

CONSOLIDATED TEXT

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**Study area of International Relations and Future Studies**

**BA and MA Thesis Writing Guide**

**Tallinn University**

**School of Governance, Law and Society**

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**Tallinn**

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## 1. General Provisions

This guide sets the official rules and recommendations for writing and defending a thesis within the study area International Relations and Future Studies at Tallinn University School of Governance, Law and Society. It is intended for both Bachelor's and Master's students undertaking an independently written thesis and for members of the supervisory committee. All students must adhere to the guidelines detailed herein. More informal assignments (e.g., essays or short research papers) are governed by separate study area guidelines.

## 2. Types of Theses

A thesis is a written dissertation written independently by a student wishing to graduate and complete their curriculum. The thesis must be written independently, and sources must be cited. Failure to cite a source is considered plagiarism and further action will be taken according to the Tallinn University Statutes and its appendices.

When writing the thesis, a student should adhere to this guide and the advice given to them by their thesis supervisor. When grading the thesis, the panel should first and foremost take into consideration the content requirements outlined in this guide as well as the grading guidelines found in the appendix.

There are two principal types:

### 1. Bachelor's Thesis

- An independently written dissertation demonstrating competence in applying theoretical and empirical approaches.
- Expected to be a systematic analysis of an issue related to international relations.

### 2. Master's Thesis

- An advanced, independently written dissertation that reflects specialist-level research ability.
- Must present original research contributions within the field.

Both types may be empirical or theoretical. The theoretical thesis offers students increased freedom in structuring their work (see Annex I for detailed model examples).

### 3. Structural Provisions

A thesis is divided into two main sections:

#### Content Part

- Introduction
- Main Chapters (including theoretical basis and, if applicable, methodology, and empirical analysis)
- Summary and Conclusions

#### Formal Part

- Title Page
- Abstract (language options as provided by the curriculum)
- Table of Contents
- References
- Appendices (optional)

#### Volume Guidelines:

- Bachelor's Thesis (12 credits): Content part should be approximately 35–40 pages (based on 1 page = 1,800 characters without spaces).
- Master's Thesis (24 credits): Content part should be approximately 60–70 pages (based on 1 page = 1,800 characters without spaces).

#### **N.B.**

- The formal part (title page, table of contents, abstracts, references, and appendices) is not counted toward the page limit for content. The volume of the thesis may differ from the requirements if it is permitted by the thesis supervisor.
- For sample BA theses, please consult- <https://www.etera.ee/page/main> - or ask your supervisor for samples. Please follow the structure of the sample theses when formatting your own thesis, especially the Title Page.
- The difference in credits awarded between BA and MA theses is a reflection of the size of the task and not a difference in the requirements related to its content.

## 4. General Thesis Requirements

### 4.1 Every thesis must clearly articulate:

- Problem Statement: Define the research problem, accompanying questions, and the scope of the study.
- Theoretical Basis and Empirical Analysis: The work must include a solid theoretical framework and a clear description of the methodology and data used, especially in cases of empirical theses. If the thesis is primarily theoretical the methodology section and empirical analysis can be exchanged with suitable sections for the theoretical argument made by the student.
- Findings and Conclusions: The contributions must be well argued, based on the analysis, and placed in a broader context.

**N.B.** In all cases, the thesis should explicitly state its objectives, follow a logical structure, and maintain academic integrity (all sources must be properly cited).

### 4.2 Research Integrity

- Research integrity is of paramount importance. Plagiarism is not tolerated. For more information on ethics and good research practices, please consult Tallinn University guide here: <https://www.tlu.ee/en/ethics-and-good-practices>. This guide also offers guidance on good supervision practices.
- The study area of International Relations and Future Studies encourages our students to consult Artificial Intelligence (AI) during their research strictly in the framework of Tallinn University's guidance: [TLU Recommendations for the Use of Artificial Intelligence, as of 20.02.2024 | Tallinn University](#). The student is expected to be familiar with the university guidelines and strictly adhere to them.
- The IR study area strongly recommends **not** using AI systems for:
  - o Making summaries during the learning process (incl. text and reading summaries);
  - o For translating texts;
  - o For finding references.
- It is *forbidden* for students to generate any textual content with AI. This means that the student must present their original writing. The supervisor has a right to ask the supervisee about AI use, especially if they have reasonable doubt that the text was generated by AI. If a student uses AI for any reason, they are mandated to save all the

prompts and previous thesis drafts (incl. chapter and sub-section drafts) for evidence. When sharing your drafts with your supervisor, always share a document copy (not pdf). Please do not share a link to a document available on cloud with your supervisor as you are required to have different versions of the text available.

#### 4.3 Ethics in Research

##### BA Theses

- For BA research whose empirical section includes living participants or might affect others (including non-human animals), ethical review is conducted by the thesis supervisor.

##### MA Theses

- For MA research whose empirical section includes living participants or might affect others (including non-human animals), ethical review is conducted by the thesis supervisor. The supervisor can reach out to the Head of Studies in case of doubt to raise the ethical review process.

#### 5. Formatting Requirements

All theses must be formatted according to the following specifications:

- Font: Times New Roman
- Font Size: 12
- Text Alignment: Justified
- Line Spacing: 1.5
- Other: Headings are to be clearly distinguishable (active headings are recommended so that the Table of Contents links to each section).

#### 6. Principles of Supervision

##### Student Responsibilities:

1. The student is responsible for the validity of the data used and for confirming the sources of the opinions expressed in the thesis;
2. The student must consult their supervisor when choosing the topic and overall structure of the thesis and must have their approval before proceeding with their research;

3. A Bachelor's student has the right to 30 hours worth of supervision, which includes consultation meetings, reading thesis drafts and giving written feedback. Master's students have the right to 50 hours worth of consultation with the same conditions applying as with Bachelor's students;
4. The student shall turn to their supervisor for advice and guidance upon encountering issues or questions when writing their thesis;
5. The student is obligated to inform their supervisor of any potential upcoming difficulties encountered in researching the topic and of any potential changes to the problem statement and the wording of the topic;
6. In case of insurmountable problems in communication or misunderstandings between the student and their supervisor, the student has the right to turn to the head of study area for a solution;
7. The student must adhere to the thesis guidelines, meet deadlines and organise their cooperation with their supervisor accordingly;
8. The final thesis must be submitted to the supervisor no later than ten days before the officially announced thesis submission deadline, unless the student has reached a different agreement with their supervisor.

#### Supervisor Responsibilities:

1. The supervisor will assist the student, in accordance with the schedule they and the student have set, in defining the initial hypothesis and research questions, in choosing a suitable theoretical framework and methodology, in recommending appropriate literature, in adhering to the content and form requirements and in giving feedback on the general direction of the thesis;
2. The supervisor will point out mistakes, shortcomings and weak points in argumentation and structure. They will assess the research methodology and terminology as well the style and language used throughout the thesis;
3. The supervisor is obligated to inform the student of any potential upcoming difficulties and changes to the structure and schedule of their cooperation;
4. The supervisor has the right to terminate their cooperation with the student should the student consistently miss deadlines, violate research ethics or consistently ignore the supervisor's advice.
5. The student and the head of studies must be notified in writing should the supervisor choose to terminate the cooperation;

6. The supervisor is obligated to respond to the student's queries within five working days, unless having previously informed the student otherwise;
7. If the supervisor grants an exception to the student with regard to the volume requirements of the thesis, they are obligated to state the reason for the exception.

## 7. Thesis Procedures and Defence

### 1. Submission:

- All theses must be submitted electronically in both .docx and .pdf formats via the designated e-learning platform.
- Before submission the supervisor needs to sign their agreement to the submission of the thesis on ÕIS. The document file (pdf) with their supervisor's signature has to be uploaded to Moodle.

### 2. Defence:

- The defence is held publicly before a designated panel.
- The presentation should be concise (7 minutes for Bachelor's theses and 10 minutes for Master's theses), clearly outlining the main arguments and findings.
- After the presentation, the panel—including the supervisor (or their written opinion), a reviewer, and committee members—will conduct a question-and-answer session.

### 3. Evaluation:

- The final grade is determined by combining the written thesis's quality, the evaluations from the reviewer and supervisor, and the student's performance during the defence session.
- Detailed grading matrices for Bachelor's and Master's theses are provided in Annexes II and III.

## 8. Final Provisions

- These guidelines must be observed by all students and staff within the International Relations and Future Studies study area.
- These guidelines may be revised and amended by a decision from the Director of School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS). Suggestions for amendments may be made by the Head of study area, head of study programme and the School's

study board. Issues that are not discussed in these guidelines are to be solved by the Director or the Head of studies, who will consult the head of study programme.

- Issues not covered by these guidelines will be resolved in consultation with the Head of study area.

## ANNEXES

### Annex I: Thesis Structure Models and Format Examples

This annex provides two recommended formats specifically adapted to the needs of International Relations and Future Studies research.

#### Model A: Standard Empirical/Hybrid Thesis Structure

1. Title Page
2. Abstract (in one or two languages)
3. Table of Contents
4. List of Abbreviations (if applicable)
5. Introduction – Justification for the topic and outline of the structure
6. Literature Review - A review of relevant literature and formulation of hypotheses/research questions
7. Theoretical Framework – Discussion of the theoretical framework of the thesis
8. Methodology – Clear description and justification of research design, data choice, collection methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) and data analysis methods.
9. Empirical Analysis – Presentation of data and findings
10. Discussion - discussion of thesis results
11. Conclusions and Recommendations – Discussion of results and implications
12. References – Complete and consistently formatted
13. Appendices – Relevant supplementary material

## Model B: Theoretical Thesis Structure

Students who choose a purely theoretical approach enjoy greater freedom in structuring their work. One possible model is:

1. Title Page
2. Abstract
3. Table of Contents
4. Introduction – Outline of the research problem and its significance
5. Literature Review – A flexible, in-depth discussion of multiple theoretical perspectives; this section can be organized in chapters or as a continuous narrative, as long as the argument remains coherent. This section helps you develop the ‘gap’ in the literature which you are trying to fill.
6. Chapter structure – Critical synthesis and reflection on the theories, with illustrative case studies, if applicable
7. Conclusions – Summarize new insights and propose future research directions
8. References and Appendices

**NB:** In both models, students are advised to consult with their supervisor to ensure the chosen structure meets academic and academic filed standards.

## Annex II – Bachelor’s Thesis Grading Criteria

*Note: A grade of F is given if the work is plagiarized and/or not related to the curriculum; such submissions do not meet even the minimum requirements for grade E. (In all cases, connection with the curriculum is assumed and is not separately itemized per grade.)*

All theses are evaluated based on 6 criteria: Problem definition, Theoretical framework, Empirical part, Conclusions and Recommendations, Formatting, and Defence. Please find a thorough description thereof below.

### Evaluation criteria:

1. **Problem Definition:** Evaluates whether the research problem is current, clearly defined, and significant. The research questions must be logically connected to the problem and precisely formulated.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
The problem is current, reasoned, and significant for the specific field. – It builds on or develops earlier work or provides a practical solution. – Research questions are clearly and specifically worded, well delimited, and correspond excellently to the research purpose.	The problem is current and significant. – The problem and research questions are logically connected and are clearly and adequately formulated.	The problem and research questions are clear and well connected.	The actuality and significance of the problem have not been convincingly established. – Questions are interlinked at a general level, but there are noticeable shortcomings.	The problem and research questions are unfocused and relate to the topic only to a small extent.

2. **Theoretical Part:** Assesses the range and synthesis of academic literature used, the clarity of the theoretical framework, and the connection between theory and the research problem. It also looks at whether the thesis offers a new or innovative contribution, even if modest.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
A broad range of relevant academic literature is used,	Relevant literature is used; the	Main theoretical perspectives are covered and	The theoretical framework has been applied but	The treatment of theory is insufficient,

covering the most important sources and establishing connections between different approaches. – The student synthesizes the literature, and the link between the problem, theory, and (if applicable) the empirical analysis is clear. – The work offers (even modest) new contributions to current knowledge.	theoretical framework is coherent and critically discussed, with a clear connection to the research problem.	applied. Some critical analysis can be seen, although the synthesis is limited.	lacks depth. The connection between theory and the problem is only moderately clear.	superficial, or poorly connected to the research problem.
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3. **Empirical Part:** Considers the suitability and justification of the chosen data collection and analysis methods. The quality and clarity with which the empirical data are presented and used to answer the research questions are key.

A	B	C	D	E
The chosen method for data collection is fully justified; the data are appropriate, clearly presented, and analyzed in depth, thoroughly answering the research questions.	The empirical methods and data collection are clear and suitable; the analysis is relevant and mostly thorough.	The empirical approach is evident and applied, though parts of the analysis may be generic or underdeveloped.	The description and application of data collection or analysis are insufficient or contain notable weaknesses.	The empirical component fails to respond effectively to the research questions.

4. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Focuses on how clearly and thoroughly the conclusions summarize the study's findings and whether the recommendations are supported by the analysis and discussed in a broader context.

A	B	C	D	E
Conclusions are clear, well argued, and discussed in a	Conclusions adequately summarize the	Conclusions summarize the work but may be	Conclusions are superficial or inadequately	Conclusions and recommendations are weak or do

broader theoretical or societal context. – Recommendations are innovative and directly supported by the analysis.	results, and recommendations are reasonable.	limited in critical insight or detailed analysis.	supported by the analysis.	not address the research questions adequately.
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5. **Formatting:** Checks adherence to formal presentation standards (e.g., font, spacing, citation accuracy) and the overall quality of the academic language.

