



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Thesis manual

Thesis writing in Business Administration

Table of contents

1.	<i>The thesis process</i>	2
1.1	Finding a thesis partner.....	2
1.2	The role of the supervisor	2
1.3	The supervision process	2
1.4	Writing on commission	3
1.5	Ethical guidelines for thesis work.....	4
1.6	Work-in progress seminars	4
2.	<i>Oppositions and Final seminar</i>	5
2.1	Oppositions.....	5
2.2	Before defending the thesis at the final seminar.....	6
2.3	The thesis seminar	6
2.4	Grading.....	7
2.5	The grading process.....	7
3.	<i>The thesis structure</i>	8
3.1	Introductory layout.....	8
3.2	The main body of the thesis	8
4.	<i>Language and formatting</i>	11
4.1	Headings.....	11
4.2	Layout, font, etcetera	11
4.3	Page numbering.....	12
4.4	Table of contents	12
4.5	Figures	12
4.6	Tables	12
4.7	Referencing.....	12



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

1. The thesis process

A **course introduction** for all thesis students will be held the first morning of the course. At the beginning of each semester (or, for 30 hp theses, at the end of the previous semester), Thesis Course coordinators will invite students to an information meeting regarding thesis writing.

1.1 Finding a thesis partner

Team composition:

- Degree projects and master level theses are co-authored by two students.
- Bachelor-level theses are written in groups of three.
- It is not allowed for co-authors to write at different levels.
- Students are strongly encouraged to write within one discipline (e.g., marketing, management, entrepreneurship, finance, accounting).
- Master's students **must** choose a topic within their program's discipline.

Form a team early: Start as soon as possible to ensure that you get a partner.

- To help you find a partner - enter your research interest in the database and search for other students with similar interests:
<https://www.hh.umu.se/forms/cas/thesis/researchinterest.php>.
- Once your team is formed, register it here:
<https://www.hh.umu.se/forms/cas/thesis/thesisteam.php>.

Students who have registered a team will be assigned a supervisor by the Thesis Course coordinator. Students and supervisors cannot make private agreements on supervision.

1.2 The role of the supervisor

The supervisor acts primarily as a discussion partner and sounding board.

The supervisor will:

- Coach you and your co-author to set realistic and achievable goals.
- Ensure you work independently.
- Provide feedback on your ideas and choices rather than prescribing exact solutions.
- Ask critical questions and provide guidance.
- Supervisors do **not** proofread your thesis.

Keep the expected learning outcomes (ELOs) in mind throughout the process. The supervisor may indicate if your work does not align with these goals, but the grading teacher and examiner make the final evaluation.

1.3 The supervision process

Your **supervisor will invite you to an initial supervision meeting** where you discuss collaboration and your research idea. This includes:

- Ways of communication and expectations.
- When and how to hand in the material before the meetings.
- How to book supervision meetings.
- A comprehensive plan for the semester.
- Your research idea for the thesis. Ideally, this discussion could be based on your proposal.



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ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Important: All thesis courses are **campus-based**, and you are expected to attend supervision meetings and seminars on campus.

Working in Teams: You **must work on your thesis in Microsoft Teams** so the supervisor can follow your progress. This includes working documents, literature sources, and your data. The supervisor will create a team for you using your **Umu-ID**. You are expected to use Office 365 (M365), provided for free to all Umeå University students, see www.umu.se/en/student/help-and-support/it-services/software-and-services/email-and-microsoft-365/

Before the first meeting:

- Identify different topics which you find interesting and suitable for a thesis study.
- Prepare a study proposal of 500 to 800 words outlining your preferred idea/ideas to discuss with your supervisor, as suggested during the introductory meeting (about one month before the course starts).

Supervision requirements:

- At least **three meetings** to discuss drafts of different parts of the thesis, **in addition to** seminars.
- Meetings are scheduled in advance.
- Submit material in good time before the meeting (as agreed with your supervisor).

Note: Your supervisor **must approve** your data collection instrument and the consent form/information before you start collecting data.

Responsibilities: Thesis work is an **independent project**. You and your partner are responsible for:

- Driving the work forward.
- Taking initiative.
- Preparing for supervision.
- Working towards meeting the ELOs.

If problems arise: Contact your supervisor first. If the issue persists, contact the Thesis Course Coordinators or, thirdly the Director of Studies.

Supervision period: Supervision is guaranteed only during the semester of your first registration on the thesis course. If you register but decide not to write your thesis that semester, notify your supervisor and study advisor immediately.

1.4 Writing on commission

Writing a thesis on commission can be rewarding, as it offers practical relevance and business contacts. However, it often requires extra effort because the commissioner's task may not easily translate into an academic research question. Remember: the primary goal is to meet the ELOs for the course. Note that writing on commission is not a valid reason for single-authorship.

For theses written on commission, the supervisor will discuss how the expected learning outcomes (ELOs) can be reconciled with the commission task. Their responsibility is to advise on academic standards and ELOs – not on the specifics of the commission.

