

# Guidelines for Writing Theses

International Accounting Group

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# 1 Introduction

The following guidelines provide an overview of the basic requirements for the formal design of theses (master's theses, bachelor's theses, and seminar papers) at the International Accounting Group at WU. During the work process, content-related supervision is provided by the group's faculty.

## 2 Process – From Assignment to Submission

### 2.1 Bachelor's Thesis

#### 2.1.1 *Assignment and Topic Allocation*

The assignment for writing a bachelor's thesis is centrally managed through the Learn Club "Topic Allocation for Bachelor's Theses in the Specializations/SBWL International Accounting & Controlling".

To qualify for writing a bachelor's thesis, successful completion of Courses I to III of the specialization "International Accounting & Controlling" is required. The grades from these courses are taken into account for the allocation of places.

In the Learn Club, you will receive an overview in advance of which topic areas are offered for selection. You will be required to select four topics that you would particularly like to work on and two topics that you would prefer not to work on under any circumstances.

Where possible (but not guaranteed), you will then be assigned a topic from your top four preferences. However, you will not be assigned any of the topics you rejected, even if it means not being assigned a topic at all.

#### 2.1.2 *Supervision*

Following the assignment of students and topics, a **kick-off meeting** is scheduled in November resp. March. During this meeting, the requirements for the bachelor's thesis are outlined. The meeting includes detailed discussions on the process, structure of the thesis, and formal guidelines.

From this point on, the following deadlines apply:

1. **Milestone** after 2 months: Submission of a table of contents and a concrete research concept (methods chapter).
2. **Milestone** after 4 months: Submission of preliminary results.
3. **Milestone** after 6 months: Submission of the complete bachelor's thesis.

These dates are deadlines that must be met. Students must send all submissions to their supervisor. In case of questions or uncertainties, students can contact their supervisor at any time.

### *2.1.3 Submission*

The maximum time allowed for completing the bachelor's thesis is 6 months from the start of the topic allocation. The bachelor's thesis must be submitted on time as a PDF document uploaded electronically on Learn. You can find more information [here](#).

All data files (Excel, Word, etc.) must be sent via email to the supervisor.

## **2.2 Master`s Thesis**

### *2.2.1 Assignment and Topic Allocation*

Students in the master's program in Finance and Accounting have the opportunity to write their master's thesis at the International Accounting Group. The assignment is managed centrally through the "Department of Finance, Accounting & Statistics"

### *2.2.2 Supervision*

As part of the Master Thesis Seminar, you will present the progress of your work and receive feedback. The suggestions from this feedback can then be incorporated into your master's thesis. Additionally, students can contact their supervisor at any time if they have further questions.

### 2.2.3 Submission

The thesis must be submitted as a PDF document electronically via Learn. When collecting the final documents, a bound copy must be submitted to the examination office. You can find more information [here](#).

In addition to submitting the PDF document via Learn, a supplementary USB stick must be submitted to the International Accounting Group within five days.

The following documents must be saved on the USB stick: the master's thesis as both a Word and PDF file, the literature used (if available electronically), and all data and calculations used. All files and documents should be organized in folders. The master's thesis should be named as follows:

**„LastName\_FirstName.docx“ or „LastName\_FirstName.pdf“**

To submit the USB stick, you can contact [lukas.obernauer@wu.ac.at](mailto:lukas.obernauer@wu.ac.at) or use the mailbox in Building AD, 1<sup>st</sup> floor (International Accounting Group).

## 3 Resources

The more time you invest in finding appropriate resources for your thesis, the better and faster your work will progress. A sound literature review at the beginning of your project helps you understand the topic better, focus on the research questions, and conclude your thesis with relevant implications.

The starting point of your research project should always be the WU's libraries. You can retrieve all the relevant information through the resources provided on the libraries' homepage. The staff at the library offers free training sessions for your research as well as valuable guidelines on using the various search engines. We recommend you have a closer look at all these offers to increase the effectiveness of your endeavors. Although you find many physical resources, it is recommended to start your research activities by looking at certain electronic databases. The following table lists the most important databases that you should consider:

<b>Austria</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>International</b>
LexisNexis online	Beck online	EBSCO Host
Lindeonline	nwb (not licensed)	Emerald
RDB	Springer	JSTOR
Verlag Österreich eLibrary	WISO	ProQuest
		ScienceDirect (Elsevier)
		Springer
		SSRN
		Taylor & Francis online
		Wiley

Further databases of high relevance for our field (containing various accounting standards) include:

- AFRAC – Austrian Financial Reporting and Auditing Committee ([www.afrac.at](http://www.afrac.at))
- DRS – Deutsche Rechnungslegungs Standards
- eIFRS – Electronic International Financial Reporting Standards
- FASB Accounting Standards Codification
- KSW – Kammer der Steuerberater und Wirtschaftsprüfer ([www.ksw.or.at](http://www.ksw.or.at))

You can find the **comprehensive list of databases** available at the WU [HERE](#). Please note although you can access all these databases via the WU's campus, for your convenience, it is also possible to do your research and download papers from most of them via VPN clients.

It is ok to consider any resource you find in the databases for use if they contribute to your work. However, resources such as teaching materials or newspaper articles should be reviewed skeptically, as in most cases, these resources are deemed inappropriate for inclusion in a thesis. Of course, sometimes it is adequate to use newspaper articles, for example, to motivate the relevance of your research. In case of doubt, you can discuss this with your supervisor.

Journals, on the other hand, should be an essential part of your literature research. If your thesis focuses on normative aspects, e.g., the contents and impacts of the new IFRS, you should refer to the following journals. These are the most relevant IFRS-oriented journals in German-speaking countries and are fully available via the WU's databases:

<b>Journal Title</b>	<b>Database</b>
Die Wirtschaftsprüfung (WPg)	Beck online
Praxis der internationalen Rechnungslegung (PIR)	WISO
Zeitschrift für internationale Rechnungslegung (IRZ)	Linde online (preferably), Beck online
Zeitschrift für kapitalmarktorientierte und internationale Rechnungslegung (KoR)	WISO
Zeitschrift für Recht und Rechnungswesen (RWZ)	LexisNexis online

With regards to more internationally oriented, research-focused literature, you should consider papers published at least in the following international top journals in the field of accounting:

<b>Journal Title</b>	<b>Database</b>
Accounting and Business Research (ABR)	Taylor & Francis online
Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal (AAAJ)	ScienceDirect
Accounting, Organizations and Society (AOS)	ScienceDirect
The Accounting Review (TAR)	EBSCO Host
Auditing: A Journal of Theory and Practice (AJTP)	ProQuest, EBSCO
Critical Perspectives on Accounting (CPA)	ScienceDirect
European Accounting Review (EAR)	EBSCO Host
Contemporary Accounting Research (CAR)	ProQuest
Journal of Accounting and Economics (JAE)	ScienceDirect
Journal of Accounting Research (JAR)	Wiley, JSTOR
Journal of Business Finance & Accounting (JBFA)	EBSCO Host

This, of course, is just a small excerpt of journals available in our fields of research. For more comprehensive lists of renowned journals, please refer to lists such as the following, which also give an indication of the relative importance of different publications in terms of scientific standards (the higher a journal is rated by the following institutions, the higher the papers' quality is to be considered and the better for your thesis if you can build upon them in your work):

- VHB's JOURQUAL Rating: [CLICK HERE](#)
- Scimago Journal & Country Rank: [CLICK HERE](#)
- WU's Star Journal List: [CLICK HERE](#)

Besides journals, books can also play a very important role in many analyses – especially if the focus of the thesis lies on (new) regulations and their interpretations. E.g., if you discuss the content of any relevant questions associated with certain IFRS. The following table shows the most important legal commentaries that are available; if relevant, you should refer to all of them:

<b>Book</b>	<b>Data base</b>
Beck'sches IFRS-Handbuch	Beck online
Haufe IFRS-Kommentar	print only
Internationales Bilanzrecht (Thiele et al.)	print only
Rechnungslegung nach IFRS (Baetge et al.)	print only
Rechnungslegung nach Internationalen Standards (Adler et al.)	print only

If you need guidance on literature in more specific fields, e.g., the relevant books and journals for accounting based on national GAAP in Austria or Germany, your supervisor will gladly provide you with additional materials.

Furthermore, (“Big-4”) auditors or other institutions often publish manuals or guidelines on certain topics, such as new accounting standards (free of charge) online, which are also appropriate resources for theses.

Google – and especially [scholar.google.com](https://scholar.google.com) – can also be helpful. However, please note that, in general, you should be careful regarding using online resources. Depending on your project, they might be more or less appropriate. However, as a rule of thumb, resources such as the following should never (!) be quoted for your thesis (please note that this is a non-exhaustive list):

- Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon
- Iasplus
- Investopedia
- Wikipedia

Except for the case of very rare circumstances, the same also applies to blogs, newsletters, etc.

## 4 Content Requirements

### 4.1 Structure

The thesis should include the following elements in the specified order:

- Cover Page

Please use the most recent official cover page for the [bachelor's thesis](#) or [master's thesis](#).

- Statutory Declaration

The academic work must include a statutory declaration. This is already provided on the pre-defined cover page. Please enter the date and sign the declaration.

- Abstract

The abstract should capture the reader's interest in the work. It summarizes the core of the thesis in a few words and should particularly highlight the significance and relevance of the topic. The abstract should not exceed 250 words and should not contain abbreviations or footnotes.



- Table of Contents
- List of Figures, Tables, and Abbreviations (if applicable)
- Main Text

The main text of an academic paper generally consists of three sections: introduction, main body, and conclusion. The **introduction** includes the research question or problem statement, the objective, and the structure of the thesis. It should also provide references to the various chapters. The content should include a brief introduction and delineation of the topic. The **main body** encompasses the original theoretical or practical contribution. This may include, for example, theoretical foundations, case studies, concepts, empirical research, analyses, critical evaluations, comparisons, etc. The **conclusion** summarizes the thesis “as a whole” in a final statement. It should not reference specific chapters but rather derive conclusions and provide an outlook. Additionally, the limitations of the work should be addressed.

- Reference List

Further information on the reference list can be found under section 5.3.

- Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (if applicable)

Further information can be found under section 5.4

- List of Company Reports (if applicable)

All company reports, such as annual, financial, or sustainability reports, should be listed chronologically in the list of company reports. The company name, year of publication, and fiscal year should be provided. If the report is available online, a complete link and the retrieval date should be provided, like referencing online sources.

- Appendix (if applicable)

The appendix contains supplementary materials and information that may be necessary for understanding the thesis but would interrupt the flow of reading if included in the main text. Easily accessible information for the reader should not be included in the appendix but referenced using citations. The appendix may include mathematical proofs, questionnaires used, or full transcripts of interviews. The main text should reference the contents included in the appendix.

## **4.2 Scope of the Thesis**

The number of pages is not a criterion for the quality of a thesis. The content and the level of engagement with the topic are more important. A “concise” and precise writing style enhances the value of an academic work. The following guidelines apply to the scope:

- Bachelor’s thesis: 30-35 pages of main text
- Master’s thesis: 50-55 pages of main text
- Seminar papers: The scope is communicated separately

All guidelines regarding the scope refer to the main text and exclude the cover page, abstract, tables of contents, reference list, and any other lists or appendices.

## **4.3 Additional Requirements**

### **Topic Fidelity and Delimitation**

The topics described in the assignment and those announced in a title must be addressed in the corresponding section or chapter without digression.

### **Completeness**

The announced topic must be covered thoroughly and in sufficient depth. Any limitations must be justified. Basic requirements for any academic work include logical argumentation, correct application of methods, and consistent conclusions.

### **Declaration of Statements**

The source of statements made in the thesis must be clearly indicated. Own findings and conclusions should be logically justified, and third-party statements must be cited properly. The competent and critical handling of academic texts should be evident throughout.

### **Structure**

The thesis should be clearly structured so that readers can follow the student’s line of thought (“red thread”). In addition to the actual discussion of the topic, the thesis should include an introduction and a concluding section (e.g., summary, critical evaluation, outlook).

## Language

Academic works must be objective. They should be written in an objective, impersonal style with appropriate academic language. Colloquial language should be avoided. Correct spelling and punctuation are essential. The thesis should be written clearly and with stylistic accuracy in either German or English.

## Literature

There is a relationship between the quality of a thesis and the quality and extent of the literature used. In addition to standard works, recent academic publications, scientific studies, and articles from professional journals (so-called "peer-reviewed journals") should be considered. Original sources should be used for fundamental theoretical approaches.

## Original Contribution

The thesis should demonstrate the student's own contribution, for example, through their own analyses, data collection, investigations, or evaluations. The student's own critical work significantly influences the overall assessment, alongside other factors.

# 5 Formal Requirements

## 5.1 Formatting

### Page Margin Spacing:

Top margin	3.0 cm
Bottom margin	2.5 cm
Left margin	2.5 cm
Right margin	2.5 cm

### Font:

Font type	Times New Roman (Arial)	
Font size	Main text	12pt (10pt)
	Footnotes	10pt (8pt)
	Figure captions	10pt (8pt)
	Table captions	10pt (8pt)
Alignment	Main text	Justified with appropriate hyphenation
	Footnotes	Left-aligned

Line Spacing:

Main text	1.5
Footnotes	1

Heading Font Sizes:

Level 1	16pt (bold)
Level 2	14pt (bold)
Subsequent levels	12pt (bold)

Chapter Numbering and Page Numbers:

Outline structure for the main text: 1/1.1/1.1.1

Page numbers: Arabic numerals

## 5.2 Citing in the Text

### 5.2.1 Works in German

Indirect Citations:

Sources should be marked with a footnote (superscript Arabic numeral) in the text and numbered consecutively at the bottom of the corresponding page. If a source refers to a specific expression, the footnote should be placed directly after the word. If the source refers to a preceding sentence or sentence, the footnote should be placed at the end of the sentence, following the punctuation mark. The footnote begins with "Vgl." (cf.). If a passage is supported by more than one source, all sources should be listed in the footnote, separated by semicolons.

Example: Vgl. Hummel/Schlick (2016), S. 467.

Example: Vgl. Hummel/Schlick (2016), S. 467; Cho/Patten (2007), S. 645.

Direct Citations:

Direct quotations (also called verbatim citations) should be enclosed in quotation marks. The footnote reference follows immediately after the quotation, and the footnote starts with the author's last name. "Vgl." is not used. Direct quotations always require their own footnote.

Example: Hummel/Schlick (2016), S. 467.

### 5.2.2 *Works in English*

#### Indirect Citations (Harvard Style):

For works written in English, the German citation style with footnotes can be replaced by the Harvard citation style. In this case, the source reference is inserted directly in the running text, specifying the author's name, year of publication, and page number in parentheses at the appropriate place. The citation is usually placed at the end of the sentence, before the final punctuation mark.

Example: In addition, particularly managers lobby for an exclusion of less controllable earnings components from net income, because they do not want to be held responsible for such performance items (Biddle/Choi, 2006).

#### Direct Citations (Harvard Style):

Direct quotations should be enclosed in quotation marks. If the quotation forms a complete sentence, the punctuation at the end of the sentence is included; otherwise, it is omitted. Question marks or exclamation points at the end of a sentence should always be included to avoid changing the meaning of the quotation.

Example: Both income components are often viewed similarly in nature as “transitory items with little ability to predict future cash flow and minimal implications for company value” (Jones/Smith, 2011, p. 2047).

Note: If you deviate from the described citation style and follow different rules, it is important that you maintain **consistency** and **clarity** throughout your work.

## 5.3 References

The bibliography should list all cited sources in alphabetical order by the authors' names. Different types of sources are not categorized separately; the separation in the following examples is only for clarity. If multiple works by the same author are cited, they should be arranged chronologically. If a work is displayed over multiple lines, the subsequent lines should be indented (hanging indent of 0.5 cm). A space should be included between each reference, and each reference should end with a period. For works with more than three authors, only the first name followed by "et al." is listed in the footnotes, but all authors must be fully listed in the bibliography. Individual authors should be separated by semicolons.

Example for citing monographs:

Meyer, Conrad (2012). *Accounting – Ein Leitfaden für das Verständnis von Finanzberichten*. EXPERTsuisse.

Laine, M.; Tregidga, H.; Unerman, J. (2021). *Sustainability Accounting and Accountability* (3. Aufl.). Routledge.

Example for citing journal articles:

Biddle, G.; Choi, Jong-Hag (2006). Is comprehensive income useful? *Journal of Contemporary Accounting & Economics* 2(1), 1-32.

Matten, D.; Moon, J. (2008). "Implicit" and "explicit" CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Review* 33(2), 404-424.

Example for citing working papers:

Hummel, K.; Jobst, D. (2023). The EU Non-Financial Reporting Directive and Loan Costs: Insights from Syndicated Loans. Working Paper. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4641046>

Example for citing an anthology:

Roszkowska-Menkes, M. (2020). Greenwashing. In S. Idowu, R. Schmidpeter, N. Capaldi, L. Zu, M. Del Baldo & R. Abreu (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sustainable Management* (1–6). Springer International Publishing.

## 5.4 Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.) in the preparation of a thesis is only permitted for editing the text and must be explicitly declared *and* documented. This includes correcting grammar and spelling errors, punctuation mistakes, and refining wording to make the text more fluent, precise, clear, and concise. The declaration is to be included in a separate section after the bibliography, where the chat history must be disclosed. Further information can be found at the following links:

- ChatGPT: [ChatGPT Shared Links FAQ](#)
- Gemini: [Share your Gemini chats](#)

The full responsibility for the scientific quality of the submitted text lies with the author of the thesis. The requirements in Section 5.2 apply even when using artificial intelligence.

Example Declaration:

ChatGPT-4 was used for editing the following sections of the bachelor's/master's thesis:

Section 2.1.1: <https://chatgpt.com/share/61d70fe3-4ee8-4271-a419-3279719bd46b>

Section 3.1: <https://chatgpt.com/share/61d70fe3-4ee8-4271-a419-3279719bd46b>

## 5.5 Abbreviations List

Terms for which an abbreviation is used must be written out when first mentioned - except for the abbreviations contained in the DUDEN dictionary. The abbreviation is written in brackets after this. The abbreviation must be given for all subsequent mentions. All abbreviations used must be recorded in the list of abbreviations.

Example:

International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) are globally recognized.

## 5.6 Additional Rules and Notes

- Paragraphs can be separated by a blank line or inserted space. Layout and page length should be considered. A single sentence does not constitute a paragraph.
- The options "bold" and "italic" should generally not be used for emphasis. Foreign language expressions may be italicized. Italics in verbatim quotations should be retained as such.
- No text should appear between the headings of the main chapter and the first subchapter (e.g., between 1 and 1.1 or between 1.1 and 1.1.).
- All formalities should be applied consistently throughout the entire thesis.
- Use gender-neutral terms or plural forms in the thesis (e.g., die Studierenden).
- Double quotation marks should be used exclusively throughout your thesis, except where "a quotation is 'within' a quotation". Long quotations (i.e. quotations more than three lines) should be indented and set off from the regular text, with the source of quotation added at the end.

- Every academic work is checked using software for plagiarism and AI usage.

A work is plagiarized if texts, contents, or ideas produced by someone else are passed off as own work. This is the case especially when parts of texts, theories, hypotheses, findings, or data are incorporated into a work verbatim or in paraphrased or translated form without identifying these elements as quotations and referencing the original sources and authors (§ 51 [2] item 31 of the Universities Act 2002 [Universitätsgesetz, UG]). Reusing material from previously submitted and graded or published texts without indicating it as a citation is also considered plagiarism (self-plagiarism).

Students are considered to have committed academic fraud if they use unauthorized aids, if they pass off texts written by a third party as their own in a written paper or in an exam (ghost-writing), or if they present fabricated or falsified data or findings (cf. § 51 [2] item 32 of the Universities Act 2002).

Consequences include among others failing grade of the thesis and revocation of the academic degree. In addition, civil claims and criminal consequences are possible.

You can find the WU plagiarism guidelines [here](#).

## 6 Further readings

We recommend familiarizing yourself with the specific tasks and challenges of scientific writing. We are aware that this might take some time; but experience shows that it pays off both in terms of the quality and efficiency of your work. To do so, you should refer to these guidelines and approach your supervisor with questions you might have. Furthermore, we recommend referring to literature such as the following:

- Ebster, C., & Stalzer, L. (2017). *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten für Wirtschafts- und Sozial- wissenschaftler* (5th ed.). Vienna: Facultas UTB.
- Eco, U. (2020). *Wie man eine wissenschaftliche Abschlussarbeit schreibt* (14th ed.). Vienna: Facultas UTB.
- Karmasin, M., & Ribing, R. (2019). *Die Gestaltung wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten*. (10th ed.). Vienna: Facultas UTB.
- Skern, T. (2019). *Writing Scientific English* (3rd ed.). Vienna: Facultas UTB.



## 7 Conclusion

The following control questions may help to ensure that the content and formal criteria are met:

### Structure and Organization

- Is the thesis logically structured? Is there a clear thread?
- Are theory, empirical findings, and practical considerations balanced (depending on the topic)?
- Is the content appropriately distributed across the different sections?
- Does the thesis consistently pursue its stated objectives? Are the objectives met? If not, is this justified? Are the findings summarized in a conclusion?
- Were the solutions developed on a theoretical basis?

### Literature

- Is the thesis based on relevant literature? Were any foreign-language sources consulted?
- Were original sources used for fundamental theoretical approaches?
- Was the literature selection up to date?

### Appearance and Readability

- Are spacing, formatting, font choices, etc., consistent and appropriate?
- Does the thesis guide the reader effectively?
- Are the results presented clearly? Are complex issues explained with the help of illustrations?

### Language

- Are the statements clear and in an appropriate style?
- Is the grammar, spelling, and punctuation, correct?
- Does the language meet the standard of academic work?

### Citation and References

- Was citing done consistently and correctly?
- Are the references consistent, and correct? Do citations match the references?
- Are indirect citations formulated independently?

## 8 Notes on Publication Requests

There have been reports of publishers increasingly offering to publish students' theses. We would like to note that decisions regarding external publication of a thesis rest with the International Accounting Group. For questions, please contact Lukas Obernauer ([lukas.obernauer@wu.ac.at](mailto:lukas.obernauer@wu.ac.at)).

**We wish you success in completing your thesis!**

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