

## The Style Sheet for research papers (including MA Thesis) at the School of Humanities

### List of Contents

1. Writing a research paper / thesis .....	2
2. Compulsory components of a research paper / thesis .....	2
3. Tables, charts, drawings, diagrams .....	3
4. Language and style .....	3
5. Title of a research paper or a thesis .....	4
6. Formatting and layout .....	4
7. Matters related to good research practice and supervision .....	5
<i>The role of the supervisor</i> .....	5
<i>The role of the student</i> .....	5
8. Referencing and the list of works cited and consulted .....	6
9. Confirming your MA thesis topic .....	7
10. The length of a research paper that is part of BA exam and a MA thesis .....	8
11. Submitting the thesis and permission to proceed to defence .....	8
12. Examiner report .....	8
13. The procedure of the defence .....	10

This Style Sheet is not a handbook of how to write a research paper and /or a thesis. The aim of this Style Sheet is to draw attention to some important issues related to the writing and formatting of a paper, to some commonly occurring problems and to some shortcomings that papers commonly have; therefore having a preventive goal.

## **1. Writing a research paper / thesis**

Any research paper must have a clearly stipulated and worded **aim** (according to the character of the thesis a task, research problem, a hypothesis). The research problem asks questions on issues that are not known yet or are relatively unknown in the subject area. A hypothesis is a statement that the research will either confirm or negate the assumed answer to the research problem. When wording the aim of the paper it should formulate what the research attempts to achieve and what will be the target of the work.

The mediated **theory** should be related to the aims of the research and /or the applied approach. This means that while writing either the overview of the literature or the theoretical background, a perspective should be assumed that this piece of writing should contain only the knowledge and background that the readers will need to understand the following empirical and analytical part. Everything else, commonly appearing either as discursive material or an addenda to the main topic, commonly remains unnecessary and is superfluous information.

## **2. Compulsory components of a research paper / thesis**

The compulsory components of a paper may vary depending on the type of a paper. The components below are fully compulsory for MA theses. In other cases the compulsory components will be specified by a lecturer or a supervisor of a specific paper.

**Title page** (sample in the appendix)

### **List of contents**

**Introduction:** Giving reasons about the choice and actuality of the research topic or applicable object, explanation and reasons for the aim of the thesis, the research problem, concrete research questions, hypothesis, the description of the research material and of the methods used to achieve these aim(s), and a short overview of the structure of the thesis (what each part of it will deal with).

**Main part** will consist of several chapters, overview of the information related to the topic, and of the significant terminology, if necessary an overview of the methodology or research and development, an analysis and synthesis of existing and / or new material, the solutions and results received as part of the work, the interpretation of them and the conclusions made.

**Summary:** the most significant results and conclusions of the work, analysis of the fulfilment of the aim of the thesis, suggestions on further development of the paper / thesis, and for further research in the field.

**List of sources used** (only literature where a reference has been given should be listed)

A paper / thesis that has been written for a study programme which has English as the language of tuition should have a **Summary in Estonian** which should not be a verbatim translation of the summary of the thesis, but a brief summary of the whole thesis, covering the aim(s) and results of the thesis, the introduction, the basis of theory and methodology and a small-scale model of the summary. The summary in Estonian must contain the thesis title in standard Estonian. The summary must appear at the end of the paper / thesis.

### **The subsections**

The subsections must have content-related titles, and titles like ‘Analysis of the material’ or ‘The theoretical background’ should be avoided as they do not give sufficient information on the content of the chapter.

The proportion of the subsections must be appropriate. From one point of view the readers will find it easier to read a text that has been divided into sections. From the other point of view subsections should be created only if there is significant content reason for it. For example, there should be at least two subsections to a section, they should not be too short (i.e. only a few paragraphs).

### **3. Tables, charts, drawings, diagrams**

Presenting ample amounts of figures and lists inside the text will seriously hinder the ability to read the text. It is sensible, in this case, to gather the numeral and illustrative data into a table and draw graphs and diagrams based on them. If the data tables are longer than half a page they should be delegated to the appendix of the paper / thesis and appropriately referenced inside the text.

