

How to develop and write a thesis

Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to illustrate and explain the process, structure and norms that define the development of an undergraduate and graduate thesis, beginning from its conception up to the final presentation. The thesis is the outcome of an empirical and intellectual process that starts with the exploration of a topic of interest in coordination with a professor (the ‘Thesis advisor’), in order to develop a research question and further methods and approaches to procure information to answer to the original research question. This process builds knowledge, where knowledge can be obtained through one or more main methodological tools – for example, the review and study of the literature on a topic, interviews and surveys, sensory analysis tests, etc. – whose results are then analyzed and discussed in the written report that constitutes the thesis. The discussion part hence is built by understanding the data and information gathered in the context of what we already know on the topic, both in empirical and theoretical ways. Nonetheless, the purpose of the thesis may also plainly be to expose the state of art of a specific topic, or to elaborate in an original way a specific point of view.

What is a graduation thesis?

The thesis is an original and personal work with which the candidate must show her/his capacity to critically think and elaborate on a chosen topic.

The undergraduate and the graduate thesis can be written and presented in English or Italian language.

When to look for a thesis advisor and how

Exceptions apart, students shall start the thesis process at the beginning or during their last year of courses. The student then asks one of the course professors for supervision, and the latter, if she/he accepts, will become the thesis advisor of the student’s thesis.

The undergraduate student and her/his thesis advisor

If the student in the undergraduate program already has an idea of the topic she/he wishes to address in the thesis, she/he should expose it and discuss it with the professor of the course more inherent to the topic. The professor can accept the idea, refuse it, or propose to modify the original proposal.

In the case that the student is still looking for a topic of interest for the thesis, she/he can ask to a professor of her/his choice to propose some topics and themes, in order to reach a shared idea for the thesis.

In the case of an interdisciplinary thesis, the thesis advisor might decide to ask also for the supervision of a colleague, who then becomes the supporting advisor for the thesis.

The graduate student and her/his thesis advisor

The graduate student must present her/his thesis proposal to the professor of the discipline that is more relevant for the chosen topic. The professor can accept, refuse, or ask to modify the original proposal. Most students of the graduate degree start from the internship project to elaborate the final thesis along the same lines, but this is not a compulsory process: thesis that are not related to the internship project are also welcome. If the student decides to pick a different topic from the one of her/his internship, she/he can propose a different topic or, if ideas are missing, ask to a professor of her/his choice to propose some topics and themes, in order to reach a shared idea for the thesis.

In the case of an interdisciplinary thesis, the thesis advisor might decide to ask also for the supervision of a colleague, who then becomes supporting advisor for the thesis. The thesis advisor is the one who

proposes a supporting advisor; in the case that the student does it, she/he must first inform the thesis advisor and the latter will take the final decision.

Further help on how to choose a thesis advisor

If the student has so many doubts as being unable to identify a discipline or a potential thesis advisor, she/he can ask her/his mentor for suggestions, on appointment. The mentor listens to the ideas and doubts of the student and points her/him toward a potential thesis advisor or someone within the University able to help the student.

The student is advised to consult the ‘UNISG Faculty Expertise’ which can be found on the [Esse3 portal](#).

Relationship with the thesis advisor

It is a good habit for the student to consult and confront periodically with the thesis advisor. Each thesis advisor will indicate to the student the ways that she/he prefers for the delivery and correction of the thesis and of its chapters. If a student decides to change thesis advisor, she/he should communicate this to the previous thesis advisor.

How to write a thesis

Some classical books and guides provide instructions about writing a thesis (available for consultation at UNISG Library). For example:

- Umberto Eco, *Come si fa una tesi di laurea*.
- Gianfranco Gambarelli, *La tesi scientifica di laurea e dottorato*.

However, the student is advised to consult with the thesis advisor for the formulation of the thesis.

Regarding formalities and formatting (e.g. page setup, fonts, notes, margins, bibliography, etc.), the student is invited to consult the guide for the writing of the final thesis which can be found on the [Esse3 portal](#).

How to find a topic and how develop it into a thesis

The first steps: searching a research question

The original idea for the thesis’ topic and the specific thesis’ research question are the outcome of a preliminary process around the theme to be addressed. Thus, once the student has identified a theme of interest (usually connected to a passion or interest of the student), she/he is advised to consult the scientific literature on the theme, with the aim of formulating a specific research question to be developed in the thesis. The student should become acquainted with the literature regarding the theoretical problems around the selected theme, the specific context of study (e.g. historical, anthropological, economical, etc.), and the empirical features of the selected case study (or studies). Indeed, as claimed by several scholars, the most important part of a research lays in the correct definition of the research question (and associated sub-questions). These shall be questions that can be answered through the collection and analysis of data and information, that cannot be answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and that deepen the existing knowledge about the selected topic. The aims of the research for the thesis, then, are just a re-writing of the formulated research questions.

It should be stressed that once the research question has been formulated, the successive steps can vary greatly depending on the subject area. The indications that follow are therefore only suggestions and must firstly be evaluated by the candidate together with their thesis advisor, who will be able to steer them in the right direction.

It should be specified that the undergraduate thesis can also be presented in the form of a review of

the literature of the topic being studied, showing in a scientific and detailed way the current “state of play” in regards to the topic.

Preliminary literature review

The student should carry out a preliminary review of the literature inherent to the chosen theme and topic in order to have a knowledge deep enough for the definition of meaningful research questions. Such a preliminary literature review allows the student to grasp and understand the concepts, definitions, main variables, and available knowledge and gaps in the information on the chosen topic. The student will then expand and deepen this preliminary review while carrying out the research and the thesis writing.

Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses aims at establishing potential relations among the variables and the phenomena under study, and are based on available knowledge on the topic (coming from preliminary observations, literature review, etc.). The hypotheses formulated should be justified based on theoretical or empirical references, or of a combination of the two. Research hypotheses can be developed starting from the research question and sub-questions and formulating hypothetical answers to the questions.

Variables and indicators

Starting from the hypotheses (or from the research questions, although in a less precise way), a further step in the development of the thesis is in finding the indicators. Indicators are the empirical references (measurements) of the different variables included in the research hypotheses. Variables, in fact, are concepts that are still too abstract to be managed at the level of ‘facts’, while indicators operationalize the variables, capturing their empirical manifestations. Indicators include information and data that can or cannot be analyzed with mathematical or statistical tools, but often they are nonetheless quantifiable. It does not matter if an indicator is quantitative or qualitative, the important aspect is that the student try to establish the sources (e.g. literature, observations, interviews, surveys, etc.) where to obtain (through the methodology, see below) the information she/he needs.

Research tools and methodology

The research tools are the combination of methods developed to collect and generate information on the indicators of a chosen topic. Methods that are unfit for the research purpose will yield partial or irrelevant information. In choosing her/his research methods and instruments, the student should:

- Select methods that are appropriated to the purpose of the research
- Figure out how to select and find sources for the information needed
- Assess how many sources (or case studies) are necessary
- Decide what kind of information to search, and for what purpose

The thesis’ “ingredients”

The thesis, as written work, includes a title page and an index before the introduction. The thesis is usually organized like this:

1. Introduction and literature review
2. Aims of the research *or* thesis
3. Materials and methods *or* Data and methodology
4. Results and discussion
5. Conclusions
6. Bibliography *or* Literature cited
7. Attachments (if any)

Title page

The title page must follow the model the student can find on the [Esse3 portal](#).

Index

It must include the ordered list of the chapters that compose the thesis and the pages where they can be found.

Introduction

A good introduction can be written only once the results of the investigation are known and analyzed. It is then a good idea to write the introduction to the thesis after having completed the rest of the thesis, and not before.

The introduction section should introduce the topic and stimulate the reader to read the rest of the thesis, and should include:

- A description of the topic of the thesis and the reasons for its choice
- The ‘state of art’: available knowledge on the topic, documented through a literature review
- The reasons for which further studies on the topics are important
- Anticipations about the methodology used
- Anticipations of the results
- A brief description of the organization of the chapters of the thesis and their content

Aim of the research

It is the purpose of the research and thesis. It can be modified during the course of the thesis development, but it is not advisable to begin without having one. It is worthy then to write it explicitly apart. However, this section can be integrated with the introduction.

Materials and methods *or* Data and Methodology

Here the student needs to illustrate in detail the methodology, data, and information on which the research is based, i.e. all the ways in which the information used has been gathered. It is better to indicate, besides the list of useful material, also those sources that have not been useful.

Results and discussion

The results include all those data and information found during the research and through the methodology. After presenting the results, the student will engage in a discussion of these results; the discussion aims at understanding the results in a wider context and framing them into the literature on the topic. Results should be coherent with the aims of the thesis.

Conclusions

The conclusions summarize the results and the main points of the discussion, focusing particularly on new findings of the thesis in the context of the topic’s literature.

Bibliography

The bibliography is compulsory, whatever the system chosen to list it. The student is advised to speak with the thesis advisor to decide what system to follow, as it normally varies among disciplines. In any case, the literature sources in bibliography must be listed in alphabetical order by surname of the first author or editor, and, in second order, by title and year of publication.

If, besides the bibliography, a further section of sitography is added, the alphabetical order should also be followed and the date of the last visit to the site should be included. It is not advised to use commercial websites or any other non-academic source to conduct the literature review. If the student use sources found in Google Books, she/he should cite them as if they were consulted in paper format.

Attachments (if any)

Every attachment, table, drawing, and figure shall be numbered and titled and inserted in the text in the proper place.

Literature search

‘Classical’ literature review (with paper works and books)

<http://www.sbn.it> (for books)

<http://acnp.unibo.it/catalogo> (for Journals)

Website of the libraries’ hub (e.g. for Piedmont: <http://www.librinlinea.it>)

To check the availability of a work in UNISG Library, the student should enter in [Librinlinea](#), activate the option ‘Advanced search’ and select ‘Single Library’ and the name ‘University of Gastronomic Sciences (TO0U9)’.

Interlibrary loan

When a book or a journal is available only in a faraway library, it is often possible to use the interlibrary loan and bring the works to Pollenzo when they are needed, even if for a short period. For this, the student should refer to the librarian.

Online resources

The Online Library grants to the students access to databases and electronic journals. It is possible to access these articles and databases from any internet location inserting username and password (<https://www.unisg.it/biblioteca-online-unisg/>).

Literature search in Google Scholar is free of charge (<https://scholar.google.it/>).