

Master's Thesis Guidelines of the Chair of SME

Research and Entrepreneurship

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1. Preliminary Remarks

This guideline applies to all master's theses to be written at the Chair of SME Research and Entrepreneurship of the University of Mannheim. The guidelines are binding. Deviations are possible only in justified cases and after consultation with the respective supervisor.

2. Formal Requirements

Students who intend to write their master's thesis at the Chair of SME Research and Entrepreneurship must have completed at least one qualification course (either MAN 606, 607, 630, 631, 632 or 634) AND the research seminar MAN 770. An exception is made for

students conducting an Inside the Venture Master's Thesis in which case any research seminar offered at the University of Mannheim can be accepted as prerequisite and the completion of MAN 770 is therefore not a binding requirement.

More information on the Inside the Venture Projects can be found on [here](#).

3. The Steps towards your Master's Thesis

If you are interested in completing your master's thesis at the Chair of SME Research and Entrepreneurship and meet the formal requirements stated above, please adhere to the following steps.

3.1 Find a supervisor.

As a first step, please decide on a broad area of interest for your thesis and contact a research assistant or research associate from this field of interest to discuss your research project and their capacity to supervise you. You can find an overview of our chair's [research topics](#) and our [researchers' profiles](#) on the official website of the Institute for SME Research (ifm). We encourage you find a supervisor for thesis **two months prior** to your intended thesis registration.

3.2 Develop a research question.

After you and your supervisor have agreed on a general field of interest, your next important task is to identify a research gap in existing literature and develop a respective research question. We advise you to base the selection of your research question on its novelty and scientific relevance, the feasibility and resource-intensity of the research project as well as on your personal interest in the topic. Some supervisors may require a pre-proposal draft of your research project, therefore please ensure you clarify any such expectations.

3.3 Write your research proposal.

Once you have finalised the selection of your research question, you are required to submit a research proposal. Within this document you must outline the theoretical foundation of your research question, its expected outcome and contribution to theory and/or practice as well as detailing the intended methodological approach to answer it. You are also asked to include a preliminary structure for your thesis as well as a timeline for completion. The research proposal should span approximately **six pages**, excluding references but including tables, figures and appendices.

Your research proposal must be accepted by your supervisor which may require an iterative process. You are therefore advised to send the first version of your research proposal approximately **4 weeks prior** to your intended thesis registration. Please note that your supervisor can choose to no longer supervise your thesis should you fail to communicate with them or adhere to deadlines set by them. **After the beginning of the supervision, the student must submit a proposal within two months. If the student fails to submit any proposal within two months without providing a valid explanation, the supervisor reserves the right to terminate the supervision.**

3.4 Register your thesis.

After you have obtained approval of your research proposal by your supervisor, you must formally register your thesis with [Ms. Gabriele Schleicher](#), secretary of the chair. You may do so either by downloading the [Master's Thesis Registration Form](#) and submitting a signed electronic copy of the filled-out form, or by making an in-person appointment with Ms. Schleicher (gabriele.schleicher@uni-mannheim.de) during her office hours. Once you have registered your thesis you will receive a binding due date. You will have 20 weeks to complete your thesis. Please note that once registered, the title of your thesis can no longer be changed.

3.5 Attend and present at the Master's Colloquia.

All students conducting their master's thesis at the Chair for SME Research and Entrepreneurship should attend the Master's Colloquia held during their period of writing and are **obliged to present their** own research at such a colloquium session **once within the first 12 weeks** post-registration. You must register for your presentation slot with our secretary, [Ms. Gabriele Schleicher](#). Please also ensure you communicate your intentions to present at the Master's Colloquium with your supervisor. You can find more information on the Master's Colloquium [on our website](#).

3.6 Complete and submit your Master's thesis.

You must submit your master's thesis within a maximum of 20 weeks after registration but no earlier than two weeks before your respective deadline. **Two hardcopies** of the thesis must be handed in in bound form to our secretary, Ms. Schleicher, within her office hours.

Alternatively, the copies can instead be sent by mail to the following address: University of Mannheim, Institute for SME Research, Chair of SME Research and Entrepreneurship, addressed to Ms. Schleicher, 68131 Mannheim. Both copies will remain with the university beyond your graduation. Students are also required to submit a **digital version** of the thesis in pdf format on USB drive. Alternatively, the thesis and any accompanying materials can be submitted by email directly to the supervisor. If applicable, any algorithms, computer programs, or routines used to create and interpret the data (e.g. CATA files, State do-files and State log-files) and anonymized transcripts of all interviews conducted for the thesis must be submitted in digital format.

The last page of the thesis must contain a physically **signed declaration of authorship**.

Please note that all work will be checked for plagiarism and any unethical behaviour, plagiarism or fraud will not be tolerated.