Any tables should be assigned a consecutive number and given a title that describes the contents of the table and its purpose. An indication of the source, or basis for the calculation, are to be shown in case the table is taken in its already published form from another source. In that case the source should be clearly indicated. Any charts or tables should be clear and interpretable without any help from the main text.

All the diagrams and illustrations (including photos) should be numbered by using Arabic numerals throughout the thesis and there should be always a short descriptive heading and a source reference.

### **4. Language and style**

A research paper / thesis should be written **using grammar and vocabulary in an appropriate register that compliment the academic nature of the text**. The **style should be neutral**. In an Estonian context it commonly means that non-personal wording (passive voice) or third person is preferred. In English using the first person is more common and should be used (*I*

*investigate*). Students are welcome to use the style common in their field of research as long as it remains consistent throughout the thesis. Moreover, judgemental, subjective, and opinionated expression is not appropriate for an academic work and should be avoided.

The MA thesis / research paper that is part of a BA exam is commonly written in the language of the tuition of a particular study programme or in the language of major specialisation. Students may apply to write their thesis or BA research paper in another language if the reason is very well grounded. Such reasoning should be submitted with the application for confirming the thesis topic.

Students are expected to polish their own academic language by using all available sources and style manuals.

## **5. Title of a research paper or a thesis**

The **title** of any research paper must be informative since at a later stage the paper / thesis title should wield maximum information on the contents when a database search is done. Once the thesis is finished the author (with the supervisor) should consider the title once more and if necessary amend it accordingly, as often during the writing the focus of the paper will change, there are adjustments in the material used, or the thematic field covered will be narrowed. The final title should correspond to the contents of the paper.

## **6. Formatting and layout**

There are various style manuals available and students are encouraged to use the system that is most common in their field of research.

**Font.** The preferred font is Times New Roman, 12 points, with 1,5 spacing.

**Margins.** Upper and lower margins should be 2,5 cm, the right and left margin 2 cm.

**Paragraph style.** The paragraph style should be consistent: if you use indentation, you use it throughout. If you use indentation the first paragraph after the title should preferably start without an indentation. If you do not use indentation there should be a space between the paragraphs. No mixing of the two styles is permitted within the same paper.

**Justifying.** The text must be justified from both left and right margin.

**Headings.** It is highly recommended that automatic heading styles are used since they will permit the automatic list of contents to be created. It should be remembered that the space between the last paragraph of a chapter and the new heading should be larger than between the heading and the following paragraph. Even though the text should be justified from both sides the titles should commonly be set to the left margin. If the title is on a separate row there is no full stop after it.

**The major level subsections** (heading 1 level) start on a new page.

**The page numbers** of a thesis are placed at the bottom of a page, in the centre. The title page does not have a page number although it is counted (i.e. the page numbers start from the page after the title page with two).

A sample **title page** is appended to this manual.

## **7. Matters related to good research practice and supervision**

### ***The role of the supervisor***

A research paper / thesis is an individual and independent work of a student and is carried out in cooperation with the supervisor. In order to find a suitable supervisor the students may browse the staff profiles at the School of Humanities homepage or ask the help of the study programme administrator. The role of the supervisor is to give guidance: to help to choose a topic, to plan the research, to recommend relevant literature, to monitor that the paper meets all formal and content requirements. The supervisor is not responsible for editing the language of the paper, it is the responsibility of the student. When the supervision starts it is recommended that the student and the supervisor agree, if possible in writing, upon the general terms and dates of the process.

The tasks of the supervisor:

- 1) Assist the student in choosing the topic, formulating the research problem, selecting methods, selecting relevant literature and other sources, and help in providing academic credibility;
- 2) Coordinate the action plan of the research, counsel the student, supervise and consult with the student during the process of conducting research in all its phases;
- 3) Provide advice on finding relevant subject related literature;
- 4) Supervise the conducting of experiments, surveys etc., necessary for writing the paper;
- 3) Verify that the student's research meets the requirements set with respect to the content and form, including checking the finished paper in plagiarism detection system Urkund;
- 4) Participate at the MA defence.

The supervisor is commonly a staff member of the School of Humanities (lecturer, researcher, or PhD student). Decisions on external supervisors for MA thesis are made by the School director during the process of confirming the thesis title. If the external supervisor is not a university employee or does not teach in higher education, the director will appoint a co-supervisor from among the academic staff of the university.

### ***The role of the student***

The tasks of a student when compiling a research paper:

- 1) To compile the plan of research (including the timeframe), to find and work through relevant literature and other sources, to compile the results of independent research into an appropriate standard paper;
- 2) To submit the parts of the paper to the supervisor to be read and commented upon according to the agreed research plan, to take into account the comments of the supervisor or give reasons to the supervisor for disagreeing with the comments;
- 3) To submit a paper that meets all criteria by the deadline and rules set by the academic unit.

The supervisor and the student have a right to initiate the discontinuation of their cooperation on grounds of substantial disagreements. An application should be submitted to the Head of Studies of the School. The application for the change of supervisor should be signed by the administrator of the study programme. The supervisor has a right to initiate the discontinuation of supervising when the student does not follow the agreed timeframe, breaks the rules of research ethics and/or does not follow the supervisor instructions without giving any justification. The student will be appointed a new supervisor by the director of the School and the student, the former and the new supervisor will be informed of the decision.

## **8. Referencing and the list of works cited and consulted**

The aim of referencing is to describe the trail of thought that has led the author of the paper to the results presented. Referencing is compulsory everywhere where another author's work is used, cited or ideas relied upon, and there are existing sources. Whenever ideas, thoughts or data borrowed from other authors are presented without reference, it becomes a case of plagiarism. Commonly known facts stand as an exception here.

The referencing system of the Tallinn University Press, or any other system specific to the subject area should be used in the paper for referencing and compiling the list of works cited. One referencing system should be used consistently within one piece of writing. The specific referencing system is agreed upon with the supervisor.

The authorial text must be clearly distinguishable from all mediated thoughts, facts, data, tables, drawings, quotations etc., any un-referenced and copied proportion of a text is plagiarism. The indirect referencing thorough other sources can be used on rare occasions, but such referencing is commonly not acceptable due to the availability of web databases (EBSCO and others) and the articles that can be accessed via them, and not acceptable whenever a book can be borrowed in an Estonian library or browsed using internet libraries.

The usual way of using sources is referring to them: the contents of the original are mediated by paraphrasing and summarising. When mediating a text in another language the translation must be accurate to avoid changing the original idea. Any referencing must be close to the original, free of personal viewpoints and should not change the bias of the original. Referencing should be more compact and tense than the original text.

Direct quotations are commonly used in the case of particularly illustrative, interesting or colourful examples. A citation must be verbatim and identical to the original. A quotation can be abbreviated or shortened, it may contain markings in square brackets and in italics helping understanding (to which must be added: my stress and author's initials). When translating quotations from foreign language sources the same rule applies as in the case of referencing. Italics must be used to distinguish the foreign quoted words from the rest of the text. When something is abbreviated from a quotation it should be marked by using one of the following: /.../ ; (...) ; [---] ; ... consistently.

Short, one or two sentence, quotations should be distinguished from the text by inverted commas. Longer quotations are separated from the main text by line spacing and by indenting the whole quotation. The quotation line spacing is single-space. A quotation may be distinguished by the use of italics in which case inverted commas are not required.

The **confirmation of authorship** for the MA thesis will be required: with the thesis a licence form is submitted and by signing it the author of the thesis confirms that all the sources have been appropriately referenced and quoted. The following text must be used:

“I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe the intellectual property rights of other persons or the rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act. I hereby confirm that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted. All the works and conceptual viewpoints by other authors that I have used, as well as, data deriving from sources have been appropriately attributed.”

/Signature/

## 9. Confirming your MA thesis topic

The MA thesis **topic** must be related to the main subject areas of the study programme you are following. Your thesis may have either a research, or an applied approach. Other classifications may be possible depending on the specifics of the study programme (for example, film projects for visual anthropology).

A **research** approach is based on original research of primary and /or secondary sources, and using a certain method.

An **applied** approach consists of a defensible piece of work (for example, exercise books, document of suggestions on how to enhance communication in an organisation, a textbook, a workbook, a stylebook for an organisation, a description of original methodology to be applied to produce something subject related etc.) and an attached document that has the typical structure of a final thesis. The optimum length of the attached document is 30 standard pages. The size of the applied part of the thesis is not stipulated. Crucially important, a thesis with an applied approach must have a practical applicable value.

For both approaches it is expected that important theoretical approaches and statements are familiarised by reading subject related literature. The development of the thesis is possible

based either on individual research results or based on some other empirical material, therefore enabling either to confirm or challenge critical approaches towards the source(s).

The application for confirming the thesis topic should be submitted using the form by the deadline stipulated by the School of Humanities. The confirmation should happen no later than during the penultimate semester of nominal studies of the student. The thesis title and supervisor will be confirmed by the director of the School by the deadline stipulated in the academic calendar and the decision will be based upon the rules set in the Study Regulations. More detailed information on confirming the thesis title and a supervisor will be made available for the students via the School home page by the second week of September.

#### **10. The length of a research paper that is part of BA exam and a MA thesis.**

The **length** of a research paper or a MA thesis is measured without appendices (one standard page equals 1800 characters). Each study programme has set a standard length for their research paper / thesis and it will be introduced to the students in a research seminar or MA seminar.

#### **11. Submitting the thesis and permission to proceed to defence**

The thesis will be defended during the time confirmed by the School Study Collegium based on the Academic Calendar. The defences take place twice a year: in January and the end of May – beginning of June. It is permitted to hold pre-defences, students will be informed about this by the administrator of the programme, the head of the defence board or by the supervisor. Information concerning defences will be published on the School website at the latest by the mid-term (reading) week. The defence information contains the deadline for submitting the thesis and the regulations for doing so, and the defence dates. A thesis that is not submitted by the stipulated time will not be permitted to proceed to a defence and will be dealt with during the next defence period.

A student will be **permitted to proceed to a defence** by the director of the School. A student must have fulfilled the study programme and there cannot be any standing financial obligations towards the university. The thesis should be (digitally) signed by the supervisor confirming its suitability to proceed to a defence and the thesis should be registered for a defence. All the information concerning the defence, including the examiner report, will be sent to the student's **tlu.ee** e-mail.

#### **12. Examiner report**

The MA thesis examiner will be appointed by the Head of the Defence Committee based on the examiner's subject related competences and taking into consideration the Study Regulations. The examiner may be a Tallinn University staff member or an expert outside university who meets the requirements of the Study Regulations. The examiner will be given access to the digital copy of the thesis.

The examiner will submit their review by the latest three working days before the defence to the Study Counsellor of the School of Humanities. The review will be sent to the student at the latest one working day before the defence.

The review will contain an **evaluation**, whether the thesis meets the criteria set for a MA thesis, but does not suggest a concrete **mark**. When evaluating the thesis both the examiner and the defence committee will base their decision on the evaluation criteria set for the thesis in the specific study programme. The mark of the thesis will be decided by the defence committee and take into consideration not only the examiner review but also the presentation the student makes during the defence and the ability of the student to participate in academic discussion during the defence.

The final mark will be based, among other things on:

- the clarity of the aim (or goals) of the work and the correspondence of the work to the set aim (or goals);
- how well reasoned was the research problem;
- the reasoning upon the choice of particular research methods and the mastering of the chosen methods;
- the actuality of the thesis, its reliability and practical value (the last one in case of applied research);
- its original intellectual contribution;
- the veracity of the work (how well the claims are supported by arguments and rely on the evidence presented);
- how systematic is the thesis and how well the claims are combined into a non-contradictory entity;
- the structure of the work and the contiguity of the parts of the thesis (including the correspondence between the title and the contents, the suitability of the method to the aim of the work, the correspondence of the summary and conclusions to the treatment of the topic throughout the thesis);
- the layout of the work, including issues of referencing and quoting;
- appropriateness and accuracy of the language;
- presenting and defending one's viewpoints during the defence.

The examiner will be able to rely upon the criteria set for the thesis and on the following table.

#### EVALUATION AID FOR THE EXAMINER

	Excellent	Good	Meagre	Deficient
Actuality of the topic, setting of the research problem				
Chosen method (in case of MA originality of the approach), its suitability for the material				
The structure of the work (how logical)				

Suitability of theoretical background and its contiguity to the analysis				
The sufficiency of material, its analysis and thoroughness				
Thoroughness of presenting the research results				
Accuracy of the referencing apparatus (the total amount of references and quotations compared to the total length, the clear distinction between the author's and sources' text, the correct layout and referencing of the quotations)				
Appropriate use of style and language				
The capacity/amount of materials used: their relevance and suitability				
The total layout of the thesis				
The total impression the thesis creates and any other relevant comments				

### 13. The procedure of the defence

The defence committee for the thesis defence will be assembled by the director of the School for one academic year. The defence committee is assembled following the rules set by the Study Regulations.

The defence is public and will take place during the announced time in the announced room in the prearranged order in front of the defence committee. The defence information will be made available through the School home page. The defence may be declared closed if a thesis contains information that cannot be made public: due to the author's property rights belonging to other people; the Personal Data Protection Act; a state or commercial secret; due to other confidential information in the thesis. The Director of the academic unit shall declare the defence closed by his/her order and restrict access to the thesis. A well reasoned application to have a closed defence and to set access limits to the thesis should be handed in with the thesis. The decision is made by the Director of the School.

During the defence the supervisor and the examiner will participate in addition to the defence committee. In special cases a decision may be made that the presence of the examiner is not needed, and the review will suffice. The committee meeting is led by the chairperson who will introduce the procedure at the beginning of the defence, the speakers and the regulations for the presentation.

The procedure of a defence starts with the presentation of the student. The aim of this presentation is to give an overview of the thesis to the audience and should state the aim of the thesis, describe briefly the method used, provide a general characterisation of the material used and describe the main results. It is recommended that the student should use appropriate examples and visual and aural aids to illustrate the presentation. If a media presentation is to be

used, the files should be submitted one working day before the defence according to the regulations at the School home page.

After the student's introductory presentation, the examiner will present his or her comments and questions. These questions and comments should be answered as part of the academic discussion. If the examiner is not present the review will be read aloud. The committee has no obligation to mediate the answers and comments of the student to an examiner who is not present.

After the academic discussion between the student and the examiner the floor is given to the members of the committee and the auditorium. This can be challenging for the person defending. It is important that the student should remain calm and think through the answers. Should there be questions that cannot be answered (due to missing data, because they are outside the range of the present thesis etc.) the student must give a short explanation why answering is not possible during the defence.

The procedure will end with a short summation by the student. If the student wishes to thank anybody, this is the time.

The defence committee will finalise the marks at the latest after all the theses of the day are defended and will announce the marks to the student(s) and the audience on the same day. The final marks will be entered on an official form.

The graduation documents will be issued during the annual graduation ceremony in June. The students who defend in January may wait and receive their documents in June, or should they wish or need their documents earlier, may receive them one month after the defence from the School office.

TALLINN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

First name and surname

TITLE OF THE THESIS

MA Thesis

Supervisor professor/associate professor/lecturer First name and surname

Tallinn 2020