

## Guidelines for BA and MA theses

at the professorship of Computational Social Sciences

### 1. Preliminary remarks

Written academic work in computational social science consists of intensive engagement with clearly defined research questions. Start with a concrete question that can realistically be answered within the scope of a thesis and formulate it as precisely as possible - ideally in a single sentence. Always coordinate your research question with your supervisor before you begin to write.

An excellent thesis is characterized by a clearly defined question, coherent argumentation, and a clear academic writing style. It also requires choosing an appropriate methodology and making clear how your results answer your research question. We expect a scientific, value-free analysis (not: "XY is bad", "The state must...", "I personally feel...").

### 2. Structure of a thesis

**The thesis consists of:** title page, table of contents, main body, references, appendix, a signed declaration of authorship.

The **title page** contains:

- "[Bachelor's/Master's] Thesis for the [Bachelor's/Master's] Degree Program in [Your study program] at LMU Munich
- Title of the thesis
- Name, student ID, complete address, phone number, email address
- Name of the supervisor, including their email address and the postal address of the institute

The **main body** ideally follows this structure:

#### 1. Introduction

Capture the reader's interest from the first page! Within a few sentences, it should be clear what your research question is and why it is relevant.

- Introduction to the topic (the "hook": e.g., a guiding question, a surprising claim, a quote).
- Development, delimitation, and precise formulation of the research question.
- Explanation of the relevance of the topic (theoretical, empirical, methodological, societal, political – but not personal involvement).
- Brief outline of the content describing how the question will be addressed.

#### 2. Theoretical overview and/or State of research

Situate your study in existing knowledge. The emphasis can vary: some projects will rely more on theoretical framing, others more on prior empirical work.

- Present relevant theoretical ideas and explain their link to your research question. Outline differences between theories; present positions and counter-positions.

- Provide a systematic overview of current research on your question.
- Integrate and organize studies rather than listing them sequentially.
- Interpret findings with respect to your research question.
- Critically assess methodology; weigh studies accordingly.
- Highlight contradictory findings and potential reasons.
- For causal research questions, explain WHY X is expected to affect Y.
- Provide a systematic summary of key results.

### **3. Data, variables, and analytical approach (empirical theses only)**

Derive research question(s) and/or hypotheses after the research overview.

- Describe your dataset, sampling, variables, pre-processing steps, and operationalization.
- Specify analytical methods.
- Ensure transparency so the study can be replicated.

### **4. Results (empirical theses only)**

Present key statistical results in figures/tables.

- Use graphics rather than tables in the main text.
- Report descriptive statistics, models, robustness checks.
- Ensure figures and tables are clear, labeled, interpretable, and referenced in the main text.

### **5. Conclusion and Outlook**

Restate the research question and summarize findings.

- Provide a clear answer, linking back to theory and/or state of research.
- Point out limitations.
- Optionally, provide policy recommendations, but only if directly derived from analysis.
- Suggest avenues for future research.

## **3. Formal Requirements**

### **Length**

Bachelor's thesis: Approx. 80,000 characters (incl. spaces and references)

Master's thesis: Approx. 140,000 characters (incl. spaces and references)

Recommended in Times New Roman 12pt, 1.15-1.5 line spacing, 2.5cm margins.

### **Citations**

Use one consistent citation style (e.g., Harvard or APA) throughout the thesis. Always indicate quotes: both direct quotations and paraphrased passages must be cited. Only include works you have read yourself in the bibliography.

Using a citation manager, such as [Zotero](#), is recommended.

### **Data & Code**

In addition to the standard requirements (two printed copies for PAGES and a PDF file sent to the supervisor), students must also submit the data and code. These should be provided to the supervisor preferably through cloud storage (e.g., [LRZ Sync+Share](#)).

If cloud storage cannot be used, data and code may also be submitted on a USB stick. If data cannot be shared (e.g., due to licensing or confidentiality), discuss this with your supervisor before submission.