

# Guidelines for Seminar Papers and Degree Theses

Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Chair of Marketing

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## How do I apply for a seminar course?

To submit a **seminar paper** to the Chair of Marketing, students must first apply for enrollment in the seminar. The seminar will be announced on ViaCampus and the Chair's website several weeks before the application deadline, which is usually right at the beginning of the semester (see syllabus for application deadline). In case the number of applications exceeds the supervision capacity, students will be selected according to their grade average in marketing courses. Other selection criteria may apply (see syllabus). After being accepted, students attend the first seminar meeting and will be assigned a topic or project. The allotted preparation time for the seminar paper as well as the exact submission deadline will be announced in the syllabus or during the first seminar meeting. If the submitted seminar paper has been evaluated with a grade of 4.0 or better, the student will present her/his seminar paper during a seminar meeting, when the course also includes a final presentation. Seminar participants who fail to submit their paper will be graded with 5.0 (fail) and their applications to future marketing seminars will be given low priority, should the number of applications exceed the supervision capacity. Please note that students cannot receive course credits for the same seminar twice, therefore, ensure that no credits have been received under the same examination number (Prüfungsnummer) yet.

## How do I apply to write a bachelor's / master's degree thesis?

To submit a bachelor's or master's **degree thesis** to the Chair of Marketing, students must apply to the examination board (not directly to the marketing chair!) for supervision. The application deadline is March 15 for the summer semester and September 15 for the winter semester. The instructions and application form for the degree thesis can be found on the Examination Board's website: <https://www.wiwi.europa-uni.de/en/studium/pruefungsangelegenheiten/index.html#03-abschlussarbeit-149068799>.

The number of applicants that can be accepted depends on the number of researchers and research assistants working at the Chair. When applications exceed supervision capacity, students are selected according to their grade average in marketing courses. In addition, the number of marketing courses that students have passed successfully will be considered. In case of rejection, students are allowed to re-apply in the following semester. However, since the same application and selection process applies, a re-application does not increase the chances of acceptance.

After being accepted for supervision, students **choose a topic from a variety of thesis topics offered by the marketing department** (note: students **cannot propose their own topic** nor a topic suggested by their employer). The topic selection list also includes information on the prospective supervisor. For master students, this process takes place shortly before or right at the beginning of the semester as announced by the Chair. No alternative dates will be offered to master students. Bachelor students have the option to choose between writing their bachelor thesis either in the first or the second block of the semester and therefore select their topics at the beginning or in the middle of the semester accordingly. The final thesis topic will be registered at the Exams Office after a few days of consideration. Students need to ensure that they have fulfilled all requirements to register their thesis on time as announced by the Chair. If they fail to do so, the supervision agreement becomes void. The thesis preparation period is determined by the respective study regulations and starts from the time the thesis is registered. The Exams Office will inform you about your concrete submission deadline.

All students at the Chair of Marketing write their thesis **in English**. Master students are required to conduct an empirical study for their thesis, while Bachelor students produce a theoretical, literature-based thesis. **Students, who have been accepted for supervision but fail to register or submit their thesis will not be accepted for supervision again.**

## How do I receive supervision?

Thesis **supervision** takes place in one-to-one meetings during office hours - not via email or phone. The student contacts the supervisor in advance to request and arrange a consultation meeting. To make optimal use of the allocated time slot and ensure the meeting is as productive as possible, students should consider the following:

- Being knowledgeable about the instructions provided in this document is assumed.
- Proposed literature provided for the allocated topic should be read and reviewed to get a basic understanding of the topic and/or the methodology.
- Students propose an agenda of the points/questions they would like to discuss by email **two working days prior to the scheduled meeting**. E.g., if the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the outline of the thesis, the outline needs to be attached. This allows the supervisor to prepare for the meeting. In case the student does not send the required information on time, the **supervisor can postpone the meeting**.

Writing a **BA/MA thesis reflects the student's ability to work independently** on an assigned topic and will be evaluated as such. The final result should be a fair representation of the student's (not the supervisor's!) knowledge and problem-solving skills. Thus, while the supervisor provides general guidance, the expectation is that the student works self-sufficiently to find solutions/answers by consulting the many academic online/offline resources available.

## What are the general requirements for seminar papers?

For courses that include a seminar paper as the examination, students should learn how to answer a research question on their own by writing a **seminar paper**. This will be primarily achieved by evaluating relevant research literature. Often, the aim of the seminar is to produce a paper that fulfills academic research criteria in preparation for writing a degree theses at the end of their studies (please always refer to the seminar syllabus for a detailed description of the seminar's aim and required deliverables). The overall length of the seminar paper (introduction, body, conclusion, including all tables and figures, references, and the appendix) should not exceed **10 pages**. Exceeding the page limit leads to deduction of points during the evaluation. Seminar papers are written **in English** and submitted on time as a Word document in the appropriate Moodle course, including attachments.

## What are the general requirements for degree theses?

The **master's/bachelor's thesis** is a written exam and constitutes a part of the diploma grade. Students should check the up-to-date examination regulations before they start writing their thesis. This time-bound project should demonstrate the student's ability to independently work with scientific methods, critically evaluate academic literature, and write in a scientific and precise fashion following a clear line of argumentation. The overall length (introduction, body, conclusion, including all tables and figures, references, and the appendix) should not exceed **40 pages** for master's theses and **20 pages** for bachelor's theses. The thesis is written **in English**. Bound copies of the thesis should be

handed in to the Exams Office according to the deadline. The Word document and required attachments should also be handed in in digital form

### **What are the general characteristics of a seminar paper/thesis?**

A seminar paper/thesis represents scientific work, and suitable topics will be determined by the supervisor. Theses written in companies will not be supervised at the Chair of Marketing, due to potential conflicts of interest.

The focus of the thesis/seminar paper is **scientific argumentation**. Statements and theoretical claims except well-known and commonly accepted facts should be backed-up by citing relevant academic literature or corresponding data. scientific study is characterized by a **theoretical orientation and a structured, critical argumentation**. The evaluation of **sources** should meet the up-to-date and international standards.

### **How do I search for and evaluate literature?**

The right strategy for literature search and determining the sources of information depends on the topic. As a basic principle, **scientific journals** are the main sources of information for preparing a scientific thesis. They can be searched and accessed via electronic databases. The essential step in the literature search and evaluation is assessing the **relevance** of articles, which can oftentimes be achieved by first reading the article's title, abstract, and, if applicable, introduction and conclusion. If the article is deemed to be relevant, then the rest of the article should be read. Following this process saves time that might be wasted by reading irrelevant articles. The recency and quality of an article are important. To assess the quality of the journal an article is published in, students should refer to the VHB-JOURQUAL journal ranking, which ranks journals from best (A+) to worst (D) Generally, students should aim to reference articles from journals that are ranked A+, A, or B. Articles from C or D-ranked journals should be referenced sparingly.

There is no required amount of literature the seminar paper/thesis is based on. Typically, the number of sources cited in a seminar paper is around 10, in a bachelor's thesis between 20 and 30 and in a master's thesis between 30 and 50.

### **What is the structure of the manuscript? Which sections should be included?**

The structure below is recommended for all theses and seminar papers:

- (1) Cover Page
- (2) Table of Contents
- (3) Introduction
- (4) Body
- (5) Conclusion
- (6) Bibliography/References
- (7) Declaration of Academic Integrity

The page count begins with the introduction and ends with the references (or the appendix if it is included). The cover page, table of contents, and declaration of academic integrity are not included in the page count.

## Where can I find the thesis / seminar paper template?

The thesis/seminar paper template, which can be downloaded from the Chair's website, is prepared in accordance with the above-mentioned structure and formatting guidelines (e.g., page margins). A template for the layout of the title page is also included.