Key considerations:

- **Clear agreements:** Define what is feasible within the scope of a thesis, what resources the company will provide, and what they expect in return.
- **Confidentiality:** Consult with your supervisor before signing any confidentiality agreement. Such agreements apply only between you and the company – not the University or your supervisor. In general, we advise against signing any non-disclosure agreements.



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

- **Public access:** The company must understand that once the thesis is graded, it becomes a publicly available document. Sensitive details (e.g., company name) can be pseudo-anonymized to protect confidentiality and integrity.
- **Supervisor access:** Your supervisor must always have full access to all data used in the thesis.
- **Registration in DiVA:** If your thesis is commissioned, this must be indicated when uploading the final thesis in DiVA, after grading.

Further information and current opportunities are available on the thesis Canvas site, including links to external resources.

1.5 Ethical guidelines for thesis work

Your thesis must follow established ethical guidelines for social science research. Key ethical principles include:

- **Informed consent:** Participants in the study must receive sufficient information about their participation to agree voluntarily to take part. Use the **template** provided in Canvas to ensure consent from your respondents.
- **Respect and integrity:** Studies should be conducted and reported so that participants do not experience harm or inconvenience.
- **Anonymity and confidentiality:** Promises made to participants must be honored.
- **Transparency:** Disclose research motives and any commercial or other interests.
- **Honesty:** Do not use deception in data collection or reporting.
- **Compliance:** Follow laws, rules and regulations regarding data use (e.g., GDPR, Swedish Personal Data Act).

Although these rules may seem obvious to many, there might be some tricky situations, and if you are unsure about ethical issues, consult 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/>.

On the thesis Canvas site, you find detailed instructions on academic integrity, and policies on plagiarism, attempts to deceive and the usage of AI.

Important notes:

- A thesis is an **independent project**. Both authors jointly own the material and share equal responsibility for the entire text and workload.
- All theses must be submitted to **the system for plagiarism check** before the seminar.
- After an approved grade, your thesis will become a public document, available online. Consider pseudo-anonymizing companies or respondents where appropriate. Inform participants that the thesis will be publicly accessible.
- Carefully review the information on GDPR on the Canvas course site.

1.6 Work-in progress seminars

The 30 ECTS Degree Project and 30 ECTS Master's Thesis (2nd year) courses include **three mandatory (examined)** work-in-progress (WIP) seminars. For the 15 ECTS Bachelor thesis course there is one obligatory work-in-progress seminar.

- **Purpose:** WIP seminars support the thesis writing process by providing feedback and guidance at key stages.
- **Scheduling:** Each supervisor sets the date for the seminars and provides specific seminar instructions.
- **Attendance:** WIP seminars are **mandatory**, and **personal attendance of both authors** is required.



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

- See the course syllabus for details on the contents of each seminar.

2. Oppositions and Final seminar

The thesis course concludes with a final thesis seminar where your thesis is discussed. Each student will:

- Defend their own thesis at one seminar.
- Act as main opponents at another seminar.
- Act as side-opponent at a third seminar.

2.1 Oppositions

Every thesis student **must act as a main opponent and side-opponent of a thesis at the same level and ECTS credits.**

Recruiting main opponents:

- Each thesis writing pair or trio are **responsible for recruiting main opponent/s** for their thesis seminar.
- Recruit early to avoid difficulties.
- Do **not** exchange theses for main opposition with students supervised by the same supervisor or those who attended the same WIP seminars.
- You can advertise for a main opponent - check existing posts first.

Recommended approach:

- **Organize the main opponent exchange in groups of three (or four) theses;**
 - A critiques B, B critiques C, and C critiques A.
 - This assures coverage even if one thesis is delayed.
 - Be prepared to include additional if needed.
- You do **not** recruit side-opponents – they select theses themselves in the database.

The written opposition:

- Templates for the written main- and side-oppositions are available on Canvas - **use them!** On the Canvas site you will also find instructions for the oppositions.

Main opposition

- Includes **oral** opposition at the thesis seminar and **individually written** opposition.
- Oral main opposition is usually done by a pair of opponents.
- Main opponents lead the thesis seminar from start to finish.

Side-opposition

- Includes **individually written** side-opposition and **active** participation in the corresponding thesis seminar.
- Complements the main opposition orally at the seminar.

Grading

- Both main and side-oppositions are graded “Pass” or “Fail” individually based on both the written assignment and the performance at the seminar (active participation is mandatory).
- Absence results in Fail regardless of reason.
- If the opposition is graded as Fail, you must complete a new opposition on a different thesis in accordance with the seminar supervisor's instructions.



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UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

- After grading, the seminar supervisor reports the grade to the Student Administration Office. Check your grade via the “[Student web](#)” (ladok for students) rather than contacting the seminar supervisor or the Student Administration Office.

2.2 Before defending the thesis at the final seminar

The final thesis seminar must be scheduled during the specified **thesis seminar periods**, announced on the thesis Canvas site. Normally, there is **one seminar period at the end of each semester** and **one extra period during the following semester** for delayed theses.

Deadlines and readiness

- Authors must complete the thesis within the set deadlines, including any revisions from the supervisor.
- All **mandatory WIP seminars** must be passed before the final seminar.
- The supervisor will provide **written advice** on whether your thesis is ready for the seminar or should be delayed.

