

# How to write a bachelor thesis

Guidelines for BIN thesis students planning a thesis with Rural  
Sociology or Sociology of Development and Change.

Jessica de Koning & Renee Stam

RURAL SOCIOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

# Table of Contents

1	Introduction to the bachelor thesis at RSO and SDC .....	2
1.1	Thesis at RSO and SDC .....	2
1.2	What is a bachelor thesis? .....	2
1.3	Length of a bachelor thesis.....	2
1.4	Language.....	2
1.5	Contact .....	2
2	Planning of a thesis.....	3
2.1	Schedule .....	3
2.2	Expected hours of work.....	3
2.3	Logistical steps.....	4
3	Preparation phase .....	5
3.1	Thesis vacancies and topics.....	5
3.2	Arrange supervision.....	5
3.3	Develop a rough idea of your problem statement .....	5
4	Proposal phase .....	6
4.1	Contract .....	6
4.2	Supervision schedule .....	6
4.3	Thesis proposal.....	6
4.4	Chapter structure .....	7
4.5	Approval of proposal and continuation to the research phase.....	7
5	Research phase.....	8
5.1	Literature review .....	8
5.2	The literature .....	8
5.3	Supervision during research phase.....	9
6	Writing Phase.....	10
6.1	Structure bachelor thesis.....	10
6.2	Coherency.....	11
6.3	Draft and planning of assessment .....	12
7	Assessment phase.....	13
7.1	Exam preparation .....	13
7.2	The exam .....	13
7.3	The grade.....	13

# 1 Introduction to the bachelor thesis

This document helps you to write your bachelor thesis within the allocated time. It includes information on the administrative tasks, planning, as well as thesis writing and research skills. The document is a guideline and is based on a standard bachelor thesis consisting of a literature research of a research problem. This document is designed for a thesis that starts and finishes in a period of 8 weeks. This is the time that you should dedicate to a bachelor thesis. Note that the supervisor is the main person who will guide you through the thesis process and this document serves as an additional source of information on that supervision process.

## 1.1 Thesis at RSO and SDC

As a thesis student, you do your thesis research at a specific chair group that fits your interests and your bachelor programme. Students of the BIN programme that have chosen to do the specialisation sociology, can write their thesis with supervision from Rural Sociology (RSO) or Sociology of Development and Change (SDC). The student studies a topic that relates to the fields of research of the chair groups of RSO and SDC. The education coordinator assigns a supervisor to the student based on the interest and availability. RSO and SDC work with thesis vacancies. To ensure a smooth progress of the thesis and right supervision, we strongly advice students to match their thesis topic with a vacancy. RSO and SDC will sent around a brochure with all the vacancies in February/March.

## 1.2 What is a bachelor thesis?

The student studies this by means of a literature review and performs a critical analysis and summary of the researched subject. The topic of study should reflect the 12 ECTS that stand for a bachelor thesis. Generally, a bachelor thesis does not include empirical data collection. The course guide of the bachelor thesis provides more information on what types of bachelor thesis exists. Read the BIN course guide before you start the thesis.

## 1.3 Length of a bachelor thesis

A bachelor thesis is 12 ECTS. This stands for 8 weeks of full-time study (42 hours per week). This includes the assessment.

## 1.4 Language

In principle, students write in English due to the nature of our international staff. Students can write in Dutch if their supervisor and the examiner understand it.

## 1.5 Contact and information

For questions about the bachelor thesis, please contact the education coordination team at the following addresses: [Thesis.RSO@wur.nl](mailto:Thesis.RSO@wur.nl) or [Thesis.SDC@wur.nl](mailto:Thesis.SDC@wur.nl).

## 2 Planning of a thesis

One of the most important elements of the bachelor thesis is the planning. Without a good planning, students will not be able to finish the thesis in the given time. The bachelor thesis must be completed within 8 weeks (including the assessment).

### 2.1 Schedule

The following schedule needs to be followed in order to finish in time. Any deviation from this will most likely result in delays.

	Week X	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
<b>Preparation</b>	Topic								
<b>Proposal</b>	Problem statement								
		Method							
		Theory							
<b>Research</b>			Literature research						
				Literature analysis					
<b>Writing</b>						Writing report			
							Draft		
<b>Assessment</b>									Exam

#### Important tips

- In order to finish in time, you **must** have a topic and a draft problem statement ready before week 1 starts. This is crucial to ensure a good start.
- Plan around a week between the draft report and the exam. This is time needed to process the feedback on the draft report and to give the examiner enough reading time for the assessment.
- Sometimes the different phases overlap. Do try to keep as much to the structure as possible.

### 2.2 Expected hours of work

To make the planning, students should realise that a bachelor thesis stands for 8 weeks full time work (full time means a 42-hour workweek). This includes the work on the thesis, the administrative tasks (thesis contract, signatures on contract, planning), the finishing of the thesis (including the reference list). This does not include the preparation phase. Note that for the assessment, students need to plan about a week between the draft and the final thesis to give the examiner enough reading time. It is a good idea to make week plans in which you indicate the number of hours per task of that week. If for some reasons, you are not able to spend the full 42 hours on the thesis you can plan these moments at another moment in time and work more than 42 hours in that week. Keeping track of time is an important tool to meet the deadline.

## 2.3 Logistical steps

The following steps are summarized in the table below. The explanation of these steps follows in the next chapters.

<b>Preparation</b>	<b>Week X*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Determine your topic</li> <li>✓ Check the thesis vacancies of RSO and SDC</li> <li>✓ Arrange supervision via the education coordinators</li> <li>✓ Develop a rough idea of your problem statement (1 A4)</li> </ul>
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Week 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Write a proposal</li> <li>✓ Set up and sign the thesis contract (including signature of study advisor)</li> <li>✓ Set up a supervision schedule (including arrangements on frequencies of feedback, reading time and expectations on feedback)</li> <li>✓ If possible, create a chapter structure for the thesis and determine how much time you allocate to each chapter.</li> <li>✓ Finish proposal and get approval for continuation</li> </ul>
<b>Research</b>	<b>Week 2-6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Collect the literature and analyse the literature according to the plan</li> <li>✓ Communicate clearly about your progress</li> <li>✓ Hand in each chapter on time and give enough reading time to the supervisor.</li> </ul>
<b>Writing</b>	<b>Week 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Finish the draft thesis report</li> <li>✓ Ensure the report meets the criteria (e.g. registration number, course code on front page)</li> <li>✓ Plan the assessment date</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Week 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sent a pdf of the final report to the supervisor</li> </ul>

*\*) 6-8 weeks before week 1/Start*

## 3 Preparation phase

Phase 1 starts about 4-6 weeks before the actual bachelor thesis starts. The steps below will ensure the best start for your thesis.

### 3.1 Thesis vacancies and topics

As a first step to find a thesis topic, students should visit the websites of RSO and SDC to determine which chair group fits their interests. For RSO visit [www.ruralsociologywageningen.nl](http://www.ruralsociologywageningen.nl) and for SDC visit [www.developmentandchange.org](http://www.developmentandchange.org).

RSO and SDC work with thesis vacancies. These vary between specific topics or broader frameworks for research and reflect the interest of the supervisor. It is strongly recommended that you choose one of the vacancies. RSO and SDC have an overview with vacancies that is shared with the study advisor. If you want to have a look at the thesis vacancies, you can always send an email to the coordinating team.

Students with own ideas about a specific topic need to plan an intake to discuss this as soon as possible but at least 4 weeks before the start of a bachelor thesis.

The thesis topic must match the following criteria:

- ✓ Topic links directly to one of the thesis vacancies of RSO and SDC or links to the research field of RSO and SDC
- ✓ Topic is of academic relevance and there is enough academic debate about it
- ✓ Topic is of societal relevance and there is enough societal debate about it
- ✓ Topic is interesting to you and you are highly motivated to research it.

### 3.2 Arrange supervision

In order to arrange supervision, students need to plan an intake with the education coordinators by sending an email to [Thesis.RSO@wur.nl](mailto:Thesis.RSO@wur.nl) or [Thesis.SDC@wur.nl](mailto:Thesis.SDC@wur.nl). During the intake, the education coordinators determine which supervisor are best suited and available to supervise. It takes 1 to 2 weeks to arrange supervision so plan accordingly.

Please note that by choosing a vacancy from the RSO and SDC thesis vacancy overview, you are more likely to get assigned the supervisor mentioned by the vacancy. In case of an open topic, the choice of supervisor depends on fit and availability. Students cannot demand a certain supervisor.

### 3.3 Develop a rough idea of your problem statement

In order to prepare for the thesis, it is vital that you prepare a rough idea of your problem statement (1 A4) that includes the following elements:

1. The topic of research
2. The relevance of the topic (academic and societal)
3. A short indication about the availability of academic literature and the identification of a few core articles that will be important to your research.
4. A planning (see chapter 2)

This document should be presented at your first meeting with your supervisor.

## 4 Proposal phase

The proposal phase should be finished in week 1.

### 4.1 Contract

Students fill in the thesis contract and discuss this with their supervisor. Then the supervisor and the study advisor need to sign the contract. The contract is then sent to the supervisor for archiving. **Students are not allowed to start the thesis without a signed contract.**

### 4.2 Supervision schedule

The contract includes a rough indication of a work schedule. Discuss the work schedule with your supervisor and make sure it is feasible. Also, discuss the frequency of the meetings and the reading time a supervisor needs to comment on your work as well as expectations on feedback.

### 4.3 Thesis proposal

A bachelor thesis proposal is a short document of about 5 pages text that typically includes:

1. Problem statement
2. Research question(s)
3. Conceptual framework
4. Methods
5. Planning

Note that sometimes the exact structure of a proposal can be different than the above. The above is a standard way of approaching a topic but in communication with your supervisor students can develop their own proposal structure.

#### 4.3.1 Problem statement (max 1000 words)

A good problem statements needs a first initial literature review to determine the academic relevance of your research.

A problem statement has the following building blocks.

1. **The ideal situation:** Describes a desired goal or ideal situation; explains how things should be. This can be a more empirical explanation of a situation (e.g. a case) or a more theoretical point of departure (e.g. a literature debate)
2. **The reality:** Describes a condition that prevents the goal, state, or value in the first part from being achieved or realized at this time; explains how the current situation falls short of the goal or ideal.
3. **The Consequences:** Identifies the way you propose to improve the current situation and move it closer to the goal or ideal. This could be by bringing in a new perspective from different literature or by comparing it to other cases.

For more explanation on a problem statement you can visit this website:

<https://www.editage.com/insights/the-basics-of-writing-a-statement-of-the-problem-for-your-research-proposal>

#### 4.3.2 Research question(s)

From your problem statement you formulate specific and well-defined research questions. For a bachelor thesis 1 or 2 questions is generally enough.

Research questions should logically flow from the problem statement and should be clear and concise. Also, the research question should be answerable via a literature research.

Check out this YouTube clip on formulating a research question:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=19&v=1oJNO6PYZe4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=19&v=1oJNO6PYZe4)

#### 4.3.3 Theory and concepts (1000 words)

The theoretical framework is the framework, or the lens, used to study your topic. It includes necessary concepts to conduct a literature review. Without defined concepts students will not be able to conduct a structured annotated literature search. For the conceptual framework students need to do an initial, short, literature review. Preferably, a conceptual framework is included that provides a visual representation of the concept and their connections. Students can choose an already existing theoretical framework.

The theoretical framework fits a standard research proposal. It is possible that the role and the workout of a theoretical framework can look quite different than above. In consultation with the supervisor, students choose the framework that fits their research best.

#### 4.3.4 Methods (500 words)

A bachelor thesis is a literature research. This section preferably includes the following:

1. Definition of a literature research (refer to scientific sources to briefly explain what a scientific literature search entails)
2. An explanation of how you will look for the literature. What are your search terms for the initial search? How will you select the relevant literature? What databases will you use.

When writing the methods section, do a test on how much literature your search terms render. If it renders too much data, you probably need to specify your research further. If it is too little, open-up your research. Changes to your methods affect your research questions, problem statement, and concepts so do not forget to change this if needed.

#### 4.3.5 Planning

Insert here the planning you already made in the preparation phase.

### 4.4 Chapter structure

With the completion of the proposal, students think about a chapter structure and the order in which they will write down their story. Additionally, it is important to allocate time that you will spend on each chapter. Thinking ahead of how the thesis will look like, will help to submit the thesis on time as writing a thesis always takes more time than expected.

### 4.5 Approval of proposal and continuation to the research phase

When the proposal is completed, students ask approval of the supervisor to continue the research and start the research phase of their thesis. This should happen at the end of week 1.



## 5 Research phase

The research phase starts in week 2. In this period, you will look for literature, read the literature and analyse it.

### 5.1 Literature review

A literature review is the core of the data collection and will demonstrate your command of your research topic. It situates your argument and makes your research relevant.

A good literature review has the following characteristics

- It is organized around ideas not around authors,
- Focuses on individual authors only when particularly relevant.
- Includes only key academic sources (not everything!!!)

### 5.2 The literature

The literature that should be included in the review are

- Journal Articles (peer reviewed)
- Books (peer reviewed)
- Conference Proceedings
- Government, NGO, or Corporate Reports
- Theses and Dissertations

This literature can be found at e.g. [www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com), [www.webofknowledge.com](http://www.webofknowledge.com), the WUR library, Scholar Google and so on.

