

## Part-time Executive MSc in Corporate Communication



### Master Thesis Manual Thesis trajectory 2026

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# 1. Introduction

This manual is tailor-made for students studying for the Part-time Executive Master of Science in Corporate Communication (MCC) at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

When following an MSc programme 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 problem formulation to describing findings, conclusions and recommendations. The aim of the master thesis is to provide students with the skills to interpret and conduct academic research in their field. The master thesis stands for 14 ECTS and forms 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 may refer to the Master Services website for general procedures, rules and regulations: <https://master-services.rsm.nl/support/solutions/folders/80000624885>. Please note that the procedures for the specific Master of Science in Corporate Communication deviate to some extent from the RSM standards.

In case of any questions, please contact the programme coordinator at [ccc@rsm.nl](mailto:ccc@rsm.nl).

Check [www.rsm.nl/masterthesis](http://www.rsm.nl/masterthesis) for more information.

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Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University

## 2. Activities overview

What	Date	Time	Where
1. Choosing your research topic (Session 1)	November 27, 2025	15.00-17.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
2. Thesis topic assignment	January 16, 2026	Before 16.00	300-600 words, submit it in Canvas
3. Literature review (Session 2)	January 22, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
4. Confirmation coach and co-reader	February 18, 2026	Before 16.00	CCC will send you an email
5. Submit questions about research design	February 20, 2026	Before 16.00	Submit it on Canvas
6. Q&A session: Qualitative research designs (Session 3a)	February 26, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
7. Q&A session: Quantitative research designs (Session 3b)	March 5, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
8. Draft proposal	March 25, 2026	Before 16.00	3000-4000 words, send by email to your coach, co-reader and copy to CCC@rsm.nl
9. Submit questions about data collection	April 10, 2026	Before 16.00	Submit it in Canvas
10. Q&A session: Qualitative data collection (Session 4a)	April 16, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
11. Q&A session: Quantitative data collection (Session 4b)	April 23, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
12. Final thesis proposal	May 6, 2026	Before 16.00	3000-4000 words, submit in Thesis Management System (TMS) ( <a href="https://tms.eur.nl/">https://tms.eur.nl/</a> )
13. Submit questions about data analysis	May 15, 2026	Before 16.00	Submit it in Canvas

14. Q&A session: Qualitative data analysis (Session 5a)	May 21, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
15. Q&A session: Quantitative data analysis (Session 5b)	May 28, 2026	13.00-16.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
16. Draft thesis	October 30, 2026	Before 16.00	10,000-20,000 words, send by email to your coach, co- reader and a copy to CCC@rsm.nl
17. Submit questions about thesis defence	November 6, 2026	Before 16.00	Submit it in Canvas
18. Q&A session: Thesis defence (Session 6)	November 12, 2026	13.00-14.00	Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
19. Final thesis	December 4, 2026	Before 16.00	10,000-20,000 words, submit it in Thesis Management System (TMS)
20. Master thesis presentation and oral defence	By January 15, 2027		Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)
21. Graduation ceremony	February 11, 2027	Start at 14.00	To be determined

## 2.1 Choosing your research topic (Session 1)

When: November 27, 2025

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 15.00-17.00

You are responsible for finding and developing a topic that fits the themes of the Master of Science in Corporate Communication programme. It is important that you choose a topic that is of personal interest to you.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) define multiple ways to generate ideas for thesis topics. In no particular order, the techniques are:

- Brainstorming
- Making a note of ideas
- Concept mapping
- Exploring past projects (e.g., browsing or searching the book of abstracts of MSc in Corporate Communication graduates from the past years [<https://www.rsm.nl/faculty-research/centres/corporate-communication-centre/#pp-book-of-abstracts>] and /or previously defended theses in the Erasmus University repository [<https://thesis.eur.nl/>])
- Using past course assignments
- Using relevant course literature
- Searching for academic literature (e.g., in the university library collection, accessible with your ERNA account and password: <https://www.eur.nl/en/library/>)
- Following the news media
- Discussion with colleagues, other students, alumni, ...

**Readings:** Chapter 1 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

### Deliverable: Session 1

After session 1, students should have an idea about their topic(s) of interest and how to come up with specific research questions about this topic.

