



Fact sheet

Zurich, 1. January 2025

Guidelines for the preparation, design and evaluation of master's theses at the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood

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1. Aim of a master's thesis

Learning objectives achieved by writing a master's thesis:

- Understand a psychological research question.
- Translate the research question into a research plan, taking into account the current state of research.
- Comprehend and perform the appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to implement the research question.
- Sift through state-of-the-art theory, methods, and results, present them in a structured manner, present them appropriately, and discuss them in a crosslinked manner.
- Independence in carrying out these steps.

Master's theses are usually written by one student alone. However, master's theses in pairs are possible: it is possible to work together within the framework of a larger empirical study, with each master student working on a specific question within the same study. Separate master's theses are written, which are graded individually.

2. Procedure of the master's thesis

2.1 First meeting

- Topic assignment by the supervisor.
- Clarify the process and supervision plan (scope, content, implementation, procedure, mutual expectations, schedule, frequency of meetings with supervisor) using this information sheet.

2.2 Proposal, project group and research colloquium

- Development of the research question, including time schedule, with supervisor and discussion of the same in the project group.
- Writing of a proposal which should review the theoretical background, current empirical findings, and the methods used therein, and derive well-founded hypotheses from them. Additionally, the proposed methods for the master's thesis (study design, operationalization, measurement instruments, planned sample and its recruitment, statistical analysis) should be presented. The length of the proposal depends on the scope and depth of the relevant literature, so no strict page number can be specified, but it generally falls within 30 to 40 pages (font 12, double line spacing, flutter margin, formatting according to the current APA guidelines). Ideally, the proposal already constitutes the theory section and some key parts of the methods section of the master's thesis.
- Two presentations of the thesis in the research colloquium (first time: introductory presentation on the theoretical and methodological concept of the study; second time: final presentation of the results). The proposal and the two PowerPoint presentations in the research colloquium are discussed with the supervisor in advance and count as the written proof of performance required for passing the research colloquium.
- The date of the presentation must in each case be coordinated in advance with the supervisor.
- Open Science: After the final submission of the proposal, and usually before the start of data collection, the study must be presented in the FoKo and preregistered on an Open Science platform, both in consultation with the supervisor. The dataset should – also in consultation with the supervisor – be made accessible on the appropriate platform in accordance with Open Science practices after the completion of the master's thesis.
- **Please note the information regarding the booking of the master's thesis:**
The official start date of the master's thesis is the date on which the master's thesis project (proposal) is presented in the "Research Colloquium 1". Bring the completed booking form with you to this date of the research colloquium and have it signed by the main lecturer and, if supervision has been delegated, also by the supervisor.

2.3 Data collection

- Development of the research materials (questionnaire, etc.) in close cooperation with supervisor.
- After final feedback on the material from the supervisor, data collection and data entry begin.
- The student is responsible for any participant recruitment. Assistance will be provided by the supervisor. The possible use of the participant server is only possible via the supervisor.
- Any experimental rooms at the university will be organized by the supervisor. The experimental materials are organized independently by the students.
- The payment of any costs will be clarified in advance with the supervisor.
Exception: If the work is done in connection with another larger research project, the data collection procedure is based on this project.

2.4 Data analysis

- Once data collection is complete, data preparation, cleaning, and finally data analysis begin, using the statistical methods agreed upon with the supervisor.
- Statistical analyses are to be performed independently.
- Presentation of preliminary results at the research colloquium; revision based on comments.
- Submission of revised preliminary research results to supervisor.
- Feedback meeting with supervisor and possibly further adjustments.

2.5 Manuscript of the master's thesis

- The "preliminary final version" of the master's thesis can be submitted once to the supervisor for comments. Submission of the "preliminary final version" of the thesis at least 8 weeks before the final submission deadline.
- Verbal or written feedback by supervisor.
- With the definitive final version, a detailed explanation must be given in the form of a cover letter as to which changes have been made in comparison to the "preliminary final version" and, if the student does not agree with a proposed change or criticism, a justification must be given explaining this.

2.6 Documentation

The data collected for the master's thesis are the property of the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood. They have to be handed in to the chair after completion of the thesis. "Handing in" refers saving them on the chair's server. This also refers to a detailed documentation of the survey instruments and data, as well as all collected and further processed data (raw data files and data files with which the final analyses were made), and all commented analysis scripts. The documentation and the data must be stored on the server of the chair. The exact server path must be listed in the master's thesis.

2.7 Time schedule

- The master's thesis should be devised such in a way that it can be completed within a maximum of one year.
- At the beginning of the thesis project, the student will make a timeplan for the thesis, taking into account the points mentioned above.
- The timeplan will be discussed with the supervisor.
- It is the student's responsibility to adhere to the timeplan.
- If a timeplan cannot be adhered to (e.g., due to delays in the recruitment of participants) it will be revised accordingly, and the supervisor will be informed. Please note that the submission date must still be met.

3. Supervision

- The number of meetings with the supervisor may vary depending on the complexity of the study. In these meetings, the current status, next steps and key decisions are discussed. The research colloquium is also used for feedback. Students are expected to have a basic knowledge of statistics. Any gaps in knowledge must be filled independently by the student.
- The prerequisite for satisfactory and effective support is mutual commitment, reliability and dedication: meetings and deadlines are met by both sides or postponed in good time and with good reason.
- No questionnaires may be circulated or posted online without the consent of the supervisor.
- To make meetings efficient and effective, good preparation is required, which should be structured as follows:
 - Before each meeting, a brief email is sent to the supervisor with the purpose of the meeting, questions to be addressed, and possible solutions.
 - During the meeting, there is first a brief review of the current status, then discussion of the questions, and at the end a conclusion regarding the clarification of all questions.
 - At the request of the supervisor, a record of the decisions is sent to them after the meeting, in which the results of the meeting, decisions and the next steps are outlined in key words.

4. Written documents

All written documents (including drafts, outlines, etc.) must be submitted orthographically and grammatically correct and in compliance with scientific standards (APA guidelines). AI-based programs can be used for linguistic corrections. However, this – like any use of AI assistance – must be appropriately disclosed in the master's thesis.

5. Final version of the thesis

- Master's theses are usually 60 to 100 pages long (including all appendices). If the thesis exceeds or falls short of this length, the consent of the supervisor must be obtained.
- The master's thesis is proofread once in a "preliminary final version".
- Submission of the "preliminary final version" of the thesis at least 8 weeks before the definitive deadline. Deviations from this deadline are only possible in special cases and after consultation with the supervisor. Even with the "preliminary final version", the document must be submitted in a complete and finalized form and the formal criteria must be met.
- Proofreading should ensure that gross errors in content are avoided and that the thesis is accepted (minimum grade 4).
- The "preliminary final version" is included in the evaluation of the work.
- The "preliminary final version" is proofread by the supervisor within 3 weeks and returned with written or oral feedback.
- There is no entitlement to a specific grade being awarded when the final version is reviewed after proofreading.
- The final version must be submitted on December 1 (fall semester) or June 1 (spring semester):
 - electronically by email (PDF) to the supervisor (the date of the email with which the PDF is submitted is the submission date).
 - a physical copy to the administration of the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood and – unless otherwise agreed – to the supervisor.
 - electronically in the "Abschlussarbeit" submission tool on the website of the Dean of Studies Office.
- Note: Do not forget to include the *declaration of independent authorship* and the *disclosure form for the usage of AI assistants in written assignments* with your signatures at the end of your thesis.

- The document " Ermächtigung Qualifikationsarbeiten " can be signed and submitted on a voluntary basis. The author thus authorizes the reading or (in special cases) the lending of the work.
- After completion of the thesis, the supervisor prepares a proposal for an expert opinion and grade. If the chairperson is not also the supervisor, the chairperson writes the final report and determines the grade based on the supervisor's proposal.
- The assessment and grade take into account the entire performance from the acceptance of the topic up to and including the creation of the final version, i.e., all mandatory milestones are the basis for the assessment.
- Not only a priori existing knowledge and skills (e.g., regarding statistics) are taken into account, but also the ability to acquire new knowledge, independence in the design, implementation, data analysis, and writing of the empirical study/-ies, as well as personal commitment.
- The evaluation criteria are explained in more detail on the following pages.

6. Personal requirements

The following characteristics of personal work style are essential for successful completion of the master's thesis:

- Independence, structured way of working and commitment.
- Willingness to engage with the research topic.
- Willingness to work and write scientifically.
- Willingness to deal with statistical methods.
- Time flexibility: Depending on the phase of the work, more or less time will be required.
- Responding to feedback from the supervisor and implementing the required adjustments.
- Consideration of the ethical standards of research according to the guidelines of the Swiss Society of Psychology and the University of Zurich.

7. Evaluation / Evaluation criteria

A. Process criteria

1. Independence and self-initiative

- a) The student demonstrates the ability to work independently. This refers to all steps of a master's thesis: literature research, elaboration of hypotheses, organization of data collection, data analysis and writing of the report.
- b) Even with assigned master's topics, the student shows initiative in all steps. By taking on the topic, the student shares responsibility for the research project and contributes their own ideas in a critical and constructive manner.

2. Diligence and reliability

This entails:

- a) Compliance with agreements and deadlines
- b) Submission of error-free documents
- c) Precise documentation of the data collection
- d) A well-documented codebook explaining the constructs collected, their sources, descriptive statistics, any transformations or outlier corrections performed for the analysis, etc.
- e) Adequate backup of datasets
- f) Submission of self-explanatory data sets and documents (e.g., regarding variable names in the codebook) and accompanying materials (e.g., instructions for experimental manipulations).

3. Willingness to work

- a) The student is not expected to already be perfectly proficient in all areas of scientific work (e.g., in-depth theoretical knowledge in the subject area of the master's thesis, statistical methods, etc.).
- b) However, the student should familiarize themselves with these topics as independently as possible.
- c) Criticisms and suggestions from the supervisor and from the research colloquium are taken into account.

B. Evaluation criteria for the manuscript

1. Organization and structure

- a) The text is sensibly structured with regard to content and formal criteria.
- b) The individual chapters logically follow from the preceding ones.
- c) The reader is guided through the text appropriately.
- d) All manuscript parts according to APA guidelines are present.
- e) All relevant content (e.g., tables) is included in the places intended by APA (these do not necessarily have to be included in the text but could instead be listed in the appendix).
- f) Tables and figures are used appropriately and designed in compliance with APA guidelines.

2. Title, table of contents, list of tables and figures

- a) The title outlines the content of the paper (keywords).
- b) The table of contents provides information on the outline of the paper and contains all headings in the text with page references.
- c) The list of tables contains all tables in the text with page references.
- d) The list of figures contains all figures in the text with page numbers.

3. Abstract

- a) The abstract adequately summarizes the study (approx. 200 words).
- b) All manuscript parts are mentioned briefly and concisely.

4. Introduction, problem definition and theory section

- a) The introduction to the topic is sufficient.
- b) The question is derived, clearly identified and unambiguously formulated.
- c) The topic is situated in a larger context and delineated from other topics.
- d) The theoretical relevance of the topic is shown.
- e) The relevant literature is adequately considered and correctly presented.
- f) Hypotheses are conclusively derived from the cited theories and findings.
- g) The hypotheses are formulated precisely and unambiguously.

5. Methods

- a) The studied constructs are adequately described, and their choice is conclusively justified.
- b) The theoretical constructs are adequately operationalized.
- c) The selection and size of the studied participant sample are appropriate for the research question and the methods used.
- d) The population, sample, and selection procedure are described.
- e) The data collection and analysis methods are clearly presented and justified, and their utility is discussed.
- f) The relevant descriptions of the used methods are complete (additional detailed descriptive statistics can be included in the appendix).
- g) The data collection procedure is sufficiently documented.
- h) The methods are used correctly.
- i) Overall: The method is described in sufficient detail to allow replication of the study while still maintaining clarity.

6. Results

- a) The results are organized according to the research question/hypotheses.
- b) All relevant results are presented completely and correctly according to APA guidelines.
- c) The presentation of results is clear.
- d) The presentation of results is clearly separated from the interpretation and discussion.

7. Discussion

- a) The results are evaluated in relation to the research question.
- b) All important strands of interpretation are addressed.
- c) The connection of the results to the hypotheses is clear.
- d) Results are evaluated in light of existing literature.
- e) Appropriate explanations are offered for unexpected results.
- f) Possible limitations of the methodological approach are discussed.
- g) The generalization of the results is appropriate to the analyses and the data basis.
- h) Critical reflection on the work is provided.
- i) Practical implications are discussed.
- j) Further questions and suggestions for future research are identified.

8. Formal correctness

- a) The APA guidelines are correctly applied.
- b) Citations and bibliography are fully listed and correct.
- c) Figures and tables are correctly presented and labelled.

9. Spelling and grammar

Spelling and grammar are correct. AI-based programs can be used for linguistic and grammatical correction, provided they are appropriately disclosed.

10. Appendix

The used materials are attached in full, including the name and authors of the procedures.

11. Documentation of the data

With the master's thesis, a complete documentation of the data has to be handed in to the administration of the Department of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood.

- a) Master sheet = original questionnaire with variable and value labels.
- b) Codebook = listing of all variables and scales with value range
- c) Raw data file = cleaned data file without data transformations
- d) Data file for final analyses = data file with data transformations
- e) Syntax files with data transformations, calculation instructions

The documentation must be so detailed and clear that at any time someone who was not involved can work with the data set!

12. Overall aspects and language

- a) The language is clear, comprehensible and precise.
- b) Key terms are defined and consistently used.
- c) The text is carefully crafted with regards to style and format.
- d) The length and content of the work are proportionate to each other.

8. Data rights and their use in publications

- The data collected for the master’s thesis are the property of the Department of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood.
- Master’s thesis studies are conducted in a way that they could be published, i.e., that they meet all the criteria of scientific work.
- The results of the master’s thesis may only be published (including presentations, posters, etc.) in agreement with the supervisor.
- Results of master’s theses written at the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood may be included in a publication, if appropriate. Depending on the extent of their direct contribution to the development of the study and the writing of the manuscript or other activities involved in publishing, students may be invited to co-author by the supervisor.

9. Data protection and confidentiality

- All data that students collect, or of which they become aware during their master’s thesis are subject to a strict duty of confidentiality. Students must comply with this duty of confidentiality – disclosure of personal data and project materials is not permitted, even in intercollegiate discussions. All data and project materials may be used exclusively for the master’s thesis and may under no circumstances be passed on to third parties or used for other purposes.
- Violations of confidentiality will be reported to the appropriate university authorities and result in severe consequences.

10. Declaration of consent

Both parties agree to abide by the above guidelines for the preparation, design, and evaluation of master’s theses at the Chair of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood and to work constructively toward the successful completion of the master’s thesis.

Student (first name, last name / signature):

Supervisor (first name, last name / signature):

Date / place:

⇒ Originals of this document to:

- Administration of Developmental Psychology: Adulthood
- Student
- Supervisor