Tips for writing a Master Thesis at the Department of HRM & Organization

1. Introduction: ….

- Start with a "grabber", i.e. with something that attracts the **interest** of the reader.

- Following the grabber, you derive the research question and **convince the reader of its relevance.**

- **Formulate your research question explicitly and end it with a question mark!** Your research question should refer to a **link between two variables.** You think, there might be more than two relevant variables, such as mediators or moderators of a link? Please check this with **your supervisor**. Also, if you would like to ask more than one research question, please clarify this as well.

- The **last paragraph** in your introduction is devoted to describing how you will **proceed in your Master Thesis**. By doing so, refer to the respective chapters (e.g., by writing „in chapter 2, I derive/argue/discuss…"). Comment on all the relevant steps you are going to take in order to answer your research question. Deciding on how to structure your argument is an essential task of your Master Thesis. So, take all the efforts it needs to make clear how your argument is developed!

[2. Definitions]

- **Frankly, you don't need a definition-chapter**. It's a waste of space. Please define important terms whenever the respective term is mentioned the first time. If you really, really, want a chapter for definitions, this would be the right spot (and NOT in your theory chapter!).

- It goes without saying that a specific term is defined in different ways in the literature! So no need to mention this. Also, please do not render or even discuss different definitions. **Just go ahead and pick the, in your eyes, most fitting definition, cite the respective source and proceed!**

- By the way: **What needs to be defined?** Think of what an average fellow student who is not familiar with your topic knows. If you have good reason to doubt that an average fellow student does know the respective term, define it.

3. Theory: …

- **Each Master Thesis does have a theory chapter. Yes, each Master Thesis!** It might be short or long. Do not write a Master Thesis at our department without a theory chapter.

- **The theory you use does already exist.** A Master thesis is not the place to "invent" a new theory. This can be done in your PhD.

- **The main function of the theory chapter is to theoretically derive your hypothesis (or sometimes several hypotheses).** Your hypothesis/hypotheses give an answer to the research question from a theoretical perspective.

- **Derive your hypothesis/hypotheses in a straightforward and stringent manner based on your theory!** In general, you should not use empirical findings to derive your hypothesis/hypotheses, but rather solely base them on theory.

- **In most cases, you only need one theory.** Name the theory and refer to the seminal paper that first developed and presented the theory. State why you use this theory. Theories can be „old"; that's not a problem! If you use more than one theory, you need to have good reasons that should be discussed with you supervisor.

- Only describe those parts of the theory that are **needed** in order to derive your hypothesis/hypotheses.

4. Empirics: …

- **Each Master Thesis does have an empirical part. Yes, each Master Thesis!** It might be short or long. Do not write a Master Thesis at our department without an empirical chapter.

- In your empirical part, you present **own empirical results** based on a data set that you can use yourself to test your hypothesis/hypotheses or, alternatively, you may present **results of existing empirical literature ("literature review").**

- **In case you present results of existing empirical studies ("literature review"):**

  - **An existing empirical study is useful for your Master Thesis, when it allows inferences on the validity of your hypothesis/hypotheses**. It is not of any relevance whether the empirical study uses a similar theory or derives similar hypotheses.

  - **Motivate your choice.** Bring the chosen study into **context**. Are there other studies with similar results? Do the results of the chosen study differ from other studies? Why did you choose to present this study?

  - When presenting a study, **do not simply follow its narrative**, but rather present it in a way that fits to your research question. Also, **only present those findings that refer to your hypothesis/hypotheses!** Be sure to present the relevant information on the **data set and variables** that were used in the study and how the findings were obtained (**methods**). In most of the cases the reader isn´t interested in the hypotheses and the theoretical concepts of the other study, so don´t mention these.

  - **Any tables or graphs that you want to include in your Master Thesis need to be created by yourself.** Do never ever copy & paste anything out of the respective

study. If your Master Thesis is written in English, the tables and graphs also must be in English. **Also: Use this opportunity to edit the respective tables/graphs such that they fit your specific purpose!** Obviously, still name the original source of your tables/graphs (write something like „Own compilation based on….").

