E&I
Master's Thesis
Guide

Executive MBA Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Guidelines, Information, Advice

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INSTITUTE FOR
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Please carefully read this document before contacting a potential supervisor regarding your master's thesis to get an overview of the important formalities.

1 Prerequisites: Who can write a master's thesis in the EMBA E&I?

All students of the Executive MBA Entrepreneurship & Innovation (EMBA E&I) write a master's thesis as part of their program. Before you start working on your thesis, three prerequisites must be fulfilled:

(1) The first prerequisite is the completion of the six online pillars of *Research for Executives* (see the Research for Executives page on Moodle). They provide the academic and methodological foundations for your thesis. Anyone wishing to write a master's thesis in the EMBA E&I must know, understand and be able to apply their contents.

(2) The second prerequisite is to find a supervisor who agrees to supervise your thesis (see chapter 3).

(3) The third prerequisite is that you demonstrate that your planned thesis meets the standards of the EMBA E&I in terms of both topic relevance and academic quality. The evaluation is based on your research proposal (see 4.2). If these requirements are fulfilled, your supervisor will confirm the supervision.

2 What is a master's thesis?

In the EMBA E&I, we approach master's theses in an entrepreneurial and innovative spirit. Therefore, we offer three distinct formats:

1. **Academic Thesis** – answering a research question by planning and conducting a research project. It can be written as (1a) a literature review, (1b) a qualitative exploration, or (1c) a quantitative thesis (see 5.1).
2. **Managerial Thesis** – answering a case-specific question by specifying a relevant problem and proposing a solution, comparable to a consultancy report (see chapter 7).
3. **Educational Thesis (Video Thesis)** – an innovative format combining a written document with an educational video (see chapter 8).

Each format has its own advantages and challenges, but the choice ultimately lies with the student. Regardless of which option you pursue, the process and the general expectations regarding academic integrity and quality are the same; the format-specific standards are summarized in Table 1.

Good to know: All thesis formats can be completed alone or in a team of up to four students. Of course, we expect more quality when more authors are involved – the scope and requirements are increased accordingly (e.g., amount of literature and depth of the theoretical framework, number of interviews, size of the data set and sophistication of the research design, relevance of the problem, or original footage and interview snippets in a video).

The table below provides an overview of the key differences between the three thesis formats, helping you choose the option that best aligns with your interests and goals.

Table 1: Key differences between thesis formats

	Academic Thesis	Managerial Thesis	Educational Thesis (Video Thesis)
Goal	Answering a research question	Answering a case-specific question	Creating didactical material on a complex topic
Focus	Generalization of findings; contribution to academic knowledge applicable beyond one specific case or setting	Solution for a specific, unique managerial problem (e.g., of your organization or your own project)	Clear and accessible explanation of complex concepts, theories, or research findings
Relevance	Academic and practical relevance	Primarily practical relevance	Didactic value: making academic or complex content understandable to a broader audience
Standards	Strong scientific foundation, critical engagement with literature, methodological rigor	Must also meet scientific standards (clear problem statement, structured argument, correct citations), but emphasis on applicability	Requires both academic rigor in the written part and pedagogical quality in the video (clarity, accuracy, added value)
Output	An "academic" paper comparable to a journal article (literature review, qualitative or quantitative paper)	A project report comparable to a consultancy report, with actionable recommendations	A written document (literature review, video script, storyboard) plus an educational video
Scope	Approx. 30–50 pages	30–50 pages	Approx. 5-minute video plus approx. 15 pages of literature review, a video script, and a storyboard
Benchmark	"Publishable in an academic journal"	"High managerial relevance"	"Inspirational and helpful teaching material"
Citation	Correct and consistent referencing required	Correct and consistent referencing required	Correct and consistent referencing required in the written part; sources for visual/audio material must also be acknowledged

Which format is right for you?

An **Academic Thesis** is right for you if you want to become an expert in a specific field, generate knowledge applicable beyond one specific case or setting, work academically, or if you are interested in publishing a journal article. Typical questions read like this:

- Which challenges do researchers in Austria face when commercializing an invention via an academic spin-off?
- What are the main controlling needs of start-ups in the foundation and growth phase?
- What role do human and cultural aspects play in the due diligence process of M&A transactions?