4. Format

Please **consult your supervisor regarding the page limit** of your thesis. Typically, the main text body should not exceed 60, but your supervisor will inform you of their specific requirements. You must adhere to the page limit set by your supervisor. Any main text exceeding the page limit set will not be read or graded. The formatting of Masters' theses conducted at the Chair for SME Research and Entrepreneurship should follow the [Style Guide](#) published by the Academy of Management. The formatting guidelines are as follows:

- Font type: Times New Roman
- Font size: 11
- Space: Double space
- Margins: 2,5 cm from each side
- Layout: A4
- References/Citations: APA (Zotero, a free reference management software, may be used)
- Proposal: 6 pages, excluding the references, inclusive tables, figures and appendices
- Thesis: 60 pages (+10%), excluding the references, including tables, figures and appendices

For any aspects not explicitly specified, students should refer to the AoM [Style Guide](#).

5. Use of Artificial Intelligence in your Master's Thesis

The guidelines for using AI tools at the University of Mannheim require students to declare AI assistance in their academic work through an affidavit. AI tools like ChatGPT may be used and can be of great assistance while working on your thesis, but results must be critically evaluated, integrated with reputable sources, and documented with prompts and chat logs. The use of AI must be transparent, and a reflection on its use must be included in the work's

appendix. Violations of these rules are considered academic misconduct. AI tools may not meet GDPR standards. Should you decide against using AI tools for data protection or other reasons, you will not incur any disadvantages. Find more information on Guidelines for the Use of AI Tools at the Chair of SME Research and Entrepreneurship [here](#).

6. Structure and components of your thesis

Your master's thesis should contain the following components in the order provided.

6.1 Cover page

You can find a template for the cover page of your thesis in the appendices of this document.

The cover page is not allocated a page number.

6.2 Abstract

The abstract provides a brief overview of what your thesis project is about, why it is interesting and what theoretical foundation you are basing your thesis on. Conclude the abstract with your major findings. The abstract of your thesis contains no references and should not exceed a total of 250-300 words. Following your abstract, list the most relevant keywords connected to the topic of your thesis in the following format:

Keywords: sample keyword, sample keyword, sample keyword, sample keyword

6.3 Table of contents and other indexes

This section contains, in order, the table of contents, list of figures, list of tables and the list of abbreviations. A list of abbreviations is necessary if any abbreviations used throughout your thesis cannot be found in a standard English dictionary. The table of contents and the other indexes of your thesis themselves are not numbered. Their pages, however, should be numbered consecutively in Roman numerals beginning with the numeral I.

6.4 Writing Style

Your writing style should meet academic standards such as those set by the Academy of Management in their [Style Guide](#). We advise students to use concise, short and complete sentences, avoiding inflated or ambiguous wording. Please also make sure you define important terms clearly. You may find the following resources helpful with regard to writing style.

- Reuber, A. R. (2010). Strengthening Your Literature Review. *Family Business Review*, 23(2): 1005-108
- Short, J. (2009). The art of writing a review article. *Journal of Management*, 35: 1312-1317
- Lange, D., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2017). The core building blocks of an AMR article. *The Academy of Management Review*, 42(3), 407–416.
- Alveson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problematization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 247-271.

Please note that all chapters of your main body of text, as outlined below, as well as their respective pages must be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals beginning with the numeral 1.

6.5 Suggestions for writing your thesis

6.5.1 Introduction

Begin by presenting the phenomenon you are addressing and explain its relevance, linking it to existing literature to identify the research gap. Clearly state your central research question and the motivation behind it. Outline the theoretical foundation of your analysis, emphasizing one central theory that underpins your arguments. Provide a brief overview of the data and methods you will use, specifying whether your approach is quantitative or qualitative. Summarize your major findings and highlight

your key contributions to both theory and practice, along with any limitations.

Optionally, include a brief outline of your paper's structure, ensuring clarity and coherence for the reader.

6.5.2 Literature Review

Feel free to consult the two sources above in order to write a sound literature review.

Consider structuring your literature review by including subchapters.

6.5.3 Theory Development

In the next section, elaborate on your central theory and derive your hypotheses or propositions from it. Typically, four well-grounded and logically sequenced hypotheses are sufficient, with each firmly rooted in theory and non-trivial. For quantitative theses, clearly motivate your hypotheses and embed them within the theoretical context, drawing inspiration from established academic papers. For qualitative research, explain the broad theoretical perspectives informing your inquiries, which would justify your research endeavour and analytical decisions.

Ensure your study balances novelty across dimensions, avoiding the pursuit of entirely new theories, contexts, data, and methods simultaneously, as this approach is rarely feasible or successful.

6.5.4 Methods

Begin this next section by describing your **sample**, detailing how it was derived and the sampling techniques used, including steps to mitigate potential bias. Define the **core procedures and instruments** central to your study, grounding them in prior literature and justifying your chosen definitions, particularly when consensus in the literature is lacking. Outline your **dependent variable**, linking it to existing research, and provide a clear description of your **independent variables** and **control variables**, supported by prior studies. Use meaningful names for your variables to enhance clarity

and consider summarizing them in a table. Finally, explain your **empirical strategy**, describing how your model was operationalized and its basis in the literature.

6.5.5 Results

In the results section, begin by presenting **descriptive statistics**, summarizing key observations across relevant dimensions, and highlighting the most notable findings with references to figures or tables, if applicable. For quantitative research, introduce your variables step-by-step, maintaining a consistent sample size across analyses to avoid biases from missing data. State if each hypothesis is supported by referring to the relevant coefficients and parameters. Provide clear interpretations of significant findings pertaining to their economic significance, noting any variations in effects across models and discussing potential reasons, such as control variables or sampling effects. For qualitative research, present your model, narrative, or propositions, depending on the methodological approach of your preference. Use diagrams, cross-tables, or any figures which may help to synthesize results. For both quantitative and qualitative theses, include detailed outputs in appendices or supplemental materials where necessary.

6.5.6 Discussion

The discussion section connects your findings to the theoretical framework, examining whether they align with or challenge prior research. Begin by outlining your **theoretical contributions**, detailing how your findings advance theory or open new avenues for exploration. Next, highlight your **practical contributions**, offering actionable recommendations for managerial practice, a crucial aspect of the discipline. Address the **limitations** of your study transparently, acknowledging methodological or data constraints while reinforcing the study's overall value. Finally, propose

implications for future research, suggesting directions for further investigation to build on your findings or address related questions.

6.5.7 Conclusion

The conclusion should concisely summarize the key elements of your thesis, reiterating the most significant aspects of your work. Briefly highlight the main findings, theoretical and practical contributions, and limitations without introducing new information. This section serves to reinforce the overall impact of your research and provide a clear, cohesive closing statement. A concise approach, typically half a page to one page, ensures clarity and focus.

6.5.8 Appendices and references

The last section of your thesis is comprised of the **appendices** and **list of references**. In cases where AI tools have been utilized, students must include a separate section detailing which tools were used, how they were applied, and to what extent they influenced the final work. Remember to add a **signed declaration of authorship** on the very last page of your thesis. You can find a template for this declaration in the appendices of this document.

7. Master's thesis and Inside the Venture Projects

As an alternative to a regular master's thesis, students also have the opportunity to conduct a so-called Inside the Venture Project in cooperation with the Mannheim Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (MCEI). This format offers students a unique opportunity to integrate academic research with practical experience by collaborating directly with startups. This distinctive thesis format consists of two parts.

7.1 Part 1: Startup Project

In this segment, students engage deeply with a startup, undertaking tasks such as developing business plans, conducting market analyses, or evaluating business models. The objective is to provide empirically grounded, actionable insights that can drive the startup's growth and success. This hands-on experience not only benefits the startup but also allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, enhancing their practical skills and understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics. This first part of the Inside the Venture project must be limited to 40 pages for the main body, while no page limit applies for the appendices.

7.2 Part 2: Academic Research Paper

Complementing the practical component, students produce an academic paper akin to a journal article, typically spanning 25–30 pages. This paper focuses on an academic topic that may be unrelated to the startup project and can follow either a qualitative or quantitative approach. It requires a clear theoretical foundation and aims to contribute to both academic theory and practical applications, adhering to the structural and stylistic guidelines of the Academy of Management Journal.

This dual-structured approach ensures that students gain comprehensive experience, balancing empirical project work with rigorous academic research. Please visit our [website](#) for further information. Sample projects can be screened in the MCEI office upon request.

8. Template for the Cover Page



Your Thesis Title

Your Inside the Venture Project Title (if applicable)

Master of Science

Chair:

Prof. Dr. Michael Woywode

Lehrstuhl für Mittelstandsforschung und Entrepreneurship/

Chair for SME Research and Entrepreneurship

Advisor(s):

Name your thesis advisor(s)

Your Name

Born dd-mm-yyyy

Student ID: XXXXXXXX

youraddress@mail.uni-mannheim.de

Date registered:

Date handed in:

9. Template for the Declaration of Authorship

Declaration of Authorship

Irrespective of the language in which the thesis is written, the Declaration of Authorship must be submitted in German.

„Hiermit versichere ich, dass diese Arbeit von mir persönlich verfasst ist und dass ich keinerlei fremde Hilfe in Anspruch genommen habe, die nicht aus meinen Angaben ersichtlich wird. Ebenso versichere ich, dass diese Arbeit oder Teile daraus weder von mir selbst noch von anderen als Leistungsnachweise andernorts eingereicht wurden. Wörtliche oder sinngemäße Übernahmen aus anderen Schriften und Veröffentlichungen in gedruckter oder elektronischer Form sind gekennzeichnet. Sämtliche Sekundärliteratur und sonstige Quellen sind nachgewiesen und in der Bibliographie aufgeführt. Das Gleiche gilt für graphische Darstellungen und Bilder sowie für alle Internet-Quellen und von KI-basierten Anwendungen generierte Antworten. Ich bin ferner damit einverstanden, dass meine Arbeit zum Zwecke eines Plagiatsabgleichs in elektronischer Form anonymisiert versendet und gespeichert werden kann. Mir ist bekannt, dass von der Korrektur der Arbeit abgesehen werden kann, wenn diese Erklärung nicht erteilt wird.“

Place / Date

Signature