

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS ABOUT TO WRITE THEIR MASTER THESIS

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**Please read *all* of the instructions below carefully before contacting me**

1. *What do students need to be aware of before contacting the thesis supervisor?*

Professors have different areas of expertise. Students should strive to find a professor who has expertise on their thesis topic of choice for an ideal experience. My main expertise is *economic history*, though I also sometimes manage students in *business history*. If the student's thesis topic is *not* about business or economic history, then I always recommend the student to contact someone with expertise on their topic instead.

Please note: something that happened within the past 2-3 decades is normally *not considered history*. An history-oriented thesis would cover a time-horizon longer than that and usually more than 50 years. Furthermore, the official university rules stipulate that students who wish to write a thesis with me need to have passed one of my courses: Economic History or Business History in English. Finally, I usually do not accept more than 10 thesis students per semester. So, please be prepared that I might be fully booked.

In particular, I recommend that you **check my university website** to see when my next open slot for thesis students is. It might well be more than a year of head of you reading this. Further, please also note I will ask students to commit to their graduation session of choice. If the student doesn't finish the thesis in time for the agreed session, then I cannot guarantee that I can fit the student in at a later stage, meaning that the student will then have to change supervisor.

If you and your thesis topic comply with the points above, then please send an email to [jacob.weisdorf@uniroma1.it](mailto:jacob.weisdorf@uniroma1.it) including **an abstract of 100-200 words**. The abstract needs to explain **what thesis question** you would like to answer in your thesis; **why your question is relevant** to study; and **how you plan to answer** the question in your thesis (using data, theory, or something else).

Note that the sentence “My thesis investigates the role of crises in history” is **not** a question. A question would be “How have crises influenced economic or business development in history?”. Without this information, I cannot consider whether your topic falls within my area of expertise. You also need to provide **a tentative title** summarising your topic and question of interest, plus **the titles of 1-2 recent research articles** or books related to your topic or question. Finally, you need to **state the month and year** that you plan to graduate.

## 2. *What are the next steps for accepted thesis students?*

Accepted students need to go to <https://stud.infostud.uniroma1.it/> to formally establish the coordinator agreement. This step normally happens in the months leading up to the graduation session. It is the **student’s responsibility** to comply with the deadline, the supervisor **will not** send our warnings advance. Please **contact the student administration** if there are any problems with this step and not me.

Next, **the student needs to find 5-10 scientific articles or books that will serve to answer their thesis question**. This is a time-consuming task, and students will need to carefully deal with this step, as it will set the tone for how well the thesis-writing will go. Scientific books or articles are written by scholars and describe a research project and its result. Newspaper and magazine articles alongside blogposts **are not** considered academic or scientific contributions. They can be used on rare occasions, but not as a main source.

The most common scientific journals in the field of economic history are the *Journal of Economic History*, the *Economic History Review*, *Explorations in Economic History*, the *European Review of Economic History*, and *Cliometrica*. In business history, *Business*

*History* and *Business History Review* are good and relevant journals. Other journals, especially in the fields of economics or management, might also be relevant. In these cases, students need to make sure that the article's JEL code includes the letter N, which means that the article deals with economic history. Scientific book publishers include most university presses, e.g. Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Princeton University Press etc. Books in other languages than English can also be listed as long as they come from university presses.

The student then proceeds by sending the supervisor a) his or her **list of books and articles**, alongside b) **an extended abstract of 500-1000 words**, and c) a **thesis outline**. The abstract needs to briefly explain how the books and articles will be used to answer the student's thesis question. The outline reports the order of the chapters of the thesis and briefly what their main content is expected to be (see the instructions below). Once the abstract, literature, and outline have been approved by the supervisor, the student is free to begin his or her work on the thesis.

The student is **not bound** to stick exactly to what the title or extended abstract says. However, if the student wishes to make *significant* changes compared to the original abstract description, then please notify the supervisor in advance in order to confirm that the topic remains within the boundary of economic or business history.

### 3. *What should the structure of the thesis look like?*

Most students in economic and business history base their thesis on empirical evidence (data). The thesis structure in these cases could (but does not have to) include the following chapters or sections in the order proposed below:

- 1) Introduction: this section summarises the key points of the thesis. It serves to inform readers about: (i) the question that the thesis tries to answer, and why that question is important to consider; (ii) the main aspects of the debate in the literature (and maybe in the wider public) about what the answer to the question might be; (iii) the

nature and sources of the data or literature used in the thesis to help answer the question; (iv) the main conclusion of the thesis regarding what the answer to the thesis question is; and finally (v) what the main take-away points are for policy makers and other readers interested in the thesis' question. The introduction should not be more than five pages long. The student is advised during the writing process to regularly come back to the introduction to make adjustments while working on the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

2) Background: this section reviews earlier studies and what was said and done in these about the thesis' question. This involves a **literature review**. The length of this section should not be more than ten pages long.

3) Data, method, and findings: this section describes the data used by the student to answer the thesis question, as well as the method of analysis (graphical analysis, regression analysis, etc), and the findings obtained vis-à-vis the thesis' question. The data can come from articles or books or be downloaded from the internet. The student can also collect the data him- or herself, but this is normally not expected of a master student. Tables and especially graphs are much appreciated as a means to communicate the data and thesis' findings. The size of this section is normally 15-25 pages. The section can be divided into sub-sections if necessary for transparency.

4) Conclusion: this section takes stock of what the thesis found out concerning the answer to the thesis' question. It ideally summarises its findings vis-à-vis the different sides of the debate mentioned in the introduction and literature review. It also communicates how the thesis' findings might be relevant for policy makers or others interested in the question asked in the thesis. Finally, the student is meant to briefly end by reflecting upon what he or she has learned during the thesis-writing process with respect to what follow-up questions might be interesting to deal with. This section is normally no more than five pages long.

Short and concise theses are preferred to long and unfocused ones. A normal-sized thesis will range between 40 and 50 pages including graphs, tables, and images, but not the reference list or the appendix which are not subject to space restrictions. It is recommended to use Ariel, Calibri, or Times New Roman in size 12 with 1.5 or 2 line spaces. Short sentences (15-30 words) are preferred to longer ones. Also, simple words and sentences using straightforward language are more desirable than complex ones. Readability is king.

Needless to say: **plagiarism is strictly forbidden**. Students are obviously welcome to cite the works of other scholars. They can even use direct quotes from these works as long as they are put in quotation marks and appropriately referenced in the text and reference list. But the thesis needs to always be absolutely clear about the sources of the data or work cited (see the tips below about how to reference academic studies).

Inspiration on how a good thesis might look in terms of structure and citation procedures can come from articles published in any of the journals listed above. Tips on how to manage the thesis-writing process can be found here: <https://www.oxbridgeessays.com/blog/guide-writing-masters-dissertation/>.

#### 4. *What should the student expect from the supervisor and vice versa*

The thesis aims to demonstrate that the student has acquired sufficient knowledge during his or her study to ask and answer an important question in an academic way. The student's ability to *independently* choose a topic and a question to focus on is an essential part of the assessment. The more the supervisor assists the student in identifying a good question, the less the student has the opportunity to show his or her skill in this area. The same is true when it comes to finding the appropriate literature and correct method to answer the thesis' question. The student is thus *strongly* encouraged to take as many steps on his or her own as possible when it comes to proposing an interesting question along with a meaningful way to answer it throughout the thesis-writing process.

The supervisor's job is to make sure that the student's **initial choices** make sense: (i) that the question is an interesting one; (ii) that it is not too wide or too narrow for a master thesis; (iii) that it corresponds with the student's goals and ambitions for his or her later career; and (iv) that the literature and choice of method are fitting for answering the question academically.

The student is responsible for the final product, and **it is *not* the coordinator's job to check and approve the thesis or large parts of it during the thesis-writing period** or in advance of the official submission. Students **should therefore *not*** send the supervisor parts of the thesis in advance in an email asking for feedback. Supervisors are more than happy to answer and help students if they have **specific questions** about a particular (and very well-defined) issue. But the less the thesis is influenced and steered by the supervisor, the more the student can expect to be rewarded for the final result. In other words, independence is highly valued.

#### *5. The approval procedure and graduation*

The thesis, when finished, must be submitted via Infostud: <https://stud.infostud.uniroma1.it/>. Note that is the **student's responsibility to check the deadlines** for registering for graduation and for uploading the thesis. Again, any technical questions or problems in this area should be **directed to the student administration**.

**After the thesis has been officially submitted**, the coordinator will then read the thesis, and decide whether to approve it for the graduation or not. Following an approval, there will be an official defence-ceremony where multiple students take turn to present their thesis results in front of a university committee consisting of six professors.

The student is **expected to attend the graduation in person** and can only participate online if extreme circumstances dictate this. Students need to obtain approval of online participation **from the student administration and not the supervisor**. Students eligible to present online should make sure that their internet connection is strong and super-stable.

Students for the graduation need to prepare a PowerPoint presentation summarising their thesis' question; the debate that inspired it; the answers to the question found during the thesis work; and the lessons learned. Graphs and pictures are **very much preferred** to text-heavy slides. The presentation should **not** last more than 10 minutes. Please **practise repeatedly** in order to remain within this timeframe. The presentation should be prepared with an audience of non-topic experts in mind. Please note that **students need to bring the presentation on a USB stick**. The student will receive his or her final score after the student-group presentation. This completes the graduation process.

#### 6. Other important tips and details

Language: the thesis needs to be completely free of errors and presented in a manner that makes it easy to read and assess. Students, especially non-native English speakers, are urged to carefully check their texts for problems regarding the construction of sentences and other errors before submitting it. It is recommend to use a free text-correction software such as *Grammarly* (<http://grammarly.com>).

References: the works of other scholars must be correctly cited throughout the thesis and a full reference list must be provided at the end of the thesis. The normal way to cite other studies is like this (Eco 2015), and then, in the reference list at the end, writing like this:

Eco, Umberto (2015), *How to Write a Thesis*, MIT Press Cambridge

Students are encouraged to consult this website for help on how to cite and list references: <https://copyright.unimelb.edu.au/information/what-is-copyright/citing-literary-works>.