Student Guidelines
for MSc Thesis Research
at the PAP group

Introduction

This brochure is meant for students who (intend to) do thesis research at the Public Administration and Policy Group (PAP). This guide can be found on our website www.wageningenur.nl/pap.

The following sections provide a step-by-step guideline for thesis projects and information on the different stages. We hope that it will help you to successfully complete your thesis at our group.

Preparatory steps

Exploring research topics

If you intend to do a thesis at our group, please explore which research areas or topics you would like to address. Use our website www.wageningenur.nl/pap to find out about research themes the group is currently working on; check the MSc research topics offered by staff members.

Contact Thesis Coordinator at the PAP Group

As soon as you have made up your mind to do a thesis at the PAP group, contact the Thesis Coordinator, Dr Otto Hospes (otto.hospes@wur.nl). After discussing possible topics, and the courses you have followed, he may direct you to a suitable supervisor for your thesis within our group. *Note that students are only allowed to start a thesis when they have completed their BSc degree and the required courses in line with their MSc programme's rules and regulations,* see study handbook). As a rule of thumb we require that students have successfully completed *three PAP courses* (or comparable, e.g. courses offered by ENP/LAW/COM).

Focusing on the research topic

Once you have made contact with a potential supervisor - via the Thesis Coordinator - you will start selecting and demarcating a research topic. Your supervisor may assist you by giving suggestions and pointing you to suitable literature. Once you both have decided on the exact subject, you should register as a thesis student.

Registration as a thesis student

To register as a thesis student at the PAP group, you need to submit some basic information (your name, telephone number, thesis code and subject, study programme and the expected start and end date of your thesis research) by e-mail to office.pap@wur.nl (see Appendix A for a format of this message).

Writing and presenting a research proposal

Writing a good research proposal is a crucial, but also a difficult step in your thesis research. We expect you to know how to go about this from research methodology and other skills courses followed during your BSc and MSc programme (if you have not followed any, you should discuss this with your supervisor as soon as possible). As a guideline, see Appendix B for an outline for a research proposal.

Keep in mind that, particularly in the social sciences, there are no 'cooking book' recipes for a good proposal or for a good thesis report. If you have good reasons to diverge from an existing scheme, you may do so. Writing a good proposal may take you up to six weeks. Keep in mind that a thorough preparation will definitely pay back in the following phases of the thesis project.

You will present the final version of your proposal in a meeting with your supervisor, who will assess it within a reasonable amount of time. Depending on the quality of the proposal, you may go ahead with the thesis research and field work or start revising the proposal with your supervisor's feedback.

The actual research

Supervision

For most students, thesis research is their first real encounter with academic research. From your supervisor you may expect some guidance in writing the proposal, methodology and set-up, theory selection, data collection and - analysis and academic writing. However, thesis research requires that students work as independently as possible. In the end, students are responsible for choices made in terms of planning and content, **not the supervisor.**

Here are some guidelines in supervision (different procedures may be agreed early on):
- As a rule of thumb, you should have a **meeting** with your supervisor **once every two weeks**, except for the period of field work.
- In most cases, you will discuss draft texts during these meetings. Please provide these texts **well in advance (check with your supervisor what he/she expects).** Keep in mind that **each text should not be discussed more than twice** with your supervisor, this also goes for chapter versions before including them in the final thesis.

Thesis Ring - **<u>obligatory</u>** for students with a PAP thesis code
We have a thesis ring for our master students. All students, also those with a non-PAP thesis code are welcome. For students doing a thesis with a PAP thesis code the Thesis Ring is obligatory.

The goals of our thesis ring are for you to:
- Develop your skills as a reviewer
- Develop your (English) scientific writing skills
- Submit higher quality chapters to your supervisor, allowing more time for substantive discussion on your work
- Give and receive more feedback

The ring meets in general every two weeks, on Thursdays at 15.30-17.00. Check Blackboard for rescheduling due to national holidays etc. Also check blackboard for the location!