## What is a table of contents? What is an outline?

The **table of contents** is a part of the finalized version of the thesis and provides an overview of the thesis. All text sections should be assigned a numerical classification. Furthermore, each numerical classification should be paired up with a page number. The table of contents represents the **outline** of the thesis/seminar paper and shows how the topic is understood and dealt with. The outline is usually subject to change during the literature review and draft writing phase. It may serve as a base for discussion with the supervisor and should reflect the logical composition of the paper. The length of each section should reflect its importance (e.g. the introduction and discussion sections should be shorter than the literature review).

## What is an introduction and what should it address?

The **Introduction** section aims to provide the background of the topic, the problem statement, the research question(s), objectives, and method of the thesis/seminar paper. Among other things, the following aspects should be addressed:

- What is the problem statement of the thesis or what is the aim of the study?
- Why is the topic important or relevant?
- How is the chain of argumentation constructed?

## What is the body? What should the body contain?

The body represents the **main content** of the thesis and often includes sections such as Background Knowledge, Theoretical Framework, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, and Discussion. The provided text should be cohesive, and the presented topic fully addressed. **Side notes** should be avoided. **Definitions** for key terms, variables, concepts, and constructs, if deemed suitable and necessary, appear only in the main part (neither in the Introduction nor in the Conclusion). Students need to adhere to the once formulated definitions and classifications throughout their work.

### Differences between qualitative and quantitative research (for master's thesis only)

Differences in content and structure exist depending on whether the thesis is based on quantitative or qualitative empirical data. In general, while quantitative research aims to **measure and confirm** (i.e. a larger empirical sample with limited participant engagement) the purpose of qualitative research is to **explore, describe and conceptualize** (i.e. a small empirical sample with intensive engagement). This difference has implications for developing the body of the thesis.

For **quantitative** (positivist) **research**, the literature review will serve to **develop hypotheses** that are then statistically tested and dis/confirmed with the help of empirical (survey/experimental/panel) data, which will then be presented and discussed in the **results section**. The data is presented in numerical form (statistics and graphs thereof). The empirical sample should be large enough to allow

for robust and reliable statistical testing. The **minimum sample sizes** are 100 respondents for a survey and 120 respondents for a 2 x 2 experiment (30 per condition). Students need to allocate enough time for data collection in their work schedule to achieve these numbers.

**Qualitative** (interpretivist) research on the other hand, does **not develop hypothesis** but is inductive. The size of the **empirical sample is smaller** but offers considerably more depth. The objective here is to deeply mine and interpret the data in its context to excavate new knowledge and develop a broader understanding of the research phenomenon. The **findings section** therefore does not contain quantified information (i.e. statistical results, counts) but is **descriptive** in nature (e.g. presenting identified themes, processes, consumer profiles etc.). Contrary to quantitative research, the findings section is interspersed with data in textual or visual form (e.g. participant quotes/verbatim, interview observation notes, photographs etc.) to empirically underline the newly discovered themes and conceptualization, which is then contrasted with existing literature to highlight new contributions.

### **What is a conclusion? What should be in the conclusion?**

At the end of the text, a clear and concise summary should be made. The **Conclusion** section should include the following:

- Short repetition of the problem statement, explored research question(s), core assumptions, hypotheses (if applicable), research procedure and applied method used (for empirical studies only)
- Discussion of important results and findings of the thesis/seminar paper
- Critical appraisal of the topic
- For bachelor's and master's thesis: demonstration of contribution, i.e. what is new versus already existing research
- Practical implications for e.g., marketing managers, consumers, policy makers (if applicable)
- Limitations and suggestions for future research

### **What is a bibliography / list of references?**

The bibliography lists the references used in the text in **alphabetical** order of its authors. Bibliographies are required for seminar papers and degree theses.

### **Do I need a declaration of academic integrity for my seminar paper or thesis?**

The **degree thesis** or **seminar paper** ends with a **signed declaration of academic integrity** on a separate page, the exact content of which can be found in the **thesis manual**. Students writing a **degree thesis** should update this declaration with any changes provided by the examination office when you receive your confirmation for having registered your thesis. Submissions that do not include a signed declaration of academic integrity will not be evaluated.

## How should I submit my seminar paper or thesis, data, and/or digital sources?

To address the growing threat of (partial) plagiarism, the submitted theses/seminar papers are checked for copied passages using a specialized software. Therefore, **the finalized theses and seminar papers need to be submitted as a Word document** via Moodle. This is in addition to BA/MA theses being submitted to the Exam's Office.

All **online sources** used (i.e. sources that are **only** available on the Internet - which excludes almost all journal articles that are usually available in both print and online) should be documented and **submitted in digital form**. Please include online sources in their entirety as originally retrieved and not just as a link, e.g., save webpages as PDF documents.

In empirical **quantitative** studies, the raw data such as survey or experimental data are required in a valid format (e.g. SPSS, Excel) along with methodological details (e.g., questionnaire, experimental stimuli). For **qualitative** empirical studies, various types of data may exist (e.g. audio, text, video, picture files) and should also be electronically provided. Interview data needs to be supplied in its original format (i.e. audio files) as well as in transcribed form (in Word).

All the above files should be handed in to the Exams Office as a single CD-ROM/USB-stick together with the bound copies of the thesis. If there is a large number of files, students should categorize them into folders (e.g. online sources, interview audio files, interview transcripts). For seminar papers that require a data collection, data files should be uploaded in the appropriate submission folder in Moodle.

## How should I format my paper? What is the correct layout?

The thesis should be written with a word processing program. A thesis **template** is available for download on the website of the Chair. It has been prepared according to the following instructions, which should be adhered to for submission: A proportional font (e.g., Times New Roman) with the font size 12 pt. and one and a half **line spacing** (18 pt.) is selected. The text should be formatted using hyphenation justification. There is a two-line spacing between two new paragraphs. Titles are written with larger line spacing proportionate to their classification level in the table of contents. A non-serif font (e.g., Arial) is used for the figures and illustrations. Apart from the cover page and table of contents, all other sheets should be continuously Arabic-numbered. Each sheet has a left margin of at least 3 cm, a right margin of at least 2.5 cm, as well as a top and bottom margin of at least 2.5 cm. The benchmark for the length of a page should be about 33 lines with 80 keystrokes.

## How should the table of contents be formatted?

The **table of contents** should follow a numerical order. There should be at least two lower order sub-sections under a higher order classification. An example:

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical Background and Significance of Market Research
3. Methods of Marketing Research
  - 3.1 Research Process
  - 3.2 Research Design
  - ...

## How do I format tables and figures?

Tables and figures should be clearly titled, reflecting their **content**. Titles of tables are placed above, whereas titles of figures are placed below. Tables and figures should be consecutively numbered and referred to in the text (e.g., see 'Table 3') and clearly legible when printed.

## How should I cite references?

Correct (i.e., complete and comprehensible) citation serves as a proof of scientific work. It reflects both the honesty of the author and the ability to build arguments with appropriate sources. Students are welcome to use either **APA** or **Chicago B** style formatting which are all common in the marketing and consumer research domains. However, it is essential that the chosen style is **consistent across the entire document** (meaning in-text as well as in the bibliography) to avoid point deductions for not adhering to formal citation requirements. An overview and comparison of the different citation styles can be found online, e.g. <https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-style-overview/>

## How can I write a successful thesis or seminar paper?

It is advisable to prepare a **timetable** and not postpone writing the manuscript. A common mistake is to underestimate the time required for final formatting, proofreading, and copying. Computer problems (e.g., crash, data loss) are not accepted reasons for an extension, therefore regular file backups are recommended.

When writing, assume that the reader has a good understanding of marketing in general but has only little knowledge in the specific topic of the thesis or seminar paper. Therefore, avoid extensive explanations of content the reader already knows (e.g. definitions of general terms like marketing, consumer behavior etc.) and focus on explicating what is new and interesting for the reader.

Here are some **language style** recommendations. Note that good scientific writing does not imply the use of highly complex and incomprehensible language and long sentences:

- The first-person singular pronoun “I” and the first-person plural pronoun “we” should be generally avoided, however, can be used in the method section of qualitative research master thesis.
- Using filler words, empty words, unnecessary verbiage, poetic words and unnecessary foreign words should be avoided. Instead, keep it simple (i.e., short sentences, compact style of expression, clear and exact language) and stick to marketing terminology.
- Formulate chapter titles to be both precise and as meaningful as possible, foreshadowing the content of the chapter.
- Although being a non-native English speaker is considered during the evaluation of the thesis/paper, frequent grammar, spelling, sentence structure, wording, and punctuation mistakes are distractive for the reader and lead to a deduction of points. Therefore, please employ appropriate computer programs to check spelling and grammar and use proofreading services when needed.
- Footnotes or endnotes should not be used.



## How is a thesis evaluated? What are the criteria?

Evaluation of the degree thesis begins after the thesis has been submitted, received, and forwarded to the supervisor by the exam office (and not before). The thesis should be the sole work of the author, which the author confirms by signing the declaration of academic integrity. The precise wording of this declaration is provided to the student by the examination office.

The following **criteria** are considered during the **evaluation** of the thesis:

- Substantive Content, Theoretical Foundations, and Delineation of the Thesis
  - Understanding and use of concepts, theories, and methods
  - Thematic relevance, coverage of the topic, address of research question
  - Degree thesis: size of contribution to existing knowledge
- Argumentation
  - Train of thoughts and organization of the thesis (structure, classifications, emphases, proportions, logical consistency)
  - Degree of selection and integration of arguments, soundness of conclusions
  - Clear line of argumentation
  - Clarity of thoughts, intellectual rigor, quality of critical reflection, and discussion
- Methodology (master's thesis only)
  - Appropriateness of the selected research design
  - Execution of data collection
  - Quality of data analysis and interpretation of data
  - Robustness of results
  - Overall representation and description of the method
- Selection and Evaluation of Literature Sources
  - Consideration of depth and breadth of the relevant literature
  - Quality of evaluation and integration of the literature
  - Relevance and appropriateness of literature selected
- Formal Aspects
  - Adherence to page limit
  - Correctness of citation techniques and bibliography
  - Language style, expression, clarity
  - Grammar, spelling and punctuation
  - General appearance and quality of visual aids

## Am I allowed to use ChatGPT or artificial intelligence (AI) to write my paper?

The use of **artificial intelligence** (e.g., ChatGPT) to write a seminar paper or final thesis **is not allowed** and will be treated as a case of plagiarism. In the case of AI-generated or falsified literature sources, the supervisor or exam board may demand the submission of these literature sources.

## What is plagiarism? What counts as plagiarism? What are the consequences?

Plagiarism occurs when a student obtains portions or elements of someone else's work, including information, texts, figures, tables etc., and presents them as his/her own work without correctly referring to the original source(s). It includes, but is not limited to, reusing his/her own priorly submitted work without referring to the original context of use. In other words, it is the incorrect

use/indication of sources. Submitted seminar papers and degree theses are scanned with plagiarism software.

Definitions, examples, and the consequences of academic dishonesty and plagiarism are found on the faculty's website: (Dealing with deception, including plagiarism)

<https://www.wiwi.europa-uni.de/en/studium/pruefungsangelegenheiten/index.html#02-pruefungen-149068686>

## **What is a master thesis defense and how should I prepare for it?**

In line with the [examination regulations for master's theses](#), students are required to defend their work during a colloquium. The candidate, the supervisor of the thesis, and an expert assessor take part in the colloquium. After evaluation of the written thesis, the grade for the written performance and the defense date are announced, provided the thesis has been graded with at least 4,0. A review of the thesis evaluation is only possible after the thesis has been defended.

For the defense the candidate prepares a 15-minute Power Point presentation summarizing the main results of the thesis, classifying them within a larger context, and defending them against critical objections. Not complying with the time limit of 15 minutes may result in deduction of points, and if necessary, the evaluators may ask the student to end the presentation. To stick to the allocated **time limit**, it is best to refrain from trying to present the entire thesis but instead focus on presenting only the most important points. The presentation will be followed by a question & answer session. The total duration of the defense will be approximately 30 minutes. The Power Point file needs to be sent by email to the supervisor 24 hours in advance of the presentation.