

MASTER THESIS CULTURE STUDIES

Tracks: Art and Media Studies / Digital Culture Studies / Jeugdletteratuur / Management of Cultural Diversity / Health Humanities

THE MA THESIS IN YOUR STUDY PROGRAMME

- The MA thesis is the final part of your study programme. In your thesis, you show and apply the skills, knowledge and understanding you have acquired during your studies.
- The thesis
 - Presents a research question/thesis statement or a hypothesis
 - Places the study within the theoretical framework of the field
 - Indicates the contribution it makes to that field
 - Based on data obtained through appropriate means of data collection and analysed by using relevant methods, or based on, and making interpretations of, relevant primary sources
 - Suggests potential further studies in the field
- Learning goals:
 - You are able to independently carry out a small research project
 - You are able to formulate a research question/thesis statement
 - You are able to find and critically evaluate relevant literature
 - You are able to collect appropriate data and apply appropriate methods
 - You are able to formulate an appropriate theoretical framework
 - You are able to formulate a research plan
 - You are able to report on your research in a clear and engaging manner
 - You are able to write in an appropriate academic register, following the conventions of the field in question
- For the thesis, 15 or 18 ECTS have been allocated, which represents (15 / 18x28) 420 / 504 hours, about 11 / 13 full weeks of work.
- You have to complete this work within one semester (blocks 3 & 4).

GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR THESIS; TOPICS AND SUPERVISORS

- Only start with your thesis if you are seriously planning and able to finish it within one semester. If this is not the case, wait one semester or ask advice from the [study advisor](#).
- In block 2 an information session is scheduled to get started with your thesis. In the meeting the students' (preliminary) ideas for a thesis topic, and the topics different staff members are able to supervise, will be discussed. In the MCD track, supervision takes place in a so-called thesis circle. A separate MCD Thesis Manual is available.
- Contact the thesis coordinator and discuss with him/her who is available for supervision. The thesis coordinators are:
 - MA Art and Media Studies: prof.dr. Odile Heynders
 - MA Digital Culture Studies: dr. Ico Maly
 - MA Jeugdletteratuur: dr. Suzanne van der Beek and dr. Sara Van den Bossche

- MA Management of Cultural Diversity: prof.dr. Jos Swanenberg
- MA Health Humanities: dr. Marjolein de Boer
- Based on your topic and the availability of supervisors, the thesis coordinator makes a suggestion as to who would be a good match as a supervisor for you.
- If you are still unsure about the topic of your thesis, do not hesitate to reach out to the thesis coordinator to discuss the next steps to help you find a topic. Next to that, brainstorming with fellow classmates or going through topics from previous courses you have taken to get inspiration is a good way to find a topic.
- Staff members supervise theses in their areas of expertise, but also in accordance with the time they have available for supervision. This means that in any semester, some staff members may not supervise students, while others supervise a number of students.
- Once you have a supervisor, you can arrange the first meeting with him/her and start preparing for your thesis work by
 - Fine-tuning the initial idea
 - Gathering and reading relevant literature
 - Starting to put together a research proposal to be discussed with the supervisor
- If you want to write an external thesis (i.e. a thesis for which the research is carried out in the context of an organisation or a company), you will also be assigned a supervisor from the department.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR, AND WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

- A MA thesis is always supervised by a staff member of the department. PhD candidates can also co-supervise theses, but only under the responsibility of a senior staff member.
- Your supervisor is supposed to spend no more than 30 hours supervision time on your thesis. This includes everything, from preparing thesis topics to sending in the grade of your thesis.
- You will agree on specific deadlines together with your supervisor, but as a general guideline you should prepare to have the first draft version of your thesis finished in June. You can then work on revisions suggested by your supervisor, keeping in mind that you will have to deliver the final version in early August, and also that your supervisor and second reader will be unavailable during their summer holidays (discuss the timing of the holiday period with your supervisor).
- Your supervisor is responsible for making clear agreements with you about the supervision. Make sure your expectations on these points match those of your supervisor.
 - What does s/he expect from you when?
 - When and how often do you meet i) individually or in thematic groups with your supervisor and ii) face-to-face or otherwise (via email, Skype)?
 - When and how do you have to send in your draft chapters?
 - When and how do you receive your supervisor's comments?
 - What happens when these agreements are not respected

The student

- Is responsible for her/his thesis
- Works independently and shows initiative
- Meets deadlines and follows up on agreements with the supervisor
- Uses the feedback from her/his supervisor in her/his thesis

The supervisor

- Reads the student's research proposal and gives feedback on it
- Reads and gives feedback on one version of every chapter (incl. the introduction and the conclusion)
- Reads and gives feedback on one version of a full draft
- Is available for advice regularly (face to face or by other means agreed upon)

RESEARCH PROPOSAL¹

In the last week of February, you will have to hand in a document – a thesis proposal – showing the progress of your thesis work to your supervisor and second reader. Your supervisor will inform you who the second reader is and let you know what exactly should be included in this document (e.g. introduction, theoretical background, methodology, research question/thesis statement), as the progress and phasing of your thesis work can depend on the type of research you're doing. Within two weeks after you have handed in the document, your supervisor will let you know whether s/he and the second reader agree on your plan, or whether you should make adjustments regarding the content and direction of your research, or your schedule. This is to ensure that you're on the right track and will finish in August. For further information about the proposal, see below (section 'Research proposal').