A	B	C	D	E
The formatting complies with all guidelines (e.g., font, spacing, page layout), the academic language is strong and citations are error free.	Formatting is generally correct with only minor inconsistencies.	Some formatting or citation errors are present, but overall readability is maintained.	Formatting errors are noticeable and affect clarity.	Formatting is poor and significantly detracts from the presentation.

6. **Defence:** Reviews the clarity, depth, and responsiveness of the student’s oral presentation and ability to engage with questions from the evaluation panel.

A	B	C	D	E
The defence is exceptionally well presented; the student demonstrates outstanding command of the material and provides clear, precise answers.	The defence is effective and covers the main points with good clarity.	The defence is adequate, covering essential areas but lacking in depth in some responses.	The defence shows inconsistencies or weaknesses in presentation and response.	The defence is inadequately prepared and does not address the research content sufficiently.

## Annex III – Master’s Thesis Grading Criteria

*Note: A grade of F is given if the work is plagiarized and/or not related to the curriculum; such submissions do not meet even the minimum requirements for grade E. (In all cases, connection with the curriculum is assumed and is not separately itemized per grade.)*

All theses are evaluated based on 6 criteria: Problem definition, Theoretical framework, Empirical part, Conclusions and Recommendations, Formatting, and Defence. Please find a thorough description thereof below.

1. **Problem Definition:** Emphasizes a multifaceted and innovative definition of the research problem. The criteria assess the clarity, significance, and originality of the research questions.

A	B	C	D	E
The research problem is thoroughly defined, current, and significant. – Research questions are multifaceted, clearly and innovatively worded, and provide a robust framework for the thesis.	The problem is current and significant with logical, clear, and detailed research questions.	The problem and research questions are adequately defined, though some depth may be lacking.	The research problem is insufficiently defined, and the questions appear superficial.	The problem and questions are poorly formulated, lacking coherence or relevance.

2. **Theoretical Framework:** Requires an extensive literature review with a critically integrated and advanced theoretical framework. The student’s original contributions to the discussion should be evident.

A	B	C	D	E
An extensive and relevant literature review underpins a sophisticated and critically integrated theoretical	A comprehensive review is provided with a coherent theoretical framework and	The theoretical foundation is adequately established, though critical engagement may	The theoretical framework lacks sufficient depth and critical analysis.	The theoretical framework is inadequately developed and poorly linked to the research

framework. – Theoretical perspectives are systematically applied, and the student’s original contribution is evident.	clear critical analysis.	be limited in parts.		problem and analysis.
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3. **Empirical Part:** Evaluates the methodological rigor, depth of data collection and analysis, and the appropriateness of the research methods. The quality of the empirical investigation must fully address the research questions.

A	B	C	D	E
The research methods are exceptionally well justified; data collection is thorough, and the analysis is innovative and multidimensional, fully addressing the research questions.	The methodology is well described, with appropriate data collection and analysis that covers the key points in good detail.	The empirical approach is adequately implemented, though certain aspects of data collection or analysis may be limited.	The empirical elements are weakly developed or contain significant methodological issues.	The empirical analysis is minimal, inappropriate, or does not effectively address the research problem.

4. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Looks for insightful and well-argued conclusions that are deeply connected to both the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis. Recommendations should be innovative and point toward future research.

A	B	C	D	E
Conclusions are insightful, thoroughly argued, and seamlessly connected to both the theoretical and empirical discussions. – Recommendations are innovative and	Conclusions are clear and well connected to the analysis; recommendations are sound.	Conclusions summarize the work adequately, though with limited critical insight.	Conclusions are superficial and not well substantiated by the analysis.	Conclusions and recommendations are weak and do not adequately address the research questions.

point toward future research directions.				
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5. **Formatting:** Ensures that the thesis strictly adheres to the formal guidelines (font, margins, spacing, citation style) with academic precision and consistency.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
The thesis adheres strictly to all formatting rules (e.g., font, margins, spacing), employs academic language throughout, and citations are accurate and error free.	Formatting is excellent overall with minor inconsistencies.	Some formatting or citation errors are present, though the thesis remains largely clear.	Frequent formatting errors detract noticeably from clarity.	Formatting is poor and does not comply with the established guidelines.

6. **Defence:** Assesses the student's ability to present their work in a well-structured manner, respond clearly to questions, and demonstrate a comprehensive command of both the theoretical and practical aspects of the research.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
The defence presentation is exceptionally well structured; the student demonstrates deep knowledge, capable critique, and clear, precise responses.	The defence is clear and comprehensive with a good command of the research material.	The defence covers essential aspects satisfactorily but may lack additional depth.	The defence is somewhat unclear or lacks thoroughness.	The defence is poorly executed, with inadequate responses, insufficient detail, and lacking clarity.

## Annex IV: Referencing Conventions

### Mandatory Citation:

All sources used in the thesis must be properly cited. Omitting citations (or improper citation) is treated as plagiarism. Please see sub-section 4.2 on Research Integrity for more information.

### Recommended Style:

The preferred citation style is APA. Alternative styles may be used only with explicit approval from the supervisor, but they must be applied consistently throughout the document. For APA style specifics, please consult: <https://apastyle.apa.org>.

### In-Text Citations:

Citations must immediately follow the information drawn from a source. Each sentence is treated separately here. Use the author's last name and the publication year (and include page numbers when quoting directly, pointing towards specific arguments, or referring to figures or data, etc.). For multiple references, separate sources with a semicolon.

### Direct Quotes (in-sentence and block quotes):

Short quotes (up to three sentences or lines) should be enclosed in quotation marks. When emphasizing a word or a phrase you cited before, please use apostrophes (e.g., 'ontology'). Longer quotes must be formatted as block quotes (set off from the main text) and may use a smaller font size.

To set off the block quotes, please go to 'Paragraph' and adjust indentation to 0.5. Please make sure to do this consistently throughout your text. You can use this block quote as a sample. Block quotes do not use quotation marks. Remember to readjust the indentation to continue with your text.

### Reference List:

Only cite works that are referenced in the text and arrange them in alphabetical order based on the author's last name. The entries should include all necessary bibliographic details (such as author, year, title, publisher, and publication location). For online sources, also include the URL and the date when the website was last accessed.

### Special Source Types:

Different formats are provided for books, journal articles, chapters, legal documents, and internet sources. When citing legal acts or web pages, abbreviations and the date accessed should be clearly indicated.

## Annex V: Guide for the Reviewer

- **Objective Assessment:** Reviewers are expected to provide an unbiased, systematic evaluation of the thesis. Their responsibilities include examining the overall suitability of the work for defence based on study area guidelines.
- **Key Evaluation Areas:** The review should cover specific aspects such as:
  - **General Suitability:** Whether the thesis meets basic requirements for independent compilation and is ready for defence.
  - **Problem Formulation:** Clarity, relevance, and focus of the research problem and questions.
  - **Theoretical Framework:** Adequacy and critical engagement with the literature and theoretical perspectives.
  - **Methodology and Empirical Analysis:** Appropriateness of data collection methods and the quality of analysis (if applicable).
  - **Structure and Analytical Competence:** Logical organization, clarity of argumentation, and coherence of the overall presentation.
  - **Formatting, Citation, and Language:** Correct adherence to formatting rules and academic language standards.
- **Review Format:** The reviewer should support their feedback with examples from the thesis and provide a narrative that highlights both strengths and areas for improvement. No final grade is assigned by the reviewer.
- **Documentation:** The review must be signed (digital signatures accepted) and dated, including the reviewer's name and title.

## Annex VI: The Supervisor's Assessment

- Objective Evaluation: The supervisor's assessment is important to understand the quality of the work. It cannot be a mere endorsement of the student's work. Therefore, the supervisor provides an objective assessment of the thesis based on the study area thesis writing guide. The focus areas include:
  - Overall suitability for defence
  - Problem formulation and clarity
  - Theoretical framework and empirical analysis (if applicable)
  - Logical structure and cohesiveness
  - Formatting, citation, and language quality
  - Effective use of supplementary annexes
- Assessment Without a Final Grade: The supervisor's commentary supports the final evaluation but does not assign a grade.
- Documentation: The supervisor must include their name, title, and signature (digital signatures are acceptable) along with the date.

## Annex VII – Author’s Declaration and Non-Exclusive Licence

- Independent Work Confirmation: The author declares that the thesis has been independently compiled and that all external sources have been properly cited to avoid plagiarism.
- Granting a Licence: The author grants Tallinn University a non-exclusive licence to:
  - Reproduce the thesis for preservation and electronic publication within the University Academic Library repository.
  - Make the thesis publicly available for academic and research purposes.
- Copyright and Rights Retention: The non-exclusive licence remains valid throughout the copyright protection period, while the author retains their own rights over the work.
- Compliance Statement: The declaration confirms that the granting of the licence does not infringe on the intellectual property rights of others or any data protection laws.
- Author’s declaration and the non-exclusive licence are to be submitted in the electronic study system (ÕIS) by the student.