We expect from the members of the thesis ring:
1. Attendance at the biweekly meetings are expected once you have signed up while you are in the Netherlands (please inform maarit.junnikkala@wur.nl in the PAP office if you are forced to cancel for illness, etc.).
2. Submit your work regularly to the ring, and on time (72 hours before the meeting so by Tuesday afternoon in the same week, for instructions on what to submit and formatting see separate document).
3. To giving and receiving feedback in a spirit of learning. Do not focus too much on substantive (content) feedback, this should be dealt with by your supervisor

Facilities

The following facilities are available to thesis students:
- You may use the general computer rooms in the Leeuwenborch or other university buildings.
- If you need to copy larger amount of pages for *research* purposes, (e.g. surveys), the group may be able to help. Contact your supervisor first.
- Post and telephone: when needed for your research, you can make use of the group's facilities upon your supervisor's approval.
- Literature: if you buy literature for your personal use, there is no refund. For ordering literature that is not available in the library, please contact your supervisor.
- To a certain extent and for functional purposes (for instance, participation in a seminar or an interview with key informants), travel costs in the Netherlands can be refunded for those (foreign) students who do not qualify for the student travel product (OV-studentenkaart) or if the student has a weekend only student travel product. A budget for this should be approved by your supervisor first.

Fieldwork

You will carry out empirical research in the Netherlands or abroad. During your field work you should pay attention to the following:

- Interviews: oral and written interviews will probably be part of the research. To do effective interviews, a thorough preparation of the questionnaire is crucial. **Always discuss the questionnaire in time with your supervisor.** If you do a survey, include a pre-test to check the quality of your questions. When doing face-to-face interviews, consider using a (voice) recorder. If you prefer not to use one or the interviewee does not consent, do elaborate your notes immediately after the interview.
- Collection of data and literature: take care to keep track of your data and literature. Make full records of the data sources. From the beginning, try to make proper references to literature (including page numbers to retrace quotations) to save time-consuming checks later on. Use our guidelines in avoiding plagiarism (see the section on **Writing the Report** below).

- During the fieldwork, keep in contact with your supervisor and inform him or her about your current address, e-mail address and phone number. The supervisor will be willing to support you with comments during your research, but it is your responsibility to take the initiative in making contact.
- Travel costs: air tickets and domestic travel costs for interviews and site visits will be at your own expense.

Writing the report

As with the research proposal, we expect you to be familiar with the structure of a scientific report (if not, ask your supervisor for some guidance). A report outline is added in Appendix C, but it should be considered as an example rather than a fixed format. It is good practice to develop a table of contents (ToC) early in your research (e.g. an appendix to the proposal). This ToC can then be modified during the research process and will help you to structure your argument from an early stage.

As a rule of the thumb, the total number of pages of a PAP-master thesis (including references but excluding annexes) should consist of 60 to 80 pages (or: 30,000 to 40,000 words), but not exceed 100 pages (or 50,000 words).

Do not wait too long with submitting drafts of the texts to your supervisor; the longer you postpone this, the less helpful the supervisor's comments may be.

Please be aware that the university and the chair group consider plagiarism as a major offence: it may exclude you from examination. Our guidelines concerning proper referencing and what we consider plagiarism can be found via on this page.

Thesis presentation and grading

Presentation (Colloquium)

Part of the requirements for thesis completion is the presentation of the thesis to an audience of fellow students and faculty members. Normally, you will have about 20 minutes for the presentation, followed by 25 minutes of questions and discussion.

Grading

The thesis has to be submitted digitally (as PDF) to your supervisor and office.pap@wur.nl.

Every thesis is to be evaluated by the (main) supervisor and a second reader of the PAP group. Your supervisor will decide who acts as a second reader. The colloquium takes place before the final grade is determined as its evaluation is part of the thesis evaluation. The supervisor evaluates both the thesis report as well as the process that has led to the thesis, while the second reader only evaluates the thesis report and colloquium if attended. Both readers need to agree on a grade for the report. The supervisor presents the overall evaluation results and final grade to the student in a final meeting (the second reader does not participate).

A standard thesis evaluation form is attached in Appendix D. The Dutch system of grading is applied (see Appendix F).

Publishing the report

As soon as the final version of the MSc-thesis has been submitted by the student to our secretariat (office.pap@wur.nl). The thesis report will be made available to the Wageningen University Library Catalogue for use by other students and staff members.

Further information

For all other information concerning your thesis research, your supervisor is the primary point of contact. If you need information on other, more general education issues, please contact the Thesis Coordinator, Dr Otto Hospes.

