

Last updated: 21 February 2016

**MA THESES**  
**Department of English Studies**  
College of Foreign Languages and Cultures  
University of Tartu

The MA thesis gives students the opportunity to study a specific topic of their choice within their discipline in depth and demonstrate their ability to analyse and synthesise relevant materials and present their findings in an appropriate format and in fluent academic English. The MA thesis has to have a clearly defined object of study and a research question which is to be dealt with in a systematic manner, with consistent use of evidence, and to demonstrate the students' contribution to the topic.

The MA thesis is written on a topic chosen by the student under the supervision of a member of the Department and has to comply with the requirements set by the Department in formatting and layout (see guidelines below and *Style sheet*).

### **Procedure from start to finish**

Students choose their thesis topic by the spring semester of their first year of studies. Students are advised to choose a topic on which they have taken a course and/or written a paper and thus do not have to start from scratch. They are advised to take advantage of the coursework in the MA programme. The topic has to cover some aspect of the English language, literatures written in English, cultures of the English-speaking countries or English language teaching.

Students first identify the topic area (linguistics, British/American/Canadian/Irish literature, culture studies, English language teaching) and contact a potential supervisor to discuss their potential thesis topic at the very beginning of the spring semester of their first year of studies. This may also be done earlier. The student and the supervisor discuss the proposal of the thesis (see *Appendix 1*). The proposals are to be submitted to the Department for the set deadline in the spring semester of the first year of studies.

After the supervisors have been confirmed by the Department and the students have been informed of the decision, they are to contact their supervisors immediately to discuss the plan and process of work. The decisions are made jointly by the student and the supervisor and should guide their work. If the student is not able to follow the original plan, they are to inform the supervisor immediately.

The supervisor is the student's academic advisor which means that she or he advises the student on and helps her/him with research and writing the thesis. However, students should not expect the supervisor to write the thesis or edit it. Since supervisors advise a number of students each semester, students should not expect to get their undivided attention and be ready for independent work.

After the student and supervisor have decided on the plan of work, the student will start research and will present the draft of the agreed on section of the paper to the supervisor for the set deadline. If the student does not adhere to the deadline, the supervisor has the right to not supervise them in the given semester. A similar procedure is to be followed with all other sections.

MA theses are submitted for pre-defence in the spring semester of the second year of studies (deadlines are made available on the Department home page at the beginning of the academic year). The aim of the pre-defence is to give students constructive feedback on the work completed and to thus help them fix mistakes prior to the submission of the final version. Papers are presented electronically to the Department e-mail address. The Department appoints a reviewer for the thesis. The pre-defence takes place in front of the defence board and has 3 parts: presentation by the student, reviewer's comments and discussion with the student, questions and comments from other board members. The students are either allowed to

continue their writing or recommended to take an extra year for completing the work.

The final draft of the thesis is to be presented to the Department for the set deadline in one hard-bound copy. The pdf-copy of the thesis should be submitted electronically to the specialist for studies of the Department. The supervisor will give a signed written consent to the submission of the thesis. All MA theses are publicly defended. The aim of the procedure is to demonstrate the students' familiarity with the content of the thesis and their proficiency in spontaneous spoken English. The defence can be divided into three sections: student's presentation stating the research question, methods used and main results (7-10 min), reviewer's comments and discussion with the student and general discussion. The student will see the questions of the reviewer at least one day before the defence. The student may use a PowerPoint presentation, if they need to show their data, but does not have to use one. The grade is determined by 3 components: the process of work, the quality of the finished thesis and the performance at the defence.

### **General requirements**

All theses must be word-processed and double-spaced, using Times New Roman or a similar serif font.

Black ink is used.

Text is written on one side of paper only.

MA theses are submitted in one hard-bound paper copy and as a pdf-file electronically.

The length of the 15 ECTS MA thesis is 40-50 pages; the length of the 30 ECTS MA thesis 70-80 pages (without appendices).

The page numbering starts on the title page although no page number is marked there. All other pages are numbered. Page numbers are placed in the upper right-hand corner of the page.

### **Structure of MA theses**

MA theses typically consist of the sections listed and described below. Some sections are not always needed and the titles of such sections are given in brackets.

#### **Title page** (see *Appendix 2*)

The title page contains the following information: the name of the department, the title of the paper, the type of the paper, the name of the author, the name of the supervisor and the year of submission.