- Let's say you present three different studies and confront their results with your hypothesis/hypotheses. All three studies yield different results (ranging from positive relation to negative relation to insignificant). That is not bad at all! Explain and **discuss why the results might be different**. Give the reader an idea why the results differ! Maybe also state which results might be trusted more than others. By doing so, refer to the strengths and the weaknesses of the studies. Do this in the empirical chapter or in an own discussion chapter. **There must be a critical discussion**. This is an important contribution of your Master Thesis.

- **In case you present an empirical analysis of your own:**

  - Given the short time frame of a Master Thesis, **collecting a completely new data set is typically problematic**. If you still want to do so, check with your supervisor. Any data that are analyzed within a Master Thesis supervised by the department (including data that are provided by a firm within a collaboration in terms of a "Praxis"-Thesis), have to be made available to the department for the purpose of evaluation (see below) and should also be usable by the department for future research projects (in case of firm data, the data will be anonymized such that the identity of the firm is not disclosed).

  - Concerning your empirical analyses, please be aware of the following:
    - Check if the **method** you use is appropriate to test your hypothesis/hypotheses.
    - Make sure your **estimation models are valid**.
    - **Clearly define dependent, main explanatory and control variables**.
    - Think about relevant **robustness checks**.
    - Give information on: **dataset and variables, descriptives (including correlations), method and multivariate results**; structure your empirical analysis accordingly.

  - **If you do not find any significant effects, this is not a problem at all.** It is not your aim to find significant effects, but rather to test whether your hypotheses are supported or not. If they are not supported, this is a relevant information.

  - For evaluation purposes we need, together with the pdf-file of your Master Thesis, the **complete data file** that your Master Thesis is based on (if we do not have it already) and (in any case) the **Do-file that produces the results of your Master Thesis**. Please make sure that the Do-file actually works and that it exactly produces the Tables that are presented in your Master Thesis (and no other Tables) in the exact order that they appear in the Thesis and also numerated accordingly. If the department cannot reproduce your results by simply running the Do-File, this is going to be a severe problem.

5.   Conclusion

- Sum up the **main results** of your thesis in a way that is generally understandable.
- Do not describe how you proceeded when you wrote the thesis (First, … then …). Rather concentrate on your **results** and their **implications**.

Literature

- **Stick to our binding** <u>Formal Guidelines for Scientific Writing</u>
- Make sure that **all** sources mentioned in the running text are listed in the reference list and vice versa!

Checklist

Introduction		Motivated research question?
		Defined and motivated all relevant variables?
		Formulated research question as a question?
		Described proceedings with chapter references?
Theory		Mentioned theory and quoted the originator of theory?
		Described all for research question relevant aspects of theory?
		Applied theory to research question?
		Derived hypotheses from theory in an understandable and stringent way?
		Hypotheses formulated in a testable manner?
Empirics		Mentioned motivation for choice of study?
		Literature review: For every existing empirical study that you use:
	-	Mentioned data source?
	-	Explained operationalisation of the relevant variables?
	-	Listed control variables (if applicable)?
	-	Dropped irrelevant information (e.g., hypotheses of studies)?
		Own data analysis:
	-	Clarified that data will be accessible to the Department?
	-	Checked whether method is appropriate?
	-	Made sure that estimation models are valid?
	-	Clearly defined dependent, main explanatory and control variables?
	-	Thought about relevant robustness checks?
	-	Gave information on dataset and variables, descriptives (including correlations), method and multivariate results and structured analysis accordingly?
	-	Data set and do file attached?
		Understood and able to explain (in own words) used methods?
		Worked with relevant tables and graphs? Attention: No copy & paste from literature!
		Established reference to own hypotheses?
Discussion		Findings of chosen study compared to literature?
		Compared findings of studies and tried to explain differences?
		In this context: Argued the strengths and weakness of studies?
Conclusion		Compactly summarised the findings?
		Answered research question?
		Concluded implications for further research and the praxis?
in general		Abided formal guidelines for scientific writing?
		Marked direct and indirect quotes?
		Used action titles?
		Paid attention to flow of text (appropriate transitions)?
		Used terms consistently?