

Master's Thesis Guide

Please note: Read carefully the "Degree Programme and Examination Regulations" (FPOHR), which are available online at <https://www.fau.de/universitaet/rechtsgrundlagen/pruefungsordnungen/philosophische-fakultaet-und-fachbereich-theologie-2/master-studiengaenge-an-der-philosophischen-fakultaet/>.

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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 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, research question and thesis/theory. Establish the academic (and possibly practical) relevance of your topic.
 - Introduce and define central terms/conceptions/theories you will be working with and provide an overview of the current discourse relating to your topic.
 - 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 relating to your topic and question.
 - Your research, arguments and theses 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—don't just ignore them!
 - Be aware of ethical considerations when conducting your research. If you work with empirical evidence, make sure to base your conclusions on this evidence.
 - The main part should not be one large chapter but should be subdivided as appropriate (e. g. Chapter 1: Definitions and concepts; Chapter 2: Theoretical framework; Chapter 3: Empirical case study; 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 future research/developments if applicable.
- 7. Bibliography
 - Alphabetic order and uniform formatting according to the chosen citation style.
 - All referenced works need to 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 can 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 discourse. Relevance can be primarily assessed based on gaps or controversies in the existing academic discourse.
- 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 question is the starting point and leitmotif of your thesis. The relevance and connection of the whole text to this question need to be clear throughout the thesis. It should be referenced and, if possible, 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 help formulate your own question:
 - What are the problems, contradictions or controversies concerning the selected topic?
 - Are there any academic voids or research gaps?
 - 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 apparent 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 analyses also consider the relevant jurisprudence of courts and treaty bodies.
- Direct quotes are merely intended 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) need to be referenced to the original source! Failing to do so is considered plagiarism and may result in a rejection of the thesis.
 - Don't 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 can't 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 used in the literature. If you want to reference the 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.
- The thesis proposal should indicate your topic, question, structure (tentative outline) and main arguments. It could contain information on the following elements:

- Introduction
 - Background and relevance of the topic
 - Main research question and statement/argument
 - Methodology and literature overview
- 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.
- Before the final submission, you can usually hand in a first draft to your supervisor. This should be a 'final' version in the sense that it will include all the parts of your thesis for your supervisor to comment on. It should be ready to hand in from your point of view.

3 Formal Regulations

3.1 Formatting

- Length: 20,000 to 25,000 words (appr. 60–80 pages), including footnotes, but not including the bibliography
- 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 Referencing

- 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.¹ Whenever possible, use exact references, i.e. cite concrete pages when you are referring to a concrete point made by the author.

3.3 Deadlines and Submission

- The deadline for submission is six months from the date of officially registering the thesis.
- An extension of up to two months is possible in special circumstances. This needs to be granted by the supervisor.
- Enrolment needs to be valid until the day of submitting the thesis. The last day of the third semester is March 31. If you submit your thesis later, you have to enrol for the fourth semester and pay the respective statutory fee.
- Missing the deadline results in failing the thesis. You can retake it once.
- Submission: One digital (pdf) file to the coordinator.

3.4 Allocating a Topic and Supervisor

- The topic is decided upon together with your supervisor and registered with the secretariat.
- Approach the programme director or teacher of the M.A. Human Rights you intend to choose as a supervisor. You may also approach another professor of the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Theology, or the School of Law. In exceptional circumstances, the examinations committee may also accept another supervisor (see Section 27 (4) FPOHR).
- If you cannot find a supervisor, the Examinations Committee will assign you one.
- A second reviewer is assigned by your supervisor or the examinations committee when you submit the thesis.

¹ De Schutter, Human Rights Law Review 2017, p. 14.

4 Criteria for Evaluation

- Knowledge of sources, fundamental principles, development, political and historical contexts as well as practical implications of human rights
- Grasp of relevant concepts, definitions and theories
- Coherence and quality of argument
- Discussion and development of empirical material
- Use of relevant sources, literature and – if relevant - jurisprudence
- Structure of chapters and sections
- 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, _____ (Name), student registration number _____, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are entirely my own. I completed this work independently and without the unauthorised assistance of third parties and without the use of undisclosed and, in particular, unauthorised aids. 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.

In particular, I am aware that the use of artificial intelligence is forbidden unless its use as an aid has been expressly permitted by the examiner. This applies in particular to chatbots (especially ChatGPT) and such programmes in general that can complete the tasks of the examination or parts thereof on my behalf.

This paper has not been previously presented in its current or a similar form to another examination board and has not been published.

Any infringements of the above rules constitute fraud or attempted fraud and shall lead to the examination being graded "fail" ("nicht bestanden").

I agree that the title of my thesis and my name will be published on the website of the M.A. Human Rights programme.

Place, date

Signature