HOW IS YOUR THESIS ASSESSED AND GRADED?

- As a general rule of thumb, you can expect feedback on each chapter of your thesis once and on the draft version of your entire thesis.
- Your thesis should be written in correct English (in the track 'Jeugdliteratuur' also Dutch is allowed). At any point during the supervision, your supervisor may indicate that the writing is of insufficient quality. You are responsible yourself for solving this issue. You can contact the [Scriptorium](#), or find another solution.
- At least three weeks before the end of August, you have to hand in your thesis through the online [Thesis Dossier](#). See the [Manual Thesis Dossier for Students](#).
- On request of the supervisor, you also hand in your thesis in hardcopy (printed and bound) to the supervisor and the second reader.
- The supervisor and second reader independently assess your thesis on each of the grading criteria (see the document on thesis assessment).
- After filling in the assessment forms the supervisor and second reader can have a meeting to discuss the final grade. This academic discussion leads to the final grade which will be

¹ For MCD: see the MCD Thesis Manual.

communicated to you. In case the grades of the supervisor and second reader differ more than two points, a third reader will be involved. The Head of Studies is in charge in inviting a third reader.

- Within two weeks after handing in your thesis, you will hear from your supervisor whether your thesis is a pass or not. The thesis is a pass if and only if all partial grades (i.e. the grades for each of the grading criteria) are a pass.
- The supervisor is responsible for registering the final grade in the thesis database, including a summary of the feedback.
- If the final mark is a minimally a 6, you can pick a date for the defence, after consulting your supervisor and second reader. If the final mark is below 6, you will do the resit. NB: you don't run a risk, because the highest mark will be the definitive one. If the supervisor and the second reader cannot agree on a final mark and the difference is greater than 2 points, the programme director must appoint a third reader whose task it will be to decide on a grade that equals one of the grades given by the supervisor and the second reader or lies anywhere between the two ((s)he cannot go higher than the highest grade or lower than the lowest one).
- If you are going to do the resit, the supervisor and second reader together prepare a (written) improvement report which is communicated to you by the supervisor by the end of the assessment week, or after the third reader has handed in her/his assessment. You are now in the resit phase and have 2 weeks for improvement of the thesis.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GRADUATION?

- Once the supervisor and second reader have decided that your thesis is a pass, you can request graduation. You do this by handing in a [‘request graduation’ form](#) at the Student Desk (A301). This form must be signed by you and by the supervisor. Handing in the form must be done at least three weeks before the graduation ceremony. You will set a date for the graduation ceremony in consultation with your supervisor and second reader.
- You will either have your individual graduation ceremony, or a joint ceremony with a group of students. Whether you will have an individual or a joint ceremony is something to be discussed with your supervisor; a ceremony together with other students is a possible alternative for instance when there are several students working on the same topic for their theses. In the ceremony,
 - You give a max. 20-minute presentation about your thesis. The presentation is a so-called laytalk, where you tell your friends and family about the content of your thesis (what did you study, how and why; what did you find out; why are the results interesting/important).
 - The examination committee, i.e. your supervisor and second reader, can then ask you critical questions about your thesis. The audience will then also have the chance to ask questions.
 - Your diploma is signed by the examination committee and yourself.
 - Your supervisor announces your grade and gives their laudation, a short speech to congratulate you.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CONTENT AND FORM OF YOUR THESIS?

- The thesis is an individually written product. If more students are writing a thesis on a similar topic, part of the supervision can be in small groups, and you may collaborate in designing and conducting your research. If this is the case, in your thesis you should explicitly state the extent and form of the collaboration. Your supervisor will instruct you on how to do that.
- The thesis must reflect *your own work*. A thesis consists of a number of chapters (the precise format varies depending on the field within which your study is situated and the approach you choose, but in general these include introduction, theory/background literature, research question, method, results, discussion, conclusion), which taken together should result in a text of preferably no longer than 35 pages (approximately 15,000 words), excluding table of contents, references and possible appendices.
- Your thesis is a report on data that you have analysed yourself. In some cases, you will also collect your own data (but not always; you may for instance use a previously compiled corpus etc.).
- Write your thesis using an appropriate academic register, correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Your supervisor will not accept your thesis to be insufficient on this point.
- Follow the fixed template for the title page of your thesis (see below).
- Follow the conventions used in the field (e.g. for presenting data). This is something you will learn from reading literature in the field in question, and from feedback by your supervisor.
- Follow the 'light' version of [APA guidelines](#) for sources and citations. You can find more information on the appropriate use of sources, different ways of referencing your sources, and plagiarism at <http://itswww.uvt.nl/lis/es/refcite-uk/index.html>.
- If you are working with human subjects, there are ethical considerations to be taken into account and established procedures to follow (e.g. consent forms when conducting interviews). Your supervisor will help you with these questions. For online research, there are specific considerations different from 'offline' research – again, your supervisor will help you identify any issues you may need to take into account, and you can also consult the [Ethics Guide](#) by the Association of Internet Researchers.
- You need to send a PDF to tsh.est.secretary@uvt.nl so that a digital version of your thesis can be made available online.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF PROBLEMS?

- In general, your first ports of call are your thesis supervisor, thesis coordinator, study advisor, and programme director.
- If you have problems with the writing process, and feel like you could use some extra help, you can contact the [Scriptorium](#).
- If the thesis process is not going well due to personal circumstances, please contact the [study advisor](#), who can advise on appropriate measures.

- If there are problems between you and your supervisor that cannot be solved by the two of you, please contact the confidential counsellor responsible for issues related to thesis writing (for the School of Humanities: Marije van Amelsvoort, m.a.a.vanamelsvoort@uvt.nl).
- The university also has [student counsellors](#) (or 'Deans of students'), i.e. independent advisors who are not connected to any particular programme or school; please see the website for when it is appropriate to contact them.
- If the thesis is not ready after the semester, you need to have an agreement with your supervisor as to how you will continue and when you will finish your thesis. You also need to be aware of the fact that not finishing your thesis by the end of the semester has financial consequences in the sense that you will have to pay more fees. On issues related to enrollment, the [Student Desk](#) is your best source of information.
- If the supervisor and the second reader do not agree on a grade, they will inform the programme director, who will then take appropriate action.
- Your thesis is your own work. All quotes and sourced information must be properly identified as such. If a supervisor suspects [plagiarism or fraud](#), s/he contacts the Board of Examiners, following the regular procedure in place. Plagiarism is checked with the help of Canvas.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A research proposal is a document in which you describe your proposed thesis research. Its main purpose is to ensure that both you and the supervisor have a shared vision of what the research entails, and are able to clearly communicate the research ideas to other parties. To make sure that that is the case, the research proposal will also be submitted to the second reader. The proposal should of course also be realistic and reasonable, i.e. the supervisor should agree that you will actually be able to do the proposed research in the allotted time.

The research proposal contains the following sections (section titles may differ, and each section is about half a page to one page in length):

Context ('why')

The 'context' section gives a brief, general overview of the research field that you will work in. It may contain references to relevant literature. It does not have to be extensive; you should just make clear that you already have some knowledge of the research field, can focus on a question in that field, and know why that question is worthy of investigation. The 'why' part of course is also about the societal dimension of your research; you can also explain why your study may have societal relevance. This leads automatically to the following section:

Research question(s)/thesis statement ('what')

The research question(s)/thesis statement indicates what exact question(s) you will try to answer.

Note that you are not 'pinned down' to the research defined by these questions. It may happen that, during the research, you will find that the original question should be changed or modified. Together with the supervisor, you can decide to make changes to the question, or add questions, if that is better for the research.

In case of hypotheses, you may need to do more literature research before suitable hypotheses can be defined. However, nothing stops you from already formulating some ideas on hypotheses in the research proposal, with the remark that final hypotheses will follow as you go further with your research.

Methodology ('how')

In the methodology section you describe how the research will be performed. What is your data? When appropriate, how will you collect your data? How much data is needed? How will you analyse the materials you have chosen as your data? A relation to the research question(s) should be clear. Again, in discussion with the supervisor later on, changes to the methodology can be made if they are deemed necessary, but at the time of the proposal writing you should be able to propose a specific methodology and have an explanation for why the proposed methodology is appropriate for the issue at hand.

Schedule ('when')

The schedule specifies the timeline that you are going to follow. It is useful to make clear what will you do when – when you will engage with relevant literature, when will you collect data (if applicable), when work on the analysis, and when you will write chapters of the thesis. This is useful for several reasons: it's a lesson in (research) project management and how to be realistic in planning your work, and it also makes the process more predictable and manageable not only for yourself, but also your supervisor. Having a clear plan also helps you make sure that all the different parts of your work will get the attention they deserve, and that you e.g. don't end up with too little time to write up your conclusions. Make sure to take holidays into account, and also take into account potential delays, i.e. leave some time for extensions at the end.

TITLE PAGE TEMPLATE



Title of Thesis
Possible subtitle

room for an illustration if you want to include one

MA Thesis
Name of author
Student number:
MA track:
Department of Culture Studies
School of Humanities and Digital Sciences
Date (e.g. June 2022)
Supervisor:
Second reader: