



Guidelines on Master's Thesis in African Studies

1. Preliminary remarks

Importance of the Master's thesis: The thesis not only largely defines your final grade but also forms part of your personal portfolio and will feature prominently in your CV. The choice of the topic and the approach taken play an important role for your career in the academic or professional field of your choice. The quality of the work is decisive for an academic career.

Purpose of the thesis: The thesis serves to prove your ability to produce independent academic reflection and work:

- to develop a research question
- to justify the procedure chosen
- to present the findings in a stylistically appropriate manner and
- to critically reflect on the findings

Workload: The net investment should correspond to 4–5 months' full time (150 working hours equivalent to 30 ECTS) within the given nine months' time frame. In principle, an extension is not possible.

General information: Please refer to the [Guidelines for the Master's program African Studies](#). The deadlines for registration and submission as well as the respective guidelines are published on the [website of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences](#).

Advice: The Course Coordinator will gladly assist in planning the process and offers support in administrative matters. Contact: veit.ahrt@unibas.ch.

2. Requirements for registering the project

Students must have earned at least 20 CP at the time of registration, fulfilled any additional requirements and must have acquired the necessary language skills.

At least one of the two seminar papers in the Fields modules must be on record, the second paper should at least be submitted at the time of registering. Having to write a seminar paper while already having embarked on the thesis is stressful and writing a seminar paper after submission of the thesis does not make sense.

3. When to start the thesis process

As indicated above, as soon as you have your first seminar paper on record you can in principle start the preparatory process. This can be as early as the start of your second semester. Approach your potential supervisor with your first ideas and use your second seminar paper to prepare the ground and identify the research question for the thesis. Ideally, you develop the project in the framework of the colloquium or research seminar or another course offered by your supervisor, so that by the end of the semester you have a solid research question and plan (short proposal) at hand which allows you to register the project. Students who take their exam before or in the semester they register their thesis project should choose some exam topics that assist them in the development of the thesis.



4. Supervisors

Eligible for supervision are faculty member from a subject area within the Centre for African Studies network who are responsible for the degree program, have completed their postdoctoral habilitation or hold an equivalent qualification. One of the two supervisors must be a professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The choice of an external co-supervisor requires an application. Please contact the course coordinator (veit.arlt@unibas.ch) for advice.

5. Registering your thesis project

Solicit the supervisor's agreement on the basis of a short proposal typically including the following elements:

- Short introduction (context and importance)
- Research question (grounded in a preliminary review of the literature)
- Methodology and data (including a note on access and funding implications)
- Timetable with mile stones

Include copies of your seminar papers so that the supervisor can assess your ability to work independently.

Agree with your supervisor on language, style and form of the thesis but also on the form of supervision such as presentation in the supervisor's colloquium, meetings or even commenting on a full draft.

Register your master's thesis project at the Study Administration and Examinations Office of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The forms are usually published in the first week of April and October and must be filed with all signatures by the third week of May and November respectively. Students must submit their thesis within nine months' time, that is in the third week of February and August respectively (the precise dates are published on the Faculty website). Avoid the rush both when registering and when submitting.

www.philhist.unibas.ch

4. Content of the thesis

The Master's thesis identifies a research problem in the relevant academic field and, by engaging with the problem, develops insights that can answer theoretical and conceptual questions or formulate solutions to practical questions. The topic covers a specific regional, subject-related, epistemological or theoretical question from one of the Fields modules chosen by the student: "Media and Imagination", "Knowledge Production and Transfer", "Governance and Politics", "Public Health and Social Life" or "Environment and Development". The thesis is based on available sources (publications, archives, collections) and/or data collected by the student.

With your Master's thesis you independently address and present a scientific research question. This encompasses the following elements: (a) identifying a suitable topic and formulating a research question, (b) researching the topic making use of the relevant literature, (c) establishing an argument and (d) breaking it down into adequate steps of argumentation and relating them back to the overall context, and (e) presenting the argument and result in an adequate written form.

This requires (1) the presentation and explanation of concepts and theories, (2) the application and/or comparison of these concepts and theories by establishing a hypothesis (or several hypotheses), (3) the



application of a suitable method established in the subject area for discussing and testing the hypothesis (4) linking the results to theory and thereby evaluating the said theory. The assessors of the thesis evaluate whether the work is convincing with regard to all four points listed above.

5. Standards

General standards: The thesis has to comply with the full standards for academic texts in terms of contents, referencing and structure. Please remember that the first impression irrespective of the quality of the content is visual and that a clean presentation both in style and language allows the assessor to focus on the quality of content.

Length: As a rule, a Master's thesis is of 80 pages' length (main body including footnotes but without bibliography). This results in a word count of approximately 30 000 characters. The expectations of assessors may vary – please check upon contracting the thesis with your supervisor.

Style: There is no single format for theses in the Masters' program African Studies at the University of Basel since the interdisciplinary program combines courses and faculty from various disciplines from the Social Sciences and the Arts to Environmental Sciences and Health. The following guidelines are based on the Social Sciences, which make up the majority of courses in the program. The various subject areas have specific expectations documented in the respective manuals (e.g. toolkit of the Department of History). Please check with your supervisor which style to apply.

Structure: The structure of a Master's thesis typically consists of the following elements:

- Introduction: This section focuses on the research question, which you have to ground in the literature and which informs the choice of methods and case study. Demonstrate that the research question is important and that by answering it you can make a contribution to the field. Explain the concepts used. Close off the introduction by presenting your key findings and explaining how you will state the thesis over a number of chapters.
- Review of the Literature: Identify the major arguments and state of research, in which you ground your research question.
- Methodology and Data/Sources: Explain how you went about to collect your data and what kind of data it is.
- Main part of thesis: Analysis and discussion of the data in an adequate number of chapters leading to the findings (70–80% of the paper).
- Discussion and Conclusion: Summarize the findings and discuss critically the research process.
- Bibliography and Annexes (if applicable): List all literature and sources used.

Formatting: Use the standard **styles** (Absatzformatvorlagen) provided by your word processor (headings 1–4, etc) which allow for an automated table of contents, figures and the like. Avoid empty breaks but insert page breaks and section breaks where necessary.

Page layout: The margins should be no less than 2.5cm and the spacing between lines 1.5 in order to allow for annotations. Please insert page numbers. The cover page features the following elements:

- Title of the thesis
- "Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in African Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Basel"
- Full name of student, student number and email address
- Submission date
- Supervisors (names with titles)



If you wish to include the logo of the Centre or of the University, please contact the executive office of the Centre for the correct logo and its correct position.

References: Scientific work implies that any reader can verify the statements made. Therefore, the thoughts and ideas of others –whether included in the paper as direct or indirect quotations – must be identified by a reference. If you include or mention statements and arguments from the existing literature (books, journals, newspapers, internet etc.), you must refer to the author by way of a proper reference, otherwise they are considered plagiarism. All works quoted directly or indirectly or simply referred to must be properly referenced using one specific style guide consistently (Harvard, Chicago, or MLA depending on the subject area and/or personal preferences).

Language: The thesis may be written in English, German or French (as agreed with the supervisors). Irrespective of the language used, it is expected that your thesis is flawless not only on the level of content and style but also on the level of language. Please make sure to proof read your paper thoroughly and let it cross-check by peers.

6. Submission

The master's thesis must be submitted on or before the due date as hard and soft copy (PDF identical to the print version, including the signed plagiarism statement below) directly to the two supervisors and the Executive Office. The examiners submit their reports, including grades, to the Study Administration and Examinations Office at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences six weeks before the academic semester ends.

Before submitting your paper please do a self-check with Turnitin:

<https://ub-easyweb.ub.unibas.ch/en/plagiarism/>

Please note that you must register for the semester following the submission of the thesis even if you have fulfilled all requirements including the exams.

7. Statement on Scientific Integrity

Each copy of your thesis submitted must be accompanied by a plagiarism statement, in which you confirm that you duly referenced all sources used and that the work is your own. A template in German language is available for download on the website of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science:

<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/studierende/plagiat/>

The equivalent wording in English is as follows:

I hereby confirm that I have taken note of the regulation on scientific integrity contained in the "Ordnung der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Basel für das Masterstudium vom 25. Oktober 2018" (§25) and that I have observed the rules of scientific integrity. Furthermore, the present paper has not been submitted, neither in whole nor in part, to another faculty or university for review and/or has not yet been recorded as a course achievement, e.g. in the form of credit points.

[Followed by title of paper, name of author, date and signature]



Lecturers are obliged to report any plagiarism to the Dean of Studies. In the case of a Master's thesis, plagiarism results in the following sanctions:

- thesis marked with grade 1 (complete failure/ totally unacceptable)
- suspension (exmatriculation) of the student for one or more semesters
- repeated plagiarism leads to permanent exclusion from the University of Basel

8. Criteria for evaluation

- General scientific competence and independence
- Research problem (command of literature, justification, originality)
- Methodological rigueur (data collection /use of sources/ analysis)
- Presentation and interpretation (quality and logical coherence)
- Process (project management/ time keeping/ coping with disruptions/ personal academic growth)
- Form (language and style)

9. Resources

Our mandatory course **Academic Skills in African Studies**, which is offered each autumn semester, offers a systematic introduction to writing papers. In addition, the Language Center of the University of Basel offers specific courses such as Writing your Master's thesis in English.

We highly recommend the Online Writing Lab of Purdue University, which addresses all issues related to writing and offers quick access to style manuals and the like.

www.owl.purdue.edu

Harvard Referencing Guide

www.ukessays.com/referencing/harvard/

The Chicago Manual of Style

www.chicagomanualofstyle.org

The MLA Style Center – Writing Resources from the Modern Language Association

<https://style.mla.org>

Style Guide of the American Psychological Association (APA)

www.apastyle.org

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