

# General Guideline for Master Theses at UAS BFI Vienna

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## Scope and effective date

This guideline applies to all master programmes as well as on-site certificate university programmes for continuing higher education finishing with a master's degree pursuant to § 9 FHG (University of Applied Sciences Act) at UAS BFI Vienna, but not to online certificate university programme for continuing education. If degree programmes or certificate university programmes for continuing higher education are offered in cooperation with other universities, the Academic Council may establish divergent guidelines in consultation with the provider. This guideline is effective from 1 September 2024. Students who have already agreed or been assigned a master thesis topic by the effective date are exempt from this guideline.

## Master Thesis

1. In this guideline for master theses, the **(minimum) standards which apply to all UAS degree programmes are summarised**. In addition, there may be more specific guidelines pertaining to a particular degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education which meet the specific requirements of the respective programme in accordance with this general guideline.
2. The completion of a master or certificate university programme for continuing education requires a master thesis which has been graded a pass and a comprehensive final exam (=master exam).
3. The **master thesis may be written in German or English**. It is **an academic piece of work** in which the student **independently, individually and thoroughly addresses and answers one or several suitable research questions** relating to a specialist topic or field of research in the respective degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education. In view of the methodological diversity of master theses, the independent **collection, analysis and refinement of empirical data or theoretical approaches should be particularly emphasised**.
4. The director of the degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education must ensure that a sufficient number of **master thesis supervisors** are available for each student cohort. Primarily lecturers of the respective degree or certificate university programme for continuing education qualify as master thesis supervisors. Master thesis supervisors need to meet the following requirements:
  - a) an academic degree (at least level 7 EQF or equivalent master/diploma degree) and

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- b) being lecturers at UAS BFI Vienna or UAS BFI Vienna EEC GmbH, or – in certificate university programmes for continuing higher education – lecturers at specified cooperation partner institutions
- c) or providing evidence of their expertise necessary for the supervision through subject-relevant work in other higher education institutions.
- d) The supervisor should not work in the same organisation as the supervised candidate.

If one of the conditions a or b/c is not met, a full-time lecturer – or in continuing higher education programmes the academic director or a qualified person nominated by the academic director – must act as the first supervisor.

5. As a rule, the **master thesis topics** are suggested by the students themselves. The proposed master thesis topic must be clearly related to either the curriculum of the degree programme or of the certificate university programme for continuing education or the UAS research profile. Master theses can also be assigned in the context of research projects of the degree programme or the UAS. Joint collaboration on a topic by several students is permissible if the students' individual performances are clearly discernible and can thus be assessed separately (§ 19 para. 1 FHG).
6. The schedules for drafting and supervising a master thesis are to be arranged for each degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education in accordance with these guidelines. These schedules are to be communicated to the students and lecturers in due course.
7. If the master thesis is commissioned by a partner firm of the degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education, a **co-supervisor** may be appointed from among the firm's staff by the degree programme or on-site certificate university programme for continuing education director. The co-supervisor also needs to hold an academic degree and is specifically in charge of (co-)supervising the student in content matters. In particular, they should be available for the students to talk to and provide students with the relevant practical information required to successfully write the thesis and supporting students with practical information related to the thesis. Main supervisor and co-supervisor need to hold coordination meetings. The final written assessment of the master thesis is to be drawn up by the main supervisor. The co-supervisor will not be remunerated.
8. Once the potential master thesis supervisors (subsequently only referred to as supervisors) have been identified, the students contact a possible supervisor for their proposed master thesis topic and – unless the supervisor has to decline

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supervising the thesis right away (e.g. due to capacity constraints) – submit a corresponding **research proposal**. The research proposal is a written outline of the work plan for the master thesis and serves as a basis for communication between student and supervisor. If the research proposal is not satisfactory, the supervisor may also refuse supervising the master thesis. In certificate university programmes for continuing education the research proposal is approved by the academic director and the supervisor.

9. Using the respective form, student and supervisor conclude an **agreement** on the **supervision of the master thesis**. The supervision agreement needs to be signed by both parties and forwarded by the student to the degree programme director or, in certificate university programmes for continuing education, to the academic director and the head of the Executive Education Center.

Students who do not yet have a supervisor by a certain date set by the programme director need to report this to the degree programme director or head of the Executive Education Center. If at that time no quality research proposal can be produced either, the master thesis cannot be submitted at the first deadline.

10. The **body of the master thesis** should, as a rule, comprise between 24,000 and 36,000 words.
11. Regarding the exam criteria for approval and regarding the exam criteria for grading the thesis ready to be approved, students are referred to the *Assessment Form Master Thesis*.
12. In consultation with the supervisor, the internationally recognised rules of citation appropriate in the respective subject of the master thesis or the specific criteria of the degree programme or certificate university programme for continuing education are to be applied. In addition, students are referred to the current **Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice** of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (cf. OeAWI website), which theses have to comply with as well. Furthermore, the [Guideline for gender and diversity sensitive language and usage of pictures – for students, lecturers and employees of the UAS BFI Vienna](#) is also to be observed.
13. The final draft of the master thesis can be submitted to the supervisor for a first assessment by 30 November in three-semester or by 30 April in four-semester master programmes. In certificate university programmes for continuing education, the respective deadlines are communicated to the students at the start of the first semester. Two additional submission deadlines determined by the degree programme director or the director of the certificate university programme for continuing education will be communicated in the penultimate semester at the

latest. Information on how to submit the final version of the thesis is to be provided in accordance with the procedure specified in the respective degree programme or on-site certificate university programme for continuing education. If the student cannot meet the deadlines for valid personal or job-related reasons (e.g. accident, prolonged illness, birth of a child confirmed by a doctor or hospital, important job-related reasons confirmed by the employer), the supervisors/degree programme directors/continuing higher education programme directors must be notified in due time by the student. Insufficient reasons lead to the loss of one submission deadline.

14. For the written assessment, the *Assessment Form Master Thesis* is to be used. In this form, the exam criteria for approval and grading are laid down. If the master thesis turns out to meet any of the knock-out criteria for being ready to be approved or turns out not to be valid, the entire thesis will not be graded. The submission nonetheless counts towards the total number of submissions.
15. The submitted thesis needs to undergo a **routine electronic plagiarism check**, which is carried out by the supervisor according to the guidelines of the respective degree or on-site certificate university programme for continuing education and documented in the *Assessment Form Master Thesis*. In addition to this electronic check, the supervisor also needs to check for plagiarized content. In case of substantiated plagiarism, the master thesis will be declared invalid and no further formal and content assessment of the thesis will be conducted. The submission counts towards the total number of possible submissions (§ 20 FHG). This incident is communicated to the academic director, who will formally reprimand the student and determine the further course of action. Should the student be caught plagiarising again, the student will automatically be expelled from the degree programme. In substantiated cases of plagiarism, ghost-writing or third-party authorship (e.g. automated texts generated by Artificial Intelligence) or for other violations of good scientific practice, UAS BFI Vienna reserves the right to summon the student to the Good Scientific Practice Ombudsperson at UAS BFI Vienna.
16. Altogether, there are three possible submission deadlines. The third submission of the master thesis within this period must be assessed by a board of examiners. If the **student is unable to meet a submission deadline** or if the submitted master thesis is rejected or assessed as negative due to considerable flaws, the student cannot take the master exam on the next possible date. If the master thesis is assessed by a board of examiners, the board consists of the degree programme director/the director of an on-site certificate university programme for continuing higher education/a delegated full-time member of staff, the thesis supervisor and a lecturer with expertise on the subject nominated by the degree programme director/the director of a certificate university programme for continuing higher

education. The thesis supervisor and the nominated lecturer draw up two independent assessments. Should the assessments differ significantly from each other, the chair of the board takes a decision on the final grade. If the thesis is not submitted or the submitted thesis cannot be approved and graded a pass at the final submission date, the final year of studies may be repeated once in degree programmes (if the repeat year has not been claimed yet). Within one month after the result has been communicated to the student, the degree programme director must be informed of the intention to repeat a year.

17. Every master thesis must be forwarded electronically, in a format specified by the degree programme director or the director of continuing higher education programme director, to the person in charge in the respective degree or continuing higher education programme. If the master thesis has been graded a pass (approved), the student has to submit **a copy**<sup>1</sup> of the final version to the programme coordinator electronically or as hard copy. A master thesis must include the following: A declaration that the student has written the thesis autonomously and has not used any impermissible aids (*Statutory Declaration*) and a *Non-Disclosure Notice* for theses to be treated confidentially.<sup>2</sup> For hard copies, the following additional requirements apply: the color of the **cover** has to be black. The **lettering** on the spine of the master thesis (no adhesive labels!) needs to be done as follows: in gold letters, with the name in the lower part (first name Xxxxx; last name YYYYY in capital letters), and the year at the top end of the spine (when the master thesis is upright). If applicable, the Declaration of Consent that the master thesis can be made available electronically is to be included as well. By forwarding the hard copy or the electronic master thesis to the library, the degree or continuing higher education programme ensures adherence to the publication requirement.

18. **The supervisor must grade the master thesis within three weeks** and prepare a **written assessment**. This assessment is forwarded or made available to the respective student.

19. A **modification of the master thesis topic** is only permitted in justified exceptional cases (e.g. job change). The degree programme director or the director of a

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<sup>1</sup> Diverging modes will be communicated by the respective degree programme after approval by the academic director.

<sup>2</sup> Non-disclosed theses have to be signed by the programme director and the author; otherwise, the non-disclosure is not valid. In principle, non-disclosed theses are not made available electronically. If the Declaration of Consent has been signed, however, the thesis will be made available electronically once the non-disclosure period has expired. Theses which are not intended for non-disclosure must not contain a Non-Disclosure Notice. In this case, the Declaration of Consent for electronic availability has to be signed.

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certificate university programme for continuing education decides on the student's respective request for modification after consulting the supervisor.

20. **Changing supervisors** is only permitted in justified exceptional cases (e.g. if the supervisors do not fulfil their supervising duties). The degree or continuing higher education programme director decides on the student's requested change after consulting the supervisor.
21. A master thesis **can be eligible for non-disclosure for up to five years from its approval date**, which can be applied for by forwarding **the non-disclosure form** to the degree director or the director of a certificate university programme for continuing education. Non-disclosure is to be granted if the student can furnish evidence in time that important legal or economic interests of the student are at risk. If non-disclosure is granted, the non-disclosure form is to be integrated into the master thesis immediately after the statutory declaration and must be signed and stamped by the degree programme director or the director of a certificate university programme for continuing education.
22. A master thesis which has been graded a pass and forwarded to the UAS library is a prerequisite for admission to the **oral master exam** (§ 19 para. 2 FHG).