If you cannot finish on time

If the thesis cannot be completed within the semester, it **may – if ready-** be defended in the next seminar period in **agreement with the supervisor**.

Language

- If the thesis is written in English, the seminar will be held in English.
- All **Master’s programs** and the **International Business and Economic program** require that the thesis and the seminars are in English.
- These students must also choose **English-written theses** for their opposition.

Scheduling and Uploading

- Schedule the seminar with your supervisor and main opponents.
- Once the date and time are agreed upon, the supervisor will book a room and inform the authors.
- Upload your thesis and provide:
 - Supervisor’s name.
 - Names of main opponents.
 - Date, time, and room for the seminar.
- After uploading, the Student Administration Office will publish the thesis in the database for side-opponents (during office hours).
- E-mail your thesis to the main opponents and supervisor when you upload the thesis.
- Submit the thesis to plagiarism check.

Deadline for uploading:

- **30-credit theses:** Upload at least **10 working days** before the seminar. (*See Canvas for specific deadlines*)
- **15-credit theses:** Upload at least **7 working days** before the seminar. (*See Canvas for specific deadlines*)

Note: Thesis will only be available to side-opponents (max four side opponents) after publication by the Student Administration Office.

2.3 The thesis seminar

Layout of the seminar:



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UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

- The supervisor opens the seminar, welcomes participants, and confirms which opponents are present.
- Main opponents lead the seminar and conduct a **critical examination** of the thesis.
 - The review should cover the **entire work**, discussing strengths, weaknesses, and suggesting improvements.
 - The opposition concludes with a discussion on whether the thesis meets the **expected learning outcomes (ELOs)**. (*See detailed opposition instructions on Canvas*)
- The supervisor comments on the seminar and opposition.
- Once the opponents have left, the supervisor provides feedback to the authors on revisions.

After the Seminar

- Authors have **two working days** to revise the manuscript and send the final version to the supervisor who submits the thesis for grading.

2.4 Grading

A thesis is graded based on how well it meets the **Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs)** stated in the course syllabus for the specific thesis type.

- ELOs and grading criteria differs by **level** (Bachelor, Degree Project, Magister, Master) and **scope** (15 or 30 credits).
- The ELOs describe the **minimum requirements for a “Pass” grade**.
→ **Study them carefully and reflect on how your work meets the ELOs.**

2.5 The grading process

All theses in Business Administration are graded by **grading teachers** and an **examiner**, all experienced supervisors from different sub-disciplines. The thesis can be graded as Pass, Pass with distinction or Fail.

If a thesis fails

- If the thesis does **not meet a ELOs**, it is graded **Fail**.
- Authors will receive an email with revision instructions.
- Revisions must be completed within **four weeks** (semester weeks only).
- After revisions, the thesis is reassessed.
 - If all ELOs are met → a Pass grade is assigned.
 - If not → the thesis is graded as **Fail**.

Grade notification and publication instructions

- The Student Administration Office emails the grade to the authors.
- Instructions for **electronic publication in DiVA** are included.
- When the information in DiVA is entered correctly and the thesis is uploaded, the grade is reported in **Ladok**.

Final course grade

The total grade for the thesis course is reported in Ladok **only when all examinations** are marked as passed:

- Thesis.
- Main opposition.
- Side opposition.
- WIP seminars (for Bachelor thesis, Degree project 30 cr and Master thesis 30 cr).



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

(See your syllabus for details about examinations)

Course evaluation:

1–2 weeks after the course ends, you will receive a **course evaluation by email**. Please respond—your feedback helps improve the thesis courses.

3. The thesis structure

A thesis 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.

3.1 Introductory layout

The title page: Every thesis must begin with a title page that includes:

- University, department, course and degree program.
- Title of the thesis (avoid overly long or complex titles; subtitles are allowed).
- Authors' names (listed alphabetically by last name).
- Supervisor's name.
- Semester of the thesis period.
- **Use the official templates for the front and back cover available on the thesis Canvas site.**

Summary: The summary follows the title page and should:

- Provide an overview of the entire thesis, including purpose, methods, key findings, and conclusions.
- Be comprehensive yet concise (approximately 350 - 400 words, one page).
- Be written so it can stand alone and serve as the abstract for DiVA publication.

Table of contents: Create the table of contents using your word processor's built-in tools. After the table of contents, include:

- List of appendices.
- List of figures and tables (if applicable).

3.2 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.

Introductory chapter: The purpose of the chapter is present the practical and theoretical background of the chosen research problem and position the thesis within a relevant theoretical field. It should clearly outline and delimit the focus of the study, state the purpose and formulate the research question(s). These elements must be logically connected and well-argued.

An introductory chapter may cover:

- **Practical motivation:** The practical reasons for choosing the topic.
- **Connection to theory:** Linking the practical problem to a theoretical field and explain the relevance.
- **Background and topicality:** Clarifying why the subject is timely and briefly summarize previous research to show where your thesis fits.
- **Positioning:** Indicating how your study contributes to the theoretical field.
- **Key concepts:** Definitions can be included if necessary for understanding subsequent



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ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

chapters. Full explanations belong in the theoