Thesis writing in Business Administration

Thesis work is often perceived as fun, rewarding and challenging. Together you and your thesis partner can explore an area of interest, and - in consultation with your supervisor - you can choose the topic that your thesis will focus on. If you write on commission, you can also experience the excitement of seeing how your findings benefit practitioners. However, thesis work also means being able to work independently on issues that place high demands on your analytical capability. The thesis work is thus different from other courses. Therefore, you need to plan your activities carefully, knowing that they must be carried out within a limited time period.

This text is a general introduction to thesis writing in Business Administration at Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics (USBE). You can use this manual to quickly find the information you are looking for. Although the text covers the main issues, it does not cover all possible issues. Thus, this thesis manual outlines the common guidelines of various theses written at USBE.

The instructions in this manual focus primarily on thesis work, but the formal requirements, reference system, etc., apply to all written assignments in Business Administration.

Good luck with your thesis!

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1 *Introduction*

1.1 Basic rules for thesis writing

This manual provides guidelines for students' writing in Business Administration at USBE. There is a variety of theses on different levels and scopes (for an overview, see table 1 below). For 30 hp theses, the thesis work commences at the beginning of the semester and continues during the whole semester. For the 15 hp theses, the thesis work should also start as early as possible to ensure on-time completion. This means that if you are to write the thesis during the second half of the semester, you are expected to, during the first half of the semester, start thinking about a relevant research topic and find a thesis partner to write with. Once a thesis team has been formed, you will be assigned a supervisor. When the thesis course starts, you will discuss your topic and a tentative plan for your thesis project at the first meeting with your supervisor. This means that, once the formal thesis period begins, you should be able to start working immediately on your thesis project. Please note that all thesis courses are campus courses and that you are expected to collaborate with a partner in Umeå and participate in supervision meeting and seminars on campus. It is up to your supervisor to decide whether supervision can be held online.

Some formal rules

- There is one supervisor per thesis project. Supervisors are assigned at the beginning of each semester and **the supervisor contacts his/her students for a first supervision meeting**. The notification is, as a rule, sent via e-mail (to your @student.umu.se address).
- Theses in Business Administration at USBE are co-authored by two students. The exception to this rule is theses on the bachelor's level, where students can be allowed to write in groups of three. It is not possible for two co-authors to write a thesis at different levels. This means that students writing a Bachelor and Master's thesis, respectively, or 15 vs. 30 credit Master's thesis, cannot team up.
- Master's program students should write their thesis within the program's focal area to ensure scientific relevance and contribution to practice.
- The authors must complete their thesis prior to the final thesis seminar, including any revisions given by the supervisor. The final thesis seminar takes place at the end of the thesis period. If authors are unable to complete their thesis within the designated semester, the thesis can be presented and defended next semester during the thesis period, provided that main opponents are available and upon agreement with the supervisor.
- Supervision is normally only provided during the first semester you are registered for the thesis work.

1.2 Required activities in the thesis course

The most extensive work during the thesis course is to write the actual thesis. It will not write itself. Rather it requires your full attention, and as mentioned above, we strongly recommend that you begin your preparations early. Such preparation may, for instance, include identifying a possible thesis topic and to plan for the coming thesis project activities so that you are well-prepared when the course begins. Planning is important and there are mandatory activities that you need to complete. These activities are clearly described in the thesis syllabus, and you will find further information about each activity in this manual. Below is an overview of the required activities for each thesis type.

Table 1. Overview of required activities to pass the thesis course.

	Bachelor's thesis, 15 ECTS	**Magister/1st year Master's thesis, 15 ECTS**	**Degree Project, 30 ECTS**	**2nd year Master's thesis, 15 ECTS**	**2nd year Master's thesis, 30 ECTS**
Scope	40-60 pages	40-60 pages	50-80 pages	50-70 pages	70-100 pages
Thesis + defense. Graded by the examiner.	Required. Written in pairs. Groups of three students can be allowed.	Required. Written in pairs.	Required. Written in pairs.	Required. Written in pairs.	Required. Written in pairs.
Work-in-progress seminars. Graded by supervisor.	One obligatory seminar. Individual examination.	-	Three obligatory seminars. Individual examination/ in pairs.	-	Three obligatory seminars. Individual examination/ in pairs.
Side-opposition + seminar. Graded by seminar leader.	One side-opposition. Individual examination.	One side-opposition. Individual examination.	One side-opposition. Individual examination.	One side-opposition. Individual examination.	One side-opposition. Individual examination.
Main opposition. Graded by seminar leader.	Required. Written part: individual examination. Oral part: could be in pairs.	Required. Written part: individual examination. Oral part: could be in pairs.	Required. Written part: individual examination. Oral part: could be in pairs.	Required. Written part: individual examination. Oral part: could be in pairs.	Required. Written part: individual examination. Oral part: could be in pairs.

2 *Supervision and supervisors*

2.1 The role of the supervisor

At the beginning of each semester (or, for 30 hp theses, at the end of the previous semester), the Thesis Course Responsible at the department of Business Administration at USBE will invite students to an information meeting regarding thesis writing. During the first weeks of the semester, the Thesis Course Responsible will assign supervisors to each thesis. Accordingly, students and supervisors cannot make their own agreements on supervision. To get a supervisor assigned in time, it is essential that students use the information system actively to search for a thesis partner and provide information about the thesis partnerships that have been formed.

The role of the supervisor is to be a discussion partner; they will ask (critical) questions and point out potential problems. Please note that it is not your supervisor's task to tell you how to improve your text in detail. Thus, your supervisor is not responsible for proofreading your thesis. The supervisor will try to coach you and your co-author so that your aspiration level for the thesis is realistic and feasible. The supervisor will provide advice, but also make sure you are working independently. Above all, the supervisor is a 'sounding board' against which you and your partner can test your ideas.

During thesis writing and in discussions with the supervisor, it is important to keep the expected learning outcomes actively in mind. The supervisor will indicate if they believe that your work does not fulfill these goals. However, it is always the grading teacher (and the examiner) who evaluates the final thesis – see under Grading – and decides if it is a "Pass" (or a higher grade).

If you choose to write the thesis on commission, the supervisor's role is to discuss how the expected learning outcomes (ELOs) can be reconciled with the commission. The supervisor's task is thus to advice the authors about the academic standards and ELOs, not the commissioned task as such. (More information on writing on commissions can be found at the home page and in Section 2.4).

A good advice: before any meeting with your supervisor - plan the questions that you want to discuss. Such questions may involve the outline of the theory chapter, how to design a questionnaire, etcetera. You will gain the most from the meeting with your supervisor if you, for example, can tell how you plan to select your informants. You can then ask your supervisor for feedback on your suggestion. It is not recommendable to start by asking the supervisor about "who should be included in our sample" or "how should we formulate our research question?" Although the supervisor can answer such questions, it is the students' responsibility to provide input into the process.

Note, thesis writing is a campus course. As a general rule, meetings with your supervisor takes place takes place at the University (usually in the supervisor's office) and you are expected to meet the supervisor personally. Online meetings may be used on occasions when the data collection takes place in other cities in Sweden or elsewhere.

2.2 The supervision process

Your supervisor will invite you to an *introductory meeting* where the supervisor and the thesis writers jointly set up guidelines for their cooperation. For example, the supervisor clarifies the options available for advice at different times, and how to make appointments. A comprehensive plan for the rest of the semester is usually made at this or the next meeting. **For the introductory meeting, the students are to bring any previously written theses and a description of topics that you are interested in studying.** Thus, the first meeting requires you as thesis partners to have identified different topics which you find interesting and suitable for a thesis study. In contacts with your supervisor it is very important to remember that the thesis work is an independent process where you and your thesis partner are responsible for carrying the process forward, take initiative and be well-prepared for supervision.

Concerning the number of meetings with your supervisor **a minimum** requirement for all types of theses is that students and supervisors meet to discuss the drafts of various parts of the thesis on at **least three occasions** (spread over the course). The syllabuses for 30hp Master's Thesis/ Degree Project and Bachelor theses set additional requirements about participation in *work-in-progress seminars* (see the respective syllabus and section 2.3 in this manual).

Meetings with your supervisor are normally booked in advance and the supervisor has no obligation to be available for drop-in visits. When the issues to be discussed at the meeting are connected to a draft of a chapter or a questionnaire, this material must be delivered to the supervisor on a date well before the meeting.

In case of problems with the thesis work or with supervision, the student should firstly contact the supervisor, thereafter the Thesis Course Responsible or the Director of Studies.

Students are only guaranteed supervision during the semester when they are (first-time) registered on the thesis course. Supervision is only provided during the fall and spring semesters (i.e., not during summer). In case you have registered on the thesis course but realize that you will not write your thesis during that semester, you must immediately notify your supervisor and study advisor.

2.3 Work-in progress seminars

The 30 ECTS Degree Project and the 30 ECTS Master's Thesis (2nd year) courses, include three obligatory work-in-progress (WIP) seminars. Please see the course syllabus for details on the contents of each seminar. For Bachelor thesis 15 ECTS course there is one obligatory work-in-progress seminar. At this seminar, the students will examine the strengths and weaknesses of an earlier Bachelor's thesis. Each supervisor sets the date for the seminars and provides specific seminar instructions. The purpose of the WIP seminars is to support the thesis writing process. Please note that the WIP seminars are mandatory, and that personal attendance is required.

Students who are working on theses where attendance at WIP seminars is not a formal requirement may also be invited to seminars for joint discussions during the writing process. Such seminars offer great feedback opportunities on your own work and make it possible for you to practice how to give feedback to others.

2.4 Writing on commission

Writing on commission can be a stimulating process. It can feel particularly rewarding to conduct a study with a clear practical application/contribution. It also makes the process of choosing a field of research much easier, at the same time as it provides contact opportunities with the business world (which may be of use when entering the labor market).

However, it is worth noting that writing a thesis on commission can involve more work than a "traditional" thesis. Moreover, it may be difficult to transfer the task assigned by the commissioner directly into an academic research question. Rather, it is common that the student/s have to further define, delimit and formulate an acceptable academic research question (that is doable and has a clear link to theory) within the commission. It is important to note that the first priority of a thesis is to fulfill the demands of the syllabus. A commissioned thesis must therefore allow the students to make independent choices. For example, a commissioned assignment cannot specify **exactly** which questions to ask, who to ask, when and how.

When planning a commissioned thesis, it is recommended that students find out what resources (time, money, etc.) the client company/organization is willing to provide, and what the client expects in return (e.g. format for the report, presentation of results to the company, etc.). Be clear with the commissioner about what can be reasonably expected from you and what is feasible to do within the scope of a thesis. Also, you need to have an agreement with the commissioner about the time-period for your data collection. This agreement is needed to make sure that the commissioning organization can provide information and participate during those particular days/weeks.

In case you collect data from respondents outside the commissioner, it is very important that you clearly inform that the thesis work is done on commission.

Other important questions are: who will own the data you collect? and who will use the data upon the completion of the study? The answers to these questions have consequences for how you present the project/thesis to potential respondents and external actors; and it is important that you can provide correct information about how the data will be used and for what purpose the study is made.

Sometimes, the commissioner may require that you sign a confidentiality agreement to collect and gain access to company data. In such a case, please study the confidentiality agreement carefully to make sure that your thesis work can proceed as planned. Please note that any such agreement only concerns you and the company. Thus, you cannot involve the University or your supervisor. However, we recommend that you consult with your supervisor before signing an agreement of this character. It is important that the company understands that once the thesis has been defended at the final thesis seminar, it becomes a publicly available document – there are very few, in practice almost no possibilities to classify a thesis as confidential. On the other hand, facts like the company name and other detailed information may be made anonymous or altered to protect confidential information or individual integrity. Your supervisor must, however, always be allowed full access to all data that you use in your thesis.

On the thesis Canvas site, you find information about current opportunities from companies and links to other sites where you can find external opportunities. On the thesis Canvas site, you also find a document that is envisaged to inform both students and commissioners about the priorities, demands, and the need for joint planning. This document can be presented to the company in an initial meeting.

If you have written your thesis on commission, this has to be registered when you upload your final thesis in DiVA, once you have received the grade (see further information under *Printing and archiving* on the thesis Canvas site). There you have to state the name of the company/organization and your contact person.

2.5 Ethical guidelines for thesis work

In your thesis work, the existing ethical guidelines for social science research must be followed. Some of the general ethical principles are: Anyone who participates in a study (e.g. respondents in interviews) must be given enough information to give so-called “informed consent” about their participation; studies should be carried out and reported in such a manner that participants do not experience inconvenience due to their participation; promises of anonymity and confidentiality must be followed. Guidelines on the use of data in accordance with such law, rules and regulations must be respected; the researcher may not act deceptively in data collection and data reporting; information about the research motive and possible commercial or other interests must be disclosed. Although these rules may seem obvious to many, there might be some tricky situations, and if you are unsure about what is appropriate, you should discuss such matters with your supervisor.

Information on ethical guidelines can be found in most method books. For in-depth information on ethical guidelines, we refer to the Research Council's website, and their section on ethics: https://codex.uu.se/profesional-ethics/. Furthermore, a thesis is an independent project. This means that you and your thesis partners must carry out the work and write the text. Both authors are equally responsible for the entire text, and the work should be equally divided between the authors.

On the thesis Canvas site, you find detailed instructions about the requirements for independent processing of academic texts (such as theses). There are also links to the policies (from USBE and Umeå University) on plagiarism and attempts to deceive. All theses are to be submitted to Urkund before the thesis seminar (to the supervisor's Urkund address). In chapter 11, you find information on how to properly cite different types of texts.

Please observe that, after the final seminar and approval, your thesis will become a public document that will be publicly available on the internet. It is therefore very important that you reflect upon which information should be included in the thesis and if it might be appropriate to anonymize companies/respondents (your supervisor must be informed about the organization/s you have studied). At a bare minimum, respondents should be informed that the thesis will be accessible for the public so that they know to what they agree to when participating in the study. Concerning anonymity, it is important to distinguish between on the one hand, a situation where fictional names are used, but where it is still possible for people who have insights into a specific company or industry to identify the studied company or individuals that have been interviewed, and on the other hand, complete anonymity. It is also recommended that you know the rules that apply for research according to the Swedish Personal Data Act (Personuppgiftslagen, PUL, SFS 1998: 204) and GDPR. For further information, see e.g., the homepage of the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection and the Canvas course site (for information on GDPR).

3 *Thesis types and syllabuses*

Thesis writing is an important part of university education, because it trains and tests your ability to conduct and complete an independent research project during a limited time. You learn how to identify and select a topic, design a study and draw conclusions. Theses differ from other papers that you write at university with regard to the time-period, independence, and academic demands on depth, breadth, and quality.

There are different types of theses, and which thesis you write depends on what program you study, the type of courses you have read, and the kind of degree you are pursuing. At USBE, we currently offer the following thesis types at the department of Business Administration:

On basic level: Bachelor's thesis, 15 hp (*for a Bachelor's degree 180 credits*)

On advanced level – at the end of a four-year study program

- Degree Project, 30 hp (*for a "Civilekonomexamen", translated to Master of Science in Business and Economics, 240 credits*)

At the end of **one-year studies on the advanced level:**

- 1st year Master's thesis, 15 hp (*for a "Magisterexamen", translated to One-year Master of Science, 60 credits*)

On advanced level – at the end of a two-year Master's program:

- 2nd year Master's thesis in Business Administration, 15 hp (*for a Master of Science 120 credits)*
- 2nd year Master's thesis in Business Administration, 30 hp (*for a Master of Science 120 credits)*

Examples of possible combinations of theses and degrees:

- Bachelor's thesis 15 hp + 1st year Master's thesis 15 hp = Bachelor degree + one-year Master's degree.
- Degree Project 30 hp + 2nd year Master's thesis 15 hp = "Civilekonom degree" + two-year Master's degree.
- Bachelor's thesis 15 hp + 2nd year Master's thesis 30 hp = Bachelor degree + two-year Master's degree.

Please note that if you have questions regarding what degree/thesis type that applies in your case, you should contact the study advisor.

The theses types listed above are at different levels and within different time frames (15 or 30hp); hence the requirements also differ. It is, therefore, important that you read the corresponding syllabus with its specific expected learning outcomes for your thesis type (you will find links to all syllabuses on the thesis Canvas site. See chapter 6 for a description of the grading criteria.

4 *The final thesis seminar*

The thesis work ends with a circa two lecture-hour long final thesis seminar (seminars with fewer side opponents may be somewhat shorter), e.g., 10.15 – 12.00, where the authors defend their thesis. Thus, one thesis is discussed at each seminar. At the seminar, the supervisor/seminar leader, authors, and main opponents will participate as well as possible side-opponents.

Regarding the language at the seminar: If the thesis has been written in English, the authors and their opponents must be prepared to hold the seminar in English. Only when all participants (including side-opponents and seminar leader) speak Swedish, is it possible to hold the seminar in Swedish; however, such a decision cannot be made in advance as it would exclude English speaking side-opponents. Similarly, the written oppositions (main opposition and side-opposition) should be written in English. **If the seminar leader speaks Swedish**, you may write the opposition in Swedish – but please note that it is usually easier to prepare in English since the seminar may be held in English.

Students studying at the International Business Program must **always** write their Degree project thesis 30 hp in English and hold the seminar in English. Further, IPB-students (regardless of thesis type) are expected to, **whenever possible, choose other theses written in English for their opposition** (even if it is not obligatory) as the program is given entirely in English.

Please note that **the final thesis seminar should be scheduled during one of the specified thesis seminar periods**. Each thesis seminar period comprises approx. two weeks. Normally, there will be one thesis seminar period at the end of each semester plus one extra period during the semester for those who did not complete their thesis in time. The current thesis seminar periods are announced on the thesis Canvas site.

4.1 Before the thesis seminar

Each author is responsible for recruiting main opponent/s for their thesis seminar. We recommend you to recruit the main opponent/s **as early as possible** as it may otherwise be difficult to find a suitable main opponent. For 30 hp theses, you should not exchange theses for main opposition with students supervised by the same supervisor, particularly if you attended the same work-in-progress seminars. The same holds if you have had seminars together with another supervisor's thesis groups. You can advertise for a main opponent on our thesis Canvas site. Do not forget to first check whether there is already a suitable opposition opportunity posted online!

We recommend that you organize the exchange of theses and main opponents as a constellation of three (or even four) theses; so that A critiques B's thesis, B critiques C's thesis and C critiques A's thesis. A key advantage of such a system is that the set up will function even if one of the three theses involved is not completed on time. Please be prepared to include more groups into the exchange so that all groups are able to defend their thesis and do their main opposition.

When opponents have been recruited and the thesis is in its final stages of completion, the thesis seminar needs to be scheduled with the supervisor and the opponents. As supervisors usually have other responsibilities and other theses to supervise, it is a good idea to have several alternative dates and times. In case of supervisor's sickness or similar, the school might arrange with another supervisor to lead the seminar. When the date and time for the seminar has been agreed upon, the supervisor will book a room for the seminar and inform the authors (who need this information when they upload their thesis for the final seminar).

When obligatory work-in-progress seminars are included in the course (see table 1), these **must be passed before** the thesis defense.

The thesis is made available to side-opponents via a link on the thesis Canvas site[1]. The authors upload their thesis and state the name of the supervisor and main opponents as well as date, time and place (room) for the seminar. When the thesis has been uploaded, the Student Administration Office ('Studentexpeditionen') will publish the thesis as soon as possible (during office hours) in the database for side-opponents.

Deadline: **The thesis must be uploaded for side-opponents at least <u>10 days</u>** (weekends included) **<u>before</u> the thesis seminar day, normally <u>no later than 12.00 o'clock</u> on a weekday** to be made accessible during office hours. **Note**, during the last two weeks of <u>the spring semester</u>, the time for <u>15 credit theses</u> is <u>reduced to 7 days</u>. Also, during the last two weeks of <u>the autumn semester</u>, the time for uploading theses is <u>reduced to 7 days.</u> **Note, specific deadlines relevant for each semester will be published on the thesis Canvas site.**

Please observe that you may *upload* the thesis during any time of the day and week, but it will not be *available* for side-opponents until the Student Administration Office has published it (during office hours)!

In case the deadline as above falls on a Saturday or Sunday or other holiday (or a non-workday between two holidays), the thesis must be uploaded for side-opponents **no later than 12.00 o'clock on the previous workday.**

For each thesis, 4 copies of the thesis will be electronically available for side-opponents to download through the thesis Canvas site.

The seminar version of the thesis should also be submitted electronically to Urkund (to the supervisor's Urkund address) well in advance of the seminar.

[1] Please note that it is not your responsibility to "find" side-opponents! Students can individually select your thesis upon their preference. The seminar can be held even without any side-opponents.

4.2 Form for external collaboration and permission to publish the thesis

Before the final seminar, **each thesis group** should download the *Form for external collaboration and permission to publish the thesis* from the thesis Canvas site. Fill in the name of authors and the title of the thesis in the assigned boxes. Next, the form consists of two parts:

The first part concerns “External collaboration”. Here, the authors should state if the thesis has been written in collaboration with an external partner (such as a company, trade association, or public authority) OR if one organization has been investigated in-depth. This includes theses written on commission as well as work that is particularly connected to a specific company with an assigned contact person. Also, theses with a designated receiver outside of academia may fall under this definition. If you are uncertain, discuss with your supervisor.

If the box for external collaboration has been ticked, you should also state the name of the organization and the contact person.[2] In case of external collaboration, the supervisor should also sign the form.

