

Guidelines for Writing Bachelor's and Master's Theses

General Framework

These instructions pertain to theses that I supervise and evaluate as the first reviewer. They specify and sometimes deviate from the general guidelines for writing papers and theses at IPU. If you are uncertain about which guidelines to follow in your work, please visit my office hours. Starting from the winter semester of 2024/25, I will generally only supervise empirically-qualitative theses.

Procedure

Please contact me in the semester before the one intended for writing your thesis to clarify supervisory capacities and to align your research interests with the methodological and thematic focus of the professorship. After our meeting and possibly some research, please summarize your considerations for the thesis in a 3-5 page exposé. It should include the (provisional) research question and its relevance, a rough overview of the current research status on the topic, describe and justify the methodological approach (including data production and analysis methods, sampling strategy), and considerations on field access and ethical challenges. The exposé serves as a common basis in the supervision process. Approval of the exposé is a prerequisite for supervisory agreement.

If you want to write your thesis with me, regularly attend a colloquium, which I usually offer every semester, and present your work for discussion. Please visit my office hours for questions that cannot be answered within the colloquium.

You must register your thesis with the appropriate form at BüSL, at least four weeks before the submission date. The title of the thesis can change during the process. In this case, please send an informal email to me, which I usually forward to BüSL with approval. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee a complete and detailed preliminary reading of your thesis draft before submission to BüSL. However, I can provide feedback on structure and formal design after a rough review and offer feedback on the content if you formulate a specific question about a particular section.

After submitting the thesis to BüSL, I try to read and evaluate it within six weeks. Please inform me in advance if an evaluation is needed in a shorter time or if you need confirmation of passing the thesis for applications. You will usually not receive the evaluation from me but from BüSL. Please inquire there if you do not automatically receive the evaluation.

If you disagree with the evaluation of the thesis (and can best justify your criticism of the evaluation), you have the right, according to §9 of the framework study and examination regulations, to file an objection with the Examination and Admissions Committee within three months. The two reviewers are then asked to review their evaluation and provide reasons for the reevaluation.

Formal Requirements

For the length of the thesis, I consider approximately 40 to 45 pages for bachelor's theses and 70 to 80 pages for master's theses as a rough guideline. This is based on Calibri 11pt with 1.5 line spacing and standard margins (2.4 cm left and right and 2 cm top and bottom), including the title page, declaration of independence, and bibliography; appendices such as interview transcripts do not count towards this estimate.

The specifications for font, font size, and margins are not mandatory. Please choose a font and size you find suitable for your work, determine the margins as you see fit, and decide whether to indent the first line of each paragraph (and by how much) or instead set specific spaces (e.g., 4 or 6 pt) between paragraphs to make the internal structure of the text visible. You can set headings larger if you wish, and even use different colors. New chapters can either be continuous or start on a new page for clarity. I have no specific expectations. It's your work, and you should design it in a way that you like, so you want to print and bind a copy for your bookshelf after graduation. However, please ensure consistency, so not one paragraph indented and the next with space between. Also, remember that your formatting decisions should make the work accessible to the readers (primarily the reviewers), facilitating rather than obscuring the reading.

If you have special ideas regarding the binding (just please, no spiral binding) and are unsure whether they comply with the requirements for the work as an examination, please consult the colleagues at BÜSL.

The cover of your work should include the following basic information: name of the university, title of the thesis, your first and last name, matriculation number, type of work (e.g., bachelor's thesis), field of study, academic degree, both reviewers, place and date of submission. If you wish to decorate the cover graphically (not just because you like drawing flowers, but because the decoration relates to the work, like printing tattoos in a study on the psychosocial significance of tattoos in the biographical process), this is possible.

Including a summary/abstract in your work is optional. Its value lies in providing the readers with some key messages to guide the reading.

I ask you to follow the APA citation format for citations in the text and bibliography. There are countless possible citation styles, as long as they are applied consistently. However, the APA provides a comprehensive, detailed, and clear guide that includes many special cases, allowing reviewers to quickly assess the scientific quality of the work. Please familiarize yourself with it before starting to write to avoid a significant effort to standardize everything later.

Language-related aspects

I no longer accept works that make the research subject invisible by using the passive voice ("it was researched") or strange objectifications ("The author of this work believes that..."). Please write in the first person ("I investigated how..."; "I am of the empirically justified opinion that..."). It is your work; you conducted the underlying research and struggled with the right words. The "I" does not make the work any less scientific; on the contrary, it is (best case) an expression of conscious positionality and reflective subjectivity as quality criteria of empirically-qualitative work.

I expect you to demonstrate an awareness of gender-sensitive language in your work. This certainly does not mean you must consistently use *, _ , or Binnen-I or whatever variant. In a paper about men talking about feelings, it would be strange to search for formulations as inclusive as possible. Please

choose a strategy that "justly" reflects the importance of gender-sensitive language concerning your research topic and briefly justify your decision at a suitable point. If nothing better occurs than using the generic masculine, this should be the variant that needs to be justified most clearly; pointing out reader-friendliness and that all genders are naturally included is insufficient.

I would be delighted if you used the creation of your work to develop your own research and writing style. Be creative. Qualitative research invites you to tell good (and empirically based) stories beyond rigid conventions and standardized jargon. This often applies to the entire structure of the work. Let yourself be inspired by reading qualitative studies to convincingly present your project and findings. The journal *Qualitative Inquiry* offers some examples. Here, too: The type of presentation should result from the research itself and correspond to the requirements of the topic, methods, and research philosophy as meaningfully as possible.

Content and Its Connection to Form

The previously discussed issues challenge the notion of a "normal" structure of a thesis with conventionally prescribed chapters 1 to x. However, I understand that many find it helpful to have a clear framework to work with, providing a sense of security and manageability. Therefore, here is a possible structure of a thesis based on an empirically-qualitative study – which, of course, must always be individually modified:

1. **Introduction:** Presentation of the research project and specification of the research question, relevance of the research topic, possibly discussion of specific terms or concepts essential to the work, possibly personal motivation to work on the topic, notes on the structure of the work.
2. **Context:** Historical, social, political, and other backgrounds essential for understanding the work; possibly certain discourses in which the topic is located; possibly institutional framework conditions if it was created within a larger project. This does not necessarily have to be a separate chapter, but can also be a section in the introduction.
3. **State of Research:** Overview of the field of empirical research relevant to one's work and presentation and discussion of selected key studies that are repeatedly referred to in the work or are important for understanding one's argumentation. Strategically, it is often clever to first give a broad overview of the discourse lines on the topic or related topics, indicating that one is an expert in the field and could write another 20 pages, but then focusing on those works that are of particular importance to one's research. This can be positive: inspired by, following this path. But it can also be done by differentiation: what one definitely does not want to do (with an indication of the critical aspects, of course). The discussion of the state of research is often described with the aim of identifying a research gap to which one's work should contribute. I find that absurd in this absolute sense. Not every research work has to bring something entirely new into the world, leading to strange constructions of so-called research gaps. The other side: Not always does one find something about what one is writing. However, this does not mean that it is unnecessary to write about the state of research. For one thing, it is possible to describe what other topics are negotiated in the discourse and then refer to this actual research gap, to which one's work goes. For another, there are certainly adjacent but relevant fields of research that can be referenced (for example, if nothing exists about the autumnal flight route of the Siberian grebe, but there is a lot about the flight routes of comparable birds or the spring route of the grebe). Sometimes one also finds something in

fields/discourses that seem quite remote. In bachelor's theses, depending on the topic, the state of research can also be treated as a section of the introduction.

4. **Theoretical Framework:** Recourse to theory is often tricky in qualitative work. In the sense of an inductive approach, it is about engaging with the empirical material with a certain abstinence from theory, letting oneself be guided by it, and acting as a theory generator. However, one never gets along without theory. Terms like migration, identity, and youth are not simple, definable with definitions like $x=y$. They refer to complex and sometimes highly contested discourses and quite different theoretical approaches. The chapter should indicate that you are familiar with the theoretical field and set a theoretical framework that allows the readers to follow your analyses and interpretations made with this specific methodological lens. Although the theory chapter usually comes quite early in the work, it is informed by later decisions to interpret the findings in this or that theoretical light. In the understandable desire to present oneself as an expert on the referenced approaches in the theory chapter, please ensure that only those theoretical approaches or fragments are presented in detail, to which significant reference is made in the course of the work, such as when discussing the findings.
5. **Methodology:** Why are qualitative methods suitable for answering the research question? What data production method was chosen, and why? How did you handle the data (e.g., in terms of interview transcription)? What evaluation method did you choose – and why? How did the research process unfold (e.g., regarding field access, sampling), reflection on research experiences and subjectivity as a researcher; research-ethical aspects (which go beyond informed consent, data protection)
6. **Selected Findings (or: Central Results):** Here, present the core findings of your study. The type of presentation partly depends on the evaluation method (e.g., thematic analysis: presentation of themes; research vignettes related to key moments, key "cases" in the research process). It is always a selection of possible results that you can elaborate on; therefore, it is important to decide on the selection of findings.
7. **Discussion:** Interpretative compression of the findings, also with recourse to, for example, a comparative interpretation of the findings of different interviews, classification into the state of research, the use of a theoretical approach that makes the findings plausible, critical reflection on the project's approach, blind spots and limitations, research perspectives arising from the project.
8. **Conclusion:** Here, a brief summary of the key findings could be made, implications for practice presented, in case of biographical-professional motivation of the project from the introduction, reference made again to what the research has also brought as an educational process, among other things.

Bibliography

Appendix: e.g., interview or observation guide, interview transcripts, observation protocols, memos, interim evaluations, etc., anything that facilitates understanding of your presentation and is understood as an expression of clean and reflective scientific work. Please ensure that interview transcripts must be anonymized if they are printed in the work and the work is publicly accessible at the university. You can also mark the work with a confidentiality clause, so no one can access it without your permission, but then the work also remains in the proverbial drawer. A third way is: include the item "Transcripts" in the appendix and only name the core data of the

interview, stating that the print of the interviews was omitted for data protection reasons, and the transcripts are available to the reviewers (and then send them to us by email, for example).

Beyond this rather conventional structure, there are numerous ways to convey qualitative research. The colloquium is the place to discuss one's ideas, develop concepts in the group, and understand through collegial feedback what works and how. The key aspects that appear in the outlined structure should become thematic in the work somewhere and somehow (and preferably so that the readers notice it).