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Instructions and Evaluation Criteria for Writing a Thesis in Business Administration

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1. Introduction

Writing a thesis is an exciting and challenging opportunity to delve more deeply into an area of interest. The process is different compared to regular courses, because higher demands are placed on independence and analytical ability. You are being trained in planning, executing and presenting a project during a limited time period, which is important preparation for future careers. You are expected to work independently, integrate knowledge and skills from previous courses, apply scientific methods and present and defend your thesis. In addition, the thesis process has the purpose of developing your critical thinking. Through the process of writing a thesis you are given opportunity to develop your ability to:

- work independently
- set long-term goals and plan your time
- collect empirical evidence to answer questions
- analyze the results in a reliable way
- process information critically and draw conclusions
- conduct objective investigations
- express yourself factually verbally and in writing
- factually review your own and others' work and results
  (freely based on Nyberg and Tidström, 2012, p. 34)

The purpose of higher education is to continuously train these abilities, based on a scientific approach. Most often this is done in the form of written reports and papers. Writing is a creative process - a craft that needs to be practiced in order to be refined step by step (Lindstedt, 2002). For that reason, strive to write as much as possible in every course leading up to the thesis.

The following general assumptions apply to the thesis in business administration:

- The thesis is an independent work that is written by at most two students together. You have joint responsibility for the entire paper and must conduct the study and write the text together. It is possible for paper authors with different specializations (marketing, organization and leadership, accounting) to write together. When you write together you should agree on how you will work with respect e.g. to level of ambition, defined work times every day or week, particular areas of responsibility and other approaches, such as reading each other's drafts and giving constructive feedback (Nyberg and Tidström, 2012, p. 18).

- The thesis group will get the opportunity to check their thoughts and paper concept with the examiner and advisor during the work on the introductory planning report. After the planning report has been approved by the responsible examiner, each thesis group is assigned an advisor.

- The responsible examiner will evaluate the planning report and finished paper.

- In order to discover and prevent deception and plagiarism, all submissions and the finished thesis will be reviewed by means of the anti-plagiarism system Urkund. We take cheating and plagiarism seriously and will take disciplinary measures in the form of warnings and suspension. For more information see Guidelines for examination in the Handbook for education on the university website under Education - Rules and rights.

- When the thesis is approved and has been given its final form after any revision, it will be archived and eventually published in DiVA. All submissions of theses for grading and archiving must be in digital form. All electronic archiving is done by the Department of Educational Administration after the examiner has sent the approved project electronically and a grading document that shows it has been approved. The University encourages publication of approved thesis of at least 15 credits in DiVA. If you cannot or do not want to publish the work in its entirety, only bibliographic data and abstract will be accessible. All publication is done by the Library after written approval from the student.

2. The thesis process and working procedure

A thesis at the bachelor's and master's level is for 15 credits. This corresponds to ten weeks of full-time study (about 400 hours per student), but the thesis is usually produced over a longer time period. The reason for this is that you, who are writing the paper, need to have time to think about and formulate your research problem and the purpose of the paper. In general some advance planning is required to plan and conduct interviews and other investigations. The project groups meet at a number of seminars together with an advisor or examiner according to Figure 1 . In the beginning of the respective course the course leader presents which times for seminars and deadlines for submissions apply. The seminars are graded and therefore mandatory.

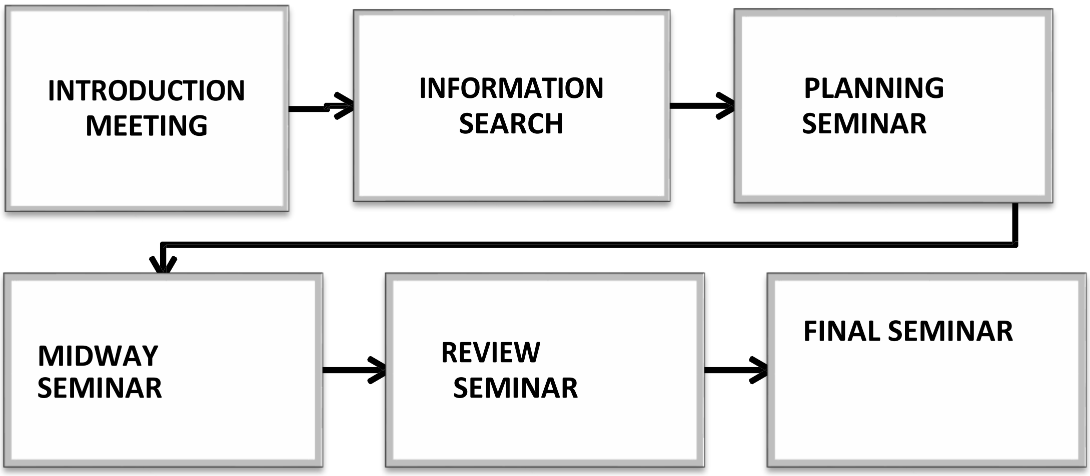

Figure 1. The meetings and seminars of the thesis process

Because you are participating in a seminar group you not only have responsibility with respect to yourselves but also to the whole group. Thus you should take an active part in the work of the group. This means that in order to be approved at the planning, midway, review and final seminar, you are expected to:

- be present, read and actively discuss others' ideas and drafts
- conduct opposition according to instructions

By being well versed in other students' research problems and methods you can contribute to a stimulating study and research environment. You will learn a lot by critically reviewing other students' texts and providing constructive criticism (Björklund and Paulsson, 2012; Nyberg and Tidström, 2012).

In the *introduction meeting* the project course is presented and information is given on how problem formulation and purpose (or research question) should be designed. A well thought-out discussion of a problem requires a lot of work and has great significance for your possibilities to formulate a relevant purpose for your paper.

At the *information search* what characterizes scientifically reviewed text is presented. Information is given on what scientific literature (primarily scientific articles, but also doctoral dissertations and research-based books and reports) there is within the subject area of business administration and how you can find it by means of relevant search terms and search methods in various databases. It is of great importance that you master this step in order to be able to independently search and select (critically review) relevant scientific literature for your problem area.

The planning report provides a basis for the *planning seminar*. In the planning report the result of the project group's literature review is reported in the form of background, problem discussion and purpose/research question. The planning report also contains preliminary ideas on theoretical frame of reference and research method (for the content of the planning report, see Appendix 2). The planning report is submitted to the examiner according to the deadline in the schedule. If the planning report is approved by the examiner, it will be presented at the planning seminar. An approved planning report is a prerequisite to continue the thesis process. If the planning report does not contain the parts required a re-examination opportunity will be offered, which is led by the examiner. Note that this means that the entire schedule for the thesis process changes and first opportunity to complete it will then be moved to August.

This is followed by the *midway seminar,* which is led by the advisor and conducted with opposition, where the opponent group presents and critically reviews the paper according to given guidelines (see chapter 4). Suitable basis for the midway seminar is the introductory chapter, theory chapter and method chapter, preferably with the basis for data collection in the form of a survey or interview template. A completed midway seminar is a prerequisite to continue the thesis process. If the research problem, purpose/questions, theory and method are not shown by the midway seminar manuscript, a re-examination will be conducted by the advisor.

At the *review seminar* complete manuscripts are considered. The meaning of complete manuscript is that there is text written in all parts of the paper and that it is possible to make a preliminary decision on the quality of the paper. The review seminar is normally two or three weeks before the final seminar. The purpose of this more formal seminar is that you will get viewpoints and constructive criticism at a stage where it is still possible to make major changes and improvements to the paper. An approved review manuscript is a prerequisite to continue the thesis process. If the review manuscript does not contain the parts that are required, a re-examination will be conducted by the advisor.

The thesis process ends with a final seminar, where the finished paper is reviewed. The seminar is led by the examiner. For papers that are not approved at the first final seminar, there are two additional examination opportunities in the following semester. Re-examination entails that <u>all</u> parts of the final seminar are completed one more time.

3. Thesis advising and associated rules

The thesis process is characterized by a high degree of independence. This means that you are responsible for the executability of the investigation and for the measures you take, for example choice of methods, collection of data, analysis of results and that the work proceeds according to schedule.

The advisor's role is to be a discussion partner. The advisor asks critical questions, offers opinions and advice as well as feedback on your texts. The advisor is not going to give exact instructions for *what* you should do and *how*, as you are the ones who must make decisions and take responsibility for them.

In order to get the most possible out of the advising meetings, you should follow some simple rules:

- submit a written background with clear indications to those parts of the text you want to discuss *well in advance* of the advising meeting
- come prepared to seminars and individual advising meetings
- make contact with the advisor before you begin data collection
- be open and receptive to suggestions
- take notes on ideas and what has been discussed
- make it a habit after an advising session to summarize what you should do and before the next advising session refer to this through a brief message to the advisor about how you have made progress/not made progress, what choices you have made, etc.
- take the initiative and schedule time as needed for individual advising in addition to what is given in connection with the seminars and indicate clearly what you want to discuss

(Rienecker and Jørgensen, 2014)

The advising that is given beyond planned seminars should be based on the fact that you have a significant problem to discuss, i.e., something that you have thought through in advance, and about which you have decided that you need an assessment or comment to be able to move forward. Please note that advising is only offered during the semester when you are in the project course, i.e., up to the final seminar.

The advisor cannot make a statement on what grade you can expect to receive, because grading of the final thesis is the examiner's task. The advisor cannot proofread the paper either or give guidance on work processing problems. For such matters you can contact the Service Center instead or the Language and Text Center (Språk- och textcentrum).

4. Opposition and defense of the thesis

To serve as an opponent of someone else's thesis is an opportunity for practice, learning and assessment. Being an opponent involves critically reviewing the presented thesis with a constructive attitude and highlighting its strong and weak sides as well as carrying on a dialogue with the authors. Through the opposition you have the opportunity to show your own competence in thesis writing. The authors should have an open attitude to the opponents and their comments, as these can contribute to improving the thesis.

The opposite stage is an important part of the process of thesis writing and is completed in all seminars in the thesis course. The requirement here is primarily approved performance. A well-conducted opposition can however influence the combined evaluation of the performance in the course.

4.1 Guidelines for the opposition

As you prepare the opposition, make sure to structure and arrange your understandings and opinions in an appropriate order — almost like a short lecture. Being an opponent means judging, offering resistance and helping each other become better. The opposition exists to provide constructive criticism by trying to show the advantages of the thesis and pointing out the possibilities that exist to improve and strengthen any weaker parts. Every thesis should be understood and evaluated according to its own prerequisites; thus the opposition should take reasonable consideration of the principles and limitations that the authors of the study have indicated, but a certain measure of "if I were you" is permitted.

The opposition should be written down so that the respondents and advisor/examiner can have it in hand after the seminar. Documenting the opposition is also beneficial for the opponents because it requires reflection. The opponents have responsibility, through conversation with the authors, to cooperate so that the purposes of the respective seminar are fulfilled. These purposes are:

- that every seminar becomes a learning opportunity for author, opponent and audience in the art of conducting and assessing scientific research and investigation.
- that the author(s) should receive exhaustive "feedback" on their work in addition to what is provided by the advisor.

The opponents should question choices made and conclusions drawn (*critical thinking)*, find and suggest new approaches to the problem treated (*creative thinking*) and see the strength and possibilities in the presented thesis *(positive thinking*). This means that the criticism should be presented in a dialogue with the authors, where the opponents will focus on reviewing the entirety and those parts which, according to them, have decisive significance for the evaluation. Some commonly occurring mistakes that opponents should avoid are:

- Being positive in overly diffuse terms. This gives the perception that the opponents have not tried or been able to penetrate the thesis and thereby have not done their job.

- Trying to “trash” the thesis. The art is to suggest better alternatives yourself.

- Going through the thesis page by page, i.e., spending time on small details. This usually means that too little time is given to reviewing and discussing analysis and conclusions. A suggestion is to instead provide a list of errors in punctuation and other small mistakes.

- Only formal errors that make it difficult for readers to understand and assess the thesis should be brought up at the seminar and briefly recounted when the summary evaluation is given.

4.2 Guidelines for the defense

Being a respondent, i.e., defending your thesis, is not a completely simple or obvious matter either. Keep in mind that you as author of the thesis have the most thorough knowledge of the thesis, but at the same time accept that your own work may have faults that are worth criticizing, and remain open to suggestions for improvement. It is recommended before the seminar to ask yourself the following strategic question: How should we act so that the opposition will be as usable and possible for the continued work on the thesis? It is often better to ask the opponents to expand on or explain their reasoning than to directly respond. Feel free to ask the opponents questions when something is unclear, such as: What do you mean by...? What would your advice be? When the opponents make observations for which the authors do not have a strong defense, it is better to admit that the opponent has a point than to try to defend yourself with poor arguments. In an otherwise strong defense it is more a strength than a weakness to grant acknowledgment to the opponent.

For more information about opposition and defense, see for example Björklund and Paulsson (2012) and Backman (2008).

5. Parts of the thesis

A traditionally structured thesis has the following parts:

- Introduction
- Theoretical frame of reference
- Method
- Empirical evidence (data)
- Analysis
- Conclusions

In the thesis every part usually constitutes a chapter. Below is described at an overall level what is usually included in each chapter. The description is not exhaustive, but instead should be seen as a supplement to other guidelines that come from method literature, advisors, scientific literature, opponents, examiners, etc. In the end each thesis group has the responsibility to find a suitable thesis structure and fill each chapter with the content required to convince the reader that the conclusions are well supported.

5.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter usually has three parts:

- Background
- Problem discussion
- Purpose/research question

Background

The purpose of the background section is to inform the reader about what area the thesis concerns. Often it is mentioned in the background that this area is current, perhaps subject to debate, that new research findings have emerged or that some form of change has taken place. It is good if the background section perks the reader's interest and makes the reader choose to continue reading the thesis. A question that the background should answer is: *What is this about?*

Problem discussion

A prerequisite for a good quality problem discussion is that a review of scientific literature within the relevant field has been made. For that reason such a literature review is one of the first steps in the thesis process, and a very important part of the work prior to the planning report (see Appendix 2).

In the problem discussion you justify why your thesis is needed. The term "problem" is actually misleading, because it suggests that the purpose of the thesis is to identify a problem that an organization has and then solve it. In the context of a thesis "problem" means something else. A problem is that knowledge is lacking about something about which knowledge is needed.

The overall question that the problem discussion should answer is: *Why is this interesting?*

It could be said that the purpose of the problem discussion is to justify the purpose/research question that comes in the following section. The overall question can be divided into two sub-questions, where the first one is:: *What do we lack knowledge about?* and the second is: *Why do we need to know this?* A good problem discussion answers both of these questions.

Purpose (or research question)

What the thesis group intends to find out in their thesis, or a little more formally, what knowledge will be created, is specified in a brief description of purpose or in one or more research questions. The question that the purpose (or research question) should answer is thus: *What knowledge will be created?* The purpose/research question can be seen as the "hub" of the thesis, around which other parts of the thesis revolve.

Try to avoid self-fulfilling purposes, for example "the purpose is to study" or "the purpose is to investigate," if what kind of knowledge the study proposes to create is not stated at the same time.

Other aspects of the introduction

If you are seeking inspiration in scientific articles it is good to know that background, problem discussion and purpose/questions in articles follow each other directly without headings between them. In student papers the headings are usually included.

Make references to as great extent as possible to scientific literature, using the correct format (see below).

The introductory chapter should preferably be written without references being made to the method that is used. A clear indication that the introduction is insufficient is that studied companies are used to justify the study and mentioned in background, problem discussion and purpose/questions. The ambition to create knowledge should go beyond the studied organizations.

Thesis groups that write a thesis with external clients must nevertheless find problem discussions and purposes/research questions of general interest.

For more perspectives on problem discussion, purpose and research questions, see Björklund and Paulsson (2012), Bryman and Bell (2017) and Rienecker and Jørgensen (2014).

5.2 Theoretical frame of reference

The purpose of the theoretical frame of reference is to elucidate the purpose with scientific literature (theory and empirical studies)[1]. This will probably mean that additional searches in scientific literature must be performed beyond what is done for the problem discussion.

[1] From here on only the word "purpose" will be used, but the line of reasoning is completely transferable to a thesis that formulates research questions instead.

The elucidation can look very different depending on what purpose has been chosen, how well developed the theories in the area are and how many studies have already been conducted in the area.

Certain purposes are within the framework of mature research areas, i.e., areas where a good deal of research has already been done. Theorization is then usually rather far-reaching and aimed at developing hypotheses. Hypotheses are qualified, well-grounded predictions about the purpose. The rest of the paper is then devoted to examining whether the hypotheses that have been developed are correct. This approach is usually designated deduction and is exhaustively described in Bryman and Bell (2017, chapter 1).

For other purposes, especially concerning areas where not as much research has been conducted, it may be difficult or inappropriate for other reasons to direct the theorization at developing hypotheses. Instead the theorization may concern increasing understanding of the purpose with scientific literature. This can be done in many different ways, for example by compiling the results from studies of adjacent areas and by identifying important theoretical concepts that are connected to the purpose of the thesis. Sometimes the theorizing will lead to specification of the purpose formulated in the introduction, and sometimes the purpose is specified and limited by means of research questions. Sometimes scientific literature is used to find the theme that will become a structure for the data collection. In certain cases the theoretical frame of reference is not finished before the empirical study is started, but instead is developed in an interplay with the data collection. Starting with collection of empirical evidence before theorizing is called induction and described in Bryman and Bell (2017, chapter 1).

Regardless of how the thesis group chooses to work with scientific literature and direct their theoretical frame of reference, it is appropriate to summarize the theorization at the end of the chapter so that it is clearly shown how the scientific literature used illuminates or helps to fulfill the purpose. For example, this can happen in the form of an analytical model. A well-developed theoretical frame of reference will clarify what is being investigated and facilitate (often it is a prerequisite for) choice of method and analysis.

Other aspects of the theoretical frame of reference

A theoretical frame of reference of high quality assumes that scientific literature is used, i.e., scientific articles, doctoral dissertations and research-based books and reports. Legal text, accounting standards and handbooks of a consulting nature are not usually considered scientific literature.

The theoretical frame of reference in the thesis at a bachelor's and master's level is expected to contain a breadth of scientific literature that reflects current research within the chosen area. The theory chapter shows the capacity to independently search and select scientific literature that illuminates the chosen purpose. The selection of literature in the theoretical frame of reference is based on a balance of topicality and relevance in relation to the purpose where sources/classics as well as subsequent research can be included.

Be careful to differentiate your own opinions and the referenced text. In longer references the reader should be reminded now and then that the text is a reference, which can be done by using reference markers. When making references, use markers such as: thinks, intends, maintains, points out, underscores, reminds, argues, explains, asserts, insists, discusses, emphasizes, reports, elucidates, assures, tells, investigates, argues and maintains. Then you signal that these are not your own ideas that you are presenting.

5.3 Method

The method chapter is a description of and argumentation for the chosen way of fulfilling the purpose of the thesis. The key word for the method account is transparency, i.e., that the thesis group is open about data has been collected. Transparency is necessary for the reader to be able to form an impression of the quality of the thesis. The descriptions of the method are done with concepts that are used in method literature and in the research literature that you will come in contact with in connection with the literature review and subsequently. Note that focus in the method chapter is description and argumentation, which means that general references to method literature are superfluous.

A good idea is to introduce the method section by connecting to the purpose of the thesis (or specified purpose/questions if that is developed in the theory chapter), as it is the purpose that governs the choice of method. Then in general terms the research strategy (see Bryman and Bell, 2017, part I) and data collection that has been conducted to fulfill the purpose are described.

If the thesis group chooses to fulfill the purpose with a quantitative method, the choice of method should be discussed in terms of reliability and validity (see Bryman and Bell, 2017, part II). If the choice falls instead on a qualitative method, it may be more appropriate to discuss the credibility of the study (see Bryman and Bell, 2017, part III).

The structure and content of the method chapter can differ markedly between different papers. There is good advice in method literature and you will find specific examples in the scientific literature you read. The important thing is that the way the group has chosen to collect empirical evidence (data) is described and justified. The reader must be convinced that the choice of method is deliberate and well considered.

Other aspects of the method chapter

Remember to justify your method with convincing arguments. Avoid self-assessment arguments such as “I think that my study is reliable,” “I perceive that x number of interviews is the right number” and “I have chosen references that I consider relevant.”

According to the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) everyone who participates in research processes should discuss research ethics issues (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). If a thesis includes ethical concerns, how this has been handled should be stated in the method section. For more information and guidelines on good research practice, see e.g. Bryman and Bell, (2017, chapter 5), Nyberg and Tidström, (2012) and Vetenskapsrådet (2017).

If the chapter on empirical evidence does not show how the data is analyzed, it may be good to describe how this is done in the method chapter. Guidance on data analysis is given in Bryman and Bell (2017, chapter 12-15, 22-23) and elsewhere.

Sometimes a prerequisite for data collection is that the studied organizations or respondents are promised anonymity. If anonymity is promised it is the thesis group's responsibility that this is preserved both verbally (at seminars) and in writing.

5.4 Empirical evidence

In the chapter on empirical evidence, which is sometimes called the results chapter, what has emerged in the investigation is reported. How empirical evidence is presented differs significantly between different types of papers, but it generally applies that all collected data that is used in the analysis and conclusions are reported in the empirical evidence chapter. Normally this chapter does not include any explicit analysis, interpretation or discussion.

In quantitatively oriented papers descriptive statistics, correlations and any connecting analyses where the hypotheses are tested are reported. It is customary to concisely state whether the results confirm or reject the hypotheses.

In qualitatively oriented papers the reported data are usually relatively extensive and do not simply contain interviews (for example) but also information about the "context," thus the surroundings or the context in which the study has been conducted. It should be clear where statements, observations, texts, etc. come from. Systematize and edit your empirical evidence so that it is reader-friendly and keep in mind that no one wants to read interview transcriptions.

Sometimes the data is presented in accordance with the themes or concepts that were identified in the theoretical frame of reference. Sometimes the data is presented in the form of a narrative, for example an implemented change in an organization can be described chronologically. The scope of the empirical chapter in qualitative papers means that they suitably conclude with a summary. More information about presenting qualitative data is found in Nylén (2005), Bryman and Bell (2017) and Rienecker and Jørgensen (2014).

Other aspects of the chapter on empirical evidence

In order to increase clarity and transparency the thesis group can make use of quotations that add interesting information to the text and tables that highlight the most important results. Interview quotations can be coded, for example, with respondent 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C etc. to illustrate different responses/opinions among the respondents.

5.5 Analysis

The analysis chapter can be considered the place in the thesis where the theoretical frame of reference and the empirical study meet. This chapter can be seen as a discussion or interpretation chapter, depending on which research strategy has been chosen.

If a quantitative analysis is used the analysis chapter is usually used to discuss the results.

Has the theory passed the empirical test? If the hypotheses turned out, which previous research studies give it support and which are rejected? Do the results support a certain theoretical direction and weaken another? If the hypotheses did not turn out, what might that depend on? How is knowledge within the area affected?

If a qualitative analysis was chosen the range is greater in how data is analyzed. In some cases an analysis is performed that concerns categorizing the data according to the theoretical concepts that were chosen or the analytical model that was prepared in the theoretical frame of reference. It may concern investigating connections between various factors, identifying patterns, making comparisons, etc. In other cases an interpretation is carried out where the focus is on understanding what has been studied. A reasonable ambition is to try, based on previous scientific studies, your own investigation and logic, to analyze generally interesting conclusions.

Other aspects of the analysis chapter

A common problem in student papers is that the analysis chapter repeats or continues with empirical evidence and theory. Be careful not to repeat text that has been previously reproduced in the theory and empirical chapters. It is your analysis (discussion, interpretation) that is important. More information about analysis is found for example in Björklund and Paulsson, (2012, p. 48, 73) and Rienecker and Jørgensen (2014, p. 218, 320).

Avoid formulations such as “we consider” or “we think” and argue instead based on what are reasonable conclusions based on the scientific literature used, collected data and logical reasoning.

5.6 Conclusions

In the conclusion chapter you connect back to the purpose of the thesis and present what you have arrived at. Often the conclusion chapter has four parts which it may be good to keep separate. In the first part, the purpose and any research questions and what empirical material the thesis is based on are repeated. In the second the conclusions are reported, that is, what the thesis group has arrived at. Here it may be possible to set the study in a broader context and also discuss various social and ethical aspects, such as sustainable development, related to the study’s research area and results. In the third part the study’s limitations are briefly described, i.e., a reflection over the execution of the study. In conclusion proposals are made for continued research in this area.

6. Thesis evaluation

According to the curriculum for Thesis project in business administration bachelor's degree (EXC504) and Thesis project in business administration master's degree (EXD951), all learning goals are examined through three thesis manuscripts and supporting documents being evaluated, discussed and commented on in connection with presentation, opposition and defense at all seminars of the course. In this way all the seminars constitute the basis for evaluation for the grade.

A thesis may be given the grade of failed (U), approved (G) or approved with distinction (VG). An exhaustive supplement may occur before a thesis gets a grade of G. Both theses with the grade G and VG may need to make certain minor supplements of a formatting nature. On the other hand it is not possible through supplementation to raise the thesis grade from approved to approved with distinction.

6.1 Evaluation criteria

The curricula for the thesis courses states that it is the student's ability to plan, execute and report on a scientific research and development project that is graded. The course goals constitute the overall grading criteria. These can however be broken down into evaluation criteria for the various parts of the thesis. The evaluation criteria for the respective thesis chapters are described below.

Introduction. The evaluation criterion is the thesis group's ability to identify and justify their purpose, i.e., to answer the questions: What is this about? What knowledge do we lack? Why do we need to know this? What knowledge will be created?

Theoretical frame of reference. Evaluation is made on the thesis group's ability to identify and present scientific literature that is relevant to contribute to fulfilling the purpose of the thesis.

Method. The evaluation criterion is the ability to describe and justify the means chosen to conduct an empirical study to fulfill the purpose.

Empirical evidence. Evaluation is done on the ability to clearly structure and present the completed study.

