



WRITING A MASTER'S THESIS IN SOCIAL EXCLUSION

SoEx Guide to Writing an Independent Research
Paper

Prepared by Khushal Naik, 2020

PROJECT ASSISTANT TO THE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Revised by Islam Sabry, 2023

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**Prepared for specific use by students, teachers and staff of the Master's Degree
Programme in Social Exclusion at Åbo Akademi**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The master's thesis is your most important demonstration of competence, through writing, in the area of Social Exclusion so far. It is an opportunity to show your academic maturity and ability to put your thoughts into writing. During this process, you will be demonstrating that you are able to choose a relevant topic, define a research question and master the required research methods. In addition, you can demonstrate your scholarship, critical and logical approach, and adherence to academic practices and rules. Thesis work involves independent reflection on social phenomena, familiarisation with theoretical discussions in the field, application of academic research methods, and integration of theory and empirical data. Furthermore, writing your thesis enables you to learn new things about yourself, for example, about your ways of work and capacity, perception, creativity and perseverance.

Guidance for the thesis process is provided in the Social Exclusion Master's seminar. Individual guidance is also provided during and after the seminars by the supervisor(s) and the researcher in charge of the seminar. Peer support is also important during the thesis process. You are thus recommended to find other thesis writers with whom you can discuss the various phases of thesis writing and share experiences.

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to provide a guide to assist in the writing and submission of a Master's Thesis in the Master's Degree Program of Social Exclusion, within the Faculty of Arts, Psychology, and Theology. This document serves as a guide, towards the completion of your degree. The Master's Thesis accounts for **30 ECTS**, and is an independent work, in which a student must demonstrate the knowledge and capability to conduct research in their field of specialization. In addition to this, **5 ECTS** will be earned from participation in *Seminar2: Methods for Studies in Social Exclusion (SE00BC11-3005)* which will be the official thesis seminar for Social Exclusion. The following sections will expand on this and give you a more detailed description of writing a Master's Thesis within the Degree programme of Social Exclusion.

To begin with, one important question commonly asked is what does it mean to write a thesis on Social Exclusion? A thesis in the Social Exclusion Master's Programme is situated in its interdisciplinary approach to studying the main subjects that make up the programme; history, philosophy, gender studies, and theology/study of religions. However, **what makes this thesis unique, or different from the subjects, is that it has a strong footing in both the subject of specialization and Social Exclusion.** Thus, this thesis will demonstrate your knowledge and ability to apply subject materials and perspectives learned from both of these areas of study. Please note, however, that whilst you are doing a specialization, it is not your main subject. Thus,

the aforementioned seminar will ensure that you remain grounded in Social Exclusion as your main subject during the thesis writing process.

It is also important to note that as of the academic year 2020/21, you will have the option to write your final independent research project as either: 1. A traditional Master's Thesis, 2. A research paper, or 3. A book chapter. You may select only *one* of these options! More information on the latter two options will be provided later in this document. The remainder of this document will consist of information on how to write a Master's Thesis. However, this information may also be applied to writing a research paper and a book chapter until a further document is available on the specific requirements for these options.

Ultimately, I hope that in reading this, you gain some insight into the project you are about to embark on and that it answers most of your questions!

1. THE PURPOSE OF A MASTER'S THESIS

According to a quick Google search, a Master's Thesis provides the opportunity for a student to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of their particular area of study, whilst also demonstrating the students' skills in research and writing; developed throughout the Master's Degree. It is independent work, and thus requires a student, under the supervision of a chosen supervisor, to research an area of particular interest to them, and display this in a body of work to be submitted to the Faculty at the end of their respective Master's Degree Program.

According to information provided in the Study Guide regarding the [Master's Thesis in Social Exclusion \(SE00BC13\)](#):

"The research process Research design and theoretical background Literature review and methodology Research group collaboration Familiarity with (different) fields Current research in the department and unit".

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Study Guide also states:

"After completion of the course, students are able to Identify high quality standards in published research and academic writing Map a field of study to identify gaps as opportunities for further research Demonstrate mastery of a selected research topic Produce a high quality research Master's thesis Oral presentation of Research process and research results Provide informed feedback on peer research thesis

Transferable Skills Research, Critical Thinking, Public Speaking, Follow through/
Ability to complete tasks/ Get things done”

2. THE THESIS

The Åbo Akademi Study Guide recommends that students find a topic and begin working on their Master’s Thesis at least six (6) months before the expected submission date. The university recommends the following:

- “Identify a topic by contacting a teacher (lecturer or professor).
- Work on the thesis and have regular meetings with your supervisor.
- In order to shorten the time needed for writing the thesis and potentially securing a higher grade, it is highly recommended that students take advantage of the courses and advice on academic writing provided by the Centre for Language and Communication:
 - Course 923800.0 Academic writing Skills in English for Masters Students (3 ECTS)
- Discuss the deadline for submission with your supervisor, based on the schedule for language review and the deadlines for application for degree certificate. NB! The thesis grading process is about 6 weeks!
- Write and include an abstract of about 2500 characters (without spaces).

The Thesis will be official approved by the Dean after the review, plagiarism check and language review is approved. After this approval, the thesis will be registered in the study register and published online.

You must apply for the degree certificate. The right time to do so is when all your courses are completed, and your thesis is sent in for review. In order to graduate, all study credits required for the degree, including the thesis and courses transferred from other universities (e.g. Univ. of Turku), have to be noted in the study register. The form and deadlines are found here: <https://abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-en-fnt/SitePages/Degree-certificate.aspx>. Degree certificates are issued approximately once a month during the period September-June.”

Important Notes:

- Although it is advised to start working on the thesis at least six months before the submission date, it is advisable to **start testing possible thesis topics during your studies!** Methods, materials, and specializations can all be explored during your degree studies to ensure a smooth thesis-writing process.

More useful, and detailed information about the Thesis can be found on the [SharePoint Master's Thesis](#) page.

Alternative forms of Master's Thesis

Students can submit their master's thesis in the form of a manuscript submitted to an international scientific journal/book. In this case, the student (with the supervisor and Head of Programme) decides upon which journal to submit to, and the manuscript/thesis is written up following the rules and instructions of that journal (length, format, referencing system, etc.). Even though publishing the paper is encouraged, it is not a requirement. Accordingly, submitting the paper according to the guidelines is enough for the student to apply for their final thesis grade. To get the grade, the student should submit the following to the Head of the programme and Faculty:

- The manuscript
- Prove of acceptance
- Reviewer's feedback
- Author instructions of the specified journal
- Thesis Abstract

Due to copyright issues, the manuscript will not be published in Åbo Akademi's publication archives Doria, only the summaries/abstracts will be published in Doria.

What kind of manuscripts can be considered?

- **Research paper:** Student can publish their thesis manuscript as a research paper with a supervisor if the students are the first author of the manuscripts.

An example of a [research paper](#) published by Alexander Rehnberg in 2021.

- **Book chapter:** Students can do a traditional thesis and then turn it into a book chapter.

An example of a published [thesis](#) by Khushal Naik in 2020, turned into a peer-reviewed [book chapter](#) in January 2023.

- **Podcast thesis:** Students can also publish their thesis as a series of podcasts (2 podcasts/max. 15 minutes each). This will be accompanied by a written academic review/summary (not less than 10 pages) discussing the theories and methods and results.

An example of a [podcast thesis](#) published by Jasmin Slimani in 2021.

- **Blog posts thesis:** Students can also publish their thesis as a series of blog posts on the social exclusion blog. This will be accompanied by a written academic

review/summary (not less than 10 pages) discussing the theories and methods and results.

An example of a [blog posts thesis](#) published by Mabel Achengeng Lekeaka in 2022

- **Joint thesis:** Students can also write their thesis together. In certain circumstances, collaborative research leading to a joint thesis may be advantageous in a master's degree program.

Students who wish to embark on a joint master's thesis project should consult first with their supervisors, and also with the Head of the Programme.

A proposal should be drafted including the following:

- One paragraph describing the unique contributions of student A to the thesis project
- One paragraph describing the unique contributions of student B to the thesis project
- One paragraph describing the joint contributions of both students

This application should then be submitted to the Head of the Programme. The Dean will formally approve the joint thesis proposal and notify the Head of the Programme.