The second part of the form concerns “Publication”. According to Umeå University policy, all theses should be registered in DiVA. Further, authors must give written permission to publish the thesis in full text, meaning that the entire thesis will be publicly accessible through DiVA (more information about the university’s Open Access policy could be found here). You should thus tick the box (provided you consent with full text publication, which should be the normal alternative) and sign the form. If the box is not ticked, the thesis will still be deposited in DiVA, but not available in full text. It will nevertheless follow the regulations regarding official documents.

When you have filled in all details as above, you upload the document to DiVA according to the instructions that you receive in the email (regarding the thesis grade) from the Student Administration Office.

4.3 At the thesis seminar

The seminar normally lasts for two lecture hours (the seminar may be somewhat shorter if it has few side-opponents). The seminar will be introduced by the supervisor who says welcome and notes which opponents are present. Then the main opponents take over the seminar and carry out their scrutiny of the thesis. This is further described in chapter 5. The side-opponents participate in the discussion in accordance with the main opponents’ instructions (either spontaneously during the seminar or when invited by the main opponents after each section).

[2] If the external partner has agreed to collaboration under conditions of anonymity, and the organization’s name is not revealed in the thesis, you could instead state “Anonymous” instead of the organization’s name. (N.B. – when later uploading the thesis in DiVA, as described in section 7.4, you should always state “Anonymous”).

The seminar concludes with the supervisor commenting on the opposition. The supervisor will also hand back the written, and graded, side-opposition memos. Sometimes, the supervisor may give the authors the side-opposition (without front page). The written main opposition will be graded after the thesis seminar. Note: to submit the main opposition, send the individually written main opposition by email to the supervisor of the thesis you have read **any time before the seminar**.

The supervisor will also give feedback on the thesis' strong and weak aspects. The supervisor may issue a revision assignment with instructions on what has to be improved before forwarding the thesis for grading (revisions from the seminar should, however, be an exception as the thesis should generally be completed before the final seminar). It is important to carefully plan the main opposition so that enough time is kept for the supervisor's summary of the seminar and to also provide enough time for the side opponents to participate in the discussions.

4.4 After the thesis seminar

After the thesis seminar, (possible) revisions of both content and form may be assigned. Any complementary work needs to be approved by the supervisor. The supervisor will then hand over the information of approved complementary work to the grading teacher and the examiner. Note, it is always the **seminar version of the thesis** that is graded.

The grade decided by the examiner will be announced from the Student Administration Office in an e-mail to the authors. Thereafter, the thesis should be filed electronically as a pdf-file in DiVA (UB's database for scholarly work). When both the thesis and the DiVA file has been uploaded, the grade will be reported into the reporting system Ladok.

However, the total grade on the thesis course can only be reported in Ladok when all compulsory assignments (thesis, main opposition, side-opposition and work-in-progress seminars) have received the grade "Pass". For details about the compulsory assignments of your particular thesis type, see the corresponding syllabus).

5 *Opposition*

5.1 Guiding principles for the opposition

The opposition comprises the discussion the strengths and weaknesses of a thesis, as a whole and in parts, by one or two main discussants/opponents (fellow students). This critical examination is an important part of the process of assessing and evaluating the value and contribution of scientific works. A thesis seminar is therefore a forum for such critical examination, and it is an important learning opportunity for both opponents and thesis authors. The critical examination that takes place in the thesis seminar in the form of a dialogue is intended to increase the seminar participants' understanding of the thesis and to make suggestions for improvements. The opposition can be divided into two parts – content and performance. The parts will be presented below.

Opposition – Examples of Questions

Problem background, problematization, research question and purpose

- Is the topic relevant for a thesis in Business Administration on the particular level? Which other fields within and outside of Business Administration are affected by or related to the topic? Why is it interesting and/or important to write about this topic? What are the scientific and practical developments within the area? What is expected to happen in the future?
- Is the research question clearly introduced, motivated and formulated? Do you understand the general idea of the thesis? Why is it a problem? For whom? Where – in which country, which type of organization, for which group of people? Is the research question possible to answer? What type of knowledge can result from answering the research question? Are the scientific value and the practical value of the study clearly stated? What are the links to previous research? Is the research question well anchored in previous research? Have relevant concepts (such as concepts appearing in the research question or the purpose) been properly introduced and defined?
- What is the relation between research question and purpose (and possible delimitations)? Are the research question and/or the purpose too broad or too narrow? Is there a connection between the research question and the purpose? Is the purpose wider than the research question?
- What is the link between the research question and the purpose and the actual work in subsequent chapters of the thesis?

Methodological points of departure

- Is there a reasonable connection and compatibility between research question, purpose, data collection and analytical methods? Are the different methodological choices clearly stated and argued for? Do the authors display in-depth methodological understanding?
- Are the research design and the chosen methods appropriate for answering the research question? Have the authors provided clear and relevant arguments for

their choice of study objects (e.g. respondent selection)? For the choice of data collection methods? For the choice of method for analysis?

- Is the actual work on the study clearly described and argued for? Do the authors show a reasonable understanding for flaws in their work and how they have attempted to overcome different shortcomings?

Theoretical frame of reference

- Are the chosen theories relevant – possible to use in this particular study? Are there other and more appropriate theories/literature? Are there theories of importance for the thesis that are missing/have been excluded? Have the authors done a thorough and systematic literature search? Have the authors understood and adequately used the theories? Do the authors clearly argue and take a stand in the theoretical chapter?

Presentation of results

- Is the presentation of results reasonable and does it fit logically with the research question? Have data been appropriately gathered, e.g. has the questionnaire been developed based on relevant theoretical concepts? Has the operationalization of the theoretical concepts been successful? Is the presentation of results in accordance with the method of data collection? For example, have case studies been appropriately described? Have interviews been handled and described in an appropriate manner? If statistical methods have been used, have the proper procedures for different tests been observed? Does the data allow for the tests made (e.g. issues of the scales used)? Does the results section prepare for the analysis in a good way? Is the presentation of results systematic and easy to understand and follow? Is it possible to assess/evaluate the instruments of data collection (e.g. questionnaires, interview guide, schema, observation plan, analysis tools)?

Analysis

- Is the analysis reasonable and logically consistent with the research question? Is it consistent with arguments presented in the methods chapter and in the theoretical framework? Are factors strengthening as well as weakening the interpretations included? Is there a clear connection to theory in the analysis? Are the authors successful in raising the level of abstraction in the analytical discussion so that it does not repeat the results section?

Credibility in conclusions and recommendations

- Has the research question been answered? And is the purpose fulfilled? Are conclusions and recommendations clearly related to the research question? Are they reasonable? Is the contribution of the study, theoretically and practically, made clear?

Social and ethical issues

- Have ethical principles for research been obeyed?
- Does the research topic involve ethical, social, environmental or similar issues?

- Have possible societal implications of research findings been adequately addressed?

Stringency and argumentation

- Is the disposition of the thesis stringent? How have the authors succeeded in connecting the different parts of the thesis? Is there a logical structure? Have some parts (e.g. chapters or specific cases or theories) received too much/little space? What contribution does the thesis as a whole provide?
- Are the language and the argumentation clear throughout the thesis? Is the title of the thesis well-formulated, interesting and relevant to the content? Is the summary succinct, and does it cover the essentials of the entire text? Are the concepts clearly defined and expressed in scholastic and precise terminology, and do the authors stick with these concepts?
- Are figures, tables, references and the reference list used in an adequate and informative manner and are formal requirements followed? Is the referencing system complete, consequential, and are guidelines followed?

Quality criteria/truth criteria:

- When performing a critical examination (opposition) on another thesis, it is always useful to consider if the study meets the quality criteria which can be applied on a certain type of study. For quantitative research, you can therefore evaluate the validity, reliability and generalizability of the study.
- For qualitative research, different quality criteria exist. A specific trait of qualitative methods is the difficulty to exactly replicate the studies, and thus other criteria than validity, reliability and generalizability should be considered. Some examples of possible criteria are: credibility (including intersubjectivity), transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. The specific criteria chosen will depend on what type of qualitative study that has been performed.

Overall:

- Have all relevant (methodological) choices been adequately motivated? Are presentations of results and analysis systematic and possible to follow? Is the thesis´ research problem clearly answered?
- To what extent have the expected learning outcomes been fulfilled?
- What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the thesis?

Format and language should be assessed from an overall point of view, rather than continually during the opposition. The assessment of the communicative precision involves assessing whether formulations are clear, if concepts and definitions are explained and adapted to the target audience or if the tables, charts and figures used are easy to understand. The opponent will also assess the language of the thesis in terms of spelling mistakes, incorrect sentence structure, etc. It is strongly recommended that a list with detailed comments on language and formalities is submitted to the authors and to the supervisor.

The main opponent/s are responsible for checking how references[3] have been used in the thesis. It might be appropriate to check a selection of references and, if problems are detected, make a more in-depth scrutiny. If plagiarism or any other unclear issues arise or are suspected, this has to be made known.

5.2 Overall principles for performing the critical review

A critical examination of a thesis can be organized in many different ways, and there are many guidelines in the relevant literature that basically say the same thing. However, no guideline can replace an understanding of the text in the thesis, and no guide can give an exact recipe for a specific opposition. The content of the opposition depends on the form of the thesis to be examined. **However, the review should cover the entire work and discuss both strengths and weaknesses.**

Serious weaknesses should be presented and discussed in a factual manner. Further, the opponent is responsible for ensuring that the opposition is thorough. Whatever the quality of the thesis (even those that are very good or very bad!), the discussion of alternative approaches and interpretations of findings are always relevant and useful. Thus, positive and negative feedback should always be balanced.

Logical precision
Logical precision is about the ability to argue and discuss the thesis as a whole, rather than individual chapters. This means, for example, that the research question(s) is discussed in the light of the subsequent choices and the relevance of the results. Similarly, when the method is discussed, this should be done with respect to the data quality, the credibility of the results and whether the method supports the answering of the research question. Based on objective arguments, the opponent draws conclusions about the quality of the thesis. The opponent's arguments in the evaluation of the choices made and their impact on the structure, content and relevance of the thesis should thus be well-founded. Logical precision is thus about the opponent's ability to present well-founded arguments and to keep this reasoning together throughout the work. Thus, it is important that the opposition is consistent. The opponent will also provide constructive suggestions on how to improve the thesis.

Communicative precision
In order to review the various parts of the thesis, the opponent can use a structure based on certain themes. Such a thematic review means that the opposition does not have to follow a chronological chapter-by-chapter structure. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between central issues and things of minor importance. It is not appropriate to go through an essay page-by-page and discuss a mix of major and minor issues. With a mixed structure there is a risk that trivialities are over-emphasized. If that happens it might seem like the opponent does not understand what is important. In addition, a page-by-page outline usually result in space shortage (written opposition) or lack of time (oral opposition). The evaluation and discussion of the analysis and conclusions may,

[3] Generally, the main theoretical/literature sources should be such that it is possible for the opponents, the supervisors, the grading teacher and others to identify and check the use of these sources.

therefore, not be properly discussed. Overall, it is important to adjust the opposition so that it is consistent with the specific learning outcomes of the thesis type that you are examining.

There are rarely any “right” or “wrong” choices in a thesis. Rather the value of the choices made should be assessed in the light of the arguments made for each choice. This means that a well-discussed and well-motivated line of arguments should support the choices made in the thesis. If such arguments are missing, the opponent should note it. Similarly, each thesis section should build logically on the previous sections. If not, the opponent should comment on it. Lack of logic may include factual errors when, for instance, the author states that a random selection of interviewees has been made while the author has interviewed those individuals who happened to be in the room at the time of interview.

5.3 Course requirements: One main opposition

Every thesis author **must act as a main opponent** (Swe: ‘*huvudopponent*’) **of a thesis *at the same level and No. of ECTS*.** The main opposition includes an oral opposition at the thesis seminar and a written text. The oral part of the main opposition can be carried out by a single opponent (i.e., on rare occasions - single author thesis students) or normally by a pair of opponents (i.e. in form of two thesis partners). The main opponents are expected to lead the thesis seminar from beginning to end, whilst side-opponents are expected to complement the main opposition with their active participation. A main opposition should cover the different sections of the work, and it is the main opponent’s responsibility to dispose of the time available in such a manner that there is enough time to highlight/examine every part. It is also the responsibility of the main opponents to ensure that both strengths and weaknesses are discussed. Thus, the main opponents lead the seminar and the supervisor’s role is to be a resource/support in discussions arising at the seminar.

The written main opposition is an individual assignment, resulting in a 5-6 full pages paper (see *Grading criteria – Thesis opposition* in the thesis Canvas site). The main opponents should hand in their papers to the supervisor at the beginning of the seminar. The written part of the main opposition is intended to ensure that the opposition is well prepared and to provide a good foundation for grading the opposition (Pass/Fail). The main opponents should not read from their opposition paper at the seminar. Rather, the main opponents should focus on the dialogue with the authors. Therefore, it is important that they have planned the seminar jointly to ensure that key issues are covered.

The thesis seminar and the main opposition – crucial phases:
The seminar commonly begins with the opponents asking the authors about errors and/or adjustments that they have found in the text after their thesis was made available to the opponents. Thereafter, the main opponent/s presents how they have planned the seminar. The main opponent should then continue with a short presentation of the thesis content to identify potential misunderstandings and to establish a common ground concerning the work reported in the thesis. The formal opposition of the thesis then follows, preferably

organized in main themes (see above). The opposition ends with a discussion on whether the thesis has met the expected learning outcomes. At the concluding part of the seminar, the supervisor comments on the thesis and the thesis seminar.

The main opposition is graded with either a “Pass” or “Fail”. The grade is individual and based upon both opposition paper and the performance at the seminar. The main opponents will not receive their grade at the seminar. The feedback from the seminar leader will be about their oral performance. As soon as possible after the seminar, the supervisor will read the opposition paper and set the grade. Please note that it might take a couple of days since the supervisor is likely to be busy with other thesis seminars. The supervisor reports the grade to the Student Administration Office who then registers the grade. We kindly ask you to check your grade via the “Student web” rather than contacting the seminar leader or the Student Administration Office.

Should the main opposition receive the grade “Fail”, the students need to make a new main opposition on a different thesis.

5.4 Course requirements: One side-opposition

In addition to the main opposition, all thesis students have to individually complete one side-opposition. This includes the writing of a side-opposition paper and to participate at the corresponding thesis seminar. Please note that the side-opposition is an individual assignment. As side-opponent, you contribute to a thorough discussion of the thesis by active participation at the seminar.

The side-opposition must be on a thesis at the same level and type as the thesis you are writing. However, **in case of a shortage of theses at your level**, it is possible to do the side-opposition assignment on a thesis at a higher level.[4] Please note that most theses are defended on the last thesis period of the semester and that you need to wait until the final publication day before you choose a thesis at a higher level. Also, we kindly ask you to indicate this in your opposition paper. In case you have questions or concerns about this, you should contact the Thesis Course Responsible.

Regarding language (Eng/Swe) in the side-opposition paper, please see the introduction of chapter 4.

5.4.1 Routines for side-oppositions

a) When a thesis has been uploaded for final seminar (as described in section 4.1 Before the thesis seminar), it will be accessible for side-opponents.

b) Before and during thesis periods, you should check the thesis Canvas site under the heading side-oppositions for upcoming thesis seminars.

[4] For example, a student writing a Bachelor thesis may in case of a shortage of other Bachelor theses to make side-oppositions on, instead choose a 1st year Master’s thesis.

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c) Select and download a copy of an available thesis. It is not possible to 'book' a thesis for side-opposition in advance. It is a "first come, first served" system. New theses for side opposition will only be posted during office hours. However, it is possible to access the database at any time. Furthermore, you can only sign up for one side-opposition and please note that you must register to be a side-opponent via the database (i.e. you cannot do your side-opposition on another student's copy of the thesis).

d) Read and make a careful evaluation of the thesis (see section 5.1 for guidance). You may choose between printing the thesis and reading it on the screen.

e) Submit your side-opposition paper electronically 2 workdays before the seminar to the stated email address of the responsible supervisor of the seminar. The exact date and time will be stated in the confirmation email of registering as a side-opponent.

You find the template for the front page for main- and side-opposition papers on the thesis Canvas site. **Please use this template!**

In addition to the side-opposition, active participation is required at the thesis seminar. Absence from the seminar will result in a Fail regardless of the cause for the absence.

Written side-oppositions are graded either as "Pass" or "Fail". Grading is based on both the formal criteria such as length and quality of the opposition paper, and on participation during the seminar.

The grade of the side-opponents' paper is announced at the thesis seminar. A short, written feedback is given on the first page of the written side-opposition, which is returned to the student at the seminar. The rest of the written side-opposition is delivered to the thesis authors. However, if the side-opposition paper receives the grade "Fail", the entire paper is returned to the side opponent (and not to the thesis authors).

5.4.2 Requirements on side-oppositions

A side-opposition paper should be about **3-4 full pages long** and examine the content of the thesis in accordance with the general criteria for writing and examining theses (see *Grading criteria – Thesis opposition* in the thesis Canvas site). The paper should be a reflective, well-argued examination of the different parts of the thesis; the outline does not have to follow thesis chapters but could be based on central themes (see further below). Do not simply summarize and repeat large sections of the thesis but instead explain and discuss positive and negative aspects and contribute actively to the seminar discussion. The use of examples and concrete suggestions for improvement are important elements of a good side-opposition. Furthermore, the side-opposition shall include an assessment of how the thesis meets the expected learning outcomes. Please note that the quality requirements on both side- and main oppositions increase with the higher thesis levels.

5.5 Grading of oppositions

The opposition assignments are an important part of the thesis course that test your ability to evaluate academic texts in the area of Business Administration. The seminar leader (normally the supervisor of the defended thesis) will grade the main and side-opposition with either “Pass” or “Fail”. When grading the written and oral opposition, the supervisor will assess whether the opposition paper addresses key issues of the thesis and whether the paper is well-structured and whether formal requirements are met.

6 *Grading*

6.1 Grading criteria

A thesis is graded with respect to how it meets the expected learning outcomes as presented in the course syllabus (see separate document) for the specific thesis type. The expected learning outcomes describe the minimum level for receiving the grade “Pass”. It is therefore important that you carefully study them and reflect upon how they apply to your work.

Accordingly, the expected learning outcomes and the grading criteria depend upon the level of the thesis – bachelor, degree project, magister or master – and the course length – 15 or 30 credits.

Furthermore, to receive the grade “Pass”, a thesis must meet language and formal requirements. Students therefore need to ensure that references are presented correctly and that spelling and grammatical errors are rare.

An overall quality assessment will always be made. For example, a thesis which is very ambitious in all separate parts, but lacks a coherent whole is not likely to receive the grade “Pass with Distinction”. Correspondingly, a thesis with a coherent whole but with some weak chapters is not likely to receive the grade “Pass with Distinction”.

6.2 Grades

A thesis can receive the grades U (Fail), G (Pass) or VG (Pass with Distinction).

The grading teacher may request revisions of a thesis. This makes it possible for the authors to revise their thesis so that it meets the expected learning outcomes and can receive the grade “Pass”. However, if a thesis is very far from fulfilling these learning outcomes after the revisions, the grade will be “Fail”. Minor revisions regarding language and formal requirements do not preclude a thesis from gaining the grade “Pass with Distinction”. Please note that it is not possible to gain a higher grade by making revisions after the final seminar.

Many students have high ambitions for their theses and work hard to get a good grade on their thesis. Against this background, it should be noted that **“Pass” is the most common grade**, which means that the thesis meets the expected learning outcomes. To receive a “Pass with Distinction”, the thesis must exceed the expected learning outcomes on several grading criteria.

6.3 Grading

All theses in Business Administration are graded by a grading teacher and an examiner. The grading teachers and examiners consist of a group of experienced supervisors representing different sub-disciplines within the area of Business Administration.

Students should be aware that **it is the version of the thesis that has been presented at the thesis seminar that will be graded**. However, if the supervisor issues revisions at the seminar (should only be done in exceptional cases as revisions from the supervisor should have been completed before the seminar), a revised manuscript must be handed in to, and approved by, the supervisor before the thesis can enter the grading process. The supervisor also writes a supervisor statement, which briefly summarizes the key strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and provides information about revisions made. The supervisor statement is internal work material, which is only available to the examiner.

The theses are read and assessed by a grading teacher. The grading teacher then suggests a grade to the examiner and after their discussion the grade is set.

If the examiner and the grading teacher find that a thesis does not fulfill the expected learning outcomes, the grading teacher will issue revisions for the thesis to reach the grade "Pass". If revisions are requested, the authors will be informed by the grading teacher via e-mail. The due date for the completion of the revisions will be set (normally four weeks after the date when the revisions were issued). The authors need to ensure that their thesis meets the expected learning outcomes when the revised manuscript is due. If not, it will receive the grade "Fail". Authors should also know that if a thesis enters the grading process while being so far from fulfilling the expected learning outcomes that a revision is likely to require more than four weeks of work, the examiner might fail the thesis directly.

