

Writing a BA or MA Thesis with Prof. Dr. Julia Straub

Modern English Literature

Some Guidelines

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Image: huffingtonpost.com

The big picture

You will write a BA or MA thesis to show to your readers — and the outside world — that you are able

- to define a research topic related to your discipline independently,
- pursue research in line with all standards of good academic practice,
- fit your ideas into the structural framework of an academic text.

With your thesis you demonstrate that you have the necessary linguistic capacities to write a substantial academic text dealing with a complex subject matter in English, considering linguistic style and originality of argument.

This sounds like a big project ... but relax: it develops out of a long process. On the way to your thesis, questions will crop up and it'll be important to find guidance when needed – this is where your supervisor steps in.

BA: 20-30 pages or 7'000-10'500 words
MA: 60-80 pages or 21'000-30'000 words

First steps

In case you envisage working on a BA or MA thesis with me as your supervisor, it's absolutely fine if you approach me with your ideas when there is a chance to talk in person, or by e-mail. This can happen much earlier than when you're planning to actually start the process. Please note, however, that I will only confirm my willingness to act as your supervisor when I have received the following from you:

An outline of your proposed topic

- detailing your thesis statement
- describing a possible structure (you can always also add a Table of Contents) of the chapters
- identifying important concepts, theories and your method
- listing central primary and secondary sources.

MA students should also indicate when they plan to submit their thesis to the Dean's Office. All students should mention whether they have already attended classes or written papers related to their chosen topic.

For BA theses, the length of the outline should be 1-2 pages, for MA thesis 2-3 pages.

Once I have approved of your topic, we will agree on a schedule for consultations, if possible, in person or virtual.

Supervision process

BA students:

Once I have approved of your topic, the next step will be for you to send me 5 pages of your writing plus a Table of Content following a schedule we will set individually. We will then have a meeting in person or via Teams to discuss your work. During a second meeting – to be scheduled according to your progress – we will discuss further portions of your work, the revised version of your Table of Contents plus another 5 pages of your writing.

The duration of your work on your BA thesis is one semester. Do not forget to sign up on myUniFR as you would for any other class you are taking!

MA students:

First round of feedback

Approximately 6 weeks after you have started the writing process (depending on your schedule and following my approval of your topic), I will expect you to submit a significant portion – e.g., a long chapter, or excerpts from several chapters, adding up to 20 pages altogether, along with a Table of Contents. I will read these pages and give you feedback in writing or in person.

Second round of feedback

The next step – in line with your schedule, but roughly 6-8 weeks later – is for you to send me the manuscript of your entire thesis or at least another significant portion of it, plus the latest Table of Contents. We will meet to discuss final changes (c. 2 weeks later). After the meeting you need to revise your thesis once more and write a short summary of the changes you have implemented as a result (1-2 pages).

Once I have received this summary, and things looking good, you will receive my permission to submit your thesis to me and the Dean's Office.

Submission, evaluation and oral exam

Importantly: There has to be enough time for me to go through your thesis manuscript (at least 2 weeks) and for you to implement changes (at least another 2 weeks) before submitting your printed and bound thesis to the Dean's Office. So do leave enough time between your planned submission to the Dean's Office and this final round of discussion and revision (c. 4-6 weeks)

I expect students to keep me informed about possible delays, especially as far as the submission of the MA thesis is concerned.

Once you have submitted your MA thesis to the Dean's Office, I have a maximum of 6 weeks to evaluate it, find a second examiner and write a report – so I need to know when to expect it. The oral defense will take place another two weeks later.

All programmes of study need have been completed before we can go ahead with the oral exam.

Please send all material to me in electronic form. I do prefer working with Word files.

General recommendations

Your BA or MA thesis represents a major chunk of your overall ECTS count – it's an important part of your studies arithmetically, but also symbolically. It comes at the end of your studies, and while the one or other coursework folder on your computer may disappear as time goes by, you may well hold on to your final thesis for a long time. So, do give it its due care and consideration.

Thoughtfulness, accuracy and complexity matter when designing your argument in your head – when bringing your thoughts onto paper writing style and correct formal presentation will also be of utmost importance. Your thesis should be reader friendly. Make sure you consult the Style Sheet provided by the Department and that you factor in enough time to reread your thesis or ideally have it proof-read by a native speaker. If there are consistent language problems (e.g., with grammar) or a sloppiness in your writing or formal presentation, this may well affect the grade that you receive negatively.

Take rules of good academic practice seriously. Declare the sources that you used for your thesis – be they print or online – accurately. If in doubt, it's better to have too many references than too few. Plagiarism is a major offence and once detected can entail grave consequences for you and your studies.

Useful links

For MA students: Dean's Office (deadlines, submission etc.)

- <https://www3.unifr.ch/lettres/fr/etudes/cours-et-examens/travail-de-master/>
- <https://www3.unifr.ch/lettres/fr/etudes/cours-et-examens/reglements-et-directives/>
- https://www3.unifr.ch/lettres/de/assets/public/files/pdf/formation_calendrieracademique/Merkblatt_Abgabe%20Masterarbeit_dt_neu.pdf

BA and MA students: Concerning plagiarism

<https://www3.unifr.ch/apps/legal/fr/document/274672>

BA and MA students: Literature Style Sheet published by the Department

<http://www3.unifr.ch/english/en/studies/timetables/>