

# Master's Thesis Guide

Please read the “Degree Programme and Examination Regulations” (FPOHR) carefully. They are available online at [https://www.fau.de/fau/rechtsgrundlagen/pruefungsordnungen/philosophische-fakultaet-und-fachbereich-theologie/masterstudiengaenge-an-der-philosophischen-fakultaet/#collapse\\_37](https://www.fau.de/fau/rechtsgrundlagen/pruefungsordnungen/philosophische-fakultaet-und-fachbereich-theologie/masterstudiengaenge-an-der-philosophischen-fakultaet/#collapse_37).

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# 1 Outline of the Thesis

Your thesis should demonstrate that you are capable of dealing with a chosen problem in the field of human rights independently and according to academic methods within a set period of time, and that you can present the results in an appropriate form. It will consist of the following parts:

1. Cover Page
2. Table of Contents
3. List of Abbreviations (if applicable)
4. Introduction
  - State your topic, concern, aim, and research question.
  - Establish the academic (and possibly practical) relevance of your topic by referring to existing theory/ empirical knowledge regarding your topic.
  - Introduce and define the central terms/ conceptions/ theories that you will be working with (this can also be done in a separate chapter in the beginning of the thesis).
  - Give a short and concise explanation of the structure and your methodology.
5. Main Part
  - Pay attention to a logical and clear structure as well as a coherent argumentation.
  - Your research, hypotheses, arguments and findings should be justified and comprehensible. Pay attention to a reasonable balance between the different parts of your thesis.
  - Discuss and rebut positions and arguments that counter your own – do not just ignore them!
  - If you work with empirical evidence, make sure to base your conclusions on this evidence. Be aware of ethical considerations when conducting empirical research.
  - The main part should not be one large chapter, but should be subdivided as appropriate. For orientation, the structure could look as follows: Chapter 1: Definitions and Concepts; Chapter 2: Theoretical (and if appropriate Methodological) Framework; Chapter 3: Empirical Research (including description and justification of research method); Chapter 4: Assessment etc.

6. Conclusion
  - Give a short summary, interpret and evaluate your results.
  - Come back to your question and answer it based on your research and the conclusions and solutions you draw from it.
  - Provide an outlook concerning remaining open questions and future research avenues, if applicable.
7. Bibliography
  - Alphabetic order and uniform formatting according to the chosen citation style.
  - All referenced works must be included. Works that you have not consulted should not be included.
8. Appendices and Annexes (if applicable)
9. Declaration of Authorship

## **2 Writing the Thesis**

### **2.1 Subject Selection**

- The possible range of topics encompasses the areas of human rights politics, philosophy and law. The subject may be based on a seminar paper.
- Your chosen topic has to be concise and focus on a concrete subject matter or problem.
- The topic should be relevant both academically and specifically to human rights research. Relevance can be assessed primarily by referring to gaps or controversies in the existing academic debate.
- The topic should be clear from the title of the master's thesis.

### **2.2 Research Question**

- To clarify your topic and focus your research, you should formulate a concise and comprehensible question. Try to really narrow down your topic and be specific. (The research question is a sentence with a question mark at the end!)
- The question is the starting point and leitmotif of your thesis. The relevance and connection of the whole text to this question needs to be clear throughout the thesis. It should be referenced and, if possible, be answered in the conclusion.
- The question can build upon or relate to a – well-founded – thesis/ statement of your own.
- The following lead questions could be helpful for formulating your own question:

- What are the problems, contradictions or controversies concerning the selected topic?
- Are there any academic voids or research gaps?
- Does available empirical evidence contradict existing theory?
- What can the paper contribute to the discussed problem?

### **2.3 Structure, Literature and References**

- The structure has to be clear and comprehensible. It should be reflected in the table of contents.
- Layout, formatting and referencing have to be consistent throughout your master's thesis!
- Pay attention to grammar and correct spelling. Have your thesis proofread.
- Consider the relevant academic/ specialist literature.
- Make use of official documents, reports, etc. of UN and regional human rights bodies and institutions.
- For legal analysis also consider the relevant jurisprudence of courts and treaty bodies.
- Use direct quotes to support your own arguments. The text must not rely on them to be understandable.
- Ensure that you reference the work of others correctly!
  - If you quote directly, use quotation marks or a block quotations (for more than 30 words).
  - Otherwise paraphrase the thought you refer to.
  - Both ways of referencing (direct and indirect quotes) must refer to the original source! Failure to do so is considered plagiarism and may result in a rejection of your thesis.
  - Do not reference secondary sources, i.e. if Immanuel Kant wrote something that Heiner Bielefeldt quotes, you have to reference Kant, not Bielefeldt! Exceptions can be made if the original text is in a language you cannot read and no translation is available or if you cannot access the original source without significant difficulties. In that case, you can reference "Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Bielefeldt". This also applies to court decisions, which are referenced in the literature. If you want to refer to a decision, you need to use the original source.

### **2.4 Thesis Proposal and Development of the Text**

- Please consult with your supervisor throughout the writing of the thesis. Unless otherwise agreed between you and your supervisor, you should submit a written thesis proposal to your supervisor within the first two months. You will receive feedback on this proposal and should then be able to write your thesis

independently. However, please do not hesitate to ask your supervisor for advice when you get stuck.

- The thesis proposal should indicate your topic, question, structure (tentative outline) and main arguments. It could contain information the following elements:
  - Introduction
    - Background and relevance of the topic
    - Main research question and statement/ argument Relevant literature/ theory
    - Proposed research methodology
  - Main part
    - Structure (chapters and subchapters)
    - Aim and main argument and purpose of each chapter → make sure to keep your question and statement in mind and how each chapter contributes towards answering or developing these!
  - Tentative bibliography
- If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask. Please take any advice given to you seriously.

## 3 Formal Regulations

### 3.1 Format

- Length: 20,000 to 25,000 words (appr. 60–80 pages);
- Text: Times New Roman 12p, justified, spacing 1.5;
- Footnotes: Times New Roman 10p, justified, spacing 1.0;
- Block quotations (longer than 30 words): Times New Roman 11p, justified, spacing 1.0, indented 1 cm from left and right, no quotation mark;
- Headings: Times New Roman 12p–16p, bold, aligned left, numbered;
- Bibliography: Times New Roman 12p, justified, spacing 1.0 with spacing between entries, no numbering or bullet points;
- Page margins: 2.5 cm;
- Terms in a foreign language should be *italicised*;
- Page breaks: Inserted between the different parts of the thesis and for each chapter of the main body;
- Use the formatting options provided by your word processor, including for the table of contents.

### **3.2 References**

- Choose a common citation style and be consistent in its use. If in doubt, consult an academic article suggested to you in the seminars and use that citation style, or ask your supervisor.
- Generally, you can use parentheses which are more common in social sciences (Krennerich 2015: 17) or footnotes which are more common in law.<sup>1</sup> Whenever possible, use exact references, i.e. cite concrete pages when you refer to a concrete point made by the author.

### **3.3 Deadlines and Submission**

- Six months from the date of registration. If you plan your time and stick to your schedule, six months are plenty of time. Do not delay working on the thesis until it's too late.
- The supervisor can grant an extension of a maximum of two months in justified, exceptional cases. The reasons must be presented in writing as soon as they transpire and, in any event, well before the deadline. Please note that the extension is not automatic and, if approved, will be communicated in writing.
- Your enrolment needs to be valid until the day of submitting the thesis – the last day of the third semester will be March 31, after that you have to enrol for the fourth semester and pay the respective statutory fee.
- In case of sickness, please ask your doctor for a medical certificate. In that case, your submission deadline will be extended by the number of days written on the certificate.
- Missing the deadline results in failing the thesis. You can retake it once. In that case, you need to choose a new topic.
- Submission: Two printed, bound copies and one digital file to your supervisor and the secretariat.

### **3.4 Allocation of a Topic and Supervisor**

- Please consult your supervisor on a suitable topic and, once approved by the supervisor, register your topic with the secretariat. The registration form is available from the webpage at [https://www.humanrights-master.fau.de/files/2020/02/I-Anmeldung-MA\\_Vergabe-Thema\\_zweisprachig\\_neu-2020.pdf](https://www.humanrights-master.fau.de/files/2020/02/I-Anmeldung-MA_Vergabe-Thema_zweisprachig_neu-2020.pdf)
- Approach the faculty member of the M.A. Human Rights whom you intend to choose as a supervisor. You may also approach another professor of FAU's Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Theology, or of the School of Law. In exceptional circumstances, the Examinations Committee may accept an external supervisor (see Section 27 (4) FPOHR). Once you have agreed on your

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<sup>1</sup> De Schutter, Human Rights Law Review 2017, p. 14.

subject, your supervisor will suggest a suitable faculty member who will serve as the second reviewer of your thesis.

- If you cannot find a supervisor, the Examinations Committee will assign you one.

## **4 Criteria for Evaluation**

- Knowledge of sources, fundamental principles, development, political and historical contexts as well as practical implications of human rights and their violation;
- Grasp of relevant concepts, definitions and theories;
- Choice and application of research method (if applicable);
- Collection and assessment of empirical material (if applicable);
- Use of relevant sources, literature and – if relevant – jurisprudence;
- Structure of chapters and sections;
- Coherence and quality of argument;
- Originality;
- Formal requirements (style, layout, citations etc).

# Annex 1: Cover Page Template

**(Title)**

(if applicable subtitle)

**Master's Thesis**

in the master programme

Master of Arts HUMAN RIGHTS

at the

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Theology

at

Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg

Supervisor:

(Title and name)

Second reviewer:

(Title and name)

submitted by

(First Name)

(Address)

(Student registration number)

(E-Mail)

(Location), (Date)

## **Annex 2: Declaration of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly attributed. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given.

I am aware that the thesis in digital form can be examined for the use of unauthorised aid and in order to determine whether the thesis as a whole or in parts may amount to plagiarism. I am aware that a false assurance fulfils the elements of fraud in accord with § 16 ABMStPO/Phil and will result in the consequences proclaimed there.

This paper was not previously presented to another examination board and has not been published.

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First and last name

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City, date and signature