



The process of writing a thesis

1.1 Introduction

The process starts with the choice of the research topic. You are expected to propose a topic yourself, after which you discuss the topic in general terms together with your supervisor. The research topic for the thesis can be found in any subject area of the field. You can get a general idea of the central and topical themes by having a look at the recent volumes of the most relevant scientific journals. Especially topics that are being studied by the staff of OBS are worth considering. A thesis may also be commissioned by a company or other organization outside the university.

As in all decisions in scientific research, there must be solid arguments concerning the choice of the research topic. There are several aspects worth noting:

- Your personal interest in the topic,
- Your own resources (knowledge, skills and time available),
- The availability of source material,
- The availability of data,
- The scientific importance of the topic,
- The general social interest of the topic and
- The importance of the topic for your future professional career.





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1.2 10 Tips to Selecting a Thesis or Dissertation Topic

Without a topic, one cannot proceed to writing or defending the proposal phase; and more importantly, one cannot begin researching or writing a thesis or dissertation.

Provided are 10 tips to help to move toward one's goal of completing a degree:

1.2.1 Be Organized — Maximize Your Research Efforts

In order to maximize your research efforts, you must be organized and efficient in your search efforts. The more organized you are in the beginning; the more time you will have to write your thesis. Be diligent about keeping track of your files in the early phases of your research to reduce your stress levels later on when your enthusiasm begins to wane. If you have to back track on your research efforts, being organized from the beginning will help make the process less painful.

1.2.2 Choose a Subject Area First — Then a Topic

1.2.3 Consider Expanding a Master's Thesis into a Dissertation

If you're working towards a PhD and you wrote a Master's thesis, consider expanding on that topic for your dissertation. You already are familiar with the topic and much of the research is done. This approach can accelerate your progress towards your goal: Completion!

1.2.4 Make Sure the Topic Is Interesting

It is imperative that both you and your advisor are interested in your thesis/dissertation topic. Some advisors are reluctant to suggest topics because of the implicit responsibilities associated with guiding a student through the process from start to completion. Your advisor's enthusiasm for your



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topic will determine his or her willingness to read, support, fund, and provide timely feedback and direction to your work.

1.2.5 Choose a Solvable and Manageable Research Problem

It is important to select a problem that is narrow enough that you can address it or solve it in a reasonable period of time. You should select a topic that can be completed within a two-year time frame. A longer time frame could allow many unexpected and competing events to occur. If you find yourself spending an exorbitant amount of time pursuing and identifying a research problem, it is possible that the problem is not solvable. With a longer time frame, you also run the risk of someone else identifying and solving the problem before you do. Hence, the concept of “original” contribution to the field is lost and you might have to start over. Moreover, you run the risk of your enthusiasm diminishing.

1.2.6 The Research Problem Must Be Worthy of Your Time

Choosing a topic that is compelling enough to sustain further research is critical. Employers evaluate potential employees based on the student’s ability to not only finish the dissertation but also make future contributions to the field.

1.2.7 Make Your Research Topic Original- Has It Been Done Before?

The prerequisite for finding a new research topic is to be informed because most things have been studied before. Staying on top of the current debates in your academic field puts you in a position to identify the gaps in knowledge. After identifying the gaps, all you need to figure out is what kinds of information will fill these gaps.



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1.2.8 Hone Your Research Skills

One way to evaluate your research skills and make sure they are up to par is to pursue a potential topic in your Research Methods or Statistics courses where you can get immediate feedback from an instructor. You can use these courses to work out potential problems in your methodology or your review of the literature; thus allowing you to work out any kinks earlier in your academic career rather than later.

1.2.9 As You Read — Ask the Following Questions:

- What is the Research Question in the Study?
- Did the Researcher Focus on the Wrong Group/subjects?
- Did the Research Leave Some Group/Something Out?
- Is the Methodology Faulty?
- Were the Findings Faulty?
- Can I Pursue the Author's Recommendation for Future Research?
- What Are the Limitations of the Study?

1.2.10 10.Don't Panic — Keep Things in Perspective

Let's face it, not too many people will read a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. A thesis or dissertation is not the type of document that piques the general public's interest mainly because of its academic rigor and writing style. The topic is generally of interest only to the student, experts in the field and the student's advisor and committee members.



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After the topic has been chosen and the supervisor has accepted it, the next step is gaining familiarity with the available scientific literature on the topic. Reading earlier research serves several purposes:

1.2.11 Outlining the general picture

- What is the state-of-the-art knowledge in the chosen research area? Is there much or little earlier research? Is it recent or older? Who are the leading scholars?
- From which viewpoints has the topic been investigated before? What kinds of methods and data have been used in earlier research? What are the most important findings?
- How does your thesis relate to other publications in the field?

1) Strengthening the substance knowledge

- Helps you to focus on the essential literature regarding your own thesis.
- Helps you to choose the studies upon which you will develop the theoretical framework of the thesis and design its empirical research setting.

2) The development of expertise

- Helps you to evaluate the existing literature critically and to identify potential gaps and shortcomings in it.



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– Helps you to make your viewpoint precise and to define the actual research problem or research task.

It is well worth starting off by studying earlier research in textbooks, edited compilations or review articles published as recently as possible. This represents a straightforward way to get at the actual source material, that is, scientific journal articles. Literature databases are another valuable tool. Guidance to the use of databases is given on the courses arranged by the university library, which, primarily, are designed for those students aiming at master degree, but which can be tailored to suit the needs of students writing their PhD theses as well. The staff of the library are experts in information retrieval. They give assistance in locating source material at any time, not only during taught courses.

The choice of research topic and getting acquainted with the literature in the chosen research area are of vital importance in getting the thesis process started. In order to ensure the smooth progress of the research process and in order to achieve successful results, narrowing down the research topic is the most critical task. Crystallizing the research focus and concentration on a limited area enable you to manage your study effectively.

For students writing their first thesis, narrowing down the research topic is often difficult, and it sometimes happens that even after the work is finished, it is still, to some extent, unclear what the purpose of the study actually is. The most common problem is a too broadly defined topic. One should note that a broadly defined topic does not equate to a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter. Rather, it is proof of the inability to discern the essential from the unessential.



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Ability to define the research topic so that the thesis offers a solution to a precisely specified research problem or task is one of the most important skills you can have as a thesis writer.

The next step in the process is writing a preliminary research plan. This document usually includes the following:

- A preliminary title of the thesis,
- A preliminary table of contents of the thesis,
- An introduction of the topic,
- An assessment of the significance of the topic and the motivation for the research,
- A description of the aim of the thesis and the research problem or task,
- An outline of preliminary research question(s),
- A brief description of the research method(s) and data and
- A brief review of existing research and/or a preliminary list of references.

The preliminary research plan can simply be composed of a sketch of outlines for the thesis. It serves as a guide for you at the outset of your work. However, the plan will develop and become more precise as the work evolves. Therefore, the final thesis may differ, and often does, from the preliminary plan.

Thesis work sometimes involves an intermediate report, especially when writing a master's thesis.

This report is presented when one or more sections of the thesis, for example the theoretical



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framework, the literature review or, in case of data-driven research, after the data description and analysis have been finished. It is also recommended that you sketch an outline of the unfinished sections of your thesis in the intermediate report.

The final report is a thesis which is nearing completion, and which the thesis writer presents orally in a thesis seminar. In Ilam University of Medical Sciences, it is a common practice that each student acts as an opponent, that is, they familiarize themselves with another student's text and comment on it orally. The other participants of the seminar will also ask questions and make comments and suggestions for improvement. Based on this feedback, you make the final revisions to your thesis and then leave it to be evaluated.

