



Guidelines for Bachelor and Master Theses

Spring 2017

These guidelines give a short summary of the most pertinent rules and recommendations for writing a Bachelor or Master thesis at the Department of Business Administration / Chair for Quantitative Business Administration at UZH. Following the rules and recommendations is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a good grade. The document focuses on those rules and regulations that I find most important – or annoying when done wrong or missing. Obviously, there are many more complete writing-aids and manuals of style which would provide you with additional guidance and which you can find in old-fashioned libraries or on the internet.

Document format

Regardless the document format (Word, LateX, Excel, Pdf or other) and delivery (electronic or printed), please make sure that you submit the document on A 4 size paper. Make sure to leave a sufficient border on all sides, use a font size 12 pt of standard fonts (e.g. Times, Times New Roman, Palatino), and line spacing between 1.2 and 1.5.

Unless specified otherwise in your formal assignment, please submit two printed and bound versions and one USB stick with the document file and all datasets used.

Cover page and accompanying pages

The cover page should include the following information: title of the thesis, area (e.g. business administration) institution (Department of Business, University of Zürich), name of the supervisor, name, complete address and student number of the author, and the date of submission of the thesis. The title page is followed by a blank page –for the simple reason that this looks better when printed in duplex (Thißen 2006/2007).

In addition to the cover page, the following pages should be included before the main text, using pagination with Roman numbers (I, II, III, etc.):

- Abstract
- Table of contents, including a list of appendixes
- List of figures
- List of tables
- List of acronyms

Pagination using Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.) should start with the main text *after* those pages.





Structure of the document, table of contents

The thesis should be structured in a way that the reader can follow its logic easily. Each well-written document has an introduction (including but not limited to the motivation for and objective of the paper, structure of the document and possibly, the research methodology used) as well as a conclusion and outlook.

Please be consistent with the numbering of headings and subheadings. A “1.” should always be followed by a “2.”, an “a)” always by a “b)” somewhere below. Too many layers of headings and subheadings are confusing whilst too few layers don’t convey enough information.

The more informative the headings and subheadings of all the chapters of your text the better.

Examples:

Not	but
“Introduction”	“Introduction: Growth Strategies of Magazine Luiza: Can the Retailer Hold its Promises?”
“Background”	“Magazine Luiza’s Position in the Brazilian Market to Date”
“The Problem”	“Balancing Fast Growth through Acquisition with Customer and Staff Loyalty”
“Conclusion”	“Conclusion: Magazine Luiza’s Strategy Ahead”

The chapters should cover the topic/topics announced in the respective chapter headings in sufficient depth and breadth. Please give reasons when you limit the topic to specific aspects but avoid digressions as well.

Figures and tables

Please make sure that all figures and tables are numbered and have a proper title. No table or figure should be included in the text or appendix unless you refer to it and explain it in the written text. List the source of a figure or table copied from another author directly under the figure or table in question. The source of figures and tables that you developed on your own should be quoted as follows.

Source: own research

References and citations

Make sure to cite content drawn from resources other than your own ideas in the text, using either the author-date system, which looks like this (Smith 2007, 34), footnotes, or endnotes. Also include a *complete* list of references used in the appendix. If you conduct interviews or gather data first hand, please list these sources separately.

There is a close correlation between the quality of a thesis and the breadth and depth of the literature used. Please make sure to include standard academic literature on the topic, relevant recent publications in academic journals and, where applicable, so-called “grey literature” from non-academic or non-published resources. Include but do not limit your search to resources available online.

Cite sources and use references on which you build your own ideas; this is a standard procedure in academic writing. The thesis should show that you are able to critically use and assess scientific sources. Nobody expects you to reinvent the wheel (or would believe that you did). It is important to cite content drawn from other resources in order to avoid plagiarism, which is defined by Purdue



University as “the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else's words or ideas” (OWL at Purdue 2008), and constitutes one of the worst sins in academic research. Thesis papers that omit citing references and sources will be rejected or declared void. In sum, do not copy content from other sources without quoting the sources.

Refer to standard manuals such as the Chicago Manual of style for rules pertinent to references and citations. Those rules are very important. You can find some standard rules online. For example, the Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide is available at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. An alternative reference for citation and other formatting rules can be found at www.financial-economics.de/latex

I recommend the author-date system but feel free to use another system. Just make sure to apply one system consistently. The “References” section of these guidelines gives a few examples of how to enter references in a list of references.

Citation rules for online sources are standardized yet. However, when quoting a document published online such as a PDF file, even if it is not available other than as a working paper, there is no need to treat it as an online source nor to quote the full URL. Remember, you do not list the library in which you have found working papers published offline either.

When quoting from interviews that you conducted please do *not* quote the name of the interview partner in the main text. You can (but you do not have to) list the name of the interview partner in the list of interviews; alternatively just give her/his function in the organization.

Own contribution

While a good thesis does not reinvent the wheel, it does not merely recount facts or analyses found in other sources either. It is important that you add to what the reader could find in the materials that you have used as a source. Examples of own contributions include:

- Synthesize information from different sources, organize and analyze them. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different economic models, computational or statistical methods for your research question.
- Do not refer to only one of two sources when dealing with a specific question or for a whole section of your paper but select and assess main issues.
- Apply data analyses techniques to a new set of research hypotheses or data, or propose a new technique for an empirical analysis.
- Show how your topic or case fits into a broader concept or compares with others, make recommendations, and adopt a point of view.

Nonetheless, make sure to use an objective and impersonal language in your own contribution.

Style and clarity

A well-written document is a pleasure to read, whereas a poorly written paper distracts the reader, regardless the quality of the content. An important rule is to write clearly and simply. If you do not understand what you write, chances are that your reader won't understand it either. Moreover, a thesis is very different from an oral presentation on the subject and should be written in Standard language. It should be written using a scientific and objective style. If you write in English, be



consistent in the use of either US or British (or another country's) English. The same applies for a thesis written in German. Make sure to avoid errors in orthography and grammar, colloquialisms, and stereotypes.

A thesis should be written for an external audience. In particular, do not assume that the reader is familiar with the content of related classes or of documents or case studies that you use as resources. As a consequence, you need to explain concepts and define terms that are not widely used in the business or economic literature, citing sources when appropriate.

Enclosed is an incomplete list of some brief recommendations on language and style— any style manual or writing aid will provide you with more suggestions how to write well.

Tense

An academic paper is generally written in present tense (unlike, for example, business school cases, which are often written in the past tense). In particular, use the present tense when referring to sections of the paper.

Examples:

Not

"In the section, we will discuss"
"The automotive industry was very dependent of steel prices"

but

"In the next section, we discuss"
"The automotive industry is very dependent of steel prices"

Omit needless words¹

Every word should serve a purpose. Also, some advice from Orwell's essay "Politics and the English language" (Orwell 1946):

- "Never use a long word where a short one will do."
- "If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out."

Examples:

Not

"The question as to whether"
"There is no doubt but that"
"The reason why that is"
"In spite of that fact that"
"The fact that she had arrived"
"As to whether"
"Egypt is a country that"
"Firstly, secondly, thirdly"
"Overly, thusly"

but

"whether"
"doubtless"
"because"
"although"
"her arrival"
"whether"
"Egypt"
"first, second, third"
"over, thus"

¹ This paragraph and the following five sections are modified excerpts from the UNDP Style Manual (UNDP 2002).



Overused words and phrases

Instead of

“contact”

“facility”

“insightful”

“roll out”

try

“be in touch with”

“plant,” “headoffice,” “hospital,” etc.

“perceptive”

“introduce,” “implement”

Names and styles of address

Always check to make sure names of individuals and organizations are spelled correctly.

Numbers

Numbers expressed in words

In general, numbers under 10 should be written in words. Numbers should also be spelled out in the following contexts: at the beginning of a sentence; in approximate or isolated references to dimensions, weights and measures in non-technical, non-statistical texts; in fractions in narrative text; and in reference to ages in non-technical, non-statistical texts.

Numbers expressed in figures

Numbers between 10 and 999,999 should normally be expressed in figures. In addition, the following are always expressed in figures: percentages; ratios; results of voting; dates and time of day; numbers with decimal or vulgar fractions; statistics; degrees; dimensions, weights and measures, except when they are obviously intended to be approximate or in isolated references in a non-technical context; series of figures; document symbols; and page and paragraph references.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations should not be used for words or titles that occur only once or twice in a text. If a title occurs many times in a document, a short form may be used. The full title should be given the first time it appears and repeated only where necessary for clarity. Thereafter, a short title may be used unless there is a risk of ambiguity.

Acronyms

Acronyms should not be used for names that rarely appear in a text unless the acronym is more familiar than the full name. A list of acronyms should be inserted either at the beginning or the end; the names should still be written out on first use in the text.

Appendix

The appendix should contain all those figures, tables or other pieces of information that would overload the main text and are not immediately needed to understand the main text. A long appendix should be structured and listed in the table of content.



References

Chicago Manual of Style, The. 14th ed. Chicago and London: The Chicago University Press, 1993.

Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." First published in *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art* (1946). Available at http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/politics/english/e_polit (accessed on 30 June 2008).

OWL at Purdue. *Avoiding Plagiarism*. West Lafayette/Indiana: The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University, 2008. Available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/> (accessed on 25 March 2008).

Thißen, Dirk, "How to Write a Seminar Paper". *Seminar: Writing Techniques*, Aachen: RWTH Aachen, Lehrstuhl für Informatik, 2006/2007. Available at http://www.nets.rwth-aachen.de/content/teaching/seminars/sub/seminar_hints/seminar_paper.pdf (accessed on 25 March 2008).

UNDP Style Manual. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2002.