

MASTER IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES: LANGUAGES AND CULTURES
IN CONTACT



**VNiVERSiDAD
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CAMPUS OF INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE



Universidad de Valladolid

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Guidelines on How to Write a Master thesis.

General

A thesis is basically your hypothesis on a given subject. Your Master thesis at the University of Salamanca and Valladolid should be 30 pages (double-spaced) in length.

A brief presentation of your research and findings has to be presented orally.

In a **Master** thesis (as in a PhD thesis) you should consider various elements: background theory, methodology, your own perspective and contribution to the chosen subject.

Background theory: you must be aware of the present state of the art and the developments, controversies, and breakthroughs that are currently informing the topic/ issue/ problem you have chosen to write about. What do leading theorists, writers, critics think of this issue?

You should develop a literature review in which you demonstrate that you grasp the background theory of your subject. You should organize other critics' opinions, identify trends in present research, and define areas of theoretical weaknesses.

A simple list of authors and titles with a brief description of the work is not enough, it is important to relate it to **your own perspective** and **contribution**.

Make a clear statement of the problem under exploration.

Your thesis should remain **focused on your hypothesis and contribution**.

It is necessary to establish the nature of your problem/ topic you are confronting and set about analyzing it. You will have to analyze your hypothesis against other critics' arguments. Your thesis should be supported with your own arguments and should not stray from your focal point or main story line. Your argument should not be blurred with extraneous material that does not contribute to the maintenance of your thesis position.

At the same time you must justify the relevance and validity of the material you are going to use in order to support your theory. You need to justify your particular theoretical approach in the light of your topic and your conceptual perspective to it. Justify the interpretive framework you have chosen and why it is appropriate to your theoretical suppositions.

Make sure to spell out your contribution, that is, you have to evaluate the importance of your thesis to the development of your problem/ topic/issue under discussion. Underline the significance of your analysis, point out the possible limitations and advantages of the approach you have chosen.

Your own voice has to come through in your writing. If you find radical disagreements between your own theory and those of other critics, analyze the differences. The aim of this 'research' is to sharpen and develop your own ideas, not to abandon them yet you should make adjustments if you learn things you did not know before. Your reading of secondary sources should be actively interrogative. You should question the sources, verify their logic or coherence, and attempt to sustain the validity of your own perceptions against them. Make sure you always acknowledge your use of these secondary materials. It is important **not to plagiarize**. You must always acknowledge other people's words and ideas and give a full bibliographical reference. Also you have to give credit to your supervisor's works, tips and instructions.

Plagiarizing is a serious offence and is subject to disciplinary action.

You should not to copy passages from your secondary reading verbatim unless it is a quotation. It is better to translate other people's theories into your own words by summarizing or paraphrasing them.

The Introduction and the Conclusions of your thesis are very important. In both it is imperative to demonstrate that you have a good grasp on the subject. The Introduction has to be a presentation of your own approach and the way in which you will approach it: the state of the art, the methodology you will use, your main objective, your

contribution to the subject under discussion, and a brief description of the various chapters.

A **Master** thesis or **Ph.D** thesis needs to be “**an original contribution to knowledge**”.

Being original may sound too daunting yet you need not come up with a whole new way of looking at a certain topic you only have to contribute a step to the understanding of the theory. You can be original in many ways.

Having many original ideas, methods of interpretations

Making a synthesis that has not been made before

Looking at a subject in a new interpretive framework

Furthering the interpretation begun by other scholars

Taking a particular theory and applying it to a new area

Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies

Looking at aspects that critics have overlooked so far

Proving the validity of a theory or approach on a certain topic that may have been studied by other scholars but which you interpret in a new way.

Style

The text must be clearly written in acceptable English. Good grammar and thoughtful writing will make the thesis easier to read.

Short, simple phrases and words are often better than long ones.

Be concerned with eloquence, elegance and efficient communication.

Stylesheet

Times New Roman, 12, double spaced.

Leave large margins since the copy will be bound and hence the width of margins will be shortened.

Extension: 30 pages long.

How many copies?

For a Master thesis you need to submit **3 bound copies** to the dissertation committee. Do not forget to offer an additional **copy** to your supervisor.

Thesis Title: should be a synthesis of your dissertation

Thesis structure

A thesis should include

- **Title** (make it concise, eloquent, and interesting. It should bear a relationship to the contents and it should not be general and vague. For example “The Works of Chaucer” is **not a** title. But “Story and Story-telling in The Canterbury Tales” would be more appropriate. Ideally your title should arouse the curiosity of your examiner and supervisor.)
- **Introduction** (your aims, hypothesis): The introduction has to be solid. It should explain the angle you take on the topic or how you have interpreted the questions you raise in your dissertation. The introduction should start with what you do in this paper and formulate your major contribution. What is the topic and why is it important? State the issue you are dealing with as simply as you can. Motivate the problem and your hypothesis. Provide a concrete definition of a problem/issue and the way in which you would like to solve it.
- **Literature survey** – the background theory should be a review of relevant literature on the subject. What attempts to analyze this subject have been made so far? From what perspectives? What other kind of approaches have been attempted on this subject? Explain your approach and how it fits into the series of interpretations advanced so far on the subject.

- **Methodology**
- **Discussion** – development of your theory
- **Middle chapters** - There is no recipe for a perfect order. But your argument should flow naturally from your assumptions to your conclusions through the middle chapters. The order in which you present your argument is extremely important. You will have to figure out how one aspect of your theory depends on the understanding of something of something else. Place yourself in the reader's position and imagine what you need to say first, second, or third, etc. so that he can understand you better.
- **Conclusions: The ending has to be a tight, conclusion of all you have argued before. It should be a brief** summary and a synthesis of your contribution. It should come as a logical consequence of your argument and should tie all the strands together.
- **Bibliographical references:** Make sure that you do not omit relevant papers by researchers in the field, nor your supervisor, or by potential academics with whom you may want to work with in the future.

The Title page

should contain the following information:

Seal of the University

Title/author/ English Department/ University of Salamanca/ Supervisor's Name

Second page:

"This thesis is submitted for the degree of Master in Advanced English Studies: Languages and Cultures in Contact /The University of Salamanca /Date.

Name of Supervisor who approves your thesis.

Your Signature and that of your supervisor

Abstract

This part will be the most widely published and most read. It should be a synthesis of your thesis: a concise description of the issues and problem(s) addressed, your method of solving it/them, your results and conclusions. An abstract must be self-contained. An important thing to remember is that an abstract is *not* an introduction but a résumé of your thesis.

Acknowledgments

Most thesis authors put in a page in which they thank all those who have helped and supported during the process of writing the thesis.

Table of contents

Write down the different sections, chapter titles and subheadings of each chapter including introductions, conclusions and bibliography.

The introduction starts at page 1. Previous pages are not numbered.

General points to bear in mind

- Follow the rule “first describe what you do, then explain it, and compare it to other critics’ alternative points of view”
- Use active voice and avoid passive constructions when the agent is known. Not: “it is assumed that ...”, but “So and so asserts that ...”
- “I” is fine. Do not use the royal “we” on a sole-authored paper.
- Present tense is usually best. Most importantly, though, keep the sequence of tenses consistent.
- Use the normal sentence structure: subject, verb, object.
- Do not use run-on sentences with complicated constructions and an ever-increasing numbers of embedded clauses. The precision of definition is essential.
- Do not use abbreviations in academic writing. Do not say “So, let’s say you’ve read the text” but “So, let us say you have read the text”.