SUPERVISION

Once you have chosen your specialization, you will be assigned a supervisor. Supervision will be determined by the head of the programme together with the subject of your specialization.

At the end of the first year of your studies, you will be asked to submit a suggestion for your Master's Thesis topic and which Supervisor(s) you would like to work with you from within your chosen specialization (2-3 suggestions).

Based on your suggestion, the head of the programme in collaboration with the subjects will decide on the appointment of a supervisor and a second supervisor.

Utilise your supervisor's expertise and experience in research by asking questions and testing your interpretations. Do not hesitate to ask directly if something seems unclear. Make sure you understand the supervisor's tips and comments by asking such questions as "so, do you mean that ...". In the same way, make sure that the supervisor understands what you find particularly interesting in the topic area so that he/she can guide you exactly in the right direction. Always prepare carefully for the meetings with your supervisor. Consider in advance what questions need to be clarified at that particular moment (these are details that can be included in the supervision agreement). If you have given a piece of text to the supervisor beforehand, you can

mark and comment on your current problems in the text or list them separately. In any case, when you submit text to your supervisor, always include an explanation of its role in the thesis (e.g. preliminary table of contents, or reference to your latest agreement with the supervisor). Do not hesitate to submit even unfinished sections, because they help the supervisor to comment on your work and understand points that you may find problematic. However, remember that you are independently responsible for decisions related to the content and form of your thesis. Please note that it is advisable to always submit those parts of the thesis in advance that you wish to discuss. Questions or concerns may be written into the document so that your supervisor has time to prepare for the meeting. Submitting these up to five days before the meeting would provide the supervisor with enough time to familiarise themselves with the topic and questions.

WHERE TO BEGIN

As has been mentioned (or will be during your seminars), the Master's Thesis will be the final task that you do at the end of your Master's Degree, and thus comes after you have completed your required courses. By this point, you must have chosen your specialization. Your specialization will determine your supervisor and will help you focus your topic on a more specific, or specialized, aspect of Social Exclusion.

As mentioned above, the Åbo Akademi Study Guide advises that you begin the thesis process by identifying a topic after contacting your supervisor, once you have identified one (This section is expanded on later).

The process of choosing a topic now begins! The following is an example of a process for choosing a Master's Thesis topic:

Define the goals of writing a thesis: It is advisable to choose an interesting topic! Some of the main objectives for creating a thesis thus include:

- *To feel satisfied with the work:* select an interesting topic that is manageable to write about, whilst also attractive to you and something that can be researched without getting bored during the process.
 - *To make a useful paper for people:* Select a topic that will be helpful for others to know something new.
1. Make interesting ideas for your thesis: Once again, it is important to select ideas which attract you the most!
 - Think about your favourite subjects. This will make it easier to identify a topic!
 - Consult with the subject and your supervisor about your ideas. The seminar in the second year will also be a good place to present and discuss your proposals, and peer support in this platform will greatly help you to develop your ideas as well.
 2. Select the right subject for your thesis: Part 2 has helped you come up with several possible topics for your work. However, now comes the step to choose one which fits your goals, and can also be made into a Master's Thesis in Social Exclusion.

3. Select a question for your thesis: Think up potential questions you want to research and answer throughout your research.
- Your thesis will answer these questions using strong arguments, so make sure that they are achievable using the model of:
 - Who is involved?
 - What is happening?
 - Where does this take place?
 - When is it occurring?
 - Why is it happening?
 - And How did it play out, or is it playing out?
 - Make sure that your questions help to make your thesis original; by being focused, interesting, and well-organized!
 - When you have chosen your topic, it may help to generate 5-10 questions about it. These can be refined and narrowed down later to be about 1-3, as they will help to define the way of your future research.

NOTE: As you are aware, the Master's Degree Program in Social Exclusion has four (4) specializations: History, Gender Studies, Religion/Theology, and Philosophy. When choosing your topic, it is advisable to assess which of these four specializations your ideas best fit, as it will determine the effectiveness of your supervision, and the overall quality of our research, methodology, and your overall thesis.

It is always good to remember that choosing a topic can be a long process, and may take even longer to narrow down the idea. This is, however, all part of the process and the final product will reflect the work and time you put in to be specific and detailed!

