

Students' Guidelines for Bsc Theses / Extended Essays (ENP 80912 or ENP 81609)

(Studiewijzer voor BSc afsluiting
bij de leerstoelgroep Milieubeleid)



Address: Hollandseweg 1, 6706 KN Wageningen, The Netherlands

Telephone: +31.317.484.452 **Fax:** +31.317.483.990

Web www.enp.wur.nl/UK

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Introduction

This brochure is meant for students BMK and BIN who already have contacted the ENP group for their bachelor thesis or extended essay. The following sections provide the aims and procedures of BSc thesis projects (BMK) and extended Essays (BIN) (ENP 80912 or ENP 81609, respectively). We hope it will help you to successfully complete your Bachelor at our group.

Aims of Theses and Extended Essays (Bachelor Completion)

ENP 80912 Extended Essay: (for BIN 12 credits, including lectures)

ENP 81609: Bsc Completion 2 (for BMK, 9 credits excluding 3 CR for lectures)

The individual bachelor completion centres on application and synthesis of knowledge, acquired in the BSc, with an emphasis on environmental policy aspects in a broad sense (including management, economy, sociology, and juridical aspects). The student has to study a demarcated environmental policy topic (by means of a literature review or empirical research) and prove to have sufficient knowledge to critically analyse and summarise the given subject. He/she must also be able to clearly communicate the findings in writing. The subject will be determined in consultation with the Bsc-thesis supervisor.

Aims:

After finalising the thesis / extended essay students are able to:

- formulate a research problem and do (literature) research according to scientific standards;
- integrate and apply theoretical knowledge obtained in the study;
- work individually and independently in scientific research (under supervision);
- plan and carry out the work within the available time;
- write a state-of-the-art paper on an environmental policy issue, on the basis of information from scientific literature;
- present and defend the results of such work for an audience of staff and students.

Preparatory steps

Focussing the subject

In preparation of their thesis, BMK students will take the lectures of ENP 81603 on policy evaluation, BIN students will take lectures within the 12 credits course of ENP 80912. Theories presented and discussed in these lectures will form the basic tools for your research. In consultation with your supervisor (being the lecturer or another staff member of our group) you will choose a policy-relevant subject to study.

The actual research

Facilities

The following facilities are available to thesis students:

- Room 2017 is reserved for thesis students ENP and contains 4 PCs.
- If these computers are occupied, you may always use the general computer rooms in the Leeuwenborch building.
- Post, telephone and fax: When needed for your research, you can make use of the group's facilities. Contact your supervisor first.
- Copy costs: If you need to copy larger amounts of pages for research purposes, (e.g. multiple draft copies, or surveys), the group can refund. Contact your supervisor first.
- Literature: For ordering literature that is not available in the library, contact your supervisor.

Fieldwork

Empirical research for Bsc theses / extended essays will be carried out in the Netherlands.

- Collection of data and literature. Take care to keep track of your data and literature. Make full records of the data sources. And, right from the beginning, try to get used to making proper references to literature (including page numbers to retrace quotations).
- Interviews: Oral and written interviews may be part of the research. To do effective interviews, a thorough preparation of the questionnaire is crucial. Always discuss the questionnaire timely before the interviews with your supervisor. If you do a survey, include a pretest to check the quality of your questions. When doing oral interviews, consider the use of a recorder. If you prefer not to use it, elaborate your notes immediately after the interview.
- Finances: in principle domestic travel costs for interviews and site visits and copy costs for reporting will be at the group's expenses, provided that you make a budget and planning in advance and have it approved by your supervisor.

Writing the report

A report outline is added in Appendix B, but this outline should be considered as an example, not as a fixed format. Usually, it is good practice to start making a table of contents early in your research (e.g. an appendix to the proposal). This table, which of course can and will be modified during the research, will help you to structure your argument.

Talk with your supervisor about the best way to discuss the draft texts of your report. Do not wait too long with submitting parts of the text; the longer you postpone, 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 / graduation. Our guidelines concerning proper referencing and what we consider plagiarism can be found on www.enp.wur.nl/UK

Thesis presentation and grading

Presentations

Part of the requirements for BSc thesis completion is the presentation of the thesis for an audience of fellow students and faculty members. Normally, you will have about 20 minutes of presentation, followed by 10 to 20 minutes of debate. For BMK students, a yearly presentation day of all BSc theses is planned in June.

Grading

The thesis has to be submitted as a paper copy, at least one week before the grades have to be submitted to the student administration (consult the university's year planning to obtain the precise data).

The supervisor evaluates both the thesis report as well as the process that has led to the thesis. The supervisor presents the evaluation results and final mark to the student in a final meeting.

Students should hand in two hard copies: 1 for the supervisor, 1 for the ENP archive.

Further information

For all other information concerning your BSc thesis research / extended essay, your supervisor / lecturer of the BSc completion course is the primary contact. If you need information on other, more general education issues, you can contact the education coordinator, Bas van Vliet.

Appendix A: Outline thesis proposal

Here are the main sections 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 kind 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 be realistic and proportional to the size of the research project.

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. You will not be implementing new (policy) strategies, let alone changing the world...

Good research questions:

- are precise (so not too general),
- are focused on the key issues of the research (so their number is limited, and they do not address issues that are only indirectly related to the research aim)
- can be answered within the proposed research (so they are not too broad, or beyond the reach of scientific research).

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.

Methods

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 etcetera. Try to describe your methods as accurate as possible. Consult a methodology handbook if you feel uncertain about the methods.

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.

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.

Appendix B: 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.

Empirical chapters

Presenting the empirical findings.

Evaluatory 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.