



University of St.Gallen

Institute of Accounting, Control
and Auditing

Guideline for writing a thesis at the Competence Center Auditing under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Florian Eugster

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Note: Please contact us only if you want to write your Bachelor or Master thesis under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Florian Eugster and not if you have the strategy to contact many professors at the same time.

1 Application and Supervision for Academic Thesis

The following phases describe the process of applying for and writing a thesis at the Competence Center Auditing at the University of St.Gallen. Both English and German theses are possible:

As a first step: find out about current research topics of the competence center in advance! Specifically, visit the publication list of Prof. Dr. Florian Eugster ([Alexandria / SSRN](#)). Additionally, you can also visit the latest articles in well-renowned journals to get some inspiration. You can access them over [HSGswisscovery](#). Here are some excellent journals:

- Accounting Organizations and Society
- Contemporary Accounting Research
- European Accounting Review
- Journal of Accounting and Economics
- Journal of Accounting Research
- Review of Accounting Studies
- The Accounting Review

Inspired by these high-quality articles you can start to formulate your research topic. As a preparation, you can also check the excellent access to research [databases](#) that we have here at the University of St.Gallen.

Please provide us with a description as meaningful as possible (max. 3 pages). You can use the research proposal framework by Faff (2015), which includes the following elements: (1) Working title, (2) Basic research question, (3) Key papers, (4) Motivation/Puzzle, (5) Idea, (6) Data, (7) Tools, (8), What's new?, (9) So what?, (10) Contribution, (11) Other Considerations.

If you are interested in writing a thesis, please contact the thesis coordinator at the competence center as early as possible. The execution of a thesis requires a lead time of at least a month. Please note that we have distinguished application deadlines. Decisions are made shortly after the deadlines.

The number of supervised theses depends on the capacity of the Competence Center. For better control of the capacity, there is a fixed procedure for the allocation process. Essential are the application deadlines:

- 1. 01 January,**
- 2. 01 April,**
- 3. 01 July,**
- 4. 01 October.**

Please submit the following documents by e-mail to the **coordinator** by the application deadline:

- Application for Master or Bachelor thesis form, incl. research proposal (max 3 pages),
- CV, letter of motivation (max. 1 page), transcript of grades.

Within two weeks after the application deadline, you will receive feedback on provisional acceptance or rejection. In case of a preliminary acceptance, you will receive a supervision agreement. Within one week, you must return the signed supervision agreement (incl. the schedule for working on the topic as well as the registration forms for the DAO) to the coordination person.

2 General Information

Expectation Management

Bachelor/Master thesis completion time is 12 months, but the actual workload is less, agreed with the advisor. The Master thesis counts for 12 ECTS and the Bachelor for 18 ECTS, which corresponds based on the Bologna recommendation of 30 hours per ECTS to 360 hours for the Bachelor Thesis and 540 hours for the Master thesis. Translated to a full-time work week of 40 hours per week, this translates to 9 weeks for Bachelor, and 14 weeks for Master theses. In other words, writing your thesis during an internship at an investment bank or a Big 4 company during the busy season is probably not a very smart decision.

The best practice is to contact the supervisor after 3 weeks of data collection to get feedback on the process. Interim submissions provide continuous supervision and feedback, and we encourage this to a limited degree. Good form is it to get feedback on the 50% and 85%-versions of your work.

3 Linguistic and formal aspects

Some General Notes

Besides the content, the linguistic and formal presentation of your thesis plays an essential role in the evaluation of the quality of an academic thesis as well (together with other formal factors listed below). See the appendix for more information on the grading. Further, an accurate and clear elaboration is a basic requirement of scientific work.

Important: Given the availability of word processing programs with grammar correction, typing errors in the thesis should not occur. To guarantee overall quality and eliminate linguistic inconsistencies, a third-party review of the thesis prior to final submission is recommended and allowed.

The scientific principles of uniformity must be applied throughout the thesis writing process. All formal elements must adhere to academic standards. Consistency in font, spacing, language, abbreviations, table and figure legends, and citation style is essential.

The length of the thesis is max. 40 pages for a bachelor thesis and max. 60 pages for a master thesis. These are counted from the first page of the Introduction until the Conclusion. The layout of the pages is based on following standards:

Entry left: 3.0 cm

Entry right: 2.5 cm

Header/footer: 1.25 cm (text with enough spacing)

An appropriate and legible font type and size are to be chosen. We require the use of *Times New Roman* in size 12. Line spacing should be 1.5. The text should be justified.

We recommend the usage of Word but of course, LaTeX can also be used and is highly effective when you have a lot of mathematical formulas. Overleaf.com could be a good starting point.

Citation Guideline

All the references incorporated in the thesis must be disclosed both in the main text and in the bibliography. The non-disclosure of the references used in the thesis is considered to be plagiarism. For further information regarding the consequences associated with plagiarism and the general rules concerning quotations, please see the fact sheet "quotations and plagiarism": <http://studentweb.unisg.ch/en/masterstufe/rechtlichegrundlagenundmerkblaetter>

The citation of the sources both in the main text and in the bibliography should be compliant with the academic standards posed by the University of St. Gallen. For further information, please visit the library webpage of the University of St. Gallen (<http://www.unisg.ch/en/wissen/bibliothek/recherche/linksammlung/anleitungen/zumzitieren>). Utilizing the APA-Style for citations is mandatory (www.apastyle.org).

Pay attention to the distinction between direct and indirect quotations. Direct quotes must be surrounded by quotation marks and must be exactly as written, including spelling, punctuation, and accentuation. Indirect quotes paraphrase

other authors' ideas. All quotes must be listed in the bibliography. Indirect quotes in the text should be easily understandable and verifiable.

All empirical/statistical data and results must be submitted separately via an HSG One Drive link. The code needs to be written so that a member of our team can understand what you have produced.

4 Structure and specifications

Basis for academic thesis

Before starting the writing process, the student must create a problem statement (e.g., by reflecting on contradictions in current literature, identifying research gaps, contrasting theory and practice, or formulating practical questions). The student must also distinguish it from related disciplines.

In addition to the problem statement, the thesis must include a critical, precise, and purposeful literature review. It should include basic descriptive information, but students should avoid simply summarizing the work of established authors.

The literature review should be aligned with the research methodology of the thesis, creating a coherent combination of theory and methodology. The academic thesis should also add value through its conclusions, solutions, and patterns, demonstrating the research methods and reviews used.

An empirical academic thesis should underlie the following structure:

- Title page
- Abstract
- Indices
- Body, consisting of:
 1. Introduction/motivation
 2. Literature review (& hypotheses development)
 3. Research methodology
 4. Results
 5. Discussion & Limitations

6. Conclusion

- Bibliography
- Appendix

Page numbers in the abstract section/s are numbered with Roman numerals, starting with page I. The main body of the thesis is, in turn, renumbered with Arabic numerals starting with page 1. In the bibliography/appendix pages, either Roman numerals following the format (1, 2, 3) or (I, II, III) proceeding may be used.

The way the main body of the thesis is structured depends on the nature of the thesis itself. Certain elements can either appear in the introduction (which can under special circumstances be formatted as a complementary summary) or be incorporated as elements of the theoretical or methodological part.¹

Title page

A plain, minimalistic approach should be adopted in the process of designing the main title page. The title page should also be an objective reflection of the nature & format of the thesis. It should contain at least the following elements:

- Full title of the thesis
- Type of the thesis (Master/Bachelor)
- Name and surname of the supervisor²
- Name and surname of the author

Further, possible elements to be incorporated in the title page are the logo of the University of St.Gallen, the reference to the Institute of Accounting, Control and Auditing respectively the University of St.Gallen, the contact details of the author, and the submission date.

¹ Examples can be necessary terminology or explanation of the applied methodology.

² *Master Thesis*: The suggested co-supervisor is not to be mentioned on the title page.

Abstract

The abstract should provide a brief overview of the main subject of analysis to the reader. The abstract should not be longer than 250 words. The aim, the method, and the research results are elements that ought to be incorporated in the abstract.

Indices

An academic thesis contains different indices which serve as an orientation for the reader. The particular indices to be incorporated in the thesis are:

- Table of contents
- Table of pictures (if necessary)
- Table of charts (if necessary)
- Table of abbreviations (if necessary)
- Table of symbols (if necessary)

The table of contents itself is an important part of every thesis and provides an overview of how the thesis is structured. Therefore, a logical succession of chapters is to be provided (central theme) as part of the thesis, and the different chapter levels must be visible (e.g., by tabulating or using different formatting and font size)³.

Chapter levels with only one subchapter, as well as chapter levels with too many subchapters (or subdivisions), should be avoided. For Master and Bachelor theses, three chapter levels are usually sufficient. In case further levels are necessary, italic titles without chapter numbers can be used (these further levels ought not to be mentioned in the index).

As in the table of contents, also in the table of pictures, charts and on the indices, a clean presentation (e.g., correct word wrapping) is to be implemented. This is particularly important for the automatically generated indices. References are not to be listed in the index.

³ This applies for headlines in the index as for the respective headline in text. The sizes don't have to be identical, but fit the particular case.

Furthermore, large figures/tables, which have no essential importance for the thesis, are to be listed in the appendix and referred to by necessity in the text. When possible, tables are to be presented as one cohesive unit on solely one page. If this is not possible, the table must be named and additionally mentioned (“sequel”) on the new page.

The use of abbreviations and symbols should be consistent. In the body of the thesis, abbreviations must be written in full, and symbols must be defined when first used (they ought to be followed by their abbreviations/symbols in parenthesis). Abbreviations and symbols have to be listed in alphabetical order in their corresponding indices. Currently known abbreviations such as e.g., can be disclaimed.⁴

Body

The main body of the thesis contains six central elements: introduction, literature review, research methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The format and nature of the prior defined elements depend on the thesis itself.

The introduction should contain at least the problem statement and the thesis aim, as well as information about the methodological approach and the structure of the thesis.

The literature review contains all the relevant theoretical explanations and should not only present common knowledge from textbooks but further provide the basic information, conceptual differentiations, and regulatory requirements. Further, one should present the current academic findings in a summarized form. Based on this literary review, one should be able to deviate from the present status of the research. Thereby, the basis for the research gap to be worked on and the methodological approach can be defined, including the research question and/or the hypothesis.

The research methodology is the core of the thesis and therefore contains its own contribution. The sub-categorization of this part depends on the particular thesis

⁴ Using current abbreviations - especially in text - should be done with caution. The use of parenthesis or footers is the most appropriate.

itself and also differs depending on the type of methodology used (qualitative, quantitative, etc.). It generally describes how the research question of interest is attempted to be answered.

The results section provides an answer to the research question. It explains whether the chosen approach confirms or rejects the hypothesis and outlines the key findings, typically involving tables and other figures. Please note that the tables and figures should entail also a caption, which describes the content of a table and figure briefly.

The discussion aims at interpreting the results by linking the results to existing investigations of the same topic. It also elaborates on the practical or theoretical implications of the results and provides first insights into possible applications. Typically, also limitations of the study are outlined.

The conclusion should contain a summary of the research approach and its results. The defined problem statement and the main research question should be renewed and interrelated to the methodological results. Thus, it is used to emphasize the significance of the contribution to the field and lays out possible directions for further research.

Concluding information

The main body of the thesis is followed by a bibliography, an appendix as well as relevant explanatory notes. In addition, possible empirical/statistical evaluations must be submitted via an HSG One Drive link.

All sources used must be mentioned in alphabetical order in the bibliography. In addition to an organized and uniform presentation in compliance with the respective types of sources (book, book chapter, journal, internet, etc.), integrity has to also be regarded. This means that all the references must be listed in both the text and the bibliography.

The appendix – in case it is needed – differs in context from thesis to thesis. Possible elements are:

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- Large tables and figures⁵
- Excursus and demonstrations which are not core information for the understanding of the thesis
- Index of interviews
- Exemplar of questionnaires and monitoring documents

The thesis is concluded (finalized) with a signed declaration of authorship and, depending on the thesis, with a signed declaration of confidentiality. See Appendix 1 for a template.

⁵ Good legibility is also here to be minded

Appendix: Grading Sheet:

The evaluation of the final version is based on the university's official grading criteria. Furthermore, please consider the following set of criteria as an extended guideline (the order does not correspond to the weighting of the criteria).

- **Formal aspects**
 - Extent of the thesis
 - Spelling, grammar, punctuation
 - Language (academic style, use of terminology)
 - Table of contents, indexes, annexes
 - Citations and references to sources
 - Presentation and caption of tables and figures
- **Contextual aspects**
 - Structure of the thesis
 - Structural organization of the thesis (chapters, sections, titles)
 - Logic of structure (comprehensive and conclusive central theme; transitions)
 - Introduction (generates interest, thematic classification of topic, overview of objectives and structure)
 - Conclusion (comprehensiveness, central aspects considered)
 - Topic and approach
 - Degree of difficulty of the thesis
 - Definition of problem and objectives
 - Relevance to topic
 - Choice of research design
 - Methodological competence
 - Formulation of knowledge/presentation of results
 - Innovative and creative content, resp. independent development of thought processes
 - Literature and sources
 - Scope of literature and sources evaluated
 - Topicality and relevance of literature used
 - Evaluation and critical reflection of literature and sources used

Appendix: Declaration of Authorship

Please refer to the University's official declaration of authorship and confidentiality guidelines on StudentWeb

(<https://universitaetstgallen.sharepoint.com/sites/PruefungenDE/SitePages/en/Eigenst%C3%A4ndigkeitserkl%C3%A4rung.aspx>).