Once a topic has been selected, or ideas have been formed, the best way to test the quality of your research would be to develop a research plan.

RESEARCH PLAN

Before you begin to write your Master's Thesis, it is advisable to prepare a research plan. This will be explored and developed further during the Master's Thesis Seminar in the second year. There are numerous ways to write a research plan, and one *example* of a plan structure could be:

1. Title
2. Introduction
3. Proposed Research
 - a. Including potential or real research questions
4. Theoretical base and literature review
5. Methodology
6. Chapter Breakdown
7. Potential Empirical Data

8. References

EXAMPLE MODEL OUTLINE FOR MASTER'S THESIS

The following is an example outline for a Master's Thesis. However, this is only an *example*! The outline of your Master's Thesis is entirely up to you, and with agreement from your supervisor, and depends on the type of research you wish to engage in. This will also be discussed further in the seminars. Additionally, I would recommend that you *read* through different Master's Theses as they will help you see a wider variety of thesis structures, as well as help you to identify a structure that works best for you!

TITLE PAGE

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (Optional)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

- Background, topic and significance
- Research problem, literature
- Research objectives and questions
- Definition of terms
- Limitations

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Relevant literature, concepts and theories
- Summary of literature

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

- Research approach
- Data collection/ Producing empirical material
- Data analysis
- Evaluation of the research process & ethical considerations in each step of the process

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS [can also be integrated into the previous section]

6. CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES

APPENDICES (Optional)

GENERAL FORMAT REQUIREMENTS

The University has a guidebook on the technical details needed for the thesis. The following is a summary of the important formatting requirements for the thesis!

- Single-sided printing (alternatively double-sided printing) [Printing is optional as the thesis is submitted electronically]
- **Margins:** left margin 4 cm, others 2.5 cm
- **Font:** Times New Roman or other general fonts
- **Line spacing:** 1.5
- **Spaces:**

- Before heading: 2 blank lines
- By heading: 1 blank row
- Between two headings: 1 blank row
- Table text is placed above the table and does not end with a period
- Figure text is placed below the figure and ends with a full stop.
- **Page Limit:** 40-80 pages.
- **Format:** PDF format for the final submission.

[Video guides](#) for Word (including page numbering and how to avoid it on the first page, create a title page, create and edit table of contents, new styles based on the Normal style, numbered headings, search and replace characters and words) / older version of Word.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The [Faculty Criteria](#) for grading the Master's Thesis in Social Exclusion can be found in the useful links section below. The programme coordinator will select evaluators to grade your thesis.

The thesis is graded on a scale of 1-5 and is dependent on how your evaluators mark you according to the grading criteria. Once your evaluators have completed their evaluation, they will submit their final review, including comments, to the programme coordinator, following which the dean will conduct a final review and provide a final grade for your thesis based on evaluator feedback. You will then receive a final grade, including all evaluator feedback via email.

3. WRITING A MASTER'S THESIS IN YOUR GIVEN SPECIALIZATION

One important thing to remember about your thesis is that it must be related to the field of study of your specialization! Critical to this, however, is that your thesis is a Master's Thesis in Social Exclusion, and ***not*** in your selected specialization. Thus, when you are writing your thesis, always keep in mind that the majority of your thesis will be comprised of the elements of Social Exclusion that you have studied over the two years of the Master's Programme. This will be explored more in the second-year seminar and feedback will be provided accordingly to ensure that you remain grounded in Social Exclusion.

The form of methodology and theory that you wish to employ in your thesis is entirely up to you. These may take the form of your specialization's own, or you may wish to apply more interdisciplinary approaches.

4. SUBMITTING THE THESIS

THESIS DEADLINE

TBD: The thesis deadline will be available once more information has been provided by the faculty and the head of the programme.

LANGUAGE CHECK

Åbo Akademi University uses obligatory language response as a means of ensuring the quality of the language in master's theses written in English. All students working on an MA Thesis are required to hand in parts of their text during the writing process for **compulsory language response**. This will be done to assess the language of your thesis during the writing process should the need arise for corrections, well before the final submission. You can also submit during different stages of the process to see what the response is to be able to improve if necessary. This compulsory language response will be on Moodle, where you will enrol in the Moodle course: "FHPT: Language Response FHPT, 2022-2023".