Analysis. The evaluation criterion is the ability to relate (discuss, interpret) the collected data to the theoretical frame of reference based on the purpose of the thesis.

Conclusions. Evaluation is done on the quality of the conclusions (credibility or reliability and validity), awareness of the methodological limitations and the ability to place the study in a larger context.

It is important to stress that it is the entirety of the thesis that is evaluated, which means that a thesis that is not good overall cannot receive an approved grade, even if its various parts are conducted ambitiously. In addition the language and formal appearance of the thesis (see Appendix 1) are absolute requirements for an approved thesis. In certain cases copyediting may be required in order for the thesis to be approved.

The majority of students often have high goals for their thesis project and expend a lot of time and commitment. For that reason it is important to emphasize that an approved grade means quality that is satisfactory. To get a grade of VG requires that the thesis be considerably above the normal level of the majority of the evaluation criteria.

6.2 Grading procedure

An examiner within the respective discipline, e.g. accounting, organizing and marketing, is responsible for grading of theses in business administration. In order to ensure that the theses are graded in as similar a way as possible, he/she has the help of an examiner committee. As the basis for evaluations the respective examiner and examiner committee have the thesis version that was presented at the final seminar after any *minor* additions or changes.

Provided that oppositions and mandatory seminars have been conducted with a grade of approved, the entire thesis course will be reported as approved in LADOK. If the thesis is not approved at the regular examining period, or at one of the two opportunities offered in the fall for re-examination (preliminarily in August and December), the thesis can be examined in connection with next year’s thesis course.

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APPENDIX 1. Formal requirements for a thesis in business administration – language and formatting

This section specifies the requirements on language and formatting that a thesis in business administration at Högskolan Väst must fulfill. This applies to everything from what should be included in the project, such as a title page and table of contents, to how you write references. The thesis should give a uniform impression, even if two individuals write together. It is important that headings, fonts, and blank lines are the same throughout the thesis. The layout and language of the thesis contribute to "lyfta fram budskapet och öka trovärdigheten" [bring out the message and increase credibility] (Björklund and Paulsson, 2012, p. 85)

Language

Correct language is a prerequisite for an approved thesis, as language is the author's tool to convey the content of the thesis to the reader. Academic style is characterized by the fact that it is precise, uses defined terms and concepts, and is concentrated. Try to use language that is as simple and clear as possible, as unnecessarily complicated language makes the thesis less accessible. At the same time try to avoid vernacular language and slang. The scientific style is also characterized by being factual and well organized, i.e., logically arranged. Transitions between the various parts of the thesis explain to the reader how the different parts fit together and facilitate reading.

Thus it is important that the final text is well thought through and linguistically correct. In order to write a good text you will need to rewrite several times. It is worth continuously spending time working with the language during the entire thesis process, and especially with final editing and proofreading. Use spell check in the word processing program you use, and a good dictionary as a guiding principle for spelling. Feel free to ask a relative or classmate to proofread and make use of the Language and Text Center [Språk- och textcentrum] to get support and help in writing.

An academic thesis often contains specific professional terminology and central concepts and these should be defined the first time they occur in the text. The same applies to all abbreviations or acronyms, which is done by writing out the whole word/all the words followed by the abbreviation or acronym within parenthesis. Where accepted abbreviations (e.g., etc., et al.) are concerned, the use should be consistent throughout the thesis. In academic texts the abbreviation "ibid." (Latin "in the same place") can be used to refer to the same source when it occurs again without an intervening reference. The term " et al." (Latin for "and others") can be used for a reference with several authors. Page references can be abbreviated "p." (one page) or "pp." (two or more).

In academic texts you should avoid addressing the reader. Where use of "I" and "we" is concerned, according to Rienecker and Jørgensen (2014) we should use active verbs and the first person (I or we) when we write about linguistic actions and other actions you performed in connection with the investigation, i.e., "I use, select, propose, draw the conclusion that, argue for, show, maintain" (p. 318) and this will occur primarily in the method, analysis and conclusion sections plus possibly in the introductory section. The use of I/we in academic texts can vary between different disciplines. For courses in business administration at Högskolan Väst it is recommended that I/we be used instead of vaguely neutral circumlocutions such as “the author of this thesis,” “thesis author” or “writers,” which can be superfluous or unnecessarily repetitive through the text. Do not exaggerate however the use of I or we.

Normally a thesis is written so that the author varies verb tense between present and past. The past tense occurs in summary (what was done), introduction and theory section (for example with review of previous research), and method and empirical evidence sections (where the execution of the investigation is concerned). Present tense can also be used in empirical evidence and normally in the discussion section (Backman, 2008, p. 48). If e.g. ongoing or future occurrences are described or conditions with the presentation of empirical results the tense that feels most natural is used. In early drafts of the thesis, e.g. the planning report, the future tense can be used (as you are describing what you intend to do). In later versions when the data collection is completed, the text will be changed to past tense.

Generally the numbers *0–12* are spelled out instead of using digits in running text. However, where numbers constitute an important part of the text, such as reporting of scientific results, all numbers are written with digits. In running text the word “percent” is used; the % sign is only used in tables. Decimals are separated in Swedish by a comma (15,4%, 0,248 mm) and in English with a period (15.4%, 0.48 mm). Thousands are written in Swedish with a space, not a period (4 500), and in English with a comma (4,500). Large numbers over a million are easier to read if they are written out with the word “million” instead of zeros. Measurement units are written with digits followed by the unit (1 cm, 10 kg). For more information about the significance of clear academic language, see for example Rienecker and Jørgensen (2014).

Layout

The thesis must be written in A4 page format in 12-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced (in Word this means 1.15) and justified margins. Before final thesis look over the text and apply word division to avoid unnecessarily long and uneven spaces between words. Top and bottom should have 2.5 cm margins, while the pages should have 3 cm margins. A new paragraph is formed by leaving a blank line between two different paragraphs (no indent). A new chapter starts on a new page.

The page numbering of the thesis normally starts with the introduction section, which then becomes page 1. The title page is not included in the page numbering. Summary and table of contents are either not numbered at all or with Roman numerals. Starting with the introduction chapter Arabic numerals should be used. Any appendices are not included in the total page numbering, but are instead page numbered separately. See how to create page numbering in Word at the university IT support web page for guides, “Page Numbering.”

The chapters of the thesis are constructed from various sections, which are separated with subheadings and paragraphs. Use at most three *heading levels* (i.e., 1, 1.1, 1.1.1). The heading should reflect the content of the section and is used to make the text more reader-friendly. Recommended heading levels are written in an optional font in 22-point bold, 12-point bold, and 12-point italic if three levels are used. There are two blank lines between a new heading and the previous paragraph.

Use the department *Title page* template for thesis projects in business administration at all submission points (see the library's "Skriva" web page *Cover templates for projects in business administration*). The front page of the thesis should include title, author's name, any major, advisor, examiner and department in which the thesis is written, the course in which the thesis is included, semester and year (civil registration number should not be indicated). The title should be placed in the middle of the front page. The title should contain the central concepts that have been object of your interest. It is important to choose a title that in part covers your purpose with the investigation, and in part invites reading. Sometimes it can be good to have both a main title and a subtitle. Note that the title should be formulated as if you are writing a thesis about Company X; instead you are writing a thesis about a scientific problem.

The *summary* of the thesis are placed in this order on separate pages immediately after the title page. A summary should be an independent entity in the report, encompass at most one page and show the content of the whole report: title, author, course, semester, problem, purpose, method, theory, empirical findings, analysis and conclusion. It is important that it can be read independently from the thesis itself and that it also reflects the results of the thesis. Include key words too. Past tense is used for the summary as it is a compilation of what has already been done. The text in the summary is always written continuously without paragraph division.

The *table of contents* contains up to three heading levels. Summary and table of contents are not listed in the table of contents. Appendices are listed after the table of contents, for example Appendix 1: Question guide Appendix 2: Survey. If the thesis includes many figures and/or tables, often a list of tables and figures is included, which is placed after the table of contents. These lists present figures and/or tables in numerical order, followed by figure title and page number. Sometimes there is also a list of abbreviations. See how to create a table of contents in Word at the university IT support webpage for guides, "Table of Contents."

A thesis will often include various types of figures (i.e., illustrations, graphs, diagrams, images and photographs). Tables make it possible to present extensive data in an understandable way. When you think about using a figure or table in your thesis, ask yourself: does it add anything? According to Björklund and Paulsson (2012, p. 87) the table or figure should be clear and understandable, have a connection to the running text, be numbered and have a caption, be referential and be uniformly designed throughout the thesis. Each figure and table should be numbered and have a figure/table title. Numbering is done continuously throughout the thesis with Arabic numerals (not chapter-based numbering). In the figure/table caption that is placed below the figure/table either the abbreviation "Fig." or "Figure" is used, following by a number ("Fig. 1"/"Figure 1"), title and reference.

If a table is extensive it can be added as an appendix. Reproduction of figures from other publications is regulated by copyright law and reproduction agreements. To be able to use a figure permission must be obtained from the copyright holder(s). You must then disclose what you will do with the image (the purpose of the use/where publication will occur). See more information about copyright on the Library website. If you have modified someone else's figure, indicate this e.g. "Based on Jacobsen and Thorsvik, 2014, p. 106".

Reference citation according to the Harvard system

Högskolan Väst uses the Harvard system for reference citation. There is information about the Harvard system on the library website under "Skriva." You should familiarize yourself with this information BEFORE you write the thesis to avoid unnecessary added work with reference citation. In academic texts within business administration only the author's/authors' last name and year of publication is stated (and page number for any quotations) in running text, for example "Alvesson (2012) argues for a critical perspective by . . .". Avoid making reference to professional titles or first names of the author or researcher, or to book or article titles in running text. You may sometimes refer to several references in the same parenthesis to strengthen your argument, in which case the references are placed in alphabetical order separated by a semicolon, for example: (Alvesson, 2012; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2014; Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). The basic rule is that you should go to the original reference, but where this is not possible you make reference by means of a secondary reference. In running text both of the references are mentioned, e.g. if you have read Alvesson's text, which refers to a work by Brown, you write in the running text: (Brown, 1976; see Alvesson, 2015, p. 33). In the references you will only include the reference you have read yourself, as in this example:
Alvesson, M. (2015). *Organisationskultur och ledning.* 3rd ed. Malmö: Liber.

Quotations should be clearly marked in the thesis and correct citation technique is important in all parts of the thesis. Brief quotations of at most two to three lines are inserted in the running text with quotation marks (no italics). Longer quotations are marked by using block quotations in the form of separate paragraph, indented one centimeter from both right and left margins (indent and reduced line spacing and text size to 10-point (no italics). When you use block quotations quotation marks are not necessary. Ellipsis (three periods: . . .) can be used when you have omitted one or more words from a quotation and want to show that. If you are citing scientific literature or other publications you make reference to the publication and indicate from which page the quotation is retrieved. For more info se the Harvard system and the IT guide "Indents and tabs."

> Example of how a block quotation can appear in a thesis in business administration thesis in accordance with the instruction above … a block quotation is usually a quotation that encompasses several lines of text and which therefore is awkward to insert in the running text.

It is important to point out that the list of references should be in alphabetical order in a running list, regardless of type of publication. So do *not* divide up the reference list into different types of publications (articles, books, reports, studies, etc.).

APPENDIX 2. The planning report (for thesis for 15 credits)

The planning report is the basis for the planning seminar. The purpose of the planning seminar is to discuss the planned study's relevance and executability. In the planning report the thesis group will answer five questions, of which the first three are connected to the introductory chapter, i.e., background, problem discussion and purpose/questions, and the last two to theory and choice of method.

1. What is this about?
2. Why is this interesting? (What do we lack knowledge about? Why do we need to know that?)
3. What knowledge will be created?
4. How should scientific literature be used in the theoretical frame of reference in order to fulfill the purpose/answer the research question?
5. What method will be used, and why?

What is usually included in these parts is covered in the "Parts of the thesis" section above. The planning report is approved if the examiner judges that the five questions are answered reasonably and the study is deemed to be realistic to execute within available time frames.

Included within the framework for the work on the planning report is conducting a literature review. How a literature review is conducted in practice is shown for example by chapter 4 in Bryman and Bell (2017). The intention of the literature review is that the student group read up on their area, which is a prerequisite for being able to assert in a credible manner that knowledge is lacking about something within that area. The literature review is suggestive besides where theoretical frame of reference and research method are concerned.

At the planning seminar the thesis group should be prepared to describe how they have gone about finding scientific literature within their area, for example what search terms and databases have been used. Note that the literature that is used in the thesis should have undergone scientific quality assurance, i.e., consist of publications such as academic articles, doctoral dissertations and research-based books and reports.

The planning report is written in running text and in thesis form according to the formal requirements indicated in Appendix 1, including the requirement to use the template for the title page.

APPENDIX 3. Bachelor’s and master’s theses: differences

At Högskolan Väst we have two types of theses in business administration. At the basic level we have a bachelor’s thesis (also called C-essay), which is part of the bachelor’s degree. At advanced level we have a master’s thesis (also called D-essay), which is part of the master’s degree. Both of these theses are degree projects that encompass 15 credits, but because the essays are written at different levels the requirements for each are different.

For a master’s thesis higher demands are placed on scientific approach. It encompasses a more advanced problem discussion and theoretical frame of reference, both concerning line of reasoning and the extent of the scientific literature used. Higher demands are placed on methodological awareness and analytical ability as well as the quality of the conclusions, i.e., credibility or reliability and validity.

The requirements for theses are based on the national goals of the Högskoleförordningen [Higher Education Directive] for knowledge and understanding, skills and ability plus assessment ability and approach for bachelor’s and master’s level respectively (see Appendix 4 and 5).

APPENDIX 4: General Qualifications – Bachelor Degree

General Qualifications for Bachelor Degree in Business Administration
(Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100, Annex 2)

Knowledge and understanding

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the main field of study, including knowledge of the disciplinary foundation of the field, knowledge of applicable methodologies in the field, specialized study in some aspect of the field as well as awareness of current research issues.

Competence and skills

- demonstrate the ability to search for, gather, evaluate and critically interpret the relevant information for a formulated problem and also discuss phenomena, issues and situations critically
- demonstrate the ability to identify, formulate and solve problems autonomously and to complete tasks within predetermined time frames
- demonstrate the ability to present and discuss information, problems and solutions in speech and writing and in dialogue with different audiences, and
- demonstrate the skills required to work autonomously in the main field of study.

Judgement and approach

- demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues
- demonstrate insight into the role of knowledge in society and the responsibility of the individual for how it is used, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and ongoing learning

APPENDIX 5. General Qualifications – Master Degree

General Qualifications for Master Degree (60 credits) in Business Administration (Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100, Annex 2)

Knowledge and understanding

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the main field of study, including both an overview of the field and specialised knowledge in certain areas of the field as well as insight into current research and development work, and
- demonstrate specialised methodological knowledge in the main field of study.

Competence and skills

For a Degree of Master (60 credits) the student shall

- demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge and analyse, assess and deal with complex phenomena, issues and situations even with limited information
- demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues autonomously as well as to plan and, using appropriate methods, undertake advanced tasks within predetermined time frames
- demonstrate the ability in speech and writing to report clearly and discuss his or her conclusions and the knowledge and arguments on which they are based in dialogue with different audiences, and
- demonstrate the skills required for participation in research and development work or employment in some other qualified capacity.

Judgement and approach

For a Degree of Master (60 credits) the student shall

- demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues and also to demonstrate awareness of ethical aspects of research and development work
- demonstrate insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual for how it is used, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the personal need for further knowledge and take responsibility for his or her ongoing learning.

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