

Department of Communication and Media Research DCM**Guidelines for the Master's thesis in the
Master's programme "Digital Media and
Communication for Social Impact"**

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For more information, see also the [regulations on the organization of studies and exams at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Fribourg.](#)

1. Introduction

At the end of the master's programme, the master's thesis is the implementation of an independent **research project**. This includes the development of a research question, the discussion of theories and of the state of research, the selection of suitable methods, data collection and data analysis as well as the writing of the actual master's thesis.

These guidelines contain the most essential information from the choice of the topic to the defence of the thesis.

2. Contacting the supervisor and choosing a topic

All professors and post-docs (senior assistants and internal lecturers) of the Department of Communication and Media Research (DCM) are eligible as **supervisors**.

Other supervisors are generally possible, but please note the following rules:

- External lecturers can act as supervisors of master's theses if they have a doctorate in communication and have been approved by the DCM as supervisors. However, a professor of the DCM is required as a co-referee, who must also accept the research proposal. The supervision must be clarified with the programme coordinator before you start your master's thesis.
- Professors from the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences at the University of Fribourg can also supervise theses. However, the research proposal must be submitted to the programme manager for approval. They decide on the acceptance of the research proposal after consultation with the other professors of the DCM.

Before contacting a supervisor, you should first think about what **topic** interests you and how you would like to carry out your project theoretically and empirically. Also think about alternatives. Ideally, your topic should fall within the research areas of the desired supervisor.

The **first discussion** of the topic of the master's thesis with your supervisor should take place **at least two months before the start of the selected thesis period**. Only an early discussion guarantees that there is enough time to develop and revise the proposal.

3. Preparation of the research proposal

As soon as you have been accepted for supervision and the topic of the thesis has been approved, you will need to write a **first draft of your research proposal**, which you will then discuss with the supervisor. The proposal should be approx. **5-6 pages** (without cover page and bibliography) and contain the following elements:

- Cover page with working title and your contact details
1. Introduction
 2. Theory/theories and (roughly sketched) state of research
 3. Planned methodological approach
 4. Preliminary structure of the thesis (with page number of the individual sections)
 5. Schedule
- List of literature used

Please note the following information regarding the proposal's content:

- **Introduction (approx. half a page to one page):** In the introduction, first briefly explain the research problem you would like to work on: To what extent is your research project relevant to society and communication studies? Then formulate a precise and realistic research question, i.e. one that can be empirically tested as part of your master's thesis. This question must be derived from the scientific literature (theoretical foundations and relevant empirical studies).
- **Theory/theories and state of research (approx. one to one and a half pages):** Explain which theories and which state of research (previous empirical studies on your topic) you plan to base your work on. In a proposal it is not possible to outline the topical literature in all its breadth and depth, but you must consider relevant and up-to-date literature and briefly address the essential aspects that you find useful for your work. Often, theoretical foundations and state of research relevant to one's own study are presented in separate sections. However, if the two are closely related, it may make sense to cover them in one section to avoid unnecessary repetition. Ask your supervisor which style they prefer. Ideally, you should already formulate initial ideas for (hypo-)theses in the proposal that you have derived from theory and state of research and would like to test empirically.
- **Methodological approach (approx. one to one and a half pages):** Ideally, you already have experience with the methods of data collection and data analysis that you would like to use. If this is not the case, you must be willing and able to acquire the method's basics independently. With regard to data collection, the proposal should make clear how the theoretical terms and concepts used will be operationalized (if possible include initial ideas or examples of possible criteria), which research material or population you would like to investigate (and whether this is also possible), whether and how you will draw a sample and how exactly you will proceed. Regarding data analysis, you should present initial ideas on how you will analyse your data.

The first draft of your proposal should provide a succinct overview of what you want to find out (research question), on what basis (theory/state of research), and with which approach (design/methods).

You should hand in the proposal to your supervisor at least one month before the start of the selected thesis period and discuss it with them so that there is enough time for revision until the actual thesis period of 4.5 months begins. Expect that the research proposal will have to be revised (possibly several times).

As soon as your supervisor has accepted the research proposal, present the completed **registration form** (<https://www.unifr.ch/dcm/de/studies/works.html>) to them for (electronic) signature. Send the signed registration form as a PDF to irina.haechler@unifr.ch.

Note: Some supervisors have formulated specific requirements for research proposals. Find out more about this directly from your supervisor.

4. Design of the Master's thesis

For Master's theses, the usual **formal requirements** of the DCM for written work (<https://www.unifr.ch/dcm/de/assets/public/files/handouts/wissarbeiten.pdf>) apply.

The following points should be paid particular attention to.

4.1 Structure and scope

The structure and style of the master's thesis is based on a scientific journal article with **a maximum of 12.000 words (including spaces)**. The master's thesis should demonstrate that you are capable of addressing a research question relevant to communication studies in a concise, scientifically sound and clearly structured manner.

The thesis is typically divided into the following sections:

Cover page
First page with title, author, abstract (150-250 words) and keywords
1. Introduction with research problem, research question(s) as well as structure of the thesis
2. Theory/theories
3. State of research
4. Method(s)
5. Results
6. Discussion
Appendix with bibliography, instrument (e.g. questionnaire, codebook), etc.

Theory and state of research may be dealt with in a combined section, provided that they are closely linked in terms of content.

4.2 Formal design and citation method

The layout is based on scientific manuscripts:

- Side margins of 2.5 cm.
- Pages are numbered consecutively in the header.
- Tables and figures are integrated into the text and numbered and labelled throughout. Additional tables and figures can be placed in the appendix.
- The line spacing is 1.5 lines; the font for the text of the work is Times New Roman 12 point.
- Footnotes are to be kept to the necessary minimum.

All citations, paraphrases and references in the bibliography must comply with the [APA7 standard](#). Sources should be cited exclusively in the text, not in footnotes. The use of a reference management programme such as Zotero, Mendeley or EndNote is recommended to ensure a consistent citation style.

4.3 Cover page

The cover page that precedes the actual thesis must contain the following information:

- Title and subtitle of the thesis
- Name, address and student number
- Type of thesis and reference to the University of Fribourg: "Master's thesis at the Department of Communication and Media Research at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland)"
- Name of the supervisor
- Place and date of submission

4.4 Content of the thesis

- **Introduction:** The introduction concisely introduces the research topic, justifies the social and scientific relevance of the work, formulates the central research question(s) and details the structure of the work.

- **Separate or combined sections on theory/theories and state of research:** These sections present the theoretical foundations and a synthesis of the relevant state of research (i.e. results of previous empirical research). The aim is to identify research gaps and to derive precise research questions and, if necessary, hypotheses or theses. Theory and empirical work must build on each other.
- **Methods:** The methods section describes the research design (including case selection, period of data collection, population and, if applicable, sampling), data collection and data analysis. All decisions regarding methods should be presented in a transparent, comprehensible and justified manner. The section is intended to enable others to reproduce the study.
- **Results:** The results should be presented in a clear and structured manner and supplemented with tables and figures. The separation between the presentation of results and the interpretation of the results must be clearly visible.
- **Discussion and conclusion:** In the last section, the results are interpreted in the light of the theoretical assumptions and the state of research, the research questions are answered summarily and the hypotheses or theses are discussed. The aim is to show the contribution of the study to the scientific debate. In addition, limitations need to be addressed. Finally, practical/societal implications and perspectives for further research need to be discussed.
- **Appendix:** The appendix contains supplementary materials that contribute to the understanding and comprehensibility of the study (e.g. questionnaire, interview guide, codebook, stimulus material). Only content mentioned in the text belongs in the appendix. Extensive materials can be submitted electronically.

4.5 Declaration of honour

The signed “declaration” form of the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences must be included as the last page **in each bound and printed copy of the master’s thesis**. With this you confirm that you wrote the thesis yourself, that no sources and aids other than those listed were used, and that quotes and paraphrases were marked as such.

The form is available on the website of the dean’s office:

- German: https://commonweb.unifr.ch/EcoDean/Pub/site_ses/img_online/A_2014/d%C3%A9claration_%202_D.pdf
- English: https://commonweb.unifr.ch/EcoDean/Pub/site_ses/formSiteWeb/Declaration_honneur_E.pdf

The declaration must contain the place and date and needs to be signed by hand.

Attention: The dean’s office does not accept theses for which the official form with the university logo was not used for the declaration of honour!

5. Submission of the thesis

The completed thesis must **be submitted in printed and bound form** (heat sealed binding) to the dean’s office and electronically on MyUniFR. Spiral bindings are not permitted.

Before submitting the printed and bound copies to the dean’s office, the **master’s thesis must be deposited in your student account on MyUniFR (study → courses → deposit of thesis)**. To do this, you need to fill in the title and language of the thesis and then upload the electronic version of the thesis (PDF). To validate the submission, a fee of CHF 120.00 must be paid via E-Payment. Bank transfer, payment slip or cash are not accepted.

After that, you must hand in **two printed and bound copies** of the thesis (one for the supervisor, one for the library) in person to the dean's office of the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences (Boulevard de Pérolles 90, 1700 Fribourg, office D020). Submission by postal mail, in the mailbox of the dean's office or to the supervisor are not considered as formal submission. The thesis may be submitted by a third person; an authorization letter is not necessary. Further information is available directly from the dean's office (<https://www.unifr.ch/ses/en/studies/info.html>).

Theses that are not submitted in time by the end of the selected thesis period are considered unsatisfactory and will be graded with a grade of 1. If, in justified cases (e.g. serious illness, accident, etc.), it is not possible to submit the thesis on time on the specified date, the supervisor can decide whether to grant an extension.

Please note: According to the rectorate's decision of 3 February 2009, students must submit their master's thesis by the end of week 7 (mid-February) and by the end of week 37 (mid-September) if they want to avoid paying the semester fees for the next semester. For the dean's office of the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences, "end of the week" means Thursday, as the dean's office is closed on Fridays.

6. Master's Colloquium with Defence

After submission of the master's thesis, students will have an oral defence as part of the master's colloquium, during which they will present and reflect on their research. For this purpose, the candidate prepares a 10- to 15-minute presentation. In this presentation, the central content of the master's thesis is explained (topic, research question, theory, methods, results, conclusions) and then discussed in a conversation with the supervisor.

The defence is non-public and is only graded as "passed" or "failed". A member of the mid-level body takes on the role of observer and takes minutes.

You must register for your supervisor's master's colloquium on MyUniFR no later than the date you submit your thesis.

The defence takes place during the semester, approx. six weeks after the latest submission deadline. The exact date and time of the defence will be agreed upon with your supervisor.

7. Deadlines

Please note the following deadlines during the preparation and realisation of the master's thesis:

- Contact the desired supervisor at least two months before the start of the selected thesis period.
- Submit your research proposal to your supervisor at least one month before the start of the selected thesis period.
- After the acceptance of the research proposal, you will have **4.5 months** to carry out your research project and write your master's thesis. To submit by 31 March, the proposal must be accepted by 15 November of the previous year at the latest; to submit by 15 October, the proposal must be accepted by 1 June at the latest.
- To finish your studies in spring term, the thesis must be submitted by 31 March at the latest; to finish your studies in fall term, the thesis must be submitted by 15 October at the latest.
- The oral defence of the master's thesis takes place in calendar weeks 20/21 (spring term) and in calendar weeks 48/49 (fall term) respectively.

	Submission in fall term	Submission in spring term
First meeting by	1.4.	15.9.
Submission of proposal by	1.5.	15.10.
Start of thesis by	1.6.	15.11.
Latest submission of thesis	15.10.	31.3.
Defence	calendar weeks 48/49	calendar weeks 20/21