A **Managerial Thesis** is right for you if you want to address a specific, unique managerial problem that your organization faces, continue working on "your own project", or come up with a highly actionable solution. Typical questions read like this:

- What are commercially viable use cases for Fraunhofer's MRF technology?
- How should the start-up "PULS" enter the German heart surgery market?
- How innovative is OMV's downstream business as compared to their European competitors?

An **Educational Thesis** is right for you if you want to break down and illustrate a (complex) topic into easily conveyable didactical materials, gain and/or apply didactical skills, or work creatively by planning and creating audio-visual content. Our latest example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4N0Jh0k3eno

The following chapters apply equally to all thesis formats. Any specific deviations for Managerial Theses and Educational Theses are described separately in chapters 7 and 8.

3 Supervisor & possible topics

In the EMBA E&I, you choose and approach your supervisor yourself. You can approach any lecturer of the MBA program as well as any WU faculty member with a PhD degree to supervise your thesis. A list of the titles and supervisors of the last four E&I cohorts is available on Moodle.

When selecting a supervisor, make sure that

- the person is allowed to supervise you (when in doubt, ask Prof. Franke or Prof. Keinz),
- you find someone with an interest in your topic, and
- the person has enough time.

Contact your potential supervisor via email and send your draft research proposal (see 4.2). Please approach only one person at a time. If the contacted person does not have the capacity to supervise your thesis, you may then approach the next potential supervisor. For general questions, please send an email to entrep-office@wu.ac.at.

Possible topics

In the EMBA E&I, students identify an interesting and relevant topic themselves. Go with a topic you are passionate about – for example, a question you want to become an expert in, a problem your organization faces, or your own project. The list of past thesis titles on Moodle may serve as inspiration.

In all cases, topics should be kept relatively narrow. Attempting to "explain the world" is neither feasible nor advisable, even within 30–50 pages. Your supervisor will support you in refining your research question and developing it into a solid proposal.

4 The process: From the idea to the grade

4.1 Overview

Figure 1 illustrates the process of preparing and writing a master's thesis in the EMBA E&I. The process is standardized and spread across two Moodle pages: the *Research for Executives* page (from the online pillars to the presentation of your thesis with your supervisor) and the *Master's Thesis* page (style and template, submission, evaluation). Common topics such as research and citation (use of AI), plagiarism and legal consequences, supervisors, and FAQ can be found on both pages. The individual phases and milestones are explained in the following sections.

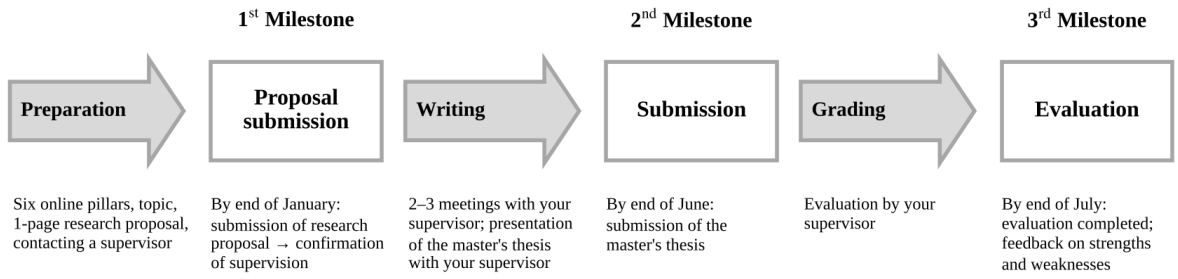

Fig. 1: Prototypical process of a master's thesis in the EMBA E&I

4.2 Preparation phase: Research proposal

After completing the six online pillars of Research for Executives and choosing your topic – go with a topic you are passionate about (see chapter 3) – the next step is to prepare a research proposal. A template is available on Moodle. The proposal should not exceed one page: state the question or topic, explain its relevance and how you want to tackle it, and make clear which thesis format (and, for an Academic Thesis, which type) you pursue. Send the draft to your potential supervisor via email (see chapter 3) and approach only one person at a time. In close coordination with your supervisor, you will refine and finalize this preliminary concept, which serves as a roadmap for both author and supervisor.

4.3 First milestone: Submission of the research proposal and confirmation of supervision

The final research proposal must be submitted **by the end of January** (for details, see the Research for Executives page on Moodle). Once the proposal meets the required standards, your supervisor confirms the supervision. From this point, the clock starts ticking: your thesis must be submitted by the end of June.

4.4 Second phase: Working on the thesis

After the confirmation of supervision, you are expected to begin work immediately – start early, time flies! Make use of your supervisor: typically, two to three meetings are held to clarify literature, structure, method, etc. When reaching out to your supervisor, have concrete questions ready. Responsibility for progress and completion lies entirely with you. Plan your

time carefully, stay focused on your research question, and make use of your supervisor's expertise when needed. Towards the end of this phase, you present your master's thesis to your supervisor.

4.5 Second milestone: Submission of the thesis

Your thesis must be submitted **by the end of June**. The style guidelines, the template and all details on the submission are available on the Master's Thesis page on Moodle. The earlier you submit, the better. Your supervisor will not proofread your thesis, so be sure to submit your best work. For empirical theses, the relevant datasets and code (e.g., R/SPSS) or interview transcripts must also be submitted/attached to ensure transparency and reproducibility. If you anticipate delays due to serious reasons, request an extension in writing well in advance.

4.6 Third phase: Grading

Your master's thesis is evaluated by your supervisor.

4.7 Third milestone: Evaluation and feedback

The evaluation is completed **by the end of July**. After grading, you may ask your supervisor for feedback. This optional exchange allows you to understand the evaluation in detail and take away valuable lessons for future academic or professional challenges.

5 What comprises a good master's thesis?

In a nutshell: The way the problem statement is elaborated and how well – methodically correct, thorough and critical – the question is answered ultimately determines the quality of a master's thesis. This clear line is often referred to as the *"common theme"*: a very good thesis is a compelling argument. It contains nothing superfluous and should be concise.

Irrespective of the thesis format, we expect that students identify an interesting and relevant topic themselves, demonstrate knowledge of the topic and the relevant literature, develop a coherent structure and storyline, and follow established academic practices (e.g., citation).

5.1 Choosing the right method

There is no universally "better" or "worse" research method. The right choice always depends on your research question and the nature of the problem you are addressing. More complexity does not necessarily mean higher quality – what matters is methodological fit, transparency, and rigor. For an Academic Thesis, the three types (1a–1c) correspond to the following approaches:

- **Conceptual or literature-based approaches (1a: literature review)** synthesize and critically review existing work. The goal is to provide the state of the art of extant research on a topic by identifying relevant academic research and integrating it meaningfully. Importantly, a literature review must go beyond a mere summary: your contribution may involve developing new models, refining existing frameworks, or formulating theories that can later be tested empirically. Such approaches can be

valuable when empirical data are not available or when the goal is to clarify concepts, build frameworks, or identify gaps in research.

- **Qualitative methods (1b: qualitative exploration)** focus on rich, in-depth insights, for example through expert interviews, case studies, or thematic analysis. They are well suited for exploring new or complex phenomena where theory is still underdeveloped and for understanding the structure, patterns, or root causes of a phenomenon. A qualitative thesis consists of a theory base plus an empirical part.
- **Quantitative methods (1c: quantitative thesis)** involve collecting and analyzing numerical data, often through surveys, experiments, or statistical models. They are particularly suitable for testing hypotheses or identifying patterns across larger samples.

What matters most is that your chosen method allows you to answer your research question in a clear, transparent, and academically rigorous way. Managerial Theses typically also draw on these methods (e.g., interviews, benchmarking, case studies, market research; see chapter 7).

Further information and examples (examples marked with "Moodle" are available there):

- *Literature review:* Jesson, J., Matheson, L., & Lacey, F. M. (2011). *Doing your literature review: Traditional and systematic techniques* (available at the WU library). For examples, see articles published in, e.g., *Academy of Management Annals* or *Management Review Quarterly*.
- *Qualitative exploration:* Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). For an example, see Hienerth, C., Keinz, P., & Lettl, C. (2011). Exploring the nature and implementation process of user-centric business models (Moodle).
- *Quantitative thesis:* For examples, see Bradonjic, P., Franke, N., & Lüthje, C. (2019). Decision-makers' underestimation of user innovation; Franke, N., Schirg, F., & Reinsberger, K. (2016). The frequency of end-user innovation: A re-estimation of extant findings (both Moodle).

5.2 Important components and core elements

5.2.1 A good title

The thesis's title should be descriptive and concise. Although it cannot summarize all aspects of the thesis, readers should immediately know what it is about. It should create a curiosity about its content. The final wording will be agreed upon with your supervisor.

Using the broadcast search method to identify lead users: an exploratory analysis
➔ Is a good title.

First propositions about factors that influence the broadcasting search process as part of lead user identification: an exploratory analysis of six lead user projects that use the broadcasting method.
➔ Content is correct, but cumbersome and impractical.

5.2.2 The four vital parts: introduction, methods, body and discussion

This structure applies to the Academic Thesis. Managerial and Educational Theses follow a modified structure (see chapters 7 and 8), but the same principles apply.

Introduction

The introduction sets the stage for the thesis. It provides the motivation and background for the topic, explains the goals of the work, and formulates a clear and focused research question. In addition, the introduction must justify the relevance of the question academically and/or practically. A strong introduction establishes the "common theme" of the thesis: everything that follows should remain connected to the research question.

Methods

The methods section must clearly and transparently describe your research design, data collection, and analysis procedures. The goal is scientific reproducibility: another researcher should be able to understand and, in principle, replicate your approach. Be explicit about choices and justify them (e.g., why a particular method, dataset, or sample).

Body

The body of the thesis contains the actual problem solving. It introduces, analyzes, and synthesizes the relevant literature and presents your own analysis. Do not simply summarize prior work – show why existing research is insufficient and how your approach addresses the gap. A well-written body maintains the "common theme," with each chapter logically building on the previous one and contributing to answering the research question.

Discussion

In the discussion, you critically reflect on your findings in relation to the research question. Analyze to what extent the question has been answered, highlight unexpected results, and consider alternative explanations. Address limitations openly and outline directions for future research. A strong discussion demonstrates self-critical awareness and shows how your results matter for theory and practice.

5.3 Some key success factors

5.3.1 Text flow and structuring: the famous "common theme"

A strong thesis is guided by a clear *common theme*. This means that every part of the text – each chapter, paragraph, sentence, and even word – should contribute directly to identifying or solving the research problem. If something does not serve this purpose, it does not belong in the thesis.

The quality of your work is judged not only by the content but also by how consistently you develop and sustain your argument. Results must answer the research question, and the literature review should support rather than distract from the argument. A well-written thesis is coherent, concise, and complete: nothing essential is missing, and nothing unnecessary is included.

Achieving this level of clarity usually requires several rounds of revision. Be prepared to cut passages if they do not fit the main argument. Although this can feel difficult, making such sacrifices strengthens the thesis and ultimately improves the grade.

5.3.2 A clear outline

A master's thesis should not require more than four numbered heading levels (e.g., 4.1.2.3.); in most cases, three are sufficient. If you feel the need for more, reconsider your overall structure – too many levels usually indicate that the text consists of headings rather than coherent argumentation.

A strong outline is logical and self-explanatory. The same principles that apply to the thesis title also apply to headings: they should be clear, concise, and meaningful. Headings must guide the reader and reflect the logical flow of your argument.

Of course, the specific outline will also depend on the chosen thesis format; for example, a Managerial Thesis will naturally follow a somewhat different structure than a classical Academic Thesis (for more information, please refer to chapter 7).

Typical pitfalls and suggested improvements:

…
2. Acquisitions and their impact
    2.1. Motives for acquisitions and their various impacts
    2.2. Target conflict: acquisition or innovation

3. Literary analysis of the impact of acquisitions on innovation
…

In this example, the first point (2.) is repeated through a sub-point (2.1.). This is illogical, because the first point should serve as the headline for the subordinating points. A second weak point is that points 2. and 3. are highly redundant, and therefore probably do not differ very much in content. As a reader you are annoyed by unnecessary repetitions.

A much better division (which could of course be improved further) would be:

…
2. Background: Acquisitions
    2.1. Overview
    2.2. Motives for acquisitions
    2.3. Target conflict: acquisition or innovation

3. The impact of acquisitions on innovation
…

…
5.2. Results of the empirical study
    5.2.1. The requirements for start-ups

5.3. Interpretation of results
…

In this structure, the question arises why the author subdivided the top point 5.2. at all: there is only one sub-point. In this respect, the title is not strictly speaking a headline. The sub-point should be eliminated.

…
3. Results of the empirical study
    3.1. Methodology used
    3.2. Importance of each founding motive
    3.3. Correlation analysis between motive and success
…

Here the headline (3.) does not actually apply to all three sub-points. 3.1. is not a result, but rather the approach. Either you make this into its own point, or you change the headline point to "Empirical study".