The Language Centre advises you to submit your thesis for language response **well in advance before you finish writing!**

Specific information can be found at this address: <https://abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-en-languages-and-communication/SitePages/Language-checking-language-response.aspx>

PLAGIARISM-CHECK SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS/ PROCESS

Submission is determined once the student and the supervisor have agreed that the final document is ready for submission to the University's Ouriginal (previously Urkund) system. The process is as follows:

- Save the file under the correct name in PDF/A format:
 - Name the file your name in the following format: firstname_family name (No Scandinavian letters).
- Request from your supervisor, a link to their Urkund account. Your supervisor will create a link. Send your assignment by e-mail to your supervisor's Urkund-account (usually the supervisor's name in the form of firstname.surname.abo@analys.arkund.se).
- *Students do NOT log on to Ouriginal, and assignments should NOT be sent to urkund@abo.fi, which is only a contact address for questions.*
- Write the name of your assignment in the subject line.
- Attach your assignment to your e-mail (Master's theses are sent in as ONE document in PDF/A format, see [instructions for eGradu !](#))
- the maximum size of the attachments is 20 MB
 - reduce the size of your files by saving them in PDF
- if you have problems submitting your coursework (e.g. because the file is too big), please contact urkund@abo.fi
- Ensure that you receive a confirmation of receipt from Ouriginal. (There, you can also check the box for indexing your work in the Ouriginal archive. By agreeing to the indexation of your work in the archive, you make it harder for others to copy your work.)
- Ouriginal compares the text with various sources (the Internet, Ouriginal 's archive and publishing

partners); the analysis takes around 24 h.

THE NEXT STEP

- You will receive an email from your supervisor after they have examined the results of the analysis report on your plagiarism-checked thesis.
- When the thesis evaluators have made their assessments of your thesis, they will write a statement, of which you will receive a copy.
 - Note: Evaluators will take up to 20 working days to evaluate the thesis.
- The faculty will inform you when your thesis is assessed. You will also be informed of your right to request rectification.

5. GRADUATION

You can apply for your degree on the intranet (requires log-in) at:

<https://abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-en-fhpt/SitePages/Diploma-and-graduation-ceremony-at-FHPT.aspx>

Fill in the sheet and then ask Amin for a final assessment. After that, you can submit the degree application by sending it to fhpt-studieradgivare@abo.fi.

6. USEFUL LINKS

Åbo Akademi University Library

This goes without saying, but this is the link to the University library online resources. The links from there are pretty self-explanatory!

- [Alma and ÅA e-resources](#)

SharePoint

SharePoint is the University's intranet, where information can be found regarding many of the university services, including the thesis.

- [Master's Thesis](#): Find specific information regarding the thesis
- [Study Guides at FHPT](#): Study guides for the Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology
- [Faculty Requirements](#)
- [Degree certificates and graduation ceremony](#): Find information regarding Degree Certificates and the graduation ceremony.
- [Plagiarism Control](#): Find information regarding plagiarism checks and the use of the Urkund plagiarism check submission.
- [Language Response](#): Find information on Language response and language check.
- [Assessment Criteria](#)

- [Information on Master's Thesis](#): This is in Swedish but can be a good resource.

eGradu:

eGradu was created when the University launched its online, Electronic Master's Thesis Process on 1 August 2018; to examine and publish all Master's Theses digitally. The following are links to eGradu, and the various steps of the electronic submission of your thesis.

- [eGraduEng: Start](#)
 - [eGraduEng: Students](#)
 - [eGraduEng: 1. Fill out the form for electronic publication of your thesis](#)
 - [eGraduEng: 2. Submit the thesis for plagiarism check and thesis evaluation](#)
 - [eGraduEng: Application for confidentiality](#)
 - [eGraduEng: Rectification request](#)
 - [eGraduEng: Language response](#)

Reference/ Citation Management

One thing that may be useful is the online reference management tool, which helps to organize and keep track of all of your citations – if you're feeling lazy to do it yourself that is! These are RefWorks and Mendeley.

- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Start](#)
- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Get set](#)
- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Save references](#)
- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Share references](#)
- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Cite](#)
- [Reference management \(RefWorks & Mendeley\): Citation styles](#)