The name of the supervisor is preceded by her or his shortened title:

*Prof.* for Professor

*Assoc. Prof.* for Associate Professor (dotsent)

*Lect.* for Lecturer

*Asst. Lect.* for Assistant Lecturer

#### **Abstract** (see *Appendix 3*)

The *Abstract* is not a part of the paper but its condensed description. The aim of the abstract is to inform the potential audience whether the paper would be interesting and/or useful for them. It should contain the aim of the paper, its structure and a one-to-two sentence summary of each of the constituent parts. It should not be longer than one page (single spaced).

#### **Table of Contents**

The *Table of Contents* lists all the sections of the paper with the exception of the table of contents itself. Although the *Abstract* precedes the *Table of Contents*, it is also included. The titles in the *Table of Contents* have the same form as in the text. At the right-hand margin, the titles are followed by the number of the page on which they appear. It is advisable to use the formatting tools offered by word-processing programmes and to draw up the table of

contents automatically.

### **(List of abbreviations)**

A *List of Abbreviations* is needed only if the student adopts abbreviations of her/his own which are employed all through the thesis, for example, shortened titles of books/poems discussed or terminology used.

### **Introduction**

The *Introduction* provides the background to the paper and explains why the student has chosen to study what she/he is studying. It should present the purpose of the paper and/or hypothesis as well as an overview of the main sections of the paper.

### **Core chapters**

Core chapters present the body of the work. Each chapter should be a unitary whole, with its own brief introduction and conclusion, but still firmly linked to the others. Their number has traditionally been two or three.

The division of material in the core chapters greatly depends on the topic. In general, the first chapter tends to be more general, providing a theoretical overview of the subject matter and the second more specific focussing on the student's own empirical study. The latter can, in turn, be divided into the following sections: research question, method (contains the method and procedure of data collection and analysis), data analysis and discussion of results.

### **Conclusion**

The *Conclusion* summarises all sections of the paper, presents the major findings and discusses their significance. New information should not be presented in this section.

### **References**

This section contains all the sources referred to in the paper. Only sources referred to in the paper are listed in the references.

If the thesis incorporates an analysis of linguistic or literary data, works which have been used to obtain the data are listed under *Primary Sources* and the materials consulted for other purposes under *Secondary Sources*. (See the *Style sheet* for more specific information and examples.)

### **(Appendices)**

Appendices contain material which is not an integral part of the core sections but is analysed and/or referred to in them (tables, word lists, etc.).

Each separate set of materials is presented in a separate appendix. If there are several appendices, they are numbered.

Appendices have headings and these are included in the *Table of Contents*.

### **Resümee (see Appendix 4)**

*Resümee* provides all the necessary bibliographical data of the thesis and serves as a source of information about it for people who do not speak English. Therefore, it contains the aim of the thesis, the methodology used, a short summary of the contents and the main findings. Basically, it is the *Abstract* and the condensed version of the *Conclusion* in Estonian.

Name of the student:

Supervisor of the thesis:

**MA THESIS PROPOSAL**

1. Preliminary title of the thesis:

2. Preliminary research question or thesis:

What are you going to do and why?

Define your research question and elaborate upon it (the relevance of the question to the research area, how your work relates to previous research, expected results, etc.).

3. Methodology:

How are you going to achieve your aims?

Describe how you are going to collect and analyse your data.

4. Preliminary outline

List the main sections as you envision them at the moment and describe what material you will cover in each.

5. Basic sources:

List the most important sources.

Date of submission /Signature of the student/

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**[TITLE]  
MA thesis**

**[NAME OF THE AUTHOR]  
SUPERVISOR: [TITLE NAME]**

**TARTU  
[Year]**

**ABSTRACT**

The first paragraph provides the motivation for writing the paper (Why should we care about the problem and the results?), its problem statement (research question and/or hypothesis) and the scope of work.

The following paragraphs briefly describe the content of the main sections (*Introduction* and core chapters) of the paper. Although the descriptions are concise, the key points (e.g, the materials studied and the methodology used) must be included. Judgements and conclusions are not added.

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

[Nimi]

[Töö pealkiri (inglise ja eesti keeles)]

[Töö liik] (magistritöö)

[Aasta]

Lehekülgede arv:

Annotatsioon:

(Eesmärk, ülesehitus, metoodika, sisukokkuvõte, peamised tulemused)

Märksõnad:

Näiteks: Inglise keel ja keeleteadus (foneetika, fraseoloogia, grammatika, stilistika, terminoloogia; psühholingvistika, rakenduslingvistika, tekstilingvistika; kultuuridevaheline kommunikatsioon), inglise/ameerika/jne. kirjandus, kirjandusteooria, tõlketeooria, inglise keele didaktika, võrdlevad kultuuriuuringud.