

MASTER'S THESIS GUIDELINES

Foreword

These Thesis Guidelines for the Aalto University School of Art and Design were approved by the School of Art and Design Academic Affairs Committee on the 21 September 2010 . They are intended to serve as general guidelines for completing a Master's thesis.

According to the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004), hereafter referred to as the "University Decree", all Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Master of Arts (MA) degree candidates must complete a thesis to receive their degree. The purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate the candidate's proficiency and ability to apply the skills learned. As seen from a professional and academic standpoint, the thesis provides the student with training in the independent acquisition of information and skills and the application of these in demanding research and instruction tasks, as well as other professional assignments within their respective field. It also familiarises students with creative problem-solving, methodologies and the use of technical presentation equipment.

In its approval of the thesis and granting of the degree, the School of Art and Design attests that the student in question has attained such knowledge and skills required by the University Decree and within his/her field of expertise that he/she qualifies for a Master's degree.

The thesis is considered as a study assignment and it is subject to the statute concerning study assignments and students' legal protection. The statute stipulates that only students properly enrolled in the University and, consequently, possessing the required study entitlement may complete the assignment.

These guidelines have been drafted to assist the work of students, supervisors, thesis evaluators and degree programmes. The guidelines include general, universally applicable policies concerning thesis requirements, the process and related supervising. Requirements or emphases pertaining to the thesis can vary in each department and degree programme. Therefore each department has its own guidelines regarding these specific elements. Below are descriptions of general objectives, thesis formats and scope requirements, which the departments cannot narrow down in their own policies.

The departments organise thesis seminars as a part of degree studies to provide more detailed information on thesis approaches, guidance, methods and execution. In any cases of discrepancy between the department-specific guidelines and these guidelines, these guidelines shall prevail.

The guidelines are divided into four sections. The first section specifies the objectives, scope and other aspects of the thesis. The second section focuses on matters vital to the thesis process itself. The third section addresses matters after the thesis has been submitted for evaluation. The fourth section contains issues pertaining to property and immaterial rights (e.g. copyright).

1. Before starting the thesis

Objective

The objective of the Master's thesis is to enhance the student's ability to independently acquire information and skills, and to apply them in demanding research and instruction tasks, as well as other professional assignments in his or her field. In addition to this, the objective is to familiarise the student with creative problem-solving, methodologies and the use of technical presentation equipment.

Scope and schedule of thesis

The Master's thesis comprehends 40 ECTS credits, which is roughly equivalent to six months of full-time study. The time needed to complete the thesis should be discussed with the supervisor.

It is recommended that the thesis be submitted for evaluation no later than 18 months after approval of the thesis plan. If the thesis involves an extraordinary, one-time event (exhibition, discussion, pedagogical experiment, performance), the thesis must be submitted for evaluation no later than 12 months from the event in question.

Group thesis

If the thesis involves extensive or otherwise exceptionally demanding subject matter, it may be completed by two or more students working as a group. It is important that each member's contribution to the project is clearly defined. A clearly defined plan concerning the delegation of work and responsibilities for the group thesis should be drafted well in advance and included in the thesis plan itself. Ideally, a group thesis should have a joint supervisor for the entire project, as well as personal supervisors for each member of the group from their specific areas of expertise. Reporting on the group thesis should be agreed upon with the supervisor. If desired, degree programmes can provide more detailed guidelines on group theses.

Types of theses

Master's theses can be roughly divided into two categories: artistic and scientific. Some degree programmes may also comprehend additional categories, such as production-based or pedagogical theses. These categories do not necessarily have to be followed to the letter; rather their purpose is to facilitate the planning and evaluation of theses.

The thesis always contains a written portion. The length of the written portion varies depending on the extent of the artistic or productive portion. The length requirements for the written portion may also vary by department. The minimum length is 60,000 characters, but that implies a strong emphasis on the artistic or production portion.

Thesis language

The written portion of the thesis is usually in Finnish or Swedish (whichever is the language of school education). The thesis can also be written in another language upon an application approved by the dean. Students whose schooling was not in Finnish or Swedish may write their thesis in English without a separate application. The language used in the thesis should be grammatically correct and appropriate to the area of expertise.

Auxiliary thesis studies

The curriculum contains studies intended to support the completion of thesis. These include for example thesis seminars, research studies, information retrieval and management courses, as well as language studies. These studies should be planned and scheduled in such a manner that they will provide maximum benefit for the thesis. Auxiliary thesis studies vary for each degree programme. Students should check their department's recommendations regarding this matter.

Thesis funding

Students complete their theses primarily at their own expense, although they may apply for outside funding.

Students may apply for a grant for their theses. More information on grants can be found on the Aalto University website, in the Student Guide, or on the National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) website: apurahat.syl.fi or www.opintoluotsi.fi/opiskelun_rahoytus/apurahat_ja_stipendit.

2. While doing the Master's thesis

Phases of the thesis

Within the degree programme, events pertaining to the thesis process are recorded on the thesis form as work progresses. The thesis process comprises the following phases:

1) approval of the thesis subject; 2) approval of the thesis plan; 3) student's proposal for thesis supervisors; 4) appointment of supervisors; 5) completion of thesis; 6) approval of thesis for evaluation by the supervisor; 7) receipt of thesis for evaluation; 8) approval of examiners; 9) completion of maturity test; 10) examiners' presentation of grades; 11) grading by evaluation panel. When the thesis has been approved, a copy of the form is submitted to the degree programme.

Thesis plan

The thesis begins with the selection of a subject. If the student has difficulties in selecting a subject, this can be discussed for example in thesis seminars together with the seminar instructor and other seminar participants. The selected subject should be approved by a professor of the degree programme or a degree programme director if the degree programme has no professor.

The purpose of the thesis plan is to help students organise their thoughts regarding the upcoming work process and put them into a presentable form for the supervisors, the degree programme professor and other thesis seminar participants. Only with a carefully considered and clearly defined plan can the student take full advantage of the support provided by supervisors and the thesis seminar.

The thesis plan is a 1–5-page report, which specifies for example:

- 1) The thesis title, student's name, department, presentation date and thesis seminar instructor, as well as the student's own proposal for the thesis supervisor(s).
- 2) The thesis assignment, research question and possible contributing questions specified for the thesis.
- 3) Starting points and background for the thesis. Perspective, connection to a broader whole and previous research, as well as possible personal criteria for selection of the subject.
- 4) Methodical selections for the thesis, i.e. what means will be used to answer the questions posed, how the student plans to collect materials, definition of the subject and analysis.
- 5) Selections concerning thesis reporting, i.e. how the student plans to explain the research process and its results.
- 6) Planned schedule for completing the thesis.
- 7) Plan for the handling of possible confidential information in the completion and presentation of the thesis.
- 8) Copyright and other immaterial rights issues possibly applicable to the thesis.

The thesis plan is discussed at thesis seminars together with the seminar instructor and other seminar participants. The final plan is approved by the degree programme professor.

Guidance

The thesis is done independently and the student must make all the related decisions and choices alone. The thesis supervisor provides guidance and support. In order to ensure the functionality of the guidance process, it is recommended that the student and supervisor make a guidance plan, according to which the work is carried out. The objective of this plan is to ensure that both parties have sufficient time to work on their own and together.

Even though a Master's thesis is primarily an independent endeavour for students, they have an obligation to ensure the quality of their work by taking full advantage of the supervisor's services during the thesis process. The students can receive assistance from one or two supervisors during the completion of their thesis. The thesis supervisor is an instructor from the student's own degree programme or an expert who is very familiar with the degree programme. In most cases, the best support for formal and methodo-

logical problems is provided by the supervisor from the student's own degree programme, with the secondary supervisor usually specialising in content-related matters.

Students are entitled to 10 hours of personal guidance.

Students can propose supervisors for their theses. If necessary, potential supervisors can also be considered together at thesis seminars. Proposals for thesis supervisor are presented to the degree programme professor. The supervisor's work lasts until he/she approves the submission of the thesis for evaluation.

Students receive assistance in planning, writing, acquiring information, using research methods and other aspects of completing the thesis from thesis seminars and auxiliary thesis studies.

Handling confidential information

The thesis is published upon its approval (see below). The published thesis must not contain any confidential information. If confidential information is handled in the completion of the thesis, for instance if the student receives financial assistance for the thesis from a private company, the final evaluated work may not contain any business or trade secrets of the funding party; these must remain in the background materials. The handling of possibly confidential information should be discussed with the supervisor at the beginning of the thesis process or immediately upon learning that confidential information will be necessary.

Grammar and style

The School of Art and Design does not have any generally prescribed practices regarding the grammar and style of theses. In many departments, grammar and style issues are discussed at thesis seminars or in other auxiliary thesis studies. Any student who requires special attention in this regard can turn to their degree programme director or amanuensis for assistance.

Thesis formatting requirements

The School of Art and Design does not have any generally prescribed practices regarding the formatting of theses. Each department is allowed to make requirements and specifications concerning formatting. If students use third parties' work in formatting (layout, photography, etc.), they must mention the third parties in accordance with copyright laws. The student's own input in the thesis must be readily apparent.

The thesis title page should contain the name of the author, the title of the thesis, the type of thesis (Master's thesis), the degree programme, the department, the school and the university.

Submitting the thesis for evaluation

To submit a thesis for evaluation, students must request the approval of their supervisor/s, which should be marked on the thesis form. Together with the abstract and thesis form, the thesis is submitted to the student's own degree programme amanuensis or the department secretary at least in triplicate. The minimum amount must be confirmed from the degree programme's guidelines. The original copy is used for evaluation and examining, and must contain all the materials used in the thesis.

Graduands must be prepared to submit the thesis for evaluation no later than two months prior to the date of graduation. Each department has more specific protocols and time limits regarding the submission of theses.

Uploading the thesis into the Optika database

When submitting the thesis for evaluation, students must also provide an electronic version and fill in the details of the thesis in the library's Optika thesis database. The thesis should be saved as a pdf file, which may contain for instance images in addition to the written portion.

3. Upon completion of the Master's thesis

Evaluation

Two examiners are appointed to check the thesis. Usually one of the examiners is an instructor from the student's degree programme and the other may be someone from outside the degree programme. It is recommended that the examiner be someone who holds at least a Master's degree or equivalent artistic qualifications. If desired, the student can provide a justified proposal for examiners. The final appointment of examiners is made by the department's evaluation panel.

Attention is paid to the following points in the evaluation of theses, depending on the nature of the work:

- 1) the artistic, professional or scientific significance of the thesis subject and its degree of difficulty;
- 2) the level of formal and technical execution in the written section of the thesis (formatting, clarity, tables, illustrations, etc.);
- 3) the ratio of background material to the student's own input, and how they are integrated;
- 4) justification of problems, hypotheses and results and the level of their explanations;
- 5) the level of interpretation of results;
- 6) the artistic quality of productions;
- 7) the level of professional skill and professional capabilities demonstrated in productions;
- 8) the interrelationship between different elements of the thesis, and their integration.

Thesis examiners are responsible for ensuring that the thesis is examined in light of the latest information pertinent to the subject, and in accordance with good artistic and scientific practices. Wherever necessary, the examiners should also ensure the accuracy of the sources used in the thesis. The written portion of the thesis should, where applicable, be subjected to a plagiarism check. Teaching and Learning Support Services can provide further instructions regarding the plagiarism check.

Presentation

Prior to the thesis being graded, a public exhibition or display is held, where the student explains the objectives and outcomes of the work. For written theses only presentations are held. If the thesis involves an exhibition, the student and evaluation panel must ensure that the examiners have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the exhibition.

The thesis can be presented at the earliest one month later since it is submitted for examining, so that the examiners have sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the work. The presentation date is usually agreed by the department's amanuensis or secretary with the student and the examiners.

At the presentation, the student presents the work to the examiners and the attending members of the evaluation panel. The presentation is a public event. The examiners provide their assessment of the thesis, with justifications. The examiners do not grade the thesis at the presentation, but provide statements with a grade proposal to the evaluation panel immediately after the evaluation. At the end of the presentation, the student is given an opportunity to respond to the examiners' assessments and questions. If an examiner is unable to attend the presentation, he or she must submit a written assessment of the thesis in advance to the chair of the presentation, which is then read out at the event. Students may respond to the statement and any questions given at the presentation.

Maturity test

A written maturity test is included in the thesis. Maturity tests must be completed in all the Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree programmes. The purpose of the maturity test is to verify the language skills specified in the University Decree, as well as the accumulated knowledge related to the degree. In the maturity test, students demonstrate that they have fulfilled the objectives of the degree, their studies and the thesis, and show their expertise in the field of the thesis, as well as in the English language.

Maturity test language

By completing a maturity test in Finnish or Swedish, students are considered to demonstrate the language skills required of state officials. Maturity tests are taken in the student's language of school education. The requisite proof of language skills requires that the maturity test and the primary language studies included in the degree be taken in the language of school education.

The maturity test demonstrates knowledge of the field of the thesis, as well as skills in that language. Students do not have to prove their language skills in the Master's-level maturity test, if they have already done so at Bachelor level. In this case only the content of the maturity test is evaluated and the language may be agreed separately.

Students whose school education was not in Finnish or Swedish can take the maturity test in English. The same principles are used in grading as for maturity tests in Finnish and Swedish, i.e. both content and language are examined.

Maturity test arrangements

The maturity test must be passed before approval of the thesis. The maturity test can be taken on one of the School's general exam days (see Study Guide) or during testing arranged by the department. Students are given four hours to complete the maturity test. The maturity test involves writing a 4–6-page essay on a subject related to the thesis. The degree programme director or another teacher from the department appointed by the director drafts the questions for the maturity test.

Assessment and grading of the maturity test

The accuracy of the content is checked by the person who drafted the questions or, if he/she is unable to do so, by the degree programme director or an instructor from the department appointed by the director. A native language teacher checks the language. The maturity test is graded on a pass/fail basis.

Evaluation

The department's evaluation panel decides on the final grade to be given to the thesis. The panel makes its decision based on the recommendations given by the examiners. Grades: 0=Fail, 1=Satisfactory, 2=Very Satisfactory, 3=Good, 4=Very Good, 5=Excellent.

Each department has one or more evaluation panels, whose task is to evaluate all maturity tests belonging to BA and MA degrees. The evaluation panel is appointed by the Academic Affairs Committee for four calendar years at a time. The panel is made up of a chairman and between two and four members, each with a personal deputy.

The evaluation panel members elect a chair and vice chair. A student's work may only be evaluated by members or deputies who have completed the same level of education or who have a professorship.

A member of the evaluation panel who is serving as a thesis supervisor cannot participate in grading the thesis in question. Information concerning the thesis, its evaluation panel, examiners and grades is recorded on the thesis form, of which a copy is sent by the department to Teaching and Learning Support Services after the grade is given.

Grounds for failure

A thesis may be failed if it does not meet the requirements specified for it or if it was completed by dishonest means, such as plagiarism.

Appeals

Students are entitled to receive information concerning the marking criteria for their theses. They are considered to have received the information once the evaluation panel's decision and the examiners' statements have been submitted. (The recipient of the letter is assumed to have received the letter on the seventh day after it was sent, unless otherwise indicated.)

Students who are dissatisfied with a decision have the right to make a reassessment request to the Aalto University Board of Examiners, in writing, within 14 days of receiving the decision. Reassessment requests should be addressed to the Aalto University Board of Examiners at:

Aalto University Degree Committee
Registry
PO BOX 11000
00076 AALTO, Finland
kirjaamo@aalto.fi

No appeals may be made against the decisions of the board.

General guidelines for graduation

The Master's thesis is usually the last study assignment to be completed by the student and is therefore related to the final completion of the degree. The students should go over their transcripts with the department's amanuensis or another person in charge of transcripts. No later than one month before graduation, the students must order their diplomas from the amanuensis. Diplomas are ordered in writing using the diploma request form. The specified deadline must be adhered to; otherwise, graduation will be correspondingly postponed.

The students should also fill in the online Questionnaire for Graduates. The amanuensis returns the diploma request form and the transcript, once signed by the degree programme director, to Teaching and Learning Support Services. The signatures verify that the study attainment is sufficient for the degree.

Archiving and publication of the thesis

The original copy of the thesis, abstract and copies of the evaluation statement(s) are permanently archived in the Library.

If possible, a second copy of the thesis and its attendant materials can be archived at the department in question.

If the thesis is a one-of-a-kind piece of artwork, presentation or exhibition, the original must be documented for example in photographs, video or another format, in such a manner that a clear view of the work can be attained without actually seeing the original production. The University reserves the right to use photographic reproductions in its image archive. Image material belonging to the thesis is documented and archived in the Library together with the written material.

The thesis abstract must be recorded on the thesis abstract form. The secretary of the evaluation panel submits a hard copy of the thesis abstract to the Library together with the thesis.

The thesis is a the public document and can be viewed at the Library or, if possible, at the department in question. However, theses cannot be loaned. The work is published once the evaluation panel has approved it and the chair has signed the minutes of the meeting. The University reserves the right to keep all the theses approved by it in a manner it deems appropriate and to publish thesis abstracts.

The references and abstracts of all theses are published in the Optika database. Students upload an electronic pdf version of the thesis to the database, and the University has the right to publish it if the student authorises publication when uploading it.

The School of Art and Design / the University has the right to use photographs selected by the students in its communications (provided that the images were taken by the students themselves and that a release agreement has been signed at the beginning of the studies; if a student has used photographs taken by another person, he/she is responsible for obtaining the necessary rights of usufruct). The students are responsible for ensuring that they possess the necessary rights to the photographs they have used. The students can also prepare a short (approx. 5 lines) caption in English, describing the photographs; this is for use in international communications.

The University requires that the name of the student and the University will be prominently displayed whenever presenting the University's theses in public.

4. Thesis property and immaterial rights

Production piece property rights

Production pieces completed as thesis at the expense of and under the direction of the University are the property of the University. Productions completed at the student's own expense are the property of the student. Cases subject to interpretation are investigated by the head of the department. The student may claim possession of a thesis production piece that was completed at the University's expense by paying the department in question an amount equivalent to the cost of the piece (for further information contact the finance coordinators in Administration).

Copyright and other immaterial rights

The student reserves all the rights to the thesis unless otherwise agreed. Copyrights and other immaterial rights issues applicable to theses must be discussed with the degree programme professor, amanuensis or thesis supervisor already at the beginning of the thesis process.

The students are responsible for ensuring that no materials that violate copyrights or other immaterial rights were used in the written part or production portion of their theses.

Immaterial rights comprehend:

Copyright

The actual copyright protects all written, artistic or otherwise expressed creative works.

Rights similar to the copyright protects, among others, the artist's output and radio and television broadcasts, as well as recordings.

Copyright is divided into two parts: moral rights and financial interest rights. A moral right comprehends an individual's authority to be mentioned as the creator of their work as well as, for example, the right to oversee how a third party uses their work. A financial interest right involves the author's right to determine the use of the work by manufacturing copies of it and making it available for public consumption.

If the thesis was completed by a group, the copyright belongs jointly to all members of the group. If it is desired that the copyright be divided among the group members in any different way (e.g. according to the work contribution), the students must agree upon the matter among themselves.

The following may also be applicable to a thesis:

Industrial property rights

The patent right protects immaterial ideas, i.e. inventions.

The design right protects the essential form of goods and services as well as ornamentation.

The utility model right protects the technical execution of an object's form or construction or combination of the two that can be utilized industrially.

The trademark protects the name, symbol or other device of an owner's product or service that differentiates it from other products or services on the market.

The sole proprietary right protects the name, symbol or other device used by a sole proprietor.

The University's right of usufruct

The University reserves the right to use theses in its teaching, research, communications and publishing functions, and to archive documented theses in the University archives.

Property and immaterial rights in commissioned theses

The property and immaterial rights for commissioned theses must be agreed upon by the client and student in a formal agreement or in a study project agreement between the client and University, provided that the thesis is done as part of a study project within the University. The University's right of usufruct and publication of the thesis must be taken into consideration in the agreement.

Publication of the thesis in the University's publication series

If the thesis is a written discourse and is to be published in the University's publication series, a separate publication agreement must be signed between the student and the University.

Legislation and directives:

- Copyright Act
- Patents Act
- Act on the Right in Inventions made at Higher Education Institutions (+ School of Art and Design directive concerning inventions)
- Registered Designs Act
- Act on Utility Model Rights

Further information:

For more information on matters related to immaterial rights and copyright issues, contact Aalto University's copyright attorney (Maria Rehbinder, tel. +358 (0)9 4703 30419, +358 (0)50 5703396).