

MASTER THESIS SUPERVISION

at the Institute for Strategic Management (ISM)

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as of September 2025



Requirements

Students from all master and MBA programs at WU can write a master thesis at ISM.

Basic knowledge in the field of strategic management is required.

Application phase

First contact and initial meeting

Students can a) either propose a topic that fits the research fields of the researchers at ISM or b) apply to a topic that is announced at the website. No deadlines need to be observed.

When applying for an announced topic, please send your current CV and grade certificate.

After first e-mail contact, an initial meeting will take place to detail the basic parameters of the thesis. Please note that this is not a confirmation of supervision. The final confirmation of supervision takes place with acceptance of the proposal.

Proposal

A proposal provides the first foundation for the thesis and is important initial groundwork. It is meant as a guideline for the student as well as for the supervisor.

A proposal is about 3 to 5 pages (excluding references and cover page) and includes the following aspects:

1. **Cover page**
 - **Title of the thesis:** This is usually a working title that can be adapted during the writing of the thesis.
 - **Name of the student**
 - **Student ID**
2. **Problem definition:** It describes which topic the thesis is dealing with and which research question(s) should be answered by writing it.
3. **Objective of the thesis:** It should be clearly stated, what the student wants to achieve and why the student writes the thesis.
4. **Procedure/Methodology:** This section describes how the student wants to work on the problem. This can be done either through a literature review or using social research methods (e.g. a survey, expert interviews, case study). During the first meeting with the potential supervisor the methodology will be agreed upon.

5. **Thesis structure:** This section provides an overview of the planned structure of the thesis.

A typical structure consists of:

- Abstract
- Table of contents
- Table of figures, table of tables, abbreviation list, symbol list (if applicable)
- Introduction (Introduction, problem definition, relevance for both theory and practice, objective of the thesis)
- Literature review and/or theoretical framework
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion
- Implications and limitations
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendix (if applicable)

6. **Preliminary list of references:** The preliminary bibliography contains the sources that the student would like to use or has already used to create the proposal.

The proposal should give an overview of the work and should clarify the goal of the thesis and the steps necessary to achieve it.

The proposal is assessed based on its quality and thoroughness (i.e. research-oriented proposals – sufficient review of relevant academic literature).

Writing phase

Time frame

The student should work on the thesis continuously. The thesis should be completed within 6 months after the acceptance of the proposal. Students are encouraged to meet this time frame and plan their workload accordingly. However, if agreed upon with the supervisor the deadline can be extended in certain circumstances. If the student unreasonably exceeds this time frame, the supervisor can decide to terminate the supervision.

Supervision style

Throughout the supervision, the student will receive feedback in written form and in verbal form during ad-hoc and regular meetings with the supervisor. The writing phase might involve presentation and/or feedback sessions.

In case you collect primary data with personified information, please pay attention to the General Data Protection Regulation ("Datenschutz-Grundverordnung", DSGVO). *Note that all conducted interviews need to be recorded.*

Formal guidelines

The student should use as much high-quality and up-to-date literature as possible. Students should mainly use articles from relevant leading international journals. ISM considers those journals high-quality that are not ranked lower than "B" (with "A+" being the best ranking) in the Star-Journal-List and the Journal Ranking of the Department of Strategy & Innovation (<https://bach.wu.ac.at/d/research/ratings/>). Other literature such as scientific books or textbooks can also be used but in moderation and with the focus on high-quality. In some cases, internet sources may be used, e.g. for corporate and industry information (such as firm websites), discussion papers, presentations, reports to funding agencies, and policy briefs. For how to deal with this so called "grey literature" see Adams, Smart, and Huff (2017).

Thesis language is English. The thesis should have a minimum of 60 pages excluding bibliography and appendix. The thesis needs to be linguistically and grammatically impeccable. Theses containing obvious defects will not be accepted for assessment.

For thesis structure see suggestions in chapter 2.2.

Formatting guidelines

There are no specific formatting requirements. However, students are advised to choose a common font such as Arial or Times New Roman in a 12-point readable font with 1.5 spacing. Commonly applied style guides such as APA6 can be used as a reference regarding formatting requirements. The chosen style shall be applied throughout the thesis.

All figures and tables must be numbered consecutively. Each figure/table should be designed in such a way that it can be understood without the corresponding text. Consequently, it should include a headline, units of measures/rating scales etc. (if applicable).

Citation

A chosen citation style must be maintained throughout the thesis. ISM recommends using APA6 as citation style. All used figures and tables must also be quoted.

Scientific work is characterized by the fact that all thoughts, which cannot be assigned to the author of the thesis, must be identified. If this is not done consistently, it is plagiarism. ISM and WU understand plagiarism as a serious infringement in academic work. Plagiarism includes missing citations (meaningful or literal), part of another author's work, the use of "Ghost Writers", "copy-and-paste" and so on. The submitted thesis is subject to a plagiarism check. Plagiarism will result in a negative evaluation of the thesis. Students are advised to check the information regarding [plagiarism by WU](#). By citing the student ensures that a third party can recognize beyond doubt which thoughts were adopted by other authors and what are the student's own thoughts.

ISM recommends using literature management software such as Citavi, EndNote or Mendeley.

The library of the WU is excellently equipped and offers access to the most important databases to systematically search for literature (<https://www.wu.ac.at/en/library/finding-literature/databases/all-databases/>).

For a guideline on how to do systematic literature reviews see Denyer and Tranfield (2009).

Closing phase

Deliverables

Finishing a master thesis at ISM involves providing the supervisor with three deliverables:

1. **Master thesis** in PDF and Word-Format. *Note that the abstract of the final version of the thesis should have around 250 words and should be understood by a broader audience, not just experts*
2. **Used research material** (e.g. interviews, used grey literature, survey data, files used for data analysis such as Excel files). *Note that a separate index for this research material is required.* Best practice is an Excel file with the following columns:
 - a) each research material file is given a unique and ascending ID related to the key topic of the thesis (e.g. Sharing001.pdf, Sharing002.mp3,...)
 - b) key features of a file (e.g. number of pages, length of an interview)
 - c) year the research file was published / generated
 - d) source of the research material file (e.g. database name, company)

Official thesis submission

The thesis needs to be officially handed in electronically with the official cover page by uploading it to [myWU](#), please find further information on the [WU Website](#). Students who have submitted their work via [myWU](#) no longer need to submit bound copies of master's theses and dissertations. A digital version is sufficient. The thesis will undergo a plagiarism check. Consult the manager of your master program on formal steps to complete your studies.

Evaluation

The evaluation process can take up to 2 months after the thesis has been uploaded on myWU. It is therefore the student's responsibility to plan ahead so that possible deadlines (e.g. completion of studies) can be met.

References

- Adams, R. J., Smart, P., & Huff, A. S. 2017. Shades of grey: Guidelines for working with the grey literature in systematic reviews for management and organizational studies. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19(4): 432-454.
- Denyer, D. & Tranfield, D. 2009. Producing a systematic review. In: D.A. Buchanan & A. Bryman (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational research methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage: 671-689.