



## How to write a master thesis?

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1. Your research project – opportunity and commitment
2. The point of departure – identifying a research question
3. The design of the study – theory, method and data
4. The argument – from theory to empirical evidence
5. Timeline and topic selection – important dates and areas of supervision

### **1. Your research project – opportunity and commitment**

Writing a master's thesis presents you with an opportunity to intensely engage with a topic that interests you and to demonstrate your own knowledge and analytic capabilities. In the process of scrutinizing one research object, you will refine your ability to use concepts and theories, to reason and to derive your own insights. As this process requires commitment, you should choose a topic or puzzle that fascinates you and will keep you working for the weeks and months to come.

Writing your thesis is as much a creative and stimulating process as it is hard work that requires self-discipline. **Stick to the work plan** that you have arranged in coordination with your advisor. In order to manage your workload over the extensive period of a year, it is highly recommended to set yourself milestones that you can realistically achieve. Stick to a schedule that builds on a written outline of your tentative thesis chapters and which has been agreed upon by your advisor. Once you agreed upon a schedule, stick to it (e.g. writing certain chapters by certain dates) and arrange tutorials with your advisor accordingly.



## 2. The point of departure – identifying a research question

Once you have selected a field of interest or topic, do not wait to get your thoughts on paper. Useful techniques to structure and clarify your ideas may be brainstorming, mind maps and brief sketches. Further you might find it helpful to talk to friends or colleagues and try to explain what interests or puzzles you. The goal is to identify a phenomenon that puzzles you and which you will be able to specify and define as your subject of research.

In order to capture the reader's interest for your study, make clear why your chosen topic is relevant in the introduction of your thesis. Explain the societal, political, theoretical, or methodological relevance and why the topic deserves closer attention. Define the key concept(s) of your study. Your research should be driven by only one question, your research question, which guides your argument throughout the thesis. You can come back to it at any point of your thesis. Ensure that all of your writing are to some extent related to your answer to this question.

As you proceed in writing your thesis the **research question** itself **may need readjustments** from time to time. As a general advice, if you do so, always try to narrow it and to make it more focused on causality. Try to use clear terms and simple language. A good research question is one, that cannot be answered with a straightforward yes or no. Instead, it allows for different arguable positions and **establishes a causal relationship**:

- **Why** (is something) ... ?

Alternative, if somewhat weaker, research questions are:

- **What** are the drivers/determinants of ... ?
- **How** (can something be explained) ...?
- **To what extent** (is something) ... ?

Clarifying your research question will require you to familiarize yourself with the existing literature. At some point early in your thesis, it is useful to include a short **literature review**, which deals with similar questions to those of your own study. It can give you an indication of what research has already been done and how existing studies could relate to your



(potential) project. Include recent work, published by high-quality journals and leading scholars in the field, as well as seminal articles and books on the subject.

What are the major arguments that have been advanced in the literature? Writing your literature review will help you to clarify the question of “what” exactly it is that you are going to investigate. This should be reflected in the specification and definition of the concepts you are going to use.

### **3. The design of the study – theory, methodology and data**

Once you have established a research question, you can start to ask “how will the subject be studied?” Based on the key concept(s) and the dynamics you wish to examine, you will be required to choose an appropriate analytical approach, or a theory. **Your choice of theoretical perspective** determines the lens (metaphorically the “glasses” you wear) through which you are going to view and address the research problem. In political science, analytical approaches or theories are used in order to identify patterns. If a theory can retrospectively explain a certain development as well as can make predictions about the future, then the respective theory matches observed reality. Such a finding through your research would confirm the validity of current explanations. For a Master’s thesis, it would be good to compare two theories in order to capture two different possible interpretations and to identify strengths and weaknesses of each.

An important step is the definition of specific variables or indicators that you use in your study of the phenomenon that interests you. Based upon these choices, formulate hypotheses, or theses, which could provide a (partial) answer to your question. **A classical hypothesis is an if-then** relationship. Alternatively, you could formulate expectations, as long as they are falsifiable. This means that after your examination of the empirical data, your expectation can be said to be true or false. You might also come up with a reflected conclusion. Do not worry, if your hypothesis is falsified, as this is a valuable result that can be presented in your findings and can inform future research.

The way in which you set up your inquiry is your **methodology**. It specifies how you will find an answer to your research question. What will you need to do and how will you do



it? Bear in mind the availability of information required for doing your research. Distinguish between secondary sources (e.g. books, academic articles ) and primary sources (e.g. official documents, Treaties, legal acts). Some information may be classified and some available ‘anecdotal evidence’ may be of limited use. Generally, in the social sciences, you can follow **two main methods** of dealing with empirical evidence:

- **quantitative data** uses numerical measurements, statistics and relations between defined variables (e.g. descriptive statistics, correlations)
- **qualitative data** captures the relationships, incentives and constraints of interactions in social settings (e.g. interviews, discourse analysis)

#### **4. The argument – from theory to empirical evidence**

In the main chapters of your thesis, keep the **focus on the presentation of empirical evidence**, collected facts and your own observations. Apply the measures, indicators, variables or categories that you developed based upon your chosen theoretical approach. When providing descriptive background information or context, **ask yourself whether it is related to your research question**. If it does not seem to be necessary for your argument to provide details, shorten it. Key to analytical writing is the formulation of reasoned judgments and the drawing of your own conclusions. Demonstrate a point you wish to make in reference to the garnered empirical evidence. Information that you show to the reader through tables or graphs need interpretation and do never speak for themselves.

In the final sections of your thesis, present and discuss the findings of your research. Summarize the outcome of your study in respect to the hypotheses or theses that you developed earlier in your thesis. Reflect upon the appropriateness of the adopted theoretical approach or theory, shortcomings, as well as possible implications for policy or research.



## 5. Timeline and topic selection – important dates and areas of supervision

Candidates for master's degrees at the Turkish-German University are required to write and defend a thesis.

When the selected topic has been approved by your advisor, you are required to submit the “Notification of Appointed Thesis Advisor Form” (*YÜKSEK LİSANS DANIŞMAN ATAMA TALEP FORM*) and the “Thesis Title and/or Thesis Subject Notification Form” (*Tez Başlığı ve /veya Tez Konusu Oluşturma Formu*) to formally submit your thesis topic and the name of your advisor to the Social Science Institute.

The deadline for the submission of these 2 documents is **10 June 2024**. For a comprehensive list of areas of supervision of potential advisors in the program see the list at the end of section 5.

For regulations concerning the preparation and the defense of your thesis, including formatting, please consult the document **Guidelines for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations** on the website of the Turkish-German University's Social Science Institute.

[http://3fcampus.tau.edu.tr/uploads/cms/sbe.tau/6258\\_4.pdf](http://3fcampus.tau.edu.tr/uploads/cms/sbe.tau/6258_4.pdf)

**(Graduation without thesis:** There exists the option of a “MA without thesis”. It requires a written project instead of a thesis and does not enable to proceed to PhD)

## **Areas of Supervision**

**Prof. André Kaiser**

- Comparative Political Institutions
- Regional Politics
- Federalism, Decentralization and Multilevel Governance
- Electoral Systems and Party Systems
- Career Patterns of Political Elites
- Female Political Representation
- The Political Systems of Germany, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand



### **Prof. Birgül Demirtaş**

- Turkish foreign policy
- German foreign policy
- Balkans
- Local (city) diplomacy
- Feminist theory of IR
- Approaches of Turkish political parties towards refugees

### **Prof. Dr. Hartmut Marhold\***

- How far does Europe go back in history? A comparative analysis of historical views
- Re-interpreting the world after the Iron Curtain: Milestone books 1989-2010
- Concepts of European integration “finalité” – an “ever closer Union” or what else?
- European integration: “Beyond the Nation State” or “Rescue of the Nation State”?
- Crises in the history of the European Union, comparison and typology
- Values and interests in European integration, a historical shift?
- Driving factors and actors of European integration – a historical assessment
- Germany’s European politics
- The shaping of sustainable development – an alternative to neo-liberalism?
- Turkey and European integration since the Ankara Agreement (1963)
- Regional integration, an option for other parts of the world?
- Turkish and European narratives about European integration, a comparison
- Comparing narratives: selected memoirs of European statesmen
- A new mobilization against ecological degradation? Youth movements and their supporters (“Fridays for Future”, “Scientists for Future” ...)
- The European Green Deal – a roadmap towards the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030?
- The European Green Deal – a “shift of paradigm” (Timmermans)?
- The EU crisis policy during the Financial Crisis of/after 2008 and during the COVID-19 Pandemic – a comparison
- The impact of recent crises (Financial crisis 2008, COVID-19 Pandemic 2020, Russian war in Ukraine 2022) on the European Union

\* Prof. Dr. Marhold shares a list of topics for Master theses, which he would be ready to guide, not the research areas

### **Prof. Dr. Kai Oppermann**

- The role of historical analogies in Turkish foreign policy
- The domestic politics of Turkish foreign policy (in particular the implications of moving to a presidential system)
- Turkish narratives on Brexit
- Turkey's relations to Russia
- Turkey and Global Governance (in particular: Does Turkey as a rising power challenge existing power relations in Global Governance; and if yes: how?)



**Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels\***

- Policies of the European Union
- EU-Turkey
- Differentiation \_ Multi -Speed or Core Europe
- European Council and other EU institutions
- Theories of Integration

\* He is willing to accept max. 3 students.

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Enes Bayraklı**

- Racism Studies: Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism
- Foreign Policy Analysis
- Turkish German Relations
- Cultural Diplomacy
- Turkish Foreign Policy
- Turkish-EU Relations
- Diaspora Studies
- Far Right Extremism
- Terrorism Studies
- Migration

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ebru Turhan**

- Future of the EU / European integration
- EU Integration
- EU-Turkey Refugee Deal
- EU-Turkey Relations
- Germany-Turkey Relations
- International Relations
- Refugee Crisis / Visa liberalization dialogue / Readmission agreement
- German Foreign Policy / Germany in Europe
- Turkish foreign policy / Turkey and its neighborhood
- Turkish-German Relations
- Media Framings / Media analysis

**Dr. Dominic Heinz**

- German Politics
- Federalism
- Joint Decision-Making
- School Policy
- Budget Policy
- Broadcasting Policy in Germany
- Policy Analysis
- Institutional Analysis



- Comparative Politics
- Research Methods

**Dr. Philipp Decker**

- Comparative politics
- Party politics
- Populism and nationalism
- Diasporas and multiculturalism
- The return of geopolitics
- State- and nation-building
- Theories and problems of democracy
- Germany in Europe and the world
- Central Europe
- Europe and the Mediterranean
- Europe and China
- Transatlantic relations (USA - Europe)
- Qualitative methods

**Dr. Taceddin Kutay**

- Political History
- Political Sociology
- Political Philosophy
- Political Theory
- Secularization and Religion-Politics Relations
- Turkish Foreign Policy
- Turkish Domestic Policy

**Dr. Suna Güzin Aydemir Decker**

- Religion-Politics Relations
- Political Philosophy
- Theories of Democracy
- Political Life in Turkey
- Recent Political History of Turkey

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zaur Gasimov**

- Russian foreign policy
- Civil-military relations
- Security Studies
- Russian-Turkish relations
- Foreign Policy of Iran
- Caucasus
- Central Asia





**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thomas Krumm**

- Political theory and history of ideas
- John Rawls, Karl Popper, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu etc.
- Qualitative methods, content analysis, hermeneutics
- Turkish-British relations
- Comparative politics, federalism
- Migration and voting behavior
- Public-private-partnerships in comparison