

MASTER THESIS MANUAL

MSc Programme Management, version: January 2018

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Introduction

This manual is for students participating in one of the pre-experience Master of Science (MSc) programmes at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM).

During the MSc at RSM, students are required to conduct independent, individual research in the academic field of their chosen master programme. Students should be able to report the entire research process leading to the master thesis, from formulating problems to describing findings, conclusions and recommendations. The aim of the master thesis is to provide students with the skills to conduct business and management research in an academically sound way. The master thesis and research methods course together mostly count for 20 ECTS and form an integral and important part of all MSc programmes. This manual gives detailed requirements for the structure, content and assessment of the master thesis.

Students are referred to the website listed below for information, general procedures, rules and regulations relating to the master thesis process. Master thesis co-ordinators can inform students of additional programme-specific rules and procedures; see Appendix 1 for contact information. Also, research clinics and similar courses can provide valuable information.

www.rsm.nl/masterthesis

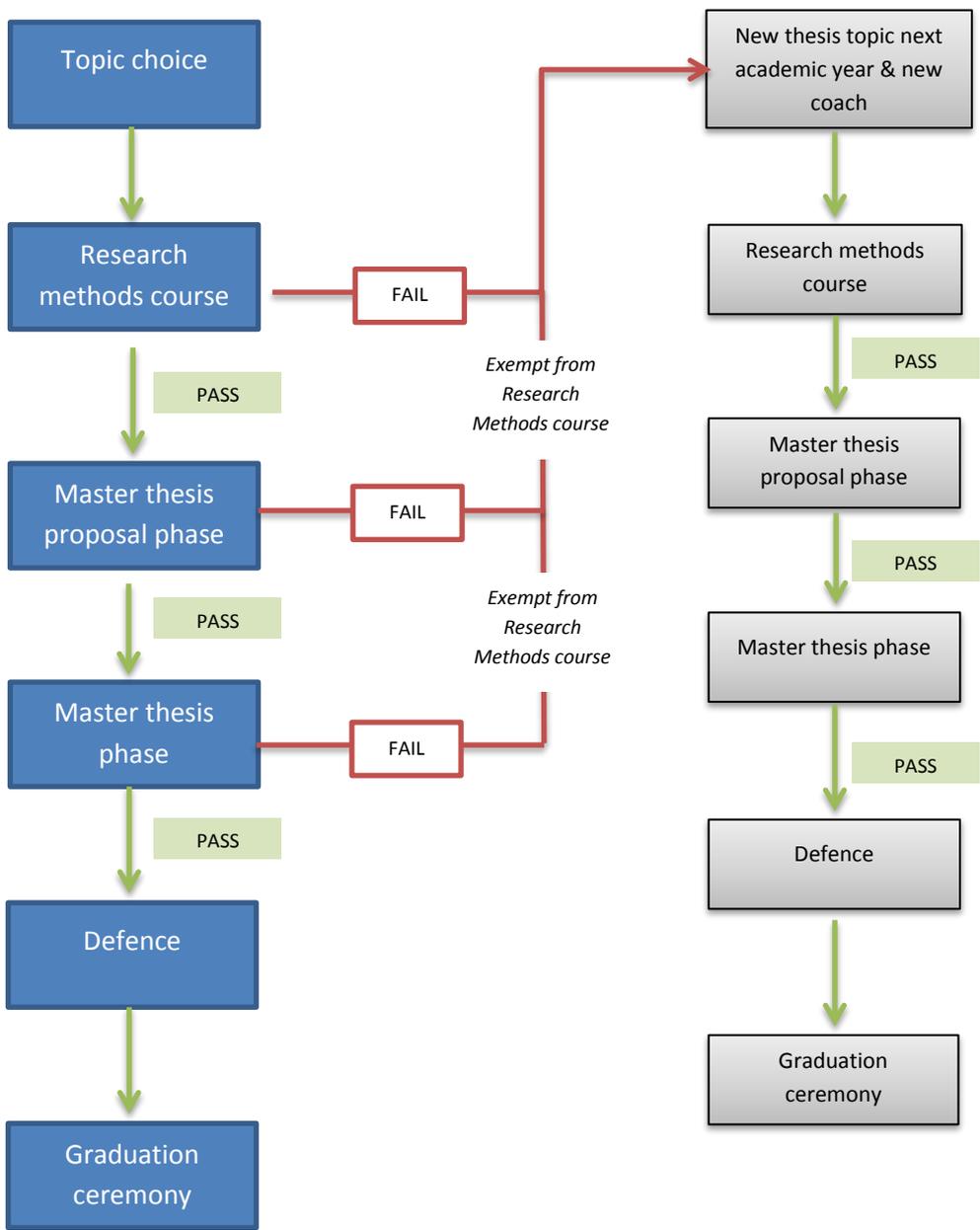


Figure 1: Schematic thesis process

Please note that admission to the oral defence means a preliminary pass of the thesis trajectory. In order to graduate, student should fulfill all curriculum components.

Structure

The number of pages for the master thesis may vary depending on the programme and can range from approximately 30 to 70 pages, excluding executive summary, literature list and appendices. The master thesis should be written in English¹.

The master thesis should comprise the following elements.

Cover page, including:

- master thesis title;
- author's name and student number;
- MSc programme that the student followed;
- full names of the master thesis coach and co-reader;
- date on which the master thesis is submitted.

Preface, stating that:

The copyright of the master thesis rests with the author. The author is responsible for its contents. RSM is only responsible for the educational coaching and cannot be held liable for the content.

Executive summary of approximately 1,000 words.

Table of contents.

Introductory chapter containing most of the information formulated in the research proposal.

Theoretical chapter(s) describing the literature review and the conceptual framework.

Chapter(s) on the research findings containing descriptions of research methodology, data collection and data analyses.

Concluding chapter with the answers to the research question, interpretation of the findings, recommendations and reflections on the thesis research project.

Reference list in which all theoretical and practical sources are properly ranked and listed.

¹ Exemption requests must be submitted at the Examination Board.

Appendices can be added to complete the master thesis.

For additional information on writing a thesis report, consult the Skills Sheets² and other sources, such as the *APA Publication Manual* (www.apastyle.com), the EUR [References and citations course](#) and the RSM [Handout of Referencing 2016](#). These explain suitable and consistent reference styles, for example quotations, reference citations in texts, and reference lists.

² Tulder, R.J.M. van (2012). *Skill Sheets: an integrated approach to research, study and management*. Amsterdam, Pearson Benelux (2nd edition).

Content

1. Identify a research question and project design – the master thesis proposal

The proposal delineates a research idea that the research will pursue. The thesis subject, project design, theoretical approach, research question and research methodology should relate to the subject and field of the student's MSc programme.

The **master thesis proposal** serves as a starting and anchor point for the master thesis. The proposal gives the coach and co-reader an initial idea of what to expect from the student.

It should identify a research question and project design. More specifically, the proposal should:

- set the scene and briefly describe the context;
- describe the research objective: what will the research contribute to theory and management practice? In practice-oriented research, is the contribution aimed at finding a problem, diagnosis, design, implementation or evaluation³?
- formulate a research question or questions which should be answered in order to achieve the objective;
- explain why the study is important and to whom;
- formulate a provisional conceptual model: what are the main concepts and how are they related in theory?
- describe and explain the research design, for example survey, experiment, and case study; measurement of concepts; detailed fieldwork plan; and the plan for analysis of data;
- provide a timetable for the thesis;
- make a provisional literature list.

2. Write a critical review

With the research question in mind, the student should critically review relevant theories and research from available literature in books and journals, such as consulting the Web of Science.

³ Keep in mind that a thesis is a publicly accessible document: research results must be publicly accessible in order to be verified, discussed and opposed. Therefore, a thesis may not include any confidential information. Only in very special cases an exemption can be made. Exemption requests (including the motivation of the external organisation and the consent of coach and co-reader) must be submitted at the Examination Board.

3. Define working concepts and conceptual frameworks

The conceptual framework should contain all theoretical concepts relevant to the research question, and how they are related (for example see Verschuren, Doorewaard, Poper & Mellion, 2010⁴). The conceptual framework can be used to organise and analyse research data in an effective way⁵.

4. Collect and analyse research data

Research methodology and methods should be clearly visible throughout the whole master thesis. In this section, the student should:

- display research data;
- discuss the nature of the questions asked and choose an appropriate methodological stance for answering the questions;
- describe, explain and justify the research methods used;
- outline the practical and technical aspects of conducting the research;
- consider ethical issues connected with the project.

In the presentation and analysis of findings, the student should:

- describe findings and their meaning;
- refer back to the literature review and the conceptual framework;
- use the literature to interrogate and evaluate own research material and vice versa.

Presentation and analysis may require several chapters, for example:

- one chapter for presentation and one for analysis;
- several chapters, each presenting a different case study.

Students should give only a description of actual findings at this stage of the master thesis.

5. Define, validate and evaluate solutions and models, and interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations

When all data are collected and analyses are completed, findings should be interpreted. In case of design-oriented research, a decision model and problem solution should be generated, tested, validated and

⁴ Verschuren, P., Doorewaard, H., Poper, R & Mellion, M.J. (2010). *Designing a research project*. The Hague, Eleven International Publishing (2nd edition).

⁵ There is ample information available, for example in the university library, on quantitative research, qualitative research, observational studies, case studies, interview techniques, and literature review methods.

evaluated. Always refer back to theory findings and research material to present the relation between the outcomes of research related to those already existing.

In the conclusions and recommendations, the student must:

- formulate an answer to the main research question;
- summarise the main argument and its theoretical and practical relevance;
- discuss the validity and reliability of findings and arguments;
- frame the conclusions and recommendations if appropriate;
- discuss any issues concerning the implementation of the conclusions or any recommendations;
- reflectively critique the account provided in the thesis concerning theoretical approach and methodology;
- make recommendations for future research.

Conclusions are drawn up at the end of the master thesis process. These are not the same as research findings or research analysis, but should be an interpretation of the findings. For this section, it would be appropriate to discuss the key contribution of the research in the light of previous knowledge.

There are three types of conclusions:

- **research conclusions:** students' understanding of the processes and dynamics of the subject the researched;
- **strategic conclusions:** students' ideas about what actions should be taken in response to the strategic question,
- **recommendations:** practical steps that should be taken to implement the strategic conclusions.

6. Write a persuasive, well-structured report

The master thesis should contain essential elements in a logical arrangement. It should describe a clear line of reasoning and argumentation. The content should be clear and consistent.

There are three types of elements essential in a master thesis: the basic line of reasoning, the theoretical line of reasoning and the empirical line of reasoning. These elements should be aligned (see figure 2).

1) Elements relating to the **basic line of reasoning**.

- What is it about? What is the basic issue?
- Which questions should be asked? How should the student answer these questions?
- What data has the student found? What are the answers to the questions?

2) Elements relating to the **theoretical line of reasoning**. These elements constitute the methods or means of getting to the facts, the lens through which one sees them in practice (focus). The reasoning is funnel-like, from general to specific.

- What common perspectives already exist about the subject in the field of business administration?
- Which ideas or models tie in with the problem or development with respect to the subject? What is known about these ideas or models?
- What have other researchers had to say about the subject?
- What theoretical notions or concepts are selected and how do they answer the questions?
- How does the student make theory findings manageable in order to apply them in practice?
- How do these theoretical notions pertain to the subject and to the problem?

3) Elements relating to the **empirical line of reasoning**. These elements ultimately comprise the locus: the facts being examined. The reasoning is funnel-like: from general to specific.

- To which practical situation – sector, company or product – do they the elements refer?
- In general, where can research data be retrieved at any given time?
- How should the data be arranged and compared?
- Considering the research question, what practical description can now be given?

Last but not least, the thesis document must be well-presented. It should not contain inaccuracies, typographical errors, spelling or grammatical mistakes, and it should have a clear and tidy layout.

7. Research ethics and management of relationships and processes

The thesis process is a learning track. Students are expected to show managerial skills and take initiative to ask for and receive feedback from their coach and co-reader in order to graduate successfully. Clear agreements about regular meetings and consultations should be made with the coach and co-reader. During the thesis process, students should be able to demonstrate the ability to conduct individual research and make coherent connections between theory and practice. Successful completion of the master thesis remains the responsibility of the individual student. Research data must be stored and made available for public scrutiny.

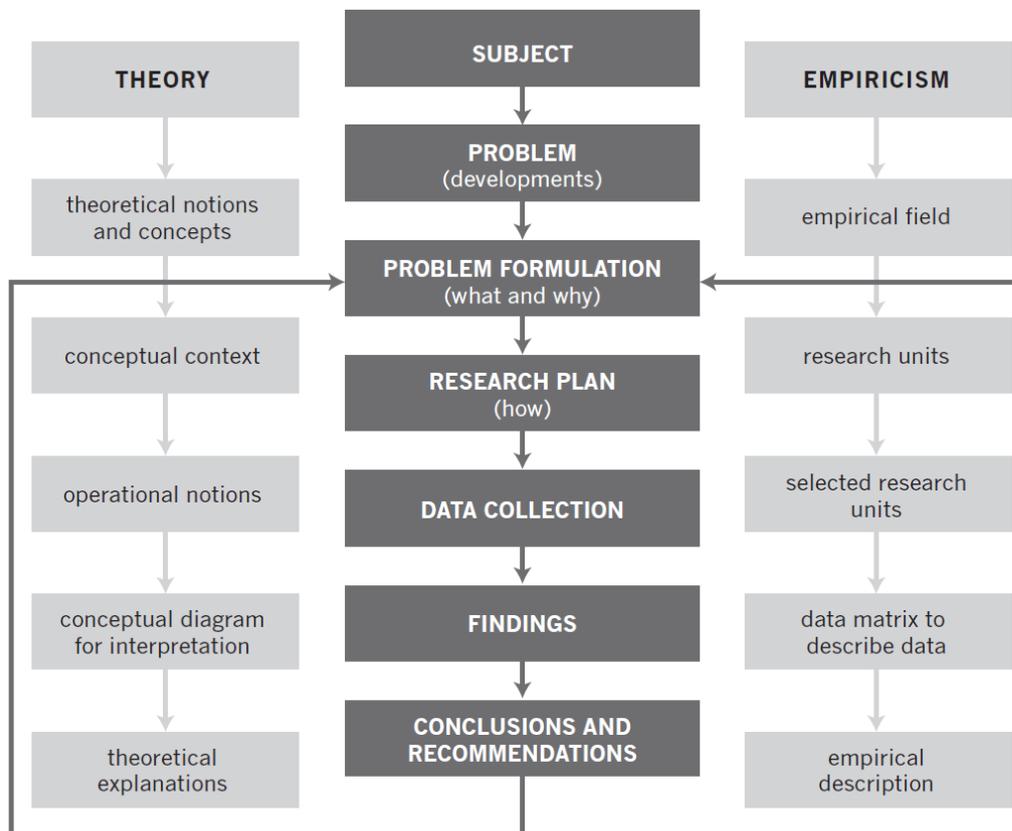


Figure 2: Alignment of basics line of reasoning (centre), theoretical line of reasoning (left) and empirical line of reasoning (right)

8. Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate

The master thesis must be defended orally by each student during the master thesis defence, which normally takes place in the office of coach or co-reader. It is a public defence, that means that the student can bring someone with them. Nevertheless, it is not a festive event: festivities with family and friends must wait until the graduation ceremony. During the defence, the student may give a short presentation containing a summary of the research and its main conclusions. Students can bring a laptop for this purpose, but must realise there are no beamers available. Presentations should be in English. The oral defence lasts about one hour:

- the coach opens the session;
- the student presents the subject, findings and main conclusions of the master thesis;
- the master thesis committee questions the student;
- the master thesis committee consults in private to establish the student's final grade;
- the coach and co-reader communicate the final grade to the student.

After the session, coach and co-reader will record the grade and their deliberations in the Thesis Online Platform (TOP).

Coach and co-reader both take part in the assessment of the thesis. Therefore, both are expected to be present at the thesis defence.

- In case a member of the thesis committee foresees being unable to attend the defence, he or she is expected to arrange replacement in time in consent with the thesis coordinator. The substitute should be a member of the same department.
- In case one of the members is unexpectedly unable to attend the defence, the department concerned is expected to provide for replacement.
- If the department cannot be reached or cannot find a substitute, the defence can take place only if the coach is present or if the coach has explicitly authorised the co-reader to replace him/her.
- If the coach is absent while no arrangement for a substitute from the same department has been made and the co-reader has not explicitly been authorised by the original coach to act on his/her behalf as coach, the thesis defence will be cancelled.

The coach or co-reader should always inform the Examination Board of the substitution by e-mail: eb@rsm.nl.

An online defence (e.g. via Skype) is only permitted with explicit approval of the Examination Board. Approval may be granted if the coach or co-reader resides abroad for a substantial period of time. Approval will generally **not** be granted if the student resides abroad. Students are generally expected to be available for an on-campus face-to-face defence, regardless of their whereabouts. Travel time and/or costs generally do **not** qualify as sufficient reasons for granting an online defence. Only in the case of very special personal circumstances, the Examination Board may decide to grant a student permission for an online defence.

Assessment

1. Eight dimensions to evaluate and assess a master thesis

Each master thesis at RSM will be assessed and evaluated according to the criteria formulated in the diagram in Appendix 2. Each column in the diagram represents a dimension of performance in the master thesis. Please note that the dimensions correspond to the eight paragraphs of the content chapter. Each row corresponds to a level of achievement. The combined dimensions constitute the basis for the final master thesis grade. The master thesis committee will use the diagram to help determine the grade of the master thesis. To determine the grade, the diagram is not imperative but rather guiding. Students are advised to check this diagram in the early stages of conceptualising their master thesis.

2. Assessment time and important end of academic year deadlines

The master thesis committee is required to assess a proposal and the thesis within two weeks at the latest, to ensure that the trajectory does not suffer delays in terms of student progress and/or administrative processes. The thesis trajectory will be assessed immediately after the oral defence.

In order to safeguard the graduation within the Academic Year (AY) and avoid having to reregister for the next AY, the following deadlines must be adhered to:

- The student must be admitted to the defence by **28 August 2018** at the latest. The TOP record should read 'Defence'. If not, the student cannot graduate in that AY

AND

- The defence should take place before **15 September 2018**

AND

- The grading form must have been submitted by **19 September 2018** at the latest. The TOP record should read 'Thesis Done'. If not, the student will not graduate in that AY.

Final version = Final version

The assessment must be based on the version that is submitted in Thesis Online Platform and not on any other version. Students should take care that this version is indeed complete and are therefore strongly advised to do a final check on spelling, grammatical mistakes, typographical errors and tidy layout, as this is taken into account when grading the thesis.

The final thesis that is uploaded in the Thesis Online Platform will be stored in the thesis repository and will be used by the accreditation bodies to judge the trustworthiness of the administration and the quality control systems respectively. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the final version of the thesis is used.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Thesis coordinator

Help and general advice on all aspects of the master thesis can be provided by the MSc programme master thesis co-ordinator.

2. Thesis committee

Each master thesis will be assessed by a master thesis committee. This committee consists of a coach and a co-reader. The coach must be a member of the academic RSM personnel associated with the department offering the student's MSc programme, unless otherwise approved by the Examination Board. The co-reader is preferably a member of the academic RSM personnel associated with another MSc programme than the one with which the coach is associated. However, coach and co-reader are allowed to be members of the same department offering the MSc Programme, with several exceptions. Specifically, (co-)promotors are not allowed to sit on a thesis committee with their PhD students, and job appraisers are not allowed to form a committee with job appraisees without a PhD degree.

Furthermore, at the request of a student, an internal or external expert may be temporarily appointed as a co-reader of a thesis committee. This person must meet the following requirements: a completed PhD, or a university master's degree with demonstrable extensive experience in performing scientific research. This examiner may act as co-reader only. The student must submit a request at the Examination Board via ec@rsm.nl.

In addition, at least one of the members of the thesis committee should be a tenured or tenure track faculty member. Hence, pairs consisting exclusively of PhD candidates and/or untenured full-time or part-time lecturers are not allowed.

3. Coach

Once a student has chosen a subject, a coach will be appointed, usually in consultation with the master thesis co-ordinator. The student and coach should meet at least six times over the course of the trajectory.

The **coach** has the responsibility to:

- approve the thesis proposal, together with the co-reader;
- agree with the student on the planning of the trajectory, such as deadlines, drafts, and feedback;
- provide guidance on all activities in the context of the master thesis;
- offer regular assessments of draft versions of the proposal and thesis;
- be available to provide timely feedback;
- approve the thesis and admit the student to the thesis defence, together with co-reader;
- conduct the final defence and award the final grade, together with co-reader.

4. Co-reader

In some programmes students should actively search for a co-reader themselves, in other programmes the co-reader is assigned to the student by the thesis co-ordinator. Thesis coordinator will inform students about the procedure. A co-reader should be an RSM faculty member from a different MSc programme than the coach, unless otherwise approved by the Examination Board as described above in the chapter *Thesis Committee*. The student and co-reader should meet at least three times over the course of the thesis trajectory.

The **co-reader has the responsibility to:**

- assist the coach in providing guidance to the overall thesis process;
- provide alternative perspectives on the research;
- discuss fundamental criticism on the master thesis;
- give advice in case of major differences of opinion between coach and student;
- approve the thesis proposal, together with the coach;
- approve the thesis and admit the student to the thesis defence, together with the coach;
- conduct the final defence and award the final grade, together with the coach.

5. Student

The **student** has the responsibility to:

- take active charge of their own thesis process;
- dedicate themselves fully and invest sufficient time for their research;
- communicate timely to coach and co-reader when feedback or guidance is required and initiate meetings to this end;
- adhere to deadlines;
- abide by RSM's code of conduct;
- successfully complete the master thesis.

6. RSM code of conduct & plagiarism

Whichever research methodology or method is used, students intending to gather empirical material should always announce they are master students from RSM in the process of preparing their master thesis. Students should take care to avoid giving the impression that data collection is for research by RSM faculty. Students cannot use RSM's official logo, letter headings or stationary. The thesis cannot be used towards the purpose of any other degree programme, at RSM or otherwise.

Plagiarism

The thesis must consist exclusively of the student's original work, and must be unique to the student and programme in question. In all cases, the thesis' author assumes responsibility for its content.

In cases where the work cites, builds on or uses research or data provided by others, the report should acknowledge and reference this in accordance with recognized reference styles as referred to in the Handout Referencing 2016. Inadequate referencing will be considered plagiarism. Please note that **all** theses (final proposal and final thesis) will be scanned for plagiarism. Every case of plagiarism shall be reported to the Examination Board. The Examination Board may impose a sanction, which varies from reprimand to exclusion from examinations for up to one year.

Relevant digital documents towards communicating the rights and obligations of students are:

- [RSM Code of Conduct](#);
- [Scientific Integrity: EUR.nl](#);
- [Handout Referencing 2017](#);
- [Brochure Cheating and Plagiarism](#);
- [Student Charter: EUR.nl](#).

7. Complaints

If a student is dissatisfied with the guidance of a coach and/or co-reader, it is important to address the issues directly with the coach and/or co-reader and/or thesis coordinator as soon as possible and well before the thesis will be graded. After grading, nothing can be adjusted anymore. Also keep in mind that the management of the process is a component of the assessment matrix: the student is supposed to take charge of the thesis process and to plan sufficient meetings with the coach and co-reader.

If the issues is not resolved by the informal approach, a student can submit a formal complaint to the Examination Board via its [web portal](#). All relevant applicable documents, such as the coach and/or co-reader's and/or thesis coordinator's response, must be attached to this submission. The Examination Board will investigate the complaint on the basis of the submitted documents and will conduct its own research in conjunction with these. Both the complainant and the involved examiners will be heard in the following investigation. Within six weeks of lodging the complaint, the Examination Board will inform the complainant of its subsequent findings and any conclusions that may have been drawn.

Please note: A complaint cannot concern the grade awarded. If the grade does not live up to expectations, the student may lodge an appeal with the Examination Appeals Board via the EUR Legal Protection Facility: legal.protection@eur.nl. The appeal has to be submitted within six weeks of the announcement of the grade.

Other master thesis issues

1. Thesis Online Platform (TOP)

RSM makes use of an online platform to support the thesis process, called Thesis Online Platform (TOP): <https://top.rsm.nl/>. Students will submit their final proposal and final thesis in the system. Coaches and co-readers will approve or disapprove the documents in TOP. At the end, after the defence, the final assessment and grading is also recorded in TOP.

2. Student evaluation of the thesis trajectory

Upon submission of the final thesis in TOP, students are asked to complete an evaluation of the thesis trajectory, their coach, and their co-reader. Students should give their honest and professional opinion. The results will only be made available to the coaches and co-readers after the final thesis grade has been registered in Osiris. Students thus need not fear for their thesis grade when being critical.

3. Timing and deadlines

The thesis trajectory is offered only once a year⁶. There will be no thesis supervision outside the trajectory, nor any additional thesis supervision for a thesis re-sit. The trajectory is divided in three stages: the research methods course, the proposal, and the final thesis. Students can fail in each of these three stages. When this happens, the student has to retake the trajectory the following year and has to choose a new thesis topic and will have a new coach. Please see figure 1 on page 4 for a schematic overview of the thesis trajectory.

Master programmes will set their own deadlines for the submission of the proposal and final thesis. The deadlines will be communicated by the thesis coordinator.

4. Exemptions from deadlines

Only in the following exceptional situations, deviations from thesis deadlines are possible:

1. An ambitious or extensive thesis

An extension may be granted by the relevant MSc-programme (by the Academic Director and/or Thesis Coordinator) on the following grounds:

⁶ For most programmes it is offered in spring. For the MSc IM-CEMS, FI-A and MiM it is offered in autumn.

- The student is an excellent student who has undertaken a research project of which the importance transcends a 'normal' MSc thesis;
- This research project is too ambitious or extensive to be completed within the normal deadlines;
- Coach and co-reader need to agree upon the necessity and desirability for an extension, referring to the talents of the students, the context in which this research takes place and the significance of the endeavour either for RSM or for the research field as a whole.

2. *Special circumstances*

The Examination Board may grant an exemption in case a student has met with unfortunate circumstances beyond his/her control. The Examination Board will only take requests into consideration which include positive advice of a student adviser in case of personal circumstances as well as the confirmation of the coach and co-reader that:

- the student has worked hard during the spring trajectory and has been on time with deliverables (if possible given the circumstances);
- the extension in order to finish the thesis is no longer than approximately one month;
- the coach and co-reader are willing and have the opportunity to supervise the student for the extension period.

Timely and well-documented requests will be ruled upon as soon as possible, preferably within two weeks, and ultimately within four weeks.

5. **Judicium: classifications of the Master of Science degree**

A master thesis can be graded from 5.5 to 10 in half-point increments. All master core courses and master electives, including the master thesis, and other courses that appear on the list of grades, will be factored into the determination of the grade point average (GPA). The GPA is calculated by multiplying the grade of an individual course by the number of ECTS of that course and then dividing the total by the total number of ECTS. Courses for which no grade is determined, such as tests assessed with a 'pass' or 'fail', are excluded from the GPA calculation.

The *judicium* is a classification of the GPA. The classification *cum laude* will be awarded if the student has fulfilled at least the following conditions:

- a. the average of the grades for the examinations under the Dutch grading system as displayed on the list of grades, weighted on the basis of the credits, is an 8.25 or higher;
- b. the grade for the examination of the thesis trajectory is at least an 8.0;

- c. no more than one examination or test (i.e. an officially recorded grade in Osiris) has been taken more than once (this applies from cohort 2013-2014 onwards). The thesis proposal is excluded from this rule.

The classification *summa cum laude* will be awarded if the student has fulfilled at least the following conditions:

- a. the average of the grades for the examinations under the Dutch grading system as displayed on the list of grades, weighted on the basis of the credits is an 9.0 or higher;
- b. the grade for the examination of the thesis trajectory is at least an 9.0, and
- c. no examination or test (i.e. an officially recorded grade in Osiris) has been taken more than once. The thesis proposal is excluded from this rule.

6. Graduation in pairs

A master thesis is considered an individual project. Students may not complete a thesis project jointly with a classmate or fellow student.

7. Combining the thesis with an internship

Combining the thesis with an internship is not recommended as internship obligations will compete with the very strict timeline for the thesis trajectory and elective requirements. Some programmes offer the possibility to substitute a 6 ECTS elective with a company project⁷. Students are advised to pursue an internship in the summer, or after finalising the thesis.

8. Master thesis repository

After graduation the master thesis is stored in the Erasmus University Thesis Repository and is publicly accessible via thesis.eur.nl. The user can view the title, name of the author and keywords. ERNA login credentials are required for the document download.

9. Thesis defence is not graduation

Finishing the thesis does not necessarily mean that a student also graduates. To graduate, a student must fulfil all curriculum components. When this is done, the student can apply for the diploma by submitting an online [Application form Master Certificate](#). The Exam Administration will send a notification e-mail with details on when & where the diploma and grade list can be collected.

Please note that the Examination Board is under legal obligation to actively issue the degree once all curriculum components are met.

⁷ Please check with your programme if this is possible. At the time of writing the following three programmes offered this possibility: Supply Chain Management, Business Information Management, and Management of Innovation.



If students wish to pursue an internship or exchange after finalizing the master programme, a postponement of issuing degree can be granted. More information about it is available on the [RSM Current Students site](#).

Appendix 1: Find your master thesis coordinator

Accounting & Financial Management	thesis.ac@rsm.nl
Business Information Management	thesis.bim@rsm.nl
Strategic Entrepreneurship	thesis.eship@rsm.nl
Finance & Investments	thesis.fi@rsm.nl
Finance & Investments – Advanced	thesis.fia@rsm.nl
Global Business & Sustainability	thesis.gbs@rsm.nl
Human Resource Management	thesis.hrm@rsm.nl
Marketing Management	thesis.mm@rsm.nl
Management of Innovation	thesis.mi@rsm.nl
Organisational Change & Consulting	thesis.occ@rsm.nl
Strategic Management	thesis.sm@rsm.nl
Supply Chain Management	thesis.scm@rsm.nl
International Management	thesis.im@rsm.nl
Master in Management	mim@rsm.nl

Appendix 2: Master thesis assessment matrix

	Identify research question and project design	Write a critical review	Define working concepts and conceptual frameworks	Collect and analyse research data	Define, validate and evaluate solutions and models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations	Write persuasive, well-structured master thesis	Research ethics and management of relationships and processes	Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate
Excellent	Well-balanced and innovative composition of research question, project design and research method.	Literature review itself is a significant contribution, well described and evaluated from new or complex perspectives.	Significant additions to the theoretical and conceptual understanding of the subject.	Contribution to development and methods for collecting and analysing research material and methodological debate.	Sophisticated interpretation of the material. The conclusions are based on the findings but transcend them.	Work of art written with style and with strong arguments.	Student has independently managed the project extremely well, <i>with careful consideration for potential conflicts of interest</i> , and has maintained excellent relationships with its stakeholders, including coach and co-reader.	Superior mastery and power in defending the research in its setup, methodology and execution.
Good	Well-defined research question, sensible project design and clear plans for conducting research.	Literature cogently evaluated using positions already available in literature.	Attempt, maybe not wholly successful, made to theorise beyond current state of literature.	Modifies and develops research methods reflecting methodological understanding.	Sophisticated interpretation of findings and conclusions are firmly based but show a creative spark. Conclusions based well on findings.	Clear, persuasive and well-structured document.	Researcher manages the project carefully and sensitively with open mindedness in the face of interests of parties in the research (including the thesis committee).	Under scrutiny managing to defend or justify choices, methods and conclusions made, while showing proficiency in transparent communication.
Satisfactory	Explicit ideas but there are some doubts about relation between question, design and methods.	Good description of appropriate fields and some general criticisms made, but no close evaluation of concepts.	Concepts defined and conceptual framework is developed. Or existing conceptual framework adapted, in context of evaluated literature.	Methods for gathering and analysing research are used competently.	Uses techniques for interpretation in a mechanical way. Findings are treated as straight forward and unproblematic. Conclusions have some connection with the findings.	Expressed well or technically correct, but not both. Clear structure adequately argued.	Research is managed straightforwardly but has not explicitly addressed issues of contextual interests and concerns.	Answering questions but not always confident and well-prepared.
Unsatisfactory	Identified interesting topic but research question is too broad, while design and methods are vague.	Limited description of literature, or no criticism or evaluation.	Definition and use of theoretical concepts is confused and no attempt made to theoretical synthesis or evaluation.	Methods for gathering data and analysing research material are confusing and unsystematically used.	Occasional insight takes the place of interpretation and conclusions have a tenuous link with findings.	Adequate expression but several mistakes. Argumentation sometimes replaced by assumption or assertion. Using bullets to disguise lack of arguments.	Student has managed the project poorly or unethically, with little contact with or concerns for the parties involved, including coach and co-reader.	Taking effort in answering questions sometimes loses focus and tendency to enter into irrelevant issues. Showing lack of abstract argumentation.

Adapted from: Fisher, C. (2004) *Researching and writing a dissertation for business students*. FT Prentice Hall