6.4 Summary: Key steps in thesis grading and reporting of results

1. The thesis seminar is held.
2. The supervisor decides whether revisions are needed.
    a. If revisions are requested, the authors submit a revised manuscript to the supervisor who approves the revisions. For minor revisions, they need to be done within 5 work days. For major revisions, they need to be done within four weeks (only semester-terms count). In the case of major revisions, only the grade "Pass" (not "Pass with Distinction") can be given. In the case of minor revisions, the thesis can receive "Pass" or "Pass with Distinction".
3. The supervisor writes a supervisor statement and sends it to the examiner.
4. The grading teacher reads the thesis and writes an assessment that is sent to the examiner. After any potential discussions, the examiner grades the thesis and reports the result.
    a. In case the grading teacher requests revisions, the students will be informed by the grading teacher. The revised manuscript must be completed within four weeks (semester-term) and submitted to the grading teacher.
    b. If the grading teacher finds that the revisions make the thesis meet the expected learning outcomes, the revised thesis is sent to the examiner.

   c. The examiner makes a final assessment of the thesis, assigns a grade and reports the result.
5. The Student Administration Office sends an e-mail to the thesis authors with the grade and feedback of the grade given. The mail also includes further instructions on electronic publication.
6. The student electronically registers the thesis in the DiVA-database, carefully following the *Instructions for publishing student theses in DiVA*, which can be downloaded from the thesis Canvas site and also uploads the *Form for external collaboration and permission to publish*. The Student Administration Office will be automatically notified by the library when it has been registered.
7. When the side-opposition, the main opposition and other compulsory seminars have been completed with the grade “Pass”, the entire thesis course can be reported as completed in LADOK. That is, while you will receive the grade on the thesis when it has been graded, it will not be formally reported until all parts of the thesis course are finalized.

7 *Course evaluation*

1-2 weeks after the end of the thesis course, a course evaluation will be sent to your email address. Please help us by answering these questions! We appreciate your answers even if you have not completed the thesis work or if you have interrupted the work.

The purpose of the course evaluation is to help us to continue to develop the thesis courses. Your input is therefore very valuable to provide us with a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the course, and potential areas for improvement.

8 *The thesis structure - Disposition (or chapter layout)*

A thesis (and other comprehensive essays) consists of different sections. Which section appears in which order is determined by the orientation of the thesis and the authors' methodological and theoretical choices. It is recommended that students look for earlier theses presented and defended at USBE within the particular field of study. While previous theses may provide some guidance and inspiration regarding structure, they should be treated as examples. Thus, earlier theses have strengths but also weaknesses and it is wrong to assume that they represent the "only" way of structuring a thesis. An imitation of a previous thesis can result in the "errors" being transferred from one thesis to the other. The instructions in this thesis manual should always be followed.

8.1 Introductory layout

The title page: A thesis always begins with a title page that states at which university, department, course and degree program the thesis has been written. Furthermore, the title page must present the names of the authors (in alphabetical order on last name), the name of the supervisor, the semester when the thesis seminar takes place, and the title of the thesis. Use the templates for front and back cover that can be downloaded from the thesis Canvas site.

The title of the thesis should clearly reflect the content of the thesis. Long and complicated titles should be avoided. The title of a thesis can include a subtitle.

Summary: The summary of the thesis follows the title page. A good summary includes information about the entire content of the thesis and its findings and can be read independently from the rest of the thesis. The comprehensive summary should have about 350 to 400 words (i.e., one page). The summary can also be used as an abstract when the thesis is finally published in the DiVA database.

Table of contents: It is recommended that you use the templates in the word-processing program to create the table of contents. The table of contents should be followed by a list of any material in appendix, and lists of figures and tables.

8.2 The main body of the thesis

The chapters of a thesis should be presented in a logical order. However, the structure of the chapters and their order may differ since they are dependent on the specific topic and research question of each thesis. Such variations may be necessary to communicate the content of the thesis in a clear and concise manner.

The purpose of the **Introductory Chapter** is to introduce the reader to the practical and theoretical background of the chosen research problem. The introduction should also clarify the position of the thesis within a relevant theoretical field to which the study will contribute. It is, therefore, important that the focus of the thesis is clearly outlined and delimited and that the purpose and research questions are clear.

Consequently, it is important that the arguments leading to the purpose and research questions are well founded and presented in a logical order. A research question can address a practical issue that needs to be resolved or address gaps in current knowledge. Thus, the motives behind a research question may be of both theoretical and practical character.

The introductory chapter may begin with the practical reasons for the chosen topic followed by a discussion that connects the practical problem to a certain theoretical field. The background of the research question should thus clarify the topicality of the subject, and briefly highlight previous research in the area. This helps the readers to learn about the findings reported in earlier research and where the authors position their thesis with respect to these findings. The brief presentation of the positioning of the thesis within a theoretical field in the introductory chapter must then be further developed in the theoretical chapter.

Some authors chose to include a section that describes relevant concepts in the introductory chapter. This might be relevant if the reader needs this information to understand the content of the text in the chapters that follow. Key theoretical concepts must be thoroughly described in relevant parts of the thesis.

The introductory chapter might end with a section that presents the disposition of the coming chapters in the thesis (a short paragraph that describes the general content and purpose of the chapter). A disposition is not needed if the thesis is short. Thus, a section that presents the disposition is motivated when it helps the readers to gain a better understanding of the content of the chapters in the thesis. The disposition section should <u>not</u> be a repetition of the table of contents.

The role of the **Theory Chapter** is to present earlier academic studies within the theoretical field. The presentation must discuss the relevance of concepts and models with respect to the focal area of the thesis. Thus, the theoretical frame of reference is not merely a presentation of extant knowledge. The layout of the chapter may vary since it depends on the study's approach. For instance, if the study aims to test hypotheses, the chapter should result in a number of relevant hypotheses. If the study’s purpose is to generate theory, the chapter needs to explain how the thesis can be positioned regarding extant theories and how the thesis might contribute to the literature. The theories may also be presented as a framework for analysis of the empirical material. Regardless of the approach, it is important that the authors present their own position and interpretations of the findings reported in earlier studies.

A common “myth” is that the authors of a thesis should not present their line of arguments in the theory chapter, which (according to the myth) should just present other researchers’ theories. This myth is false. Rather, a good theory chapter contains a well though-through line of arguments, which connects earlier studies to the topic of the thesis.

The purpose of the **Method Chapter** is to present and motivate the methods used for data collection and analysis from both a theoretical and practical point of view. The authors should present what they have done and discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of the chosen approach. Theses at advanced levels should discuss the methods applied in earlier research on similar topics. The text should also include a discussion of alternative methods and the arguments for why the authors have chosen not to use them. By presenting this information, the authors allow the readers to critically review and understand the reasons behind the methodological choices and to critically assess the relevance of the chosen methods. It is important that the chapter that presents the applied research methods is structured in a logical order.

Methods course literature or other general methods textbooks should be avoided as sources in the methods chapter. Textbooks may be used for orientation and finding sources for further reading, but the authors are expected to use the research methods literature that fits their study; see Appendix 1 for literature suggestions. Also, as mentioned earlier, the authors should search for suitable methods applied in earlier research.

The chapter must include a presentation of the chosen scientific approach (hypothesis testing, theory generation, etcetera) and the arguments behind the chosen research design (case studies, interviews, survey etc.) and methods for literature search. It is important that authors present their data collection methods, who they interviewed or the people that were included in their survey (i.e., their sampling approach). Issues regarding access to the data and the quality of the data must therefore be discussed with respect to their impact on the reported findings. The authors need to report missing responses to the overall sample and to particular questions and discuss how it affect their study.

Furthermore, it is critical that the authors present the theoretical underpinnings of their interview guide, questionnaire, experiment, or observation design so that it is clear how they will operationalize the theoretical concepts presented in the literature chapter. It is important that the authors present their analytical methods and discuss their limitations. The authors should also reflect upon ethical/societal issues of relevance for their study and explain how they have dealt with issues such as the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, etc.

The chapter that presents the **empirical data/ results** should be structured in a way that fits the data material and central concepts in the theoretical framework. The structure should thus help the readers to see the points that the authors try to make. The way that the empirical material is presented should also be consistent with the study's design as outlined in the methods chapter. A clear line of arguments, which is consistent with the methodological approach, helps the readers to identify key points in the data. It is important that the authors are selective when deciding which data to include in this chapter. This is necessary to keep a clear connection between the empirical material and the data interpretation used in the analysis. Also, the sources of the data should always be clear.

In qualitative research, quotations from interviews makes the text "alive" since they directly illustrate what the informants said in response to your questions. However, although quotations are important, they should not dominate the empirical chapter. In quantitative studies, the descriptive data and findings from the analyses should be presented in a clear and comprehensible way. Authors of quantitative studies should comment on the data in graphs and tables. Thus, do not solely repeat the information from tables and graphs in the text. Authors of qualitative studies may also use tables to summarize information. It usually facilitates the identification of key points.

The material presented in the **Analysis Chapter** should not repeat empirical results or theories. The chapter must have a clear structure. This helps the readers to assess how the study's findings answer the research questions. Depending on the objectives of the study, the analysis can identify causal connections and patterns between different factors. The conceptualization of such patterns can then be used to generate new theory. If the purpose of the study is to describe an empirical phenomenon, different interpretations can be compared. Suggestions for practical solutions might also include alternative solutions that are compared with respect to the key factors and the potentials of each alternative.

The analysis must be systematic. This is important since it helps the reader to easily follow the steps in the analysis. The analytical approach should also be consistent with the one presented in the method chapter. A good analytical discussion also compares the findings reported in the thesis with those reported in earlier studies. It is, therefore, critical that the authors make explicit references to these studies in the analytical discussion.

The **Conclusions Chapter** should revisit the research questions and purpose of the thesis and discuss to what extent the purpose has been met and explain how the research questions have been answered. This chapter also includes information about the most important/valuable/interesting findings and explains how the study contributes to extant knowledge. For theses on the D- and Master's level, respectively, it is particularly important to clarify the study's position and contribution to the literature. Thus, it is not sufficient to declare that "the study contributes to this theory" – the authors must explain how. Furthermore, recommendations to practitioners should be presented under a separate headline.

Depending on the objectives of the study, the concluding chapter may include a more general discussion of the findings' societal or social implications (regarding the last-mentioned issue, see also section 8.5). Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss the findings' limitations and include a section that identifies areas for future studies. Such suggestions may include empirical, theoretical and methodological issues.

8.3 Two thesis types: Theoretical and empirical

Students can choose between two thesis types at the Master's (or "D") level. The most common type of thesis in Business Administration is based upon empirical data that the authors collect. The other less common type is theoretical, which is written in the form of a literature review. A thesis based upon a literature review examines existing theory and research within a particular field. The analysis can then examine developments and trends and identify "unstudied" areas and knowledge gaps. The meta-analysis of extant theory therefore results in a theoretical contribution.

Degree projects and Bachelor theses cannot be literature reviews. These thesis categories must include a collection of empirical data. Studies based on secondary data are also empirical studies.

8.4 Literature search

It is the authors' responsibility to search for relevant literature.

A large body of literature is available, and the authors need to be selective. The main part of the sources used in the theoretical framework should be **scientific articles** – not course literature. The literature used in the method chapter should also include scientific articles since this makes it possible for the authors to use methods and approaches applied in earlier studies. The literature that deals with the methodological issues should thus be selected in the same way as the literature for the theoretical sections. This allows the authors to state that their operationalization of theoretical concepts is supported in previous studies. There are journals and articles that deal exclusively with methodological issues and by using the methods and approaches applied in earlier research on similar topics, the authors can increase the quality of their findings and of their thesis as a whole.

Appendix 1 provides suggestions on methodological literature.

Scientific articles in databases are easily accessible. For a selection of databases, see e.g. http://www.ub.umu.se/en/search/articles-databases. Use keywords and combinations of keywords in a systematic way.

8.5 Societal and ethical aspects

An expected learning outcome in all thesis syllabuses concerns societal, social, and ethical issues during the thesis work. These issues may include the research process and how the study is conducted. These issues may also include the framing of the research questions and the societal implications of the findings and conclusions reported in the thesis.

The first issues regarding the research process include, for example, that respondents are informed that the questions asked to them are for the purpose of a study and that they agree to participate. The informants need to be informed about integrity issues and how matters regarding confidentiality and anonymity will be handled. The entire research process should be characterized by openness and transparency and adhere to rules and regulations of relevance in the specific situation. When the study is conducted in collaboration with a company or other commissioner, it is important that those who participate in the study are informed about these issues and that data is collected for academic studies only.

The choice of research topic is sometimes based on societal or ethical concerns. Such topics may, for example, include studies on sustainability, social responsibility, ethics in auditing, ethical investments, globalization, green consumption, diversity, equality, etc. In such cases, it is relevant to discuss how different stakeholders are affected by, or look upon the phenomenon, how short-term profit maximization balances with long-term environmental sustainability, or how the rights and responsibilities of different actors converge or diverge.

A discussion of this character may also be relevant in studies that do not explicitly focus to ethical or societal problems since it can put the study's findings and conclusions in a wider context. Thus, the conclusions and recommendations may have implications, not only for the immediately concerned companies and organizations, but also for other stakeholders in the society. Insights about ethical and societal dilemmas may evolve during the thesis project and such issues can then be included in the concluding discussion. Accordingly, ethical and societal issues can influence the thesis process in different ways; how they appear in the final thesis is dependent upon the specific study's topic and design. In appendix 3 you will find a list of key words that exemplify key ethical and social/societal issues, as well as a list of literature that deals with these issues in research. Because of the abundance of literature, the authors need to be selective and choose the literature of relevance for their thesis.

9 *Language and formal requirements*

9.1 Language

The language in a thesis must be clear and appropriate. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors should be rare for a thesis to obtain the grade "Pass". The grading teacher and the examiner will not approve a thesis with frequent language mistakes.

Academic writing often contains specific jargon and concepts, such as isomorphism, cognitive dissonance, etcetera. If such concepts are part of your theoretical frame of reference, they will contribute to the precision of your writing. Beyond key concepts, you should avoid overly complex words. Always write as simple as possible, while maintaining academic clarity regarding central concepts. Spoken language, slang or "chat language" are not acceptable.

Authors who write their thesis in English can choose either British English or American English. Regardless of which type, it should be used consistently throughout the thesis (citations are of course always exactly reproduced).

A few tips for a clearer and easy to read text are:

- Make the key message in each paragraph clear to the reader. If you are unsure of what the key message is, the reader will be as well.
- Avoid long sentences.
- Avoid repeating the same word in a paragraph.
- Always use the spell check, even when you are "only" submitting drafts for meetings with your supervisor.

It is common that authors re-write the text several times to increase the quality of their manuscripts. A good advice is also to exchange proof reading services with other authors. Your supervisor has no obligation to proofread your manuscript, but is likely to make general comments on the language. A thesis with poor language and frequent grammatical errors must be proof-read. Language mistakes must be rectified before a thesis enters the grading process. Furthermore, Umeå University Library assists students in academic writing through the Academic Resource Centre (more information can be found on the library websites). The Centre provides both one-on-one writing tutorials and lectures, which are announced on the thesis Canvas site.

9.2 Headings

Each chapter includes different sections, divided by subheadings and paragraphs. We recommend that you do not use more than three heading levels: 1, 1.1, and 1.1.1, 1.1.2.

Sub-headings should only be used when there are more than one sub-section. For instance, third level headings, e.g., 5.4.1, are only used if a heading/section labeled 5.4.2. follows. If not, the second level heading 5.4 is sufficient.

9.3 Layout, font, etcetera

Page format: A4

Font: The thesis must be written in 12 pt. Times New Roman.

Line spacing: single.

Margins: top and bottom margins - 2,5 cm. Left and right margins - 3 cm.
Footnotes: 10pt, simple line spacing.

Headings: font of your choice. Use different font for different levels of heading.

Paragraphs: a new paragraph is formed by inserting a blank row between two paragraphs. No indentation.

9.4 Page numbers

The summary and the table of contents are numbered with Roman numerals (if numbered at all). If the front page is included in these numbers, the number should not be visible.

From the first page of the introduction chapter and onwards, Arabic numerals are used, and the first page of the introduction is number 1.

9.5 Table of contents

The table of contents can include up to three levels of headings. The summary and the table of contents are **not** to be listed in the table of contents.

Appendixes are listed after the table of contents according to the principle:
Appendix 1: Interview guide.
Appendix 2: Introduction letter to respondents.

If the thesis includes tables and/or figures, the table of contents should be followed by a list of tables and a list of figures. A list of tables or figures presented the items in numerical order, followed by title and page number:

Figure 1. The service development process.	12
Figure 2. SERVQUAL model.	16

A list with abbreviations is sometimes used after the table of contents, in particular if many unusual abbreviations are used. If so, these should be listed in alphabetical order.

9.6 Figures

Figures are used to denote graphs, pictures, photographs and diagrams. Each figure must be numbered and have a caption (title). Figures are numbered consecutively throughout the thesis with Arabic numerals (that is, chapters are not included in the figure number).

The caption is placed **under** the figure. It begins with Figure 1 (or the appropriate number), and is followed by the title/text.

Example: Figure 4. Overview of the analysis process.

Sometimes the figure title is followed by an explanation, and if the figure is based on data from another source, this must clearly be stated. The source is then included in the reference list.

Example: Figure 4. Interest in entrepreneurship based on gender: ♦ – men, ● – women. Source: SCB, Entrepreneurship monitor[5] (2005).

9.7 Tables

Tables make it possible to present data in a systematic and clarifying manner. Tables should always be designed with readability as a guiding star. If a table is very large (perhaps comprising several pages), it can be placed in an appendix rather than in the text.

Each table should be numbered (Arabic numerals) and receive a title that captures the content of the table. The caption is placed **above** the table.

9.8 Printing/copying

When you print the thesis (electronically), the summary, table of contents, possible acknowledgements, first chapter and reference list should always begin on a **right-hand page**. Also, new chapters always begin at **the top of a page**.

[5] Fictive source.

10 *Referencing*

Why should you reference? There are many reasons, the main ones being:

1. To acknowledge the contributions of others, also making it possible for readers to check how the source has been interpreted.
2. To support and gain creditability to your own arguments. Moreover, it allows the reader to study the issue further, if interested.
3. To demonstrate the ability to independently search, use and relate to previous research.

In general, claims about a certain situation should always be supported by references unless the claims can be considered common knowledge. To state that “H&M is a company with extensive international operations” is an example of such common knowledge. However, authors who write about the strategy or the corporate culture at H&M need to specify their source, since interpretations of such developments in H&M require insights and specific knowledge of their business. Thus, it is not common knowledge.

There are several basic ways to refer to contents from another source:

Summarize. The main point of more extensive information, perhaps a whole chapter may be summarized in considerably less space. The summary should reflect the content and key message of the original source, while the summary should be written in your own words. A reference to the original source is necessary, if applicable with page number/s.

Quote. If a few lines, sentences or string of words are reproduced exactly (word by word) from the original source, it is a quotation. These words must then be surrounded by quotation marks. The reference must specify which page of the original source that the quote comes from. The quotation must be exactly reproduced without any language editing, for instance you should not change from British English to American English.

Paraphrase. To paraphrase is to reformulate ideas / content from another source in your own words, without summarizing (reducing the original content). To properly paraphrase, it is not enough to remove a few words from the original author and shorten the original text. A reference to the original source is necessary, if applicable with page number/s.

It is important to present sources and references correctly. The rules about referencing apply to all written material that you submit for assessment/opposition, and it makes no difference if you write 1 or 100 pages.

In conclusion, the thesis project will increase your ability to process academic texts. This means that you write texts in your own words while referring to other sources. Following this procedure, the authors avoid plagiarism while producing texts of high quality. On the thesis webpage, you find a number of relevant links on how to avoid plagiarism, paraphrase, and more.

USBE is required to report cases of plagiarism and deceptive behavior to the Umeå university disciplinary committee. The disciplinary committee will assess each case and decide on appropriate actions if the authors are found guilty of such misconduct. USBE uses a particular database, Ouriginal/URKUND to control for plagiarism in theses and other texts.

11 *Reference systems*

Academic texts at USBE should use the Harvard system for presenting running references in the text. The system for presenting the references in the text and in the reference list at the end of the thesis builds on the recommendations by the American Psychological Association (APA). If you choose to utilize a software package such as Endnote Web to manage your references, you will need to make the appropriate adjustments to fulfill the requirements stated below.

11.1 References in the text – Basic principles

Principle 1: <u>All sources include the same information</u>: the author's last name + publication date (year). Further on in the text we discuss how to reference when a source lacks author.

Example: "A disadvantage with surveys is the inability to ask follow-up questions (Gilbert, 2009, p. 17)." Alternatively, with direct speech: "As noted by Gilbert (2009, p. 17), a disadvantage with surveys is the inability to ask follow-up questions."

Principle 2: <u>Page numbers should be included in each reference</u>, not only in connection to direct quotes, in tables and figures. An exception from this principle applies when you intend to reference an entire book/article/source.

Example: "Among the relatively few researchers that study ecopreneurship are Schaper (2002) and Schaltegger (2002)." Here, the argumentation refers to the works as such, and it is impossible to list a specific reference.

Principle 3: <u>In case of several references within one parenthesis, they should be separated with a semicolon and listed in alphabetical order</u>.

In the example above, the name of the author is part of the text, but another option is to place both author name and year of publication in parenthesis (in alphabetical order):

"There are relatively few researchers that study ecopreneurship (Schaltegger, 2002; Schaper, 2002; Troutville & Andersen, 1999)."

Principle 4: <u>References in the text should be clear and precise</u>, meaning that the reference should be placed close to the concept/reasoning from the external source. Therefore, the reference (parenthesis) should as a basic rule be placed within the sentence (e.g. HERE). Do not place the reference after the dot.

<u>N.B. I!</u> **Never** split the reference so that the author name is on one place and year/page on another place in the sentence!

<u>N.B. II!</u> The whole reference should always be stated, as described above. This means that **we do not use "ibid"**.

N.B. III! The first name or initials of the authors should **not** be included in the in-text references. Only the surname is included. Possible exceptions to this rule are presented under the following titles.

11.2 References in the text – More than one author

If there are two authors you write: "A disadvantage with surveys is the inability to ask follow up questions (Gilbert & Carter, 2009, p. 17)."

If there are three or more authors, you write: "An advantage with surveys is the possibility to reach many respondents (Smith et al., 2003, p. 50)."[6] Alternatively: "One advantage with surveys that Smith et al. (2003, p. 50) point out is the possibility to reach many respondents." In the reference list, however, all authors must be listed.

11.3 References in the text – Same author, different references

Same author, two different years: List the sources in order of publication: "The authors have in several articles discussed the phenomenon of co-opetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000, 2001)."

Same author, same year: Add letters to the publication year to distinguish the sources. These letters must be used each time the reference is cited in the text and in the list of references. Example: "The authors have in several articles discussed the phenomenon of co-opetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000a, 2000b)."

11.4 References in the text – Different authors, same last name

If you use several sources with the same author name and publication year, you can add the first letter of the first names in the references to separate the sources (note that initials are **only** to be included in the reference when multiple sources have the same last name and publication year):

"Several studies have shown a relationship between strong brands and a cohesive corporate culture (D. Nilsson, 2008, p. 244; L. Nilsson, 2008, p. 14)."

11.5 References in the text – Missing author

Sometimes a text lacks an (explicit) author. In such instances the organization, company or NGO should be presented as the author.

[6] As for references with three to five authors, some reference management systems will automatically list *all* authors the first time the reference is utilized; thereafter, only the first author's name followed by "et al." will be specified. This procedure is also be accepted at USBE.

Example: “In the so-called Brundtland report, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) emphasized the need to balance economic, ecological, and social sustainability.” In this example, the WCED is the organization behind the text.

Names of companies, authorities, or other organizations are usually spelled out completely each time they are cited. An exception is when there is an established abbreviation or acronym. In the first reference, this acronym is added in a parenthesis following the complete name. Thereafter, the acronym is used instead of the complete name:

The first reference: “In a report from Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB, 2009, p. 87) it is evident that…” or “In a recent report from Statistiska Centralbyrån (Statistiska Centralbyrån [SCB], 2009, p. 87) it is evident that…”.

In subsequent references only (SCB, 2009, p. x) are used.

11.6 References in the text – Secondary references

What do you do when you want to reference a scientific article, which you read about in another source, such as a book? If you must use a secondary reference, you may for example write: “In a study made by Lundberg (1999, cited in Martinsson 2002, p. 23), it was shown how the profitability in small companies increased when...”. Later, in the reference list you add Martinsson, but *not Lundberg*, because you have only read Martinsson’s interpretation of Lundberg (1999).

In most instances, access to the original source is relatively easy via Internet, databases or libraries, and hence the original source should be used. Therefore, secondary references **should only be used** in exceptional cases, for example if the original source is not available at a reasonable cost, or if the original is written in a language you do not speak.

11.7 References in the text – Web pages

The basic principle for citing web pages is to as far as possible name an author to the information you cite, or at least name the organization behind the page as the author.

Example with an author: “Companies such as Google has invested considerable sums in the wind energy industry (Schonfeld, 2010).” Accordingly, it should **not** show in the text where you have found Schonfeld’s information (i.e. a website), but only in the reference list (in the same way as you will not receive any information about the publisher of a book until you read the reference list). The year should be when the webpage was updated (not when you read it).

An example with company as the author: “Future cars will be considerably lighter and therefore more environmentally friendly, according to SSAB (2013).” Thus, authors should *not* list the entire web address directly in the text. However, when the authors name a particular web page, rather than citing specific information on that particular page they may write as follows: “Official statistics are publicly available at the homepage of Statistics Sweden (www.scb.se).” In this case, the authors are not referring to specific information on this page, and because of that it should not be included in the reference list.

11.8 References in the text – Oral sources and e-mail communication

Oral sources and other sources of personal communication should be presented according to APA’s recommendations. This may look as follows in the text: A. Andersson (personal communication, September 1, 2019), or (A. Andersson, personal communication, September 1, 2019).

Regarding e-mail communication, it is important to follow ethical guidelines and only publish the material after the informant has agreed to it. The agreement can also ensure that the informant is the person who wrote the e-mail. Thus, the agreement is a way to verify the source.

11.9 References in the text – Laws and regulations

When dealing with legal texts, you should refer to legislation when you discuss the content of the rules and to commentary legal literature when you interpret the rules. Unnecessarily long quotations and descriptions of legislation should be avoided.

Regarding Swedish laws and regulations, they are published in “Svensk författningssamling”, SFS. Each law is given a number first based on the year, and second based on the consecutive number of laws passed during this year. In references, the full number is used.

Example: “According to the Law on Annual Reporting (Swe: Årsredovisningslagen) (SFS 1995:1554)…”.

“According to 4 §, ch. 1 in the Law of Annual Reporting (Swe: Årsredovisningslagen) (SFS 1995:1554), a parent company and one or more subsidiaries will form a group.”

11.10 References in the text – Speeches, lectures, letters

Examples of unpublished sources are speeches, lectures, internal corporate documents, and similar sources. As far as possible, these sources should be cited in the text according to the principle of last name (alternatively organization) and year.

Authors should note that lecture notes and lectures are not considered suitable sources in the theoretical frame of reference in a thesis. Possible exceptions are instances when the information presented at the lecture is unique and has no equivalent in the literature.

11.11 References in the Text – A note on electronic sources

As already mentioned, electronic sources should as far as possible be referred to in the same way as other sources, i.e. author, year and, if possible, page number. Authors are encouraged to save a copy of the electronic sources that they have used; e.g. downloaded reports, e-mail communication, and so on.

11.12 References in the Text – Sources not mentioned

There are many different types of sources and most of them are not discussed here. When you encounter and cite such texts, you should try to find suitable ways for referencing in method books and research papers. The use of such sources may result in amendments to the advice presented in the thesis manual.

12 *Reference List*[7]

The basic principles for a reference list are:

- All references used in the thesis text should be included in the reference list.
- The list includes all types of sources, printed as well as electronic sources.
- The list only includes sources that were referenced in the text, and only sources the authors have read.
- The references are ordered alphabetically based on the first author's last name. It should be a *single* list (i.e. without any subheadings).
- Insert a blank line between each reference.

12.1 Article in scientific journal (printed)

Last name, initial/s[8] (year). Title of the article. *Name of the journal*, Vol. No.(Issue No.), pages.

Ping, R.A. (2004). On assuring valid measures for theoretical models using survey data. *Journal of Business Research*, 57(2), 125-141.

Two authors:

Vallaster, C., & Lindgreen, A. (2013). The role of social interactions in building internal corporate brands: Implications for sustainability. *Journal of World Business*, 48(3), 297-310.

Three to five authors - List all last names with "&" between the two last names:

Brannan, M.J., Parsons, E., & Priola, V. (2015). Brands at work: The search for meaning in mundane work. *Organization Studies*, 36(1), 29-53.

Six or more authors - The first six author names are listed, but names beyond are just noted as "et al.":

Adler, F., Cook, G., Adams, P.H., Gardner, D.J., Loomis, M.V., Vernon, S., & et al. (1999). Environmental management in growth industries. *Business Management*, 9(2), 44-61.

12.2 Article in scientific journal (electronic)

For scientific articles in electronically published journals, the same principles apply as for printed articles. Some journals are available in both electronic and printed form whereas others are only available electronically. In order to facilitate the identification of electronically published scientific articles, so called DOI:s are utilized. DOI is an

[7] Note that some of the examples used in this section are fictional.

[8] You can choose to write the complete first name, but then you must be consistent and do so for all sources in your reference list.

abbreviation of “digital object identifier”, and denotes a number with a permanent link to a document on the Internet. When a scientific article is published, it receives a DOI from the publisher. Responsible for the DOI is the International DOI Foundation. You can read more about this system at http://www.doi.org/.

Please note that **we do not require the DOI-number in the reference list of theses**. Should you choose to add the DOI-number, it should be presented as follows:

Ishaq, M. I., & Di Maria, E. (2020). Sustainability countenance in brand equity: A critical review and future research directions. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(1), 15-34. doi.org/10.1057/s41262-019-00167-5

12.3 Book

Last name, initial/s (year). *Book Title*. edition. Place of publication: Publisher.

Example:
Tonnquist, B. (2021). *Project Management*. 5th edition. Stockholm: Sanoma Utbildning.

12.4 Chapter in edited book

Author’s last name, initial/s (year). Chapter Title followed by In: Initials and last names of the editor/s, ed/s. *Book Title*. edition. Place of publication: Publisher. The chapter’s page numbers.

Walsh, T., & Conrad, W.B. (2009). Ethical dilemmas in outsourcing to third world countries. In: K.W. Moore, ed. *Business Ethics: Collected Essays*. 2nd edition. London: Academic Publishers. pp. 204-231.

12.5 Edited book

Editor’s last name, initial/s, ed/s. (year). *Book Title*. Edition. Place of publication: publisher.

Zavattaro, S.M., ed. (2021). *Public Branding and Marketing: A global viewpoint*. 1st edition. Zurich: Springer Nature.

12.6 E-books

In case you have retrieved a book in Album’s database for electronic books (or some other library), this should show in the reference list through an addition.

Author’s last name, initial/s (year). *Book Title.* Place of publication: publisher. E-book.

Baker, T., & Welter, F. (2020). *Contextualizing Entrepreneurship Theory*. New York, NY: Routledge. E-book.

12.7 Dissertations and theses

Author's last name, initial/s (year). *Title of dissertation/thesis*. Level. Place of University: Name of University.

Example:
Wenisch, S. (2004). *The Diffusion of a Balanced Scorecard in a Divisionalized Firm. Adoption and Implementation in a Practical Context.* Doctoral dissertation. Umeå[9]: Umeå University.

12.8 Conference papers

Author's last name, initial/s (year). Title of conference paper. In: editor (if an editor exists) or organization behind the conference, *Title of the conference*. Place, date. Place of publication: publisher (if there is a publisher).

The example below lack both, editor and place of publication.
Jouison, E. (2007). Action research: A missing method in the field of entrepreneurship. In: *ICSB 2007 World Conference*. Turku, Finland, June 13-14.

If the conference paper was downloaded electronically, the same details that are added below for newspapers should be included (web address, retrieval date).

12.9 Newspaper article (Printed and electronic)

Printed: author's last name, initial/s (year). Title of article. *Name of newspaper*, month and day, page number.

Carlgren, A., & Erlandsson, E. (2007). Klimatmärkt mat smart val. *Svenska Dagbladet*, August 8, Sektion: Brännpunkt, p. 5.

Electronic: author's last name, initial/s (year). Title of acticle. *Name of newspaper*, [type of medium] month and day. Available via: URL-address [Retrieved date].

Svahn, C., & Flores, J. (2021). Länder lovar stoppa skogsskövling och minska metanutsläpp. *Dagens Nyheter*, [Online] November 2. Available via: https://www.dn.se/varlden/fler-an-100-lander-lovar-stoppa-skovling-av-skogen/ [Retrieved November 2, 2021].

[9] When the place of the university also can be derived from the name of the university, the place could be excluded as a separate item in the reference.

12.10 Annual reports (Printed and electronic)

Printed: Company (year). *Title of Annual Report.* Publisher/place of publication: company.

Electronic: Company (year). *Title of Annual Report.* [type of medium]. Available via: web address [Retrieved date].

Norrmejerier (2020). *Årsredovisning 2020.* [electronic]. Available via: https://www.norrmejerier.se/-/media/pdf/redovisning/norrmejerier_arsredovisning_2020.pdf [Retrieved November 2, 2021].

12.11 Reports

With authors provided:

Use the authors last name, initial/s (year). *Title of report* (any serial numbers). Publisher. URL [Retrieved date].

Hasson, D., Villaume, K., & Berlin, C. (2021). *"Lite vanligt hyfs skadar inte": Ohövlighet i handeln – heltäckande kartläggning om förekomst av respektlöst beteende i arbetslivet, samt identifiering av goda exempel på hantering* (Research report 2021:5). Handelsrådet. https://handelsradet.se/app/uploads/2021/10/Rapport-2021_54.pdf [Retrieved August 23, 2021].

Without author (solely organization)

Organisation (year) *Title of report* (any serial numbers). Publisher. URL [Retrieved date].

Statskontoret (2018). *Den offentliga sektorn i korthet 2018*. Statskontoret. https://www.statskontoret.se/publicerat/publikationer/publikationer-2018/den-offentliga-sektorn-i-korthet-2018/ [Retrieved August 21, 2019].

12.12 E-mail communication

E-mail communication is treated in the same way as personal communication (see below).

12.13 Interviews and other personal communication

There are certain reference systems, such as APA, which recommends that personal communication is not included in the reference list (as it cannot be retrieved).

We however recommend that a special heading “Personal communication” is listed at the end of the reference list (provided of course that respondents have not been made anonymous in the empirical study).

Last name, initial/s (year). *Label of talk/communication*. [type of medium] (personal communication, complete date).

Example:
Pettersson, S. (2018). *Discussion about upcoming advertisement campaigns.* [phone call] (personal communication, May 12, 2018).

Example:
Schilling, D. (2020). *RE: Interview request* [e-mail] (personal communication, September 9, 2020).

Example:
Marklund, E. (2019). *Interview about the development of the printing industry during the 2000s.* [interview] (personal communication, January 26, 2019)

12.14 Speeches, lectures, etcetera

Last name, initial/s (year). Title of speech/lecture. *Place and occasion, organization. city, country*. Complete date.

Merrilees, B. (2018). Principles of Interactive Branding. *13th Global Brand Conference, Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK*. May 2, 2018.

12.15 Laws

This information applies to Swedish legislation.

SFS Number of law. *Name of law*. Place: Department.

SFS 1995:1554. *Årsredovisningslagen*. Stockholm: Justitiedepartementet (Department of Justice).

12.16 Brochures and other published or unpublished documents

As a general rule, the same type of information should be provided for all kinds of written sources. Here, we have only exemplified some additional types of sources. Please note that unpublished documents of course should be used with caution since it is hard for the reader to verify the source.

Author/organization/publisher (year). *Title of document*. [Type of document]. Place: organization.

Aamir, S., & Farooq, U. (2011). *Auditor client relationship and audit quality: The effects of long-term auditor client relationship on audit quality in SMEs*. [Master's thesis]. Umeå: Umeå School of Business. http://umu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:426632/FULLTEXT01.pdf [Retrieved 2013-12-19].

Perugla, D., Simon, F., Norinth, K., & Blom, S. (2013). *IKEA establishment in Umeå. A case report*. [Unpublished document]. Umeå: Umeå School of Business and Economics.

Swedish Tax Agency (2009). *Skatteregler för aktie- och handelsbolag. Taxeringsår 2009. SKV 294 utgåva 7*. [Brochure]. Stockholm: the Swedish Tax Agency.

12.17 Web pages

References to webpages (incl. blog posts, etc.) should include author, date of posting och title of the page. In case there is an overall heading or publisher for the website, this should also be stated. It might also be relevant to include a description of the type of page. The URL must of course be stated as well as the date of retrieval.

Referring to a web page with a named author:

Author's last name, initial/s (year, month date). Title of page or document. Possibly: *Title of website/publisher*. [Possibly: description of message]. Web address/URL [Retrieved yy-mm-dd].

Example:
Dunigan, J. (2015, July 29). The most important lesson in leadership from the Undercover Boss. *The practical leader*. [Personal website]. http://thepracticalleader.com/the-most-important-lesson-in-leadership-from-the-undercover-boss/ [Retrieved 2015-08-13].

Smarty, A. (2021, November 1). 3 Pre-Launch Steps To Make Your Content Project Stronger [Web blog post]. *The content marketing institute.* https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2021/11/pre-launch-content-project [Retrieved 2021-11-01].

If a specific author/originator to the particular webpage is missing, cite the organization behind the website as author (and also as the title/publisher of the page). Example:

SSAB (2020, November 13). SSAB bekräftar diskussioner gällande Tata Steel Europe Netherlands. *SSAB.* https://www.ssab.se/Nyheter/2020/11/SSAB-bekrftar-diskussioner-gllande-Tata-Steel-Europe-Netherlands [Retrieved 2021-11-02].

If the specific date when the page was published is not evident, state only the year. If year is also missing, state n.d. which means "no date". Example:

HUMlab (n.d.). About Humlab. *HUMlab.* https://www.umu.se/en/humlab/about-humlab/ [Retrieved 2021-11-02].

12.18 Films, videos, etcetera

Feature film or similar:
Title of the film (Year of distribution). [type of medium] Director. Country: studio.

Bananas (2009). [film] Directed by Fredrik Gertten. Sweden**:** WG Film AB.

Video clip:
Author or Organization (year of distribution, day, month). *Title of the video clip* [Type of medium] Link. [Date the clip was retrieved].

TEDx Talks (2019, March 6). *The surprising truth in how to be a great leader* [Video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW_PN3BDa0A [Retrieved 2021-11-02].

Wolters, M. (2019, December 3). *Situational Factors That Affect Consumer Behavior* [Video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-gvjYk3Nek [Retrieved 2021-11-02].

12.19 Radio, podcasts and similar audio posts

Speaker (year). *Title* [type of medium] Publisher. Link

Kan, J. (2021). *Finding Fulfillment in Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders* [Audio podcast] Stanford University, Stanford eCorner. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/justin-kan-twitch-finding-fulfillment-in-entrepreneurship/id80867514?i=1000537749637

Morgonpasset (2020). *Rekord i trumvirvel, tech-entreprenören Johannes Schildt och låna sjuka grejer av grannen-jao* [Radio program] Sveriges Radio, P3. https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/1447139

12.20 Social media

If the social media post does not have a title, the content is used (up to the first 20 words). Keep hashtags and links and apply emojis, alternatively described in brackets, for example, [smiley face emoji].

Sender (Year, month, day). *Title/beginning of post* [Type of text] Source. Link

Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics (2021, October 7). *Nu har nomineringen till Umeågalan öppnat!* [Post] Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/handelshogskolan.umea

Hernandez, D.H. (2021, October 3). *Re: Congratulations to Stanford neuroscientist and neuro-oncologist Michelle Monje* [Comment] Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/stanford

12.21 Apps

Developer (Year). *Name of app* (Version) [Mobile app]. [Retrieved date].

University APPs (2019). *How do I find my way around campus?* (Version 2.1.3) [Mobile app]. [Retrieved November 1, 2021].

12.22 Pictures, photographs

Photographer's (artist's) last name, initial/s (year). Title. [type of medium] (information about collection or similar).

Van Gogh, V. (1885). Autumn Landscape. [painting] (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England).

12.23 Using figures and images from other sources

It is not allowed to use copyrighted figures and images without permission. In such cases you should send a request to use the figure.

If permission is granted, this should be clearly stated after the source has been given. A standard phrase is: *reprinted with permission* or *reprinted by permission*.

Appendix 1 – Literature suggestions

To find basic methodological books, use search words such as business research methods, social science methods, research methods, and so on. If you use quantitative surveys, you should of course search for literature specializing in surveys, if you use observations you should use literature specializing on observations, and so on.

The list below contains some examples of mostly older and classic literature on methods. The books are likely to exist in newer editions.

Overarching issues

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality.* Penguin Books.

Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1987). S*ociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis.* Gower: Aldershot.

Caláis, M., & Smirchich, L. (1999). Past postmodernism? Reflections and tentative directions. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 649-671.

Chalmers, A.F. (1982). *What is This Thing Called Science?* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Drazin, R., Glynn, M.A., & Kazanjian, R.K. (1999). Multilevel theorizing about creativity in organizations: A sensemaking perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(2), 286-307.

Giddens, A. (1976). *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretive Sociologies*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.

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Appendix 2 – Example of a reference list

Overall instructions for compiling a reference list

- All references used in the thesis text should be included in the reference list.
- The list includes all types of sources, printed as well as electronic.
- The list only includes source that were referenced in the text, and only sources the authors have read.
- The references are ordered alphabetically based on the first author's last name. It should be a *single* list (i.e. without subheadings).

Example of reference list in a thesis:

Reference list

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Marklund, A.G. (2009). *Interview about the development of the printing industry during the 2000s.* [interview] (personal communication, January 26, 2009).

[10] A list of personal communication references is only relevant if the respondents could be referred to by their personal name in the thesis.

Appendix 3 – Societal and ethical aspects

Ethical/social considerations, key words exemplifying what could be discussed:

- Ethical principles for research.

Respondents rights, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality. Academic writing/independent text processing. Accuracy, transparency, objectivity in the research process. Trustworthiness, honesty, conformity to rules and laws. Openness when the study is carried out in collaboration with a firm/organization. Utilization of collected data only for thesis purposes.

- Choice of topic/research problem and/or implications/conclusions:

Fairness in treatment of different stakeholders. Vulnerability of different stakeholders. Consequences for the society/public and/or the natural environment. Balancing short-term economic gains with long-term survival of the firm and of stakeholders. Economic vs. environmental considerations/consequences. Profit versus moral principles in marketing/decision making/management/finance, etc. Issues of power, domination, oppression. Transparency and justice in financial reporting. Consumer rights and responsibilities. Globalization. Workforce diversity, equality, discrimination. Sustainability in investments, supply chain management, or business modelling, etc. Corporate social responsibility and/or corporate cititizenship.

Literature on social/ethical issues in business and in research:

Belz, F-M., & Peattie, K. (2012). *Sustainability Marketing: A Global Perspective*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

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Note! There is obviously a vast amount of literature within ethics, sustainability and research ethics, so the above is merely a brief presentation of texts.