

Guidelines for the Master's Thesis in Research in Special Needs Education

RSNE4900



**The Department of Special Needs
Education (DSNE)**
Postal addr.: PO Box 1140 Blindern, 0318
Oslo
Visiting addr.: Helga Engshus, 4. etasje,
Sem Sælands vei 7, 0371 Oslo

Phone: (+47) 22 85 80 59
Telefax: (+47) 22 85 80 21
postmottak@uv.uio.no
www.uv.uio.no/isp/
Org. no.: 971 035 854

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Guidelines for the Master's Thesis in Special Needs Education

ABOUT THE MASTER'S THESIS

The Master's Thesis is an independent scientific work. The thesis should have relevance to the field of Special Needs Education.

The work should involve planning and conducting a research project and reporting this through a Master's Thesis, where you demonstrate insight into current research, theories, and methods based on the thesis's research question. The thesis can include an empirical study or be purely theoretical. The Master's Thesis may also be linked to a professional development project and/or an evaluation project.

Two students can collaborate on a project, such as data collection, but each must write their own Master's Thesis. The exception to this is if a systematic literature review is conducted, which requires at least two reviewers. In this case, the students may also write the Master's Thesis together.

Project planning

Students express interest in writing a Master's Thesis connected to a research project or a topic that is presented at the end of the second semester ("week 24"). It will be specified who the supervisor(s) are for the relevant research projects/topics.

Students can express interest in three to five research projects/topics. They do this by writing a brief project proposal (about one page) for each research project/topic they are interested in writing a Master's Thesis on. A template will be provided for this purpose. The project proposals must be submitted during the week when the research projects/topics are presented. Students will be informed before the summer break about which project/topic and supervisor they have been assigned.

The students then write a project description for the research project/topic they have been assigned. A template has been prepared for this. The project description is a mandatory requirement and must be submitted in Canvas by week 35. The supervisor will evaluate it (approved/not approved) by week 38. If the project description cannot be approved, the students have two weeks to submit a revised project description. This revised description, which must be submitted by week 40, will be reviewed by week 42. The revised project description will be evaluated by two assessors, the supervisor and the course coordinator. If the second attempt is not approved, the student will not be allowed to proceed with the Master's Thesis.

Supervisors

Primarily, we want students to write their master's theses on research projects and topics for which ISP can provide supervision. Supervisors can be staff at ISP or external collaborators.

However, students also have the option to write their Master's Thesis based on a self-chosen topic or in connection with research projects outside of ISP. In these cases, students must find a supervisor themselves and apply to the department for approval. The supervisor should have a PhD. The application must be submitted to the department during the second semester (mid-May), so that the supervisor can be approved before week 24.

Supervision

Supervisors who are overseeing multiple students are free to organize supervision as group sessions. Each student is entitled to up to 15 hours of supervision. Two of these hours should be

dedicated to supervision on the project description. Supervision is mandatory, meaning that a student cannot submit a Master's Thesis without having undergone some form of supervision.

A supervision agreement is completed and signed by both the student(s) and the supervisor(s) during the first supervision session after the project description is approved. The student is responsible for submitting the signed supervision agreement digitally. The deadline for this submission is November 1st. If there is a breach of the supervision agreement, the study administration must be informed as early as possible.

Format of the Master's Thesis

The Master's Thesis can be submitted in two different formats.

- The traditional format - a comprehensive written work called a MONOGRAPH
- An extended summary and an article manuscript called an ARTICLE-BASED MASTER'S THESIS

The choice of thesis format is determined in collaboration with the supervisor, after the project plan has been approved. Detailed guidelines for each format follow further on in the document.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF MASTER'S THESES

Empirical theses

Empirical theses shall:

- account for the theoretical and empirical background and framework for the project
- have a clear thesis statement and/or research question(s)
- account for the research design, including overall approach, methodology, data collection, systematization and/or coding, and analysis
- discuss relevant questions about reliability, validity and ethical issues

- present results in a clear and systematic way
- discuss the results and their implications in light of the thesis statement/research question(s), and the theoretical and empirical background

The data material that is used as the basis for empirical theses is usually *research-generated*, i.e. created as part of the project in question through the use of, for example, questionnaires, interviews or observations. The material can also consist of *existing* documents ((such as curriculums, guides, reports, white papers, or archival records), analyses from previous studies (e.g. forms of systematic reviews), secondary data analyses (e.g. PISA), or other types of sources. The different types of data material can be combined.

Evaluation projects

Master's theses based on an *evaluation project* will often contain the same requirements regarding research methodology as empirical research. In addition, the following shall be accounted for

- what is to be evaluated
- the objective of the evaluation
- criteria, values, formulation of objectives or similar evaluation aims
- the role of the evaluator

Innovation projects/quality development work

A Master's Thesis can be based on a *development project (innovation work)*. This type of thesis will usually include an evaluation of the quality development work carried out. Therefore, it will often include elements of the evaluation research (see above). Master's theses based on quality development work shall account for:

- the situation before the quality development work started
- the objective of the quality development work – the innovative idea

- innovation strategy(ies) for the quality development work
- planning of the quality development work
- the implementation
- evaluation and discussion of continuation and dissemination possibilities

Theoretical theses – literature studies

The Master's Thesis can also be conducted as purely theoretical study without any type of empirical investigation. Some theoretical studies may also include a limited empirical investigation. Theses that deal with issues in the philosophy of science, conceptual analysis, or the like, are included in this category. Historical theses can also be theoretical studies. Theoretical studies that take into account and analyse selected literature shall have clear thesis statements/questions, in the same manner as other scholarly works.

Theoretical studies have the same requirements regarding independent scholarly work as other types of theses. The thesis statement/question shall be relevant to the subject of Special needs education. The candidate is expected to orientate themselves in theory and research relevant to the thesis statement/question. Therefore, certain theoretical studies can be considered as "library fieldwork" or literature reviews, e.g. qualitative reviews and/or narrative reviews.

Emphasis is placed on the candidate's ability to shed light on the thesis statement(s)/question(s), both through the selection, presentation and discussion of theory. Furthermore, it is important that the candidate is able to use the theory in an independent and critical way. Simply accounting for and referring to theory is not enough.

For this kind of thesis work, it is expected that the candidate analyses various theoretical perspectives, provides an informed discussion of sources, justifies their choice of material and supports their reasoning. Normal requirements apply regarding verifiability/reliability. This means that methodological thesis statements/questions shall be discussed, and sources provided in such a manner that the research process can be verified.

GUIDELINES FOR MONOGRAPH-BASED MASTER'S THESIS

Master's theses can be based on various types of research projects. Until now, it has been normal to implement *empirical* projects that have the objective of developing knowledge about how something *is or has been*. The objective of such studies is often description, explanation and understanding. Other projects (cf. types of thesis in the above section) will have the objective of *evaluating* initiatives, programmes, work practices, collaboration, etc. A third type of Master's Thesis could be to assess various development projects – implementing initiatives (innovation work), for example. The Master's Thesis can also be various kinds of literature studies. It is also possible to write a *theoretical orientated thesis, meaning theses that discuss basic problems with in the field of Special Needs Education*.

The Master's Thesis must be assessed based on its objectives, and scholarly requirements apply to the thesis statement/question, relevant theoretical foundation, appropriate method selection and to the presentation, interpretation and discussion of results. The following are clarified in more detail regarding such requirements in relation to various types of theses.

Scope of the thesis

Monograph-based theses should be at least 12 000 words and no more than 23 000 words for theses using quantitative methodology. Using qualitative or mixed method approaches in a thesis, the text can vary between at least 17 000 and maximum 28 000 words. *This applies to the actual thesis text*. The abstract, preface, list of contents, sources and any attachments are in addition to this.

Title page, abstract, preface, list of contents, etc.

- The thesis should be written in English

- All master's theses shall include an *abstract* that is a maximum of two (2) pages. Information must be provided about the thesis statement/question, method and material, results and conclusion(s).
- A brief *preface* should then follow. It is good scholarly practice to thank persons who have contributed positively to the implementation of your Master's Thesis.
- The table of contents shall follow the preface and an overview of any tables and figures.
The number of words of the thesis has to be reported at the end of the list of content.
- The thesis itself then follows. The reference list and any attachments come last.
- Attachments vary according to the type of master thesis and could include any relevant ethical approvals, information letters, interview guide or unfamiliar material used for data collection. For example, it is not necessary to attach a WISC-protocol, but refer to the WISC test in the reference list, while as a self-developed observation form should be attached in order to account for research base. Further, it is not usual to attach all data transcripts or unprepared raw data. However, it can be relevant to attach examples of the use of transcription guidelines or supplementary tables providing data that is discussed in the thesis, or empirical examples that demonstrate how coding has been carried out.
- Each chapter in the thesis *should be started on a new page*, numbered and given a separate chapter heading. Individual chapters are to be divided into sub-chapters (paragraphs) with separate headings. The sub-chapters (paragraphs) can also be further divided. Note that master's theses should be printed double-sided.

Co-authorship

It is only possible to write a Master's Thesis together if a systematic literature review is conducted. When two students write a thesis together, the *preface* should clearly state who is *mainly* responsible for each chapter. This allows individual assessment of the authors. Alternatively, the students can explicitly state that the whole thesis is a common product reflecting cooperation on

all levels, in which case they will receive the same grade. Each individual who has written a Master's Thesis with another student must deliver it separately in Studentweb.

Reference list for monograph-based Master's Thesis

The reference list shall be written according to rules set out by the [*American Psychological Association \(APA\)*](#).

All references cited in the thesis text must appear in the reference list. As a student, you should familiarize yourself with the current rules regarding the use of sources and citation rules in relation to writing papers.

GUIDELINES FOR ARTICLE-BASED MASTER'S THESIS

An article-based Master's Thesis shall consist of two parts: An extended summary and an article manuscript.

Extended summary

The extended summary constitutes a framework for the article and is used to contextualize and explain choices that were made in the writing of the article. It is recommended to include an introductory chapter that explains to readers how the article and the extended summary complement each other, as well as justifying the choice of intended journal for the article.

The extended summary shall emphasize the theoretical and methodological aspects of the master's study for which there is not enough room to present or discuss in the article manuscript. The summary may e.g. contain a more extensive discussion of theory and schools of thought than is commonly permitted in the peer-review article format, and/or a discussion of the

methodological tradition in which the article is situated. Results and their implications may similarly be discussed with more historical background and context than the article format allows for.

Scope of the extended summary

The extended summary shall be between 5 000 and 10 000 words. In the case of co-authorship, the length is increased by an additional 5000 words. The extended summary shall have a separate reference list, and be placed between the extended summary and the article manuscript.

Title page, abstract, preface, list of contents, etc.

- The thesis should be written in English
- All master's theses shall include an abstract that is a maximum of two (2) pages. For article based thesis, information must be provided about the thesis statement/question, method and material, results and conclusion(s), as well as title of the article and the chosen journal.
- A brief preface should then follow. It is good scholarly practice to thank persons others who have contributed positively to the implementation of your Master's Thesis.
- The list of contents shall follow the preface and should reflect the order of the extended summary and the article as following: Abstract master thesis/extended summary, preface, list of content, list of figures and tables, the extended summary text, reference list for the extended summary, attachments to the extended summary, front page for the article, summary of the article according to the chosen journal, article, reference list for the article, attachment of the article.
- **The number of words of the thesis and the article have to be reported at the end of the list of content, separately.**
- The thesis itself then follows. The reference list and any attachments come last.
- Attachments vary according to the type of master thesis and could include any relevant ethical approvals, information letters, interview guide or unfamiliar material used for data

collection. For example, it is not necessary to attach a WISC-protocol, but refer to the WISC protocol in the reference list, while as a self-developed observation form should be attached in order to account for research base. Further, it is not usual to attach all data transcripts or unprepared raw data. However, it can be relevant to attach examples of the use of transcription guidelines or supplementary tables providing data that is discussed in the thesis.

- Note: For article based theses, it is obligatory to attach the authors' manual / instructions to authors from the relevant journal.
- Each chapter in the thesis should be started on a new page, numbered and given a separate chapter heading. Individual chapters are to be divided into sub-chapters (paragraphs) with separate headings.

Article manuscript

The student chooses an academically and thematically relevant peer-reviewed research journal (Norwegian or international) from [the list of authorized publishing channels](#), and compiles the article manuscript in accordance with the authorship guidelines of the chosen journal. This includes, for example, length of abstract and manuscript, reference style and structure of the article.

The student(s) has/have to write the article manuscript by themselves as an independent work without any other co-authors. Supervision for the article manuscript follows the same general rules for supervision as for a monography or the extended summary.

After submitting and grading (at least pass, level E) of the Master's Thesis, the student and supervisors (and relevant others) can decide the further progress of the article, e.g. if they want to submit an edited and revised article manuscript to the chosen or another journal. Co-authorship guidelines should then be followed.

Scope of the article manuscript

The size of the article will vary according to the standards in the relevant journals. However, most journals require an article length between 4000 and 12,000 words.

Title page, abstract, etc.

The article manuscript shall have its own title page. This page must contain information about the title of the work, the name of the author(s), the name of the selected journal and the URL of its home page. A brief abstract and keywords should then follow on a separate page, followed by the article manuscript itself. The article manuscript shall have a separate reference list. The authorship guidelines of the chosen journal must be attached to the thesis.

Assessment weighting

Regarding thesis assessment, the extended summary constitutes 40% and the article constitutes 60% of the total grade. However, both parts must achieve a minimum grade of E in order for the student to get a passing grade.

Co-authorship

The Master's Thesis is an independent, scholarly piece of work, and only the master's degree student(s) shall be the author of the article manuscript. When two students write a thesis together, the preface should clearly state who is mainly responsible for each chapter. This allows individual assessment of the authors. Alternatively, the students can explicitly state that the whole thesis is a common product reflecting cooperation on all levels, in which case they will receive the same grade. It is only possible for students to write together if they conduct a systematic literature review.

After assessment has taken place, student(s) and supervisors can consider whether the article section of the Master's Thesis may merit further editing regarding submission to the selected journal.

The supervisor's(s') co-authorship shall then be discussed, but it is not given that the supervisor shall be a co-author (cf. [Vancouver Recommendations](#)).

If the student wholly or partially bases their article on data made available by the supervisor/supervisor's project, the student is usually not allowed to be the sole author regarding any publication of the article manuscript.

Each individual who has written a Master's Thesis with another student must deliver it separately in Studentweb and Inspira.

Reference list for article-based Master's Thesis

The reference list for the extended summary shall be written according to rules set out by the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#). The reference list for the article manuscript shall be written according to the journal's author manual. All references cited in the thesis text must appear in the reference list. As a student, you are under the obligation to familiarize yourself with the current rules regarding the use of sources and citation rules in relation to writing papers.

THESIS FORMATTING AND DESIGN

Title page

Students shall use the template for [UiO's design manual for front page](#).

The title page must contain

- Title of the thesis
- Name of author(s) (Not your candidate number)
- Master's Thesis in Special Needs Education
- Number of credits

- Department of Special Needs Education, Faculty of Educational Science, University of Oslo
- Year and semester (e.g. Spring 2025)

Formatting

- Line spacing must be one and a half (1,5)
- Text size must be 11 or 12 Times New Roman
- Page number must be placed at the bottom of the page

Note: The article manuscript of an article-based Master's Theses follow the journal's author manual.

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