

M.Sc-thesis without (too much) stress

A miracle or somehow possible?

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What is the challenge?

Managing a task which

- has a certain importance (see exam regulation)
you can show what you can do!
- lasts for a quite long time (6 months)
you cover a topic more profoundly!
- has no given detailed structure
you identify your own suitable structure!
- you are doing mainly on your own
a very good preparation for your future career!

The principles for a good thesis

1 Considering the objective of the thesis

- working scientifically, this means
 - new aspect
 - transparent working style
 - correct use of sources, no plagiarism
- working independently with supervision.

The principles for a good thesis

2 Stick to the rules

- according to the exam regulation
- according to guidelines of the institute

The principles for a good thesis

- 3 Clarify / negotiate / agree on supervision
 - who is in charge of you?
 - how often can you meet?
 - by appointment or open door policy?
 - sending email with some information before the meeting?

The principles for a good thesis

4 Clarifying the topic

- You must know what
 - you will do and
 - what you will not do.
- Regardless whether its your topic or an institute one
- Keep the topic reasonably small and specific!!!
Also with such a small and specific topic
you can show that you can work scientifically.
Note: quantity cannot replace quality

The principles for a good thesis

5 Planning the work

- You need about 50% of the time for the writing process.
- While writing also new ideas are flowing. Time and concentration is needed for dealing with these ideas.
- Be realistic: 6 months of calendar time is not equivalent to working time!!
Max. 7-8 h intensive work/day & 5-6 days/week

The principles for a good thesis

5 Planning the work

- Buffer time: at least 20% of your working time
- Calculate your time backwards from the date of submission.

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6 Using literature

- Select literature with regard to your topic
Kick out “the somehow interesting parts”
or collect them in a special folder
- Take note of both the major contents and the source
- Use software like “refworks” or “citavi”
Courses are offered by the library.

The principles for a good thesis

7 Writing

Differentiate the subtasks, make it stepwise

- Collect ideas, discuss them with a friend, make a mind map.
- Structure your ideas.
Put your ideas on cards and sort them according to logic.
- Note down your ideas, these are the first line of a paragraph.
- Explain each idea by elaborating a short paragraph.
- By doing so you gradually develop a draft version.
- Get feedback from fellow students (“is it self-explanatory?”)
- Reflect the feedback.
- Incorporate your conclusions.

The principles for a good thesis

8 Avoiding plagiarism

Using sources (knowledge from other authors) without making this clear, thus “selling” this knowledge as your own ideas is plagiarism. This is a severe offence, it is not allowed and can be a fail.

The principles for a good thesis

8 Avoiding plagiarism, what can I do?

When using information from a given paragraph:

- Read it and understand it.
- Take a few key notes and close the original source.
- Formulate the contents by using your own words = like talking to a friend.
- Note it down in your thesis, this is part of the draft.
- Put the source immediately.

The principles for a good thesis

9 Ensuring quality

- Have a realistic goal = making a good quality thesis in the intended period of time.
This is much better than striving for the perfect version (what is perfect??) which takes forever!
- Regular contact with supervisor.
Be clear what you want to ask and to discuss!
- Ask supervisor for a copy of a good thesis.
Ask: “what are the factors that show the quality?”

The principles for a good thesis

9 Ensuring quality

- Make tandem with fellow student already at the start: Discuss your ideas, the pros and cons of alternatives. There is always more than one way!
- During your working process: exchange your written parts with your fellow student.
 - This encourages you to start writing.
“By end of next week we share the draft version of chapter 2”
 - Give feedback: name also positive aspects, “I”-perspective
“The first 2 paragraphs seem logic to me, para 3 is not fully clear to me!”
- Concentrate first on the logic, polish the English at the end.

Further information

- (1) The Student Counselling Center (ZSB) considers to offer a workshop in January 2014:
“MSc.-thesis without (too much) stress”

Registration online via:



- (2) Counselling sessions take place normally each Wednesday by appointment:
zsb@uni-hohenheim.de or reiner.laue@pacteam.de

I wish you a good start of your M.Sc thesis,
it's just your final and interesting job of your studies,
not a miracle !