The following sources should only be used as illustrations

- Internet sources
- Newspapers
- Magazines

Pay special attention to those sources that you find which appear to be conducting mini literature reviews such as book reviews, first chapters of dissertations, first articles of special issues, etc. Emphasize sources mentioned by multiple authors. This means that this information is found highly relevant and ensures a high-quality contribution to the debate. Do not try to read everything and do not get stuck in reading and forget about writing. Avoid Wikipedia as principle source of information.

#### 5.2.1 Ten simple rules for doing a literature review

Pautasso (2013) has written a clear article on how to do a literature review:

Rules	Explanation	When particularly relevant
Rule 1: Define a topic and audience	Topic must be interesting to you Topic should be an important aspect of the field of research Topic should be a well-defined issue	Proposal Phase
Rule 2: Search and Re-search the Literature	Keep track of the search items you use Use a paper management system Define some criteria for exclusion of irrelevant papers	Proposal Phase Research Phase

	Do not just look for research papers also seek previous reviews	
Rule 3: Take Notes While Reading	Use a paper management system.	Research Phase
Rule 4: Choose the Type of Review You Wish to Write	A bachelor thesis typically includes an annotated literature review.	Proposal Phase Research Phase
Rule 5: Keep the Review Focused, but Make It of Broad Interest	Do not lose sight of your research focus Try to relate to broader issues when relevant	Writing phase
Rule 6: Be Critical and Consistent	After having read a review of the literature, a reader should have a rough idea of: the major achievements in the reviewed field, the main areas of debate and the research questions. Literature review needs consistency passive vs. active voice and present vs. past tense.	Writing phase
Rule 7: Find a Logical Structure	Work out your structure first before writing Diagrams, tables, figures may help in increasing structure	Writing phase
Rule 8: Make Use of Feedback	This can be your supervisor as well as your peers (share your work with your fellow students) Make sure you understand the feedback	Proposal phase Research Phase Writing phase
Rule 9: Be Objective	Do not insert own ideas without proper scientific back up.	Proposal phase Writing phase
Rule 10: Be Up to Date, but Do Not Forget Older Studies	Keep an eye on electronic lists of papers <i>in press/published online</i> Keep an eye on "sleeping beauties"	Research phase
<p><i>Pautasso, Marco. "Ten simple rules for writing a literature review." PLoS Comput Biol 9.7 (2013): e1003149. <a href="https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003149">https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003149</a></i></p>		

### 5.3 Supervision during research phase

It is possible that during the research phase, students decide to work more on their own and need less supervision. Students can also opt for a normal continuation of supervision. Important is to communicate clearly about the progress. If needed, students can hand in a part of their analysis when they need feedback on this element.

## 6 Writing Phase

The writing phase starts in week 4 and is an intense phase where you extend your proposal, insert your results from your data analysis and include a discussion and conclusion. Here you connect your proposal to your results and add discussion and conclusions. Use the chapter structure developed in the proposal phase to write down your results and work out your research into a thesis.

### 6.1 Structure bachelor thesis

A bachelor thesis should be around 20-30 pages long.

#### 6.1.1 Requirements title page

The title page includes the (work) title, students name, registration number, bachelor program and major, supervisor, course code and the date.

#### 6.1.2 Problem statement and research questions

The problem statement was already written in the proposal phase. Important is to check if the problem statement and research questions still hold and whether the scientific and societal relevance is clear and well argued

#### 6.1.3 Theoretical framework

Based on the theoretical framework of the proposal, the student checks if the theoretical framework needs further elaboration. Are the chosen concepts still relevant for the analysis of the research topic? The theoretical framework preferably goes beyond a definition of concepts. In the final thesis, the concepts are linked in a research framework and the student can position him/herself in the theoretical discussion.

#### 6.1.4 Methodology

The methodology section from the proposal is extended with a section on the actual search for literature, the data analysis and the steps that were taken to answer the research questions. Preferably it includes information on data validation.

#### 6.1.5 Results

The result chapter or chapters present the results of the literature research. Together with the supervisor, you decide on a logical and feasible structure for the results. Important guidelines for a results chapter is

- Content of the results flows logically from the problem statement and is aligned with the theoretical framework
- The descriptions are focussed and delimited in accordance with the research questions
- The context described includes only relevant information for understanding the case
- The sources used are relevant and academic

The length of the results section is variable and depends a lot on the quality of the data and the topic of research. A good result section shows that the student can organise literature and to critically evaluate the quality of the used literature sources.

#### 6.1.6 Discussion

Discussion relates the results of the research to the broader theoretical debates and reflects on the research. In a good discussion the student identifies the added value of his research relative to existing

literature. A discussion also discusses the research findings in relation to the theoretical framework and the academic and societal relevance.

### 6.1.7 Conclusion

The conclusion and answers the research questions. The following elements should be in a conclusion

- Transcends a summary of chapters by answering the research questions
- Reflects on methodology used and its limitations
- Formulates relevant recommendations for further research

In a good conclusion, the student comes to a synthesis that results in own insights, hypotheses or conclusions which contribute to the research question. A good conclusion has a clear link with research questions. All conclusions are substantiated by results. Conclusions are formulated exact and logical.

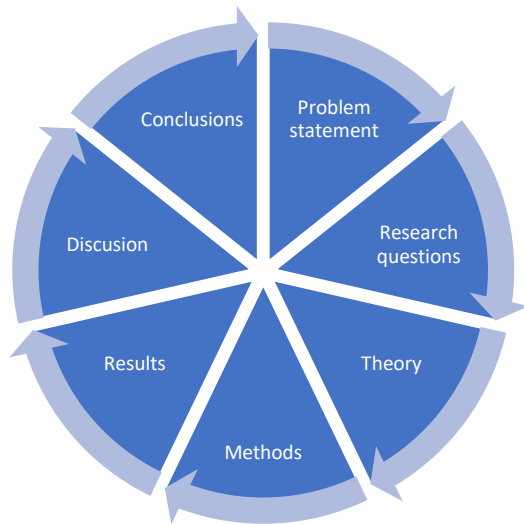
### 6.1.8 References

Include a reference list in a chosen style. Important is to be consistent in the style. Plagiarism (using scientific articles without proper referencing) is a serious offence that results in a failed mark for the bachelor thesis. A good reference list includes mostly peer-reviewed papers or specialized monographs that are very relevant.

Do not commit plagiarism as this will lead to failing the thesis. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, check out the following websites: <https://www.wur.nl/en/Library/Students/Citing-and-plagiarism.htm> en <https://library.wur.nl/infoboard/cite-reference/>

## 6.2 Coherency

The final phase is a short phase but very important. The check for coherency and the common thread of a thesis improves the quality of any thesis. Coherency is about the logical flow of your thesis: does the problem statement flow naturally into the research questions, theory, methods, and results. And do my conclusions nicely link to the problem statement? The questions below should guide into doing the full check.



Problem statement clear

Research questions deliniated

Theory and concepts directly related to problem statement

Methods and variables directly linked to theory

Results flow logically from methods and aligned with theory

Discussion ties in the results and connects it to the problem statement

Conclusions synthesises results and overall project.

### 6.3 Draft and planning of assessment

At the end of the writing phase, the student hands in a draft thesis. Together with the supervisor, the students plan the dates for handing in the draft, the turnover time needed for the supervisor to hand in the comments and plans the date for the final assessment.

## 7 Assessment phase

The assessment takes place in week 8.

### 7.1 Exam preparation

For the preparation of the exam, the student finalises the draft thesis and sends this to the supervisor and the examiner. The examiner is the second person who reads the thesis and prepares questions for the assessment.

The thesis should include the relevant information on the title page (see 6.1.1). The student needs to ensure that the right thesis code on the cover of the thesis is used. This is the same thesis code used in the contract and in your study plan. If the thesis code is not the same, the grade will not appear on the grade list and you will not graduate.

### 7.2 The exam

The exam is a 20 to 30-minute discussion on your thesis, your results and how it links to the wider academic debate. As preparation, you read your thesis and think about the relevance of your thesis, the motivation behind the choices made during your research and how it relates to broader scientific issues.

### 7.3 The grade

After the exam, you will receive your grade and will be shown a grade file with the specific grades per element of the thesis. As a standard, your supervisor uses the rubric for the bachelor thesis to come to the grades. The rubric can be found in the course guide. At the end of the grade file, the supervisor and the examiner fill in a text box with textual comments on the thesis. As a student, you have the right to see the grade file as well as the comments. You can also ask for the comments in case they are not provided.

As soon as the grade file is signed and sent to the secretariat, the grade will be registered and will appear on the student's grade list. Students need to check this as well. If a grade does not appear on the grade list, you need to follow up and contact your supervisor to check if something went wrong as soon as possible.