…
5. Literature overview: establishing teams
    5.1. Advantages of establishing teams
    5.2. Supplementation through complementary skills
    5.3. Problems of cooperation with engineers and economists
…

This illustrates a hierarchy problem. The author presents different aspects at the same level. For example, 5.2. is clearly a sub-point of 5.1. Also missing is the logical counterpart to the advantages, namely the disadvantages. A much better division would be:

…
5. Establishing teams
    5.1. Advantages of establishing teams
        5.1.1. Supplementation through complementary skills
        5.1.2. Larger social networks
    5.2. Disadvantages of establishing teams
        5.2.1. Different language of engineers and economists
…

5.3.3 A clear writing style

A good thesis is clear and precise. Obviously, the writing style also contributes to this. The ability to express yourself can be learned – make yourself aware of which texts seem clear to you and which do not, and what distinguishes them. Practice it. There is good literature on this subject. Some short rules below:

Scientific writing does not mean incomprehensible writing. *Formulate short sentences and use a clear, simple language. Someone who writes in a complicated way usually thinks in a complicated way. Remember what the philosopher Karl Popper said: "If you cannot say something simply and clearly, say nothing and go back to work, until you can say it clearly."*

Writing is a process. *No sentence that you have written has to remain that way. On the contrary – the writer Heinrich von Kleist praised "the gradual formulation of ideas" when writing.*

Do not force the reader to read a sentence three times. *This happens when you spice up your text with insertions and subordinate clauses. Rule of thumb: An insertion must be less than three seconds long. Otherwise, the reader forgets the thoughts of the main clause, which drowns out information. For comparison: "The judge denied, after he had pronounced the sentence against the accused, the defense lawyer, by not saying goodbye, any respect." Would be clearer: "The judge denied the defense lawyer any respect. After he had pronounced the sentence against the accused, he did not say goodbye to him."*

Distinguish between foreign and technical words. *Many foreign words can be replaced with a common, everyday word. Unlike foreign words, technical terms belong in a scientific text.*

Who, how, what? *"The behavior of Homo oeconomicus must be considered carefully in order to draw conclusions about the effects of the lack of information." Huh? Who here has what, how, where and why? Ask yourself these questions to avoid errors in your wording.*

Distrust adjectives. *They can often be replaced by a noun. A literary work is a book, positive developments are gains and critical statements are criticisms.*

Sometimes a simple test helps: Give the thesis to a friend or family member without a business background and ask if they really understand the text or whether there are sentences that are not yet entirely clear. Also ask if the work is structured clearly, whether the central arguments are clear, and whether it is fun to read.

Again: It is not enough to write a thesis that only has good content – quality means being able to communicate the content. By the way, this applies not only to master's theses.

5.3.4 Some tips on time management

Writing a thesis is complex and often more time-consuming than expected – especially alongside your professional commitments. Plan your milestones carefully, build in buffers, and leave enough time for revisions and feedback. Aim to finish a full draft at least three weeks before the submission deadline at the end of June – this gives you the chance to improve quality and avoid last-minute stress. Rushed, overnight work almost always results in errors and lower grades.

6 Formal guidelines

The following formal requirements are "suggested requirements", so you have some margin of discretion. Please use these responsibly. Where the Master's Thesis template on Moodle contains binding specifications, the template takes precedence. The citation rules in 6.3 and 6.4 are binding.

6.1 Formal structure of the thesis

The master's thesis is written in English. The normal range for an Academic Thesis and a Managerial Thesis is 30–50 pages (excluding reference list and appendix). For an Educational Thesis, the written document comprises approx. 15 pages of literature review plus the video script and the storyboard, accompanied by an approx. 5-minute video (see chapter 8). The more authors are involved, the higher the expectations regarding scope and quality (see chapter 2).

The thesis typically includes the following parts (applicable to all formats):

- Cover page (see the template on the Master's Thesis page on Moodle)
- Abstract
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures and Tables
- Main Body of the Thesis
- Reference List
- Appendix
- List of Aids (including all AI tools used, see 6.3.2)

6.2 Formatting the text

The thesis is one-sided, 1.5 line spacing. The font is Times New Roman, size 12, and the text alignment should be full justification. The margins should be 2.54 cm all around. All pages of the text should be numbered with Arabic numerals.

Paragraphs make the text much easier to read. It is important to make sure that paragraphs tie together coherent thoughts. Figures, tables, charts and key words greatly help readers to navigate through the document. Particularly complicated and detailed issues can briefly be summarized in this way. So do not be stingy – but do not overdo it. Figures, graphs, tables etc. are to be numbered consecutively and given a description. Figure captions are below figures, table captions above the tables.

6.3 Citations in scientific work

6.3.1 Why cite and to what extent?

A scientific thesis builds on existing knowledge. Ignoring prior literature means failing to make a genuine contribution. Careful literature research and consistent referencing are therefore essential. The WU Library regularly offers courses on literature research, which we strongly recommend.

There is no fixed minimum number of references, but a broad and solid literature base is necessary for a good thesis. Quality and relevance matter more than quantity, yet as a rule of thumb, around 50 academic sources are common for an Academic Thesis; 20 sources are certainly insufficient. Empirical theses may require fewer references than conceptual ones. A list of quality peer-reviewed journals can be found in the VHB-Teilratings.

All use of others' intellectual material – verbatim (direct quotation) or paraphrased (indirect quotation) – must be cited correctly, following the citation guidelines provided in 6.4. Proper referencing makes it clear which ideas are your own and which are drawn from other sources, and it ensures that readers can locate the material.

Plagiarism is a serious offense. All theses are checked with plagiarism detection software. For details, see the official WU Guidelines Plagiarism and the information on plagiarism and legal consequences on Moodle.

6.3.2 Note on the use of generative AI

In the EMBA E&I, we encourage students to make use of modern tools, including generative AI, as part of their research and writing process. When applied responsibly, such tools can support literature research, improve writing clarity, or help structure arguments. Examples include Perplexity for research support or DeepL Write for language refinement.

Talk to your supervisor before using AI tools in your research. It is important to clarify whether and how you can use them, and how to properly cite AI-generated content in your work. Transparency is key: clearly indicate in which sections AI tools were used and how they were used. Use a combination of these methods to ensure transparency:

- Describe which specific AI tools and AI-generated content you used and for what purpose (e.g., literature review, methodology section).
- List all AI tools used in the List of Aids (list of resources) at the end of your master's thesis.

You can find suggestions for citing AI-generated content, with links, on Moodle. Responsibility for the final thesis always rests with the author. The decisive factor is not whether AI tools are employed, but whether they are used thoughtfully and in a way that upholds academic integrity.

6.4 Presentation of sources

6.4.1 Body of the thesis

In general, citations for E&I master's theses are to be based on the APA (American Psychological Association: https://apastyle.apa.org/) guidelines, Version 7 (the most current version).

References in the body of the thesis are to be done by displaying the source in parentheses directly following the quoted or paraphrased text. The period is placed after the reference. If you cite more than one publication in parentheses, they are to be listed in alphabetical order and separated by a semicolon. Use "e.g.," if you want to give examples, but not a complete list.

All references in the body of the thesis include the author's name and the year. When there are more than two authors, only the first author is listed, followed by "et al.". Page numbers are handled as follows:

- **Direct quotations:** The exact page number(s) are mandatory (e.g., "p. 158" or "pp. 158–159"). Direct quotations are placed in quotation marks.

- **Paraphrases (indirect quotations):** Page numbers are not mandatory. However, we recommend adding them whenever you refer to a specific passage rather than to the work as a whole, especially in long works such as books, so that readers can locate the material.

The following are examples of in-text citations:

> The success of the lead-user method in generating innovative ideas for companies has already been empirically documented (Lilien et al., 2002; Olson & Bakke, 2001; Urban & von Hippel, 1988).
>
> Research indicates that customization based on expressed preferences enhances consumers' willingness to pay, purchase intention, and attitudes toward the product (e.g., Franke et al., 2009; Raimondo et al., 2013).
>
> A recent study by Krause and Franke (2024) shows that consumers abandon customization because their valence follows a U-shaped curve during the process.
>
> And as we know, "entrepreneurship is about transforming the current status and creating something new (…)" (Frese & Gielnik, 2023, p. 158).

References for tables, figures, diagrams, etc., are placed directly below the object, preceded by the word "Source" (or "Sources"). To avoid any misunderstandings, any special notes to the figures in tables, diagrams, etc., are to be labeled with small letters (a, b, c, etc.) directly in the table or figure and explained in a note directly below the object.

When you create a figure yourself, you need to identify the figure as such (Source: Own rendering). If you take the basic outlines of a figure, but make changes or additions, you must also note this:

> Source: Own rendering based on Homburg and Krohmer (2003)

6.4.2 Reference list

Overview of how to cite different sources:

– **Journal articles**
  - Surname of the author (without any title) followed by a comma
  - First name(s) of the author (abbreviated)
  - Year in parentheses, followed by a period
  - Title followed by a period
  - Journal name in italic, followed by a comma
  - Volume number in italic and the issue number in parentheses (without a space before it), followed by a comma, the page numbers, and a period
  - DOI

Krause, F., & Franke, N. (2024). Understanding consumer self-design abandonment: A dynamic perspective. *Journal of Marketing, 88*(2), 79–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231183977

Franke, N., Keinz, P., & Steger, C. J. (2009). Testing the value of customization: When do customers really prefer products tailored to their preferences? *Journal of Marketing, 73*(5), 103–121. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.103

Horvath, D., Keith, N., Klamar, A., & Frese, M. (2023). How to induce an error management climate: Experimental evidence from newly formed teams. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *38*(4), 763–775. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-022-09835-x

– **Books**

- Surname of the author (without any title) followed by a comma
- First name(s) of the author (abbreviated)
- Year in parentheses, followed by a period (if there is nothing to indicate the year of publication, this must be identified as "n.d." [= undated])
- Title of the book in italic
- Edition of the book in parentheses, followed by a period (not required for the first edition)
- Publisher followed by a period
- DOI (if available)

Jackson, L. M. (2019). *The psychology of prejudice: From attitudes to social action* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000168-000

– **Book chapters**

Edited books are collations of chapters written by different authors. To reference a single chapter, a different format is needed.

- Surname of the author (without any title) followed by a comma
- First name(s) of the author (abbreviated)
- Year in parentheses, followed by a period (see above)
- Chapter title followed by a period
- "In" followed by the names of the editors (in this case, however, with the abbreviated first names before the surname) with the suffix "(Ed.)" or "(Eds.)", followed by a comma
- Book title in italic, followed by the page range in parentheses and a period
- Publisher followed by a period
- DOI (if available)

Aron, L., Botella, M., & Lubart, T. (2019). Culinary arts: Talent and their development. In R. F. Subotnik, P. Olszewski-Kubilius, & F. C. Worrell (Eds.), *The psychology of high performance: Developing human potential into domain-specific talent* (pp. 345–359). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000120-016

If you use several works of an author with the same publication year, distinguish the citations by adding a small letter at the end of the year (e.g., 1981a, 1981b).

WTO (1981a)

WTO (1981b)

– **Web sources (publications on the World Wide Web)**

See https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples/webpage-website-references

For other types of sources (film, song, …) and more information on how to cite in your master's thesis, please refer to the official APA citation guide: https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples

6.4.3 Literature management software

We recommend using literature management software to handle citations while writing your thesis. Such software not only increases efficiency but also ensures correct referencing in your thesis. Common literature management software programs are:

- Mendeley
- Zotero
- EndNote
- Citavi

For more information about how to use literature management software, you can refer to Fit4Research (https://learn.wu.ac.at/open/fit4research/index).

7 Managerial Thesis Format

EMBA E&I students can also choose to write their master's thesis in the form of a **Managerial Thesis**, which is structured similarly to a consultancy report. The goal is to answer a case-specific question by specifying a relevant practical problem and proposing a solution in the form of actionable recommendations or implications.

This thesis format differs from an *Academic Thesis* in two key ways:

- It places greater emphasis on **problem analysis and solution development** rather than theoretical generalization.
- It typically includes **strategic recommendations or implications** that are directly relevant for practice.

The table of contents may be structured as follows (30–50 pages in total):

1. **Introduction** (approx. 3–5 pages)
   1.1. Problem statement and project context
   1.2. Goals and objectives of the project
   1.3. Relevance (e.g., for practice, industry, or entrepreneurship)
2. **Methods** (approx. 5–8 pages)
   2.1. Description and justification of the chosen methodological approach
   2.2. Data collection and analysis (e.g., interviews, benchmarking, case studies, market research)
3. **Results** (approx. 12–22 pages)
   3.1. Presentation and interpretation of findings
   3.2. Identification of key issues and opportunities
4. **Strategic Recommendations / Implications** (approx. 10–15 pages)
   4.1. Actionable recommendations for the organization or target group
   4.2. Broader implications (e.g., for entrepreneurs, managers, or policymakers)

Like all thesis formats, Managerial Theses must follow academic standards: arguments must be logically structured, sources must be cited correctly, and the work must be transparent and reproducible. Quality is assessed in particular by the relevance of the problem and the stringency of argument, data and conclusions. Teams may, for example, complement their thesis with a pitch deck.

Topics for Managerial Theses are usually derived from real-world challenges in your own organization, your own project, or other organizations and industries. They may be developed in collaboration with corporate partners, but they must always retain academic rigor.

8 Educational Thesis Format (Video Thesis): A written document and an educational video

EMBA E&I students can write their master's thesis in an innovative format that includes a written document and an educational video. The Educational Thesis primarily focuses on the development of didactic material that explains complex concepts in a clear and accessible way.

The written document is different from an Academic Thesis in two ways:

- It does not include the usual discussion and conclusion parts.
- It includes:
  - A video script: A chronological run-down of scenes (dialogue that is to appear in the video)
  - A video storyboard: A graphic representation of how the video will unfold, shot by shot

The table of contents may be structured as follows:

1. **Introduction** (approx. 1–2 pages)
   1.1. Presentation of the topic and the research question
   1.2. Presentation of its relevance (e.g., for research, teaching, or practice)
2. **Literature review** (approx. 15 pages)
   2.1. Current state of research
   2.2. Key insights
      - Describe particularly relevant topic blocks more intensively
      - Refer to and highlight findings from the latest literature
3. **Video concept**
   3.1. Background information
      - Which topic blocks will be featured in the video?
      - What is the choice based on?
   3.2. Video script
   3.3. Video storyboard

The educational video (approx. 5 minutes) is an efficient combination of visual cues (storyboard-based) and audio explanation (video-script-based) that conveys key information on a complex topic. In team theses, we expect more elaborate videos, e.g., featuring a real case, original footage, or interview snippets.

The video script and storyboard prepared by the student should be approved by the supervisor before the student proceeds with the creation of the video. Important tips and video requirements are documented in the Educational Video Guide (Moodle). Besides the guide, students who decide to write in this format receive a proposal template and an E&I branded opening and closing video template, accompanied by the E&I jingle.

The choice of topic is up to the student, as long as it addresses a complex element (theory, method, tool, framework, etc.) that can be conveyed through didactically sound material. In this way, students help future students learn and gain visibility as experts themselves.

For more details on this thesis format, please contact Noreen Kerscher (noreen.kerscher@wu.ac.at).

9 FAQ

Do I need to find a topic on my own?

Yes. In the EMBA E&I, students identify an interesting and relevant topic themselves. The list of past thesis titles on Moodle may serve as inspiration, and your supervisor will support you in refining your research question.

Who can supervise my thesis?

Any lecturer of the MBA program as well as any WU faculty member with a PhD degree. When in doubt, ask Prof. Franke or Prof. Keinz. Please approach only one potential supervisor at a time.

Can I write my thesis in a team?

Yes. All formats can be written alone or in a team of up to four students. The more authors are involved, the higher the expectations regarding scope and quality.

How many times must I revise the proposal before receiving supervision approval?

Writing a scientific thesis is an iterative process. Proposals are usually revised several times. Approval does not depend on the number of revisions, but on whether you demonstrate the ability to identify a problem and structure a solution, laying the foundation for a high-quality thesis.

Proposal and approval – why these hurdles?

Our goal is to give you the best chance to succeed. The proposal process minimizes misunderstandings and ensures you are on the right track from the beginning.

Can I hand in my thesis for pre-correction before final submission?

No. Your supervisor will not proofread your thesis. You are fully responsible for deciding when your thesis is finished. Your supervisor supports you in all important steps and decisions, but the final responsibility is yours.

Is it true that only empirical theses can receive an "Excellent"?

No. The grade "Excellent" is awarded for excellent work – whether theoretical or empirical. That said, some students find it easier to demonstrate their own contribution in empirical work.

How often do I have to report to my supervisor?

That is up to you. Typically, two to three meetings are held to clarify literature, structure, method, etc., with closer contact at the beginning. When reaching out, have concrete questions ready.

May I use AI tools?

Yes, responsibly and transparently. Talk to your supervisor before using AI tools and document their use in the thesis and in the List of Aids (see 6.3.2).

Will I receive feedback on my thesis?

Yes. After the evaluation, you can ask your supervisor for feedback to discuss strengths and weaknesses and take away valuable lessons for future work.