

Master's Thesis. What to know and what to do.

What to know and what to do before you start a Master's thesis

The master's thesis module consists of two parts. The first part is a 6 months thesis project in a research group which includes writing up the actual thesis. The second part is the oral master's thesis defense. After the thesis has been handed in, two referees evaluate the thesis usually within four weeks.

All Master Thesis projects must be supervised by a programme specific 1st supervisor, the 2nd reviewer may be selected from any of the 5 M.Sc. supervisor lists ([see the M.Sc. webpage](#)).

Generally, within two weeks after evaluation of the thesis, which has to be graded 4.0 or better, the master's thesis defense takes place. There will be no defense if the thesis is graded 5.0. In that case it is possible to conduct a new thesis project on a different topic. However, consult a student adviser beforehand.

If you plan to conduct a thesis project in a research group with a supervisor who is not listed as an academic supervisor the thesis is considered to be external. In that case, you need to ask two academics listed as supervisors for being referees for your thesis and you need to consult a student adviser. The actual project supervisor of an external thesis does not take part in the reviewing process. However, she or he may be present as a consultant during the thesis defense.

What to do before you start a Master's thesis

- Make sure that you have successfully finished all modules required.
- If you plan an external thesis contact a student advisor
- Fill out the form for registration of the master's thesis.
 - Make sure that the thesis supervisor and you have signed the form.
 - You also have to fill out a form that asks for studies abroad during your Master's studies. This form is for statistical purposes. The form is written in German. If you need help, ask lab mates or the student advisers.
- Hand in the registration form to the Master's Office at least 7 days before beginning the thesis work.
- You will receive a letter that informs you about the deadline for handing in your thesis. The deadline will be 6 month after the beginning date.
- Read the master's thesis module description for formal details. The module description gives 7 month for the duration of the module. Do not be irritated, this includes the 6 month period for the actual thesis and 4 weeks for preparation of the thesis defense.

Writing the thesis

- For preparing your thesis it is useful to know some of the criteria that are used by the referees to evaluate your thesis. You will find this information here: http://www.biologie.uni-koeln.de/sites/department_biologie/Lehre/Formulare/MSc/Master_Thesis_Evaluation_Form_neue_Ordnung.pdf
- The thesis should not exceed 100 pages (font size 12, line spacing 1.5). Because there are no further regulations as to the form ask your supervisor for instructions.
- Although the master's thesis has to be written in English, include the following declaration in German: **"Hiermit versichere ich an Eides Statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit**

selbstständig und ohne die Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus veröffentlichten und nicht veröffentlichten Schriften entnommen wurden, sind als solche kenntlich gemacht. Die Arbeit ist in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form oder auszugsweise im Rahmen einer anderen Prüfung noch nicht vorgelegt worden. Ich versichere, dass die eingereichte elektronische Fassung der eingereichten Druckfassung vollständig entspricht”.

(Translation: *“I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that I have not used any sources other than those listed in the bibliography. Content from published or unpublished works that has been quoted directly or indirectly or paraphrased is indicated as such. The thesis has not been submitted in the same or similar form or in part for any other academic award. The electronic version I have submitted is completely identical to the hard copy version submitted.”*). If a false declaration is made, the legal consequences described in Section 63 (5) of the Higher Education Institution Act of the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia (“HG”) can apply.

- **Date and sign the statement.**

Handing in the thesis

- Hand in three printed copies and a write-protected digital version at the Master’s Office. The digital version may be stored on CD or a data stick. The latter version will be copied to the electronic file system in the office.
- Meet the deadline when handing in the thesis. Otherwise, the thesis will be graded 5 (fail).

If you cannot meet the deadline a 4 week extension may be granted upon a well-founded written request to the Degree Committee. The request must be submitted before the deadline and has to be signed by the student. An additional signature of the supervisor is advantageous.

Extensions will be granted in cases of health problems of the student when certified by a medical doctor or certified health care issues with relatives or pregnancy and child care issues. See a student adviser for help with these matters.

Generally, the referees will be finished with reading and grading the thesis within 4 weeks. It is advisable fixing a date for the thesis defense with both referees before you hand in the thesis.

Master’s thesis defense

The master’s thesis defense consists of, a 20-minute talk and a discussion of 25 to 40 minutes. The talk is a presentation of the thesis’s scientific background, the most important methods and results, and the main conclusions drawn from the result. Topics in the discussion will include the broad scientific context of the thesis’s topic, the understanding of methodological matters, the discussion of the results and their implications. The master’s thesis defense is the last examination of your studies and it can only be conducted after all other modules have been completed and the thesis has been evaluated positively.

- Arrange the exact date of the talk with both referees and a keeper of minutes.
- Arrange a room for the thesis defense.
- Fill out the Master’s Thesis defense form.

- The form needs to be signed by
 - the 1st reviewer
 - the 2nd reviewer
 - the keeper of minutes
 - the candidate
- Hand in the form at least 10 days before the defense date. If the form is send by letter post it must be submitted 14 days before the defense date. You may hand in the form together with the thesis.

After the defense, the keeper of minutes will take care that the documents are send to the Master's Office.

If you fail, you can repeat the thesis defense. A maximum of two repeats is possible.

Determination of the final grade

For the determination of the final grade, the weighting will be: 15 % for each subject module and 40% for the Master's thesis. The weighting for the Master's thesis will be 75% for the written thesis and 25% for the thesis defense.

After finishing the thesis defense it may take a couple weeks until the final documents are ready to be picked up. If necessary, you may ask for an ungraded confirmation of a successful completion of the Master's program.