Appendix A: Registration form, to be sent as a separate attachment to office.pap@wur.nl

- Last Name:
- First Name:
- Registration no.:
- Study programme:
- Date of BSc graduation:
- PAP (or comparable) courses completed so far:

- Address:
- Postal Code:
- City:
- Telephone no.:

- Research topic or provisional title:
- Thesis code:
- Name supervisor at PAP:
- If applicable, name external or second supervisor:
- Date start of research:
- Date expected end of research:

Appendix B: Outline thesis proposal

When doing social science research it is important to realize that there are no fixed schemes for research proposals and reports. If you have good reasons to diverge from the suggestions below, you may do so. The outline presented here should be considered as guideline to help you in thinking and writing, not as a fixed scheme that you should follow blindly.

Furthermore, it is good to keep in mind that the research steps that you describe in the proposal can be modified in the course of the research. A proposal provides a base for starting the research, but the research process may be changed when circumstance ask for it. However, when diverging from the proposal, however, always communicate this with your supervisor.

Below you find the main elements of a thesis proposal.

Problem description

Here you describe in a concise way the problem that is motivating your research. The purpose of the problem description is to make clear to the reader that the research is important and the research questions are relevant. Tailor the problem description to this purpose and do not include all kinds of background information that is not really needed for understanding the relevance and importance of the research aim and questions. But see to it that all the major elements of your research questions are introduced and, if necessary, explained.

Research aim / objective

The research aim is a concise and precise formulation of the contribution that your research aims to make to the solution of the problem described in the previous section. The scope of the research aim should to be realistic and proportional to the size of the research project. Remember that research outcomes, by themselves, do not change the world. You cannot claim, for instance, that your research will directly change policy or policy practices or the management of certain public policy problems. Research aims can only be described in terms of 'contributing to certain solutions' by providing 'the knowledge, insights, understanding' of some relevant aspects of society.

Research questions

The research questions are the core of the proposal. These are the questions you want to give an answer to in the conclusions of your thesis report. Be modest in your objectives and subsequent research questions. Remember that you will gather and combine theoretical and empirical *knowledge* during your thesis work.
Good research questions:
- are precise (that is, not too general),
- are phrased as 'what' or 'why' questions, rather than 'how to do' questions
- cannot be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no'
- are focused on the key issues of the research (that is, their number is limited, and they do not address issues that are only indirectly related to the research objective)
- can be answered within the scope of research proposed (they are not too broad or are beyond the reach of scientific research).

Conceptual framework

In the conceptual framework you introduce the main concepts and theories you intend to use in your research. Although it is often difficult to elaborate on this in the beginning of the research, it is important to at least give some indication of the key concepts in your research and the theories that might be of interest. When describing your conceptual framework, give adequate references to literature.

Methods of data collection and analysis

Here you describe the methods you intend to use. Typical methods in social research are: interviews (structured, semi-structured, or open); surveys (based on a posted questionnaire or on oral interviews; qualitative or quantitative); text analysis (documents, newspapers, etc.); literature study; participant observation; focus groups (e.g. workshops); site visits, etc. Try to describe your methods as accurately as possible. Consult a methodology handbook if you feel uncertain about the methods.

Scope and limitations (optional)

If you want to set restrictions to the way you will address the research questions, you may include a special section to describe them. This is the case if you will restrict the research to one region, one specific category of actors, one set of literature.

Time schedule

The time schedule should preferably be presented as a chart, with horizontal time bars for all main research project activities (e.g. writing the proposal, doing literature research, preparing and taking interviews, processing empirical data, writing the theory chapters, writing the empirical chapters). Try to be as detailed and accurate as possible (keeping in mind that you may need to modify the schedule in a later stage).

Bibliography

Include a provisional bibliography in your proposal, comprising all the relevant titles that you have found so far. In the course of your research you can extend this bibliography, and so keep an up-to-date list of references.

Budget estimation (optional)

If you will manage an externally funded financial research budget, normally a budget estimation is required.

Provisional Table of Contents

Concluding your proposal, you should provide a provisional table of contents for your thesis. It shows which chapters are devoted to theory, methodology, results of field work and case studies (if any), analysis and discussion and conclusions (see appendix C).

Appendix C: Outline thesis report

Reports may be written in English or Dutch. This outline lists the main elements of a thesis report. Please note that most of the headings in this outline are describing the contents of chapters and are *not* meant as suggestions for actual chapter titles.

Title page

For the title page format, see appendix D.

Summary

(in Dutch reports, the summary has to be in English)

Table of contents

Foreword, acknowledgements (optional)

Introductory chapter

This chapter can to a large extent be based on the research proposal, and should contain at least sections on problem description, research questions, and methods. Usually, this chapter ends with a section outlining the rest of the report.

Conceptual chapters

Introducing and demarcating the main concepts used, presenting and discussing the main theoretical considerations of the research, and - if applicable - developing hypotheses or another sort of conceptual frame.

Methodological chapter

Introducing the methodological approach and demarcating the key methods used for data collection and data analysis

Empirical chapters

Presenting the empirical findings.

Evaluation chapter (optional)

Comparing the findings with the theory (theories) used, evaluating the empirical results, and - if applicable - evaluating theoretical arguments against the empirical findings.

Discussion chapter (optional)

A discussion chapter may be inserted if a further discussion of the research findings is needed before arriving at the conclusions.

Chapter with conclusions and recommendations

This chapter does not introduce new empirical evidence or theoretical debates, but summarizes the empirical and theoretical findings of the previous chapters. The conclusions should give answers to the research questions, and these answers should be underpinned by the arguments presented in the previous chapters. Separate from the conclusions, the

author can present recommendations for further research or for concrete measures to cope with the problems investigated.

References

References should be complete and consistent. Special attention should be paid to correct references in case of internet sites. If your research method comprises interviews, a list of interviews should be included. The information on respondents should be functional, and in accordance to the level of anonymity that was promised or suggested to the respondents during the interviews.

Appendices (optional)

Appendices should only be added if the information is not easily available elsewhere and is needed to fully understand the arguments of the thesis.

Appendix D: Thesis evaluation criteria

Each supervisor and second reader should use the form below to evaluate the thesis. The second reader will only evaluate the thesis report (60%) and the colloquium (10%: presentation 5%, reply to questions 5%), the supervisor will in addition evaluate the student's research skills (30%). The final - un-negotiable - mark will be based on overall evaluation concluded by the supervisor and second reader.

Thesis evaluation Wageningen University

Fill out the single lined fields. Use a comma or a point as decimal sign, depending on the language chosen.

Name chair group	environmental police
Name student	
Registration number	
Study programme	
Specialisation	
Code thesis	
Short title thesis	
Date examination	Signature
Supervisor chair group	
Supervisor outside chair group (if so)	
Second reviewer/examiner	

	grading mark 1-10	relative weight *
Research competence (30-60%) *		30%
1 Commitment and perseverance		
2 Initiative and creativity		
3 Independence		0.0
4 Efficiency in working with data		
5 Handling supervisor's comments and development of research skills		
6 Keeping to the time schedule		
Thesis report (30-60%) *		60%
1 Relevance research, clearness goals, delineation research		
2 Theoretical underpinning, use of literature		
3 Use of methods and data		0.0
4 Critical reflection on the research performed (discussion)		
5 Clarity of conclusions and recommendations		
6 Writing skills		
Colloquium (10%) *		10%
1 Graphical presentation		0.0
2 Verbal presentation and defence		

* please choose weights such that there sum is 100.

TOTAL	0.0
FINAL GRADE	0

Comment by supervisor

Comment by 2nd reviewer/examiner

Appendix E: Grading scale for MSc thesis research

The Dutch grading system for a thesis ranges from 1 to 10, allowing intermediate marks (6.5, 7.5, 8.5, 9.5). A grade below 6 is a fail; while the grade 10 is only awarded in highly exceptional cases.

The rest of the grades can be compared to the US grading system as follows:

> 6: sufficient (C)
> 7: amply sufficient (B to B+)
> 8: good (A)
> 9: very good (A+)

Please note that a 6 means that the thesis fulfils some minimum criteria, no more and no less. A thesis with a grade below 6 will not be accepted.

Appendix F: Format for the MSc-thesis cover page

Wageningen University - Department of Social Sciences

MSc Thesis Chair Group …

Title

Subtitle

Month + year:

MSc program:

Name of student:

(if applicable) Specialisation:

Name of Supervisor(s):

Thesis code:

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY
WAGENINGEN UR