## 2.2 Thesis topic assignment

Deliverable: Pre-assignment

Length: 300-600 words (one page)

Deadline: January 16, 2026

### Deliverable: Assignment

- Find a thesis topic and formulate the central issue (What broad question or problem will you be researching?)
- Find four to five academic articles and analyse the different perspectives on your question/problem, and indicate what we know but also do not yet know about your topic.
- Write a one-pager describing:
  - your thesis topic (the central problem/issue you are interested in)
  - a review of the different perspectives on the issue in the (academic) literature (4-5 academic articles)
  - a preliminary indication of the gaps (what we do not know yet) in the literature
  - one or more potential (specific) research questions that could address these gaps
  - a brief indication of the type of method(s) you might use to answer these research questions.
- Attach a self-assessment of your thesis topic using the table provided in Appendix A.

### Deliverable and deadline

Assessment type: Individual assignment

Language: English

Length: 300-600 words (about 1 page), excluding references

References and citations: Please make sure that you refer correctly in your document.

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See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, see the citing information on the website of Erasmus University, see [here](#).

Deadline: January 16, 2026 (submit in Canvas) with subject line: Name - Assignment thesis topic

## 2.3 Literature review (Session 2)

When: January 22, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

Besides discussing guidelines for conducting your literature review, in this session we will provide some feedback on your thesis topic assignments on an aggregated level. This means that we will not discuss individual assignments in great detail, but focus on feedback that pertains to several assignments.

**Pre-reading:** Chapter 2 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

Please be sure to prepare thoroughly for this meeting and read the chapter in advance.

**Deliverable:** Literature review (session 2)

After session 2, students should have be able to search for, organize and synthesize academic literature about their thesis topic.

## 2.4 Confirmation coach and co-reader

When: February 18, 2026

Where: CCC sends you an email

CCC will send you an email confirming your coach and co-reader for your thesis trajectory.

The master thesis coach has the responsibility to:

- approve the thesis proposal, after discussing 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;
- award the final grade, together with co-reader.

The co-reader has the responsibility to:

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

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 (see [here](#));
- successfully complete the master thesis.

Reading: Chapter 3 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

## 2.5 Q&A session: Qualitative research designs (Session 3a)

For: Students who plan to use a qualitative method in their thesis research

When: February 26, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the chapter mentioned below (under "Reading")
- Submit two questions about your potential research design in Canvas, by **Friday, February 20, 2026, 16:00**.

Reading: Chapter 5 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

### Deliverable: Session 3a

After session 3a, students should be able to choose a qualitative research design that is appropriate to answer their research question(s).

## 2.6 Q&A session: Quantitative research designs (Session 3b)

For: Students who plan to use a quantitative method in their thesis research

When: March 5, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the chapter mentioned below (under "Reading")
- Submit two questions about your potential research design in Canvas, by **Friday, February 20, 2026, 16:00**.

**Reading:** Chapter 5 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

### Deliverable: Session 3b

After session 3b, students should be able to choose a quantitative research design that is appropriate to answer their research question(s).

## 2.7 Draft proposal

Deliverable: Hand-in draft proposal

Length: 3000-4000 words (7-8 pages), excluding references

Deadline: March 25, 2026

The next formal step is to submit the thesis proposal. The proposal must be professionally presented (typed) and should be approximately 3000-4000 words (7-8 pages), excluding references.

Ideally, a thesis proposal contains draft versions of (at least part of) the introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology of the final thesis (see section 2.13 for an overview of the structure of the thesis). According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), a thesis proposal should broadly include the following:

- Research overview (optional): a brief summary of the proposal.
- Title (optional): a title clarifying the topic of the proposal.
- Introduction: Introduction to the research: providing a brief overview of the relevance of the research topic, what is known about the topic in the literature and what is not known, demonstrating the relevance of your research questions (given what is known).
- Research question(s): specifying your research question(s) and specifying your study as either [1] theory-building (aimed at developing new theory), [2] theory-testing (aimed at testing hypotheses derived from theory) or [3] practice-oriented (aimed at contributing to the solution of a practical problem for a specific organisation).
- (Preliminary) literature review: a more detailed explanation of what is known about the topic in the academic literature and what is not known.
- Research objectives (optional): more specific reformulations of your initial research question(s).
- Method: research strategy/design, data collection methods, data analysis methods.
- Timescale
- Resources (e.g., access to organisations, databases)
- References

Reading: Chapter 8 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

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## Deliverables and deadline

Assessment type:	Individual assignment
Language:	English
Length:	3000-4000 words (7-8 pages), excluding references
References and citations:	Please make sure that you refer correctly in your document. See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, see the citing information on the website of Erasmus University, see <a href="#">here</a> .
Deadline:	March 25, 2026 (submit to your coach, co-reader by email and a copy to <a href="mailto:ccc@rsm.nl">ccc@rsm.nl</a> )

Good luck!

## 2.8 Q&A session: Qualitative data collection (Session 4a)

For: Students who plan to use a qualitative method in their thesis research

When: April 16, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the chapter mentioned below (under “Reading”)
- Submit two questions about your potential qualitative data collection methods in Canvas, by **Friday, April 10, 2026, 16:00**.

Reading: Chapter 6 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

### Deliverable: Session 4a

After session 4a, students should be able to plan their qualitative data collection.

## 2.9 Q&A session: Quantitative data collection (Session 4b)

For: Students who plan to use a quantitative method in their thesis research

When: April 23, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the chapter mentioned below (under “Reading”)
- Submit two questions about your potential quantitative data collection methods in Canvas, by **Friday, April 10, 2026, 16:00**.

Reading: Chapter 6 of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

### Deliverable: Session 4b

After session 4b, students should be able to plan their quantitative data collection.

## 2.10 Final thesis proposal

Deliverable: Hand-in final thesis proposal

Length: 3000-4000 words (7-8 pages), excluding references

Deadline: May 6, 2026

RSM makes use of an online platform to support the thesis process, called Thesis Management System (TMS) : <https://tms.eur.nl> Students will submit their final proposal and final thesis in the system. In the end, the final assessment and grading is also recorded in TMS.

You should submit your proposal via TMS. If the initial proposal is of adequate standard, the coach and co-reader will give a pass in the system and allow you to continue. If your proposal is considered inadequate, you will be required to resubmit an improved proposal that meets their requirements within **four weeks** of receiving the request from your coach to resubmit (a thesis proposal resit).

### Deliverables and deadline

Assessment type: Individual assignment

Language: English

References and citations: Please make sure that you refer correctly in your document. See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, see the citing information on the website of Erasmus University, [here](#).

Deadline: May 6, 2026 (submit your proposal in TMS)

Good luck!

## 2.11 Q&A session: Qualitative data analysis (Session 5a)

For: Students who plan to use a qualitative method in their thesis research

When: May 21, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the literature mentioned below (under "Reading")
- Submit two questions about potential qualitative data analysis methods in Canvas, by Friday, May 15, 2026, 16:00.

### Reading:

Section 7.4 ("Analysing data qualitatively") of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P. (2018).

*Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.

### Deliverable: Session 5a

After session 5a, students should be able to plan their qualitative data analysis.

## 2.12 Q&A session: Quantitative data analysis (Session 5b)

For: Students who plan to use quantitative method in their thesis research

When: May 28, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-16.00

### Pre-assignment:

- Read through the literature mentioned below (under "Reading")
- Submit two questions about potential quantitative data analysis methods in Canvas, by Friday, May 15, 2026, 16:00.

### Reading:

Section 7.3 ("Analysing data quantitatively") of the book: Saunders, M.N. K., & Lewis, P.

(2018). *Doing research in business and management: An essential guide to planning your project* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Pearson.

Field, A. (2016). *Introducing the General Linear Model*.

<https://discoveringstatistics.com/repository/linearmodels.pdf>

### Deliverable: Session 5b

After session 5b, students should be able to plan their quantitative data analysis.

## 2.13 Draft thesis

Deliverable: Hand-in draft thesis

Length: 10,000-20,000 words (about 20-40 pages), excluding references and appendices

Deadline: October 30, 2026

The draft is a complete version of your full thesis, including appendices and reference list. The coach and co-reader will review and provide feedback on the draft. The draft should be submitted to your coach, co-reader by email and a copy to CCC by October 30, 2026. This allows sufficient time for you to incorporate the feedback into the final report.

**Tip:** Break your thesis down into chapters and accordingly send draft chapters to your coach and co-reader in between. Consequently, they can give you timely feedback and keep you on the right track.

The thesis ought to have a clear structure that has a beginning, middle and an end. The "beginning" is an executive summary and introduction, the "middle" reports the literature review, methodology, and findings, and the "end" draws the report together in the discussion. Ideally, the research proposal already contains good drafts of the beginning (introduction) and part of the middle (literature review and methodology).

**Structure of the thesis:**

### Cover page

The cover page should include the title of the thesis, your name, student number, the name of the MSc in Corporate Communication programme, names of coach and co-reader, and date of submission.

### Preface

The preface should state 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." You can also include acknowledgements and other personal reflections here.

### Executive summary (300-600 words, about 1 page)

The report should begin with an executive summary, which:

- States the research question and briefly describes its context.

- Briefly explains the main steps taken which have led to the conclusions and recommendations.
- Summarizes/explains the main conclusions and recommendations.

The executive summary should contain no tables, charts or diagrams.

### **Introduction (1500-2500 words, about 3 -5 pages)**

The introduction should cover the following points:

- Explain the central issue (practical problem) in your research.
- Explain the importance and urgency of addressing this topic, and for whom (refer to sources where needed).
- When your research is practice-oriented, include relevant background information about the organisation (such as history, size, products and services).
- Provide a brief overview of what is known about the topic and about possible causes and/or solutions to the practical problem (based on your literature review)
- Briefly explain what aspects are not (or less) known, and why is it relevant to know more about these aspects (also based on your literature review)
- Formulate your research question(s).
- Provide a 'roadmap' to guide the reader through the rest of the report.

### **Literature review (2000-4000 words, about 4 to 8 pages)**

The goal of the literature review is to provide an overview of what is known in the literature about your research question(s) – and what is not yet known. It should provide a comprehensive discussion of relevant literature, in which you synthesize the literature, rather than discussing individual articles one by one. Saunders and Lewis (2018) provide useful tips for creating such a synthesis in sections 2.6 through 2.8 of their book.

For theory-testing and practice-oriented research, it is often useful to draw a conceptual framework that represents the insights from the literature, and to describe/discuss the elements in this framework (theoretical concepts, relations between concepts, etc.). For theory-testing research, it is also customary to formulate concrete testable hypotheses.

### **Methods (2000-4000 words, about 4 to 8 pages)**

This chapter provides (1) explication and (2) justification of all steps you took. The method statement must carefully describe the research procedures and techniques that have been adopted and it should include (at least) the following components:

- The research design or strategy: what strategy have you used to answer your research question(s) (e.g., survey, experiment, case study), and why is this an appropriate strategy? See also Saunders and Lewis (2018), section 5.5.

- The specifics of the data collection: how has data been collected, from where/whom, and why (justification)?
- What did you do to increase the validity and reliability of your results?
- What are the analysis procedures and techniques, and (if they are non-standard techniques) why are these appropriate (justification)?

Being transparent about your methodologies is crucial for correctly interpreting your results.

### **Findings (2500-7500 words about 5 to 15 pages)**

The exact structure and types of content of this chapter will vary depending most notably on the nature of the research undertaken and the specific procedures and techniques. The data analyses and presentation of the results are key

In general, the findings and results section should contain the following information:

- The results of the empirical analyses (findings) intended to answer your research question(s). In a theory-testing study, you test the formulated hypotheses. In a theory-building study, you can develop a conceptual model visualizing the themes that emerge from your analyses. A practice-oriented study can also either test hypotheses or develop a conceptual model based on the analyses, depending on the research strategy chosen. You can use tables and figures to display the results where necessary, accompanied by explanations of what these tables/figures show. Please make proper tables and figures rather than copying output from statistical software, for example.
- Interpret what the results imply/mean for the research question(s) and (if applicable) for your hypotheses.

### **Discussion (1500-2500 words, about 3 to 5 pages)**

This chapter deals with the conclusion of the whole project and the implications. According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), it should:

- Briefly describe the main findings of your research.
- Discuss how your research has answered your research question(s) and met your research objectives.
- Discuss the relation between your findings and the findings of the relevant literature. Are the results consistent with or contradictory to what others have found? Explain why this may be the case.
- Describe your recommendations for practice based on the conclusions you have drawn. What are the concrete recommendations to managers or other practitioners to solve/address the issue/question?
- Discuss the main limitations of the study (e.g., regarding sampling, data collection or

analysis). In particular, you ought to explain how these limitations could (partly) explain the findings of the study.

- Indicate directions for future research. What could be relevant ideas for follow-up research, particularly in light of the limitations that you discussed?

## Deliverables and deadline

Assessment type: Individual assignment

Language: English

Length: 10,000-20,000 words (about 20-40 pages), excluding references and appendices

References and citations: Please make sure that you refer correctly in your document. See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, see the citing information on the website of Erasmus University, [here](#).

Deadline: October 30, 2026 (submit to your coach, co-reader by email and a copy to [ccc@rsm.nl](mailto:ccc@rsm.nl))

Good luck!

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## 2.14 Q&A session: Thesis defence (Session 6)

When: November 12, 2026

Where: Virtual session (Microsoft Teams)

Time: 13.00-14.00

### Pre-assignment:

- (Re-)read the section of this manual on the thesis defence (2.16)
- Submit any questions you have about the defence in Canvas, by **Friday, November 6, 2026, 16:00**.

### Deliverable: Session 6

After session 6, students should have a clear understanding of the procedures regarding the thesis defence.

## 2.15 Final thesis

Deliverable: Final thesis

Deadline: December 4, 2026

Submit your final thesis in which you have incorporated your coach's and co-reader's feedback.

### Deliverables and deadline

Assessment type: Individual assignment

Language: English

Length: 10,000-20,000 words (about 20-40 pages), excluding references and appendices

References and citations: Please make sure that you refer correctly in your document. See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, see the citing information on the website of Erasmus University [here](#).

Deadline: December 4, 2026 (submit your final thesis in TMS)

## 2.16 Defence

Deliverable: Master thesis presentation and oral defence

Deadline: By January 15, 2027

The Master's thesis defence is an integral part of the educational journey, requiring each student to individually and vocally defend their thesis work. The defence comes at the end of the thesis trajectory, once the work has been completed and the thesis has been handed in for assessment and has been approved by the coach and co-reader.

As part of the defence session, students are encouraged to provide a concise yet comprehensive presentation summarizing their research and the primary conclusions that they have drawn. It is recommended to use a maximum of approximately 10 PowerPoint slides to aid in clearly conveying the key points of their research.

Students are expected to coordinate with both their coach and co-reader to agree on a suitable date and time for the defence.

In principle, the defence will be conducted in an online session.

The total duration of the oral defence is approximately one hour, structured as follows:

- The coach commences the session with an introductory speech.
- The student is given a 10-minute slot to present the subject, findings, and primary conclusions of their Master's thesis.
- The coach and co-reader engage the student in an in-depth conversation about the thesis of about 30 minutes.
- The coach and co-reader then withdraw for a consultation of 5-10 minutes to determine the student's final grade.
- The coach concludes the oral defence by explaining the assigned grade.
- Upon completion of the defence, the coach and co-reader will record your final grade and feedback in TMS, our thesis system. The diploma documents will then be prepared for the graduation ceremony.

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## 2.17 Graduation Ceremony

When: February 11, 2027

Where: Erasmus University Campus

Time: 14.00-19.00

The graduation ceremony will take place at Erasmus University.

Welcoming usually starts at 14.00. Your guests are invited to have coffee and tea, while we will start preparing you for your entrance to the official academic ceremony. The ceremony starts at 15.00 and ends at 17.00 and thereafter we have a celebration until 19.00.

During the ceremony, we will also hand out awards about which we will inform you later on.

### 3. Roles and responsibilities

The thesis topic assignment you submit (see section 2.2) will be used to assign a coach and co-reader. While the coach and co-reader may not necessarily be specialists in your project area, they will be able to effectively guide you in further developing the scope of the project and providing advice in the research process.

The main role of the coach is to provide constructive feedback on the work delivered in order to guide you towards submitting a final thesis that meets the academic requirements. The main responsibility of the co-reader is to assist the coach in providing guidance to the overall thesis process and to provide alternative perspectives on the research. The responsibility for the final thesis is yours.

Although the level of guidance may vary across the coaches/co-readers and students, RSM anticipates that you will receive feedback from your coach about six times over the course of the trajectory and maximally three times from your co-reader. It is expected that a coach will devote approximately 10-12 hours of his/her time, and a co-reader 5-6 hours to assist you with your thesis. Please note that this time includes reviewing the material that you have submitted.

The following are suggested as appropriate communication points:

- Your first contact with your coach can be used to discuss your ideas about the project proposal (see section 2.7 for the elements of the proposal). You determine the scope of your topic, decide upon the overall research question, and determine the conceptual and empirical steps to be taken during the project. At this time, you can also discuss with your coach how you plan to communicate with each other and set out the deadlines for this process. After this first contact, you finalize the project proposal. It would make sense to ask the co-reader for feedback on the final proposal at this stage. Please note that it is customary to have separate feedback meetings with coach and co-reader, because they are expected to provide feedback (more or less) independently of each other, from their individual perspectives.
- Prior to the next meetings with your coach, you may have completed some key parts of your thesis: the Introduction, Literature Review, and some parts of the empirical chapters (notably the Methodology as well as your preliminary Findings). By doing this, you will provide the coach with material that will enable them to assess the quality of your materials. It is important for you to try to solicit clear feedback in order to ensure that you are on the right track. It would make sense to also involve the co-reader in this process, typically after you have incorporated the feedback from your coach.
- Your final contact with your coach and co-reader can occur about four weeks prior to

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the submission deadline for your final report. By this time you will have submitted a draft version of your report. The feedback provided can then give you a good indication of the quality of your final thesis.

Please remember that your coach and co-reader may be working with a number of students. You therefore should avoid sending repeated volumes of substantially the same work with only slight amendments. It is preferable that you ask focused questions about specific aspects you would like to receive feedback on. You could also take steps to facilitate this process by, for example, colour-highlighting text that you would like your advisor to review, such as improvements or additions from the last version they reviewed. Finally, please be aware that the objective of the coach and co-reader in providing feedback is to ensure that your work meets the standards. You cannot presume that feedback from the reader indicating that the progress is acceptable up to that point is indicative of the final grade.

**Tip:** If you encounter problems/challenges in your project, let your coach know. Your coach may be able to help navigate through the challenge.

## 4. Writing style and submission format

Guidelines for the writing style and format of a thesis are provided in Appendix B. In summary, you are expected to write in prose so as to build an effective argument and not only resort to "bullet points". The writing style must remain analytical and precise. Keeping your sentences relatively short is a good way to avoid unnecessary words and maximize effectiveness. Graphs and pictures should be relevant, meaningful and clearly linked to the text.

## 5. Deadlines

Once a coach and co-reader are assigned, students officially enter the trajectory and are expected to hand in their final thesis on December 4, 2026 to be able to officially graduate in February 2027. Accordingly, the deadlines in the overview of the course duration are strictly adhered to.

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 Academic Director and/or Thesis Coordinator of the programme on the following grounds:

- 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 from the final thesis deadline in case a student has met with unfortunate circumstances beyond their control. The Examination Board will only take requests into consideration which include positive advice of a coach in case of personal circumstances as well as the confirmation of the co-reader that:

- the student has worked hard during the spring trajectory and has been on time with deliverables;
- the extension in order to finish the thesis is no longer than **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.

Apart from the above extension reasons, students can also apply for extensions for other reasons. In that case, they will be liable for the submission extension fee as given in the table below.

Submission Extension Fees for session 2025-2026

Extension Length	Extension Fee
Up to 3 months	€500
From 4 to 6 months	€750
From 7 to 9 months	€1000
10-12 months	€1250
Over 12 months	Customised fee

To apply for an extension, please use the form in Appendix C.

If the participant finishes later than the appointed date without an approved extension, the participant will be required to pay the fee for the Thesis again. If the participant chooses to start the thesis trajectory again with a new topic and needs a new coaching team, the entire thesis fee of the new trajectory is to be paid.

## 6. 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 (Olivia Zhang, via [ccc@rsm.nl](mailto:ccc@rsm.nl)) 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 are not resolved by the informal approach, a student can submit a formal complaint to the Examination Board via its web portal (<https://request-eb.rsm.nl/>). 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.

## 7. Assessment

### Eight dimensions to evaluate and assess a master thesis

Each master thesis of the MCC program at RSM will be assessed and evaluated according to the criteria formulated in the diagram in Appendix D. Each column in the diagram represents a dimension of performance in the master thesis. Each row corresponds to a level of achievement. The combined dimensions constitute the basis for the final master thesis grade. The diagram is not imperative but rather guiding. The items mentioned under a dimension/column corresponding to a grade level are by no means exhaustive and determination of a grade level includes further interpretation.

The master thesis committee (coach and co-reader) will use the diagram to determine the grade of the master thesis. Students are advised to check this diagram in the early stages of conceptualizing their master thesis.

## 8. RSM code of conduct & fraud

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.

### Fraud

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. Fraud is the action or negligence of a student because of which it is impossible, entirely, or partially, to form a correct judgment about the knowledge, insight and skills of the student. Examples of fraud are plagiarism, ghost-writing, unauthorized use of generative AI, and data falsification.

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 such as described in the APA Publication Manual (<https://apastyle.apa.org/>) and the University Library's Information skills modules relating to citation and referencing (<https://libguides.eur.nl/informationskillscitinginformation/overview>). Inadequate referencing can be considered plagiarism. Please note that all theses (final proposal and final thesis) will be scanned for plagiarism. Every case of (serious) 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.

Outsourcing such as ghost-writing and use of generative AI (GenAI) can also lead to a fraud conviction. However, not all forms of outsourcing are prohibited: having someone else check a text for the quality of the English does not necessarily constitute fraud. Likewise, helping each other in a thesis group or talking about your thesis with housemates is not immediately a problem. In case of doubt as to whether input from third parties is permitted or not, the student must consult with the coach and co-reader. For guidelines regarding the use of GenAI, please see below (under "Use of generative AI").

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

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

### Use of generative AI

In the MCC thesis trajectory, we adopt a cautious approach to the use of GenAI. This approach helps to ensure that your foundational (research) skills and critical thinking abilities are (further) developed without, or with minimal involvement of, GenAI tools. GenAI can primarily be used for basic tasks where it serves as a supplementary tutor, such as brainstorming ideas, suggesting a structured outline for a text, or explaining concepts to yourself. It can't be used to write or edit the text of your actual thesis. This restrained policy ensures that you can fully comprehend and engage with your research topic, without relying on GenAI tools, thereby strengthening your independent problem-solving skills.

For the thesis trajectory it is very important to **discuss your ideas about and use of GenAI with your thesis coach**. It helps to critically consider how you use it, but also to make the most of your use of GenAI. Furthermore, you need to **document your use of AI carefully by referencing and by providing a logbook that explains what you did and how AI helped you to develop you in developing the final product**. In the RSM student support knowledge base (<https://master-services.rsm.nl/support/home>) you can find the document '**Generative AI RSM student guidance**'. This document provides information about accurate referencing and an appendix with an example of a GenAI usage logbook.

## 9. Other master thesis matters

### 1. Thesis Management System (TMS)

RSM makes use of an online platform to support the thesis process, called Thesis Management System (TMS): <https://tms.eur.nl/>. Students will submit their final proposal and final thesis in the system. Coaches and co-readers will approve or disapprove the documents in TMS. After the defence, the final assessment and grading is also recorded in TMS.

### 2. Student evaluation of the thesis trajectory

Upon submission of the final thesis in TMS, 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 not be made available to the coaches and co-readers. Students thus need not fear for their thesis grade when being critical.

### 3. 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. 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.

Regarding the cum laude and summa cum laude qualification, please note that this decision is entirely made by the Examination Board of RSM. As the MSc team, our role is to submit students' final results and are not involved in the assessment process.

#### **4. 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.

#### **5. Thesis repository**

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

#### **6. Company confidentiality**

The principles of scientific integrity state (amongst others) that publications should be honest, transparent, and independent, and that researchers should take into consideration the legitimate interests of third parties involved in the research. According to the Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity (2018) this implies that scientific research should be open to public scrutiny and criticism. To test for these qualities of scientific work, to which master theses are generally counted just like PhD dissertations, public accessibility of the work is considered an indispensable requirement.

The Examination Board's policy regarding confidentiality is that a thesis can only be declared confidential for a maximum period of two years, after which it will be published in the online thesis repository of the university. With this arrangement the Examination Board aims to balance the interests of third parties regarding the publication of sensitive information pertaining to these parties (or other stakeholders) in a thesis on the one hand, while respecting principles of scientific integrity on the other. Students can submit a request with the Examination Board ([eboffice@rsm.nl](mailto:eboffice@rsm.nl)) to keep their thesis from being published in RSM's Master Thesis Repository for a maximum period of two years by handing in a Confidentiality Form. This form needs to be signed by the student, the coach and co-reader, and if applicable, the company and needs to be handed in preferably before the deadline of the thesis proposal. The reason for early submission of the Confidentiality Form is the following.

In case a company or organization should insist that specific information would still be harmful after this confidentiality period has expired, then such information should have no place in the thesis to begin with and claims or conclusions in the thesis should not depend on such information. It is the responsibility of the student and the thesis committee (coach

and co-reader) to ensure that the feasibility of a thesis project is not hampered by such circumstances. Some projects, topics or research questions, therefore, however intriguing from a business or even scientific point of view, should not be initiated in the context of a master thesis at all, if their potential sensitivity would resist publication. In the project design stage, the intake of a master research project should reflect, in mutual consultation between the thesis committee, the student, and participating organizations, that sufficient care is taken in advance to mitigate excessive risks to publication of the thesis and therewith to the integrity of the research. Failing to do so may ultimately jeopardize the defensibility of the thesis, if findings cannot be supported due to the non-disclosure of relevant data or information because of their sensitivity.

Please refer to programme management ([ccc@rsm.nl](mailto:ccc@rsm.nl)) if you require any further support.

## APPENDIX A Self-assessment thesis topic assignment

In the table below, please indicate your level of confidence regarding the different parts of the thesis topic assignment. We will use these scores as input for the topics to discuss in session 2.

	No confidence	A little confidence	Some confidence	Moderate confidence	Complete confidence
Topic/problem/issue					
Review of 4-5 (academic) articles					
Gaps in the literature					
Potential research questions					
Type of method(s)					

## APPENDIX B Thesis writing style and format

It is imperative that the final thesis document be written in a professional manner in English. In this context, "professional" means that it meets the requirements of logical argumentation, and not that it is a business report. Arguments will need to be coherently structured. Conclusions drawn will have to be justified from data that is presented in the thesis and from adequate analysis thereof.

References will need to be provided that show that the sources used sufficiently support the claims made. For example, exclusive referencing to websites, popular magazines and newspapers is not sufficient, particularly when these articles are referencing unnamed and/or unverified data sources. See appendix 1 of Saunders and Lewis (2018). Also, make sure to avoid (accidental) plagiarism, see [Erasmus University Citing Information](#).

The thesis must be written in clear prose. You cannot rely on the reader to link disjointed and unconnected ideas. Writing in prose means that paragraphs consist of a collection of sentences dealing with a common theme or idea. In addition you will need to link your ideas from one paragraph to the next. A series of numbered bullet points or a power point presentation format are not sufficient to meet this goal. Special care must be taken not to rely on the latest buzzwords to carry your argument for you or use terminology of acronyms that are organisation-specific without adequately defining them. Deconstructing and critically examining the latest fashions should be an attitude running through your entire report.

A thesis is a structured document with major and minor headings that guide the reader through the essential components of the text. These techniques contribute to the readability of the message and your report should consist of a few major chapters with headings and sub-headings. Each of these headings and sub-headings should be followed by stretches of continuous prose relying on carefully chosen discourse to guide the reader. The reader has to be led through each stage of your analysis and be convinced of the validity of your findings. Logical argument is therefore imperative. At the end of each chapter there could be a short section summarising the most important points from within the text of that section.

You should write in a clear, formal style with a well-chosen vocabulary and use carefully constructed sentences. The following elements are important in making the message both easy to read and appealing to the eye:

- Layout
- Appropriate use of headings and sub-headings to guide the reader
- Choice of vocabulary (e.g., avoiding too much jargon)
- Sentence structure and length of sentences
- Paragraph structure and length of paragraphs

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- Use of links between paragraphs
- Use of clear discourse (e.g., “a strong rebound in sales” may be less clear than “sales are expected to increase by 5% in the Dutch market in the next 12 months”).
- Numbering and titles of graphics
- Integration of graphics into the text

**Reading:** The following classic text provides useful tips for writing in clear prose:

Strunk Jr, W. & Cowan, J. W. (2008). *The Elements of Style*.

<http://vrici.lojban.org/~cowan/style-revised.html>

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## APPENDIX C Extension Request Form

Part A – Request (to be completed by the student)

Full name:

Student ID number:

Date of extension request:

Please continue on separate sheet if necessary

Please give a detailed account of the present state of the thesis and clear reasons of why the completion might be delayed.

Signed Date

DD / MM / YY

## APPENDIX D Master Thesis Assessment Matrix

	1. Identify research question and project design	2. Write a critical review	3. Define working concepts and conceptual frameworks	4. Collect and analyse research data
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.
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.
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.
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.

	5. Define, validate and evaluate solutions and models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations	6. Write persuasive, well-structured master thesis	7. Research ethics and management of relationships and processes	8. Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate
Excellent	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	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	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	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.

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Erasmus University

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Accredited by:

