “in media res” beginning with an example is suitable. Besides the introduction to the topic, the first page always includes the research question and the hypothesis.

2.2 What does the sentence do?

The technique of being able to name the subject of a paragraph with a term is useful for both reading texts as well as for the production of your own texts (see Guidelines on [“Questions to pose when reading a scholarly text”](#)). That means, think about each paragraph you write and ask yourself what it adds to your argument. Remember that a single sentence does not constitute a paragraph.

2.3 One’s own thoughts and other people’s thoughts

One challenge in writing a scientific thesis is to make a clear distinction between your own thoughts and those of others. Techniques such as the quotation and the paraphrase serve to mark the thoughts of others. It is important that you do not leave the thoughts of others without comment; you must follow them up with your own reflections. It is equally necessary in your work that you do not only cite and discuss facts, but also, and importantly, cite and discuss the theses of other researchers, if they are relevant for your own argument (see Guidelines on [“Distinguishing one’s thoughts from those of others”](#)).

2.4 Citation forms

Decide on one of the three proposed citation styles and use it consistently (see Guidelines [“Citation Styles”](#)). For citations of audiovisual materials and online available materials, i.e. blogs, websites, and social media, refer to the Guidelines on [“Citing Audiovisual Media”](#). Complete PDFs of the manuals from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) can be found in the research colloquium’s ILIAS course. All other unusual citation forms can be looked up in the manuals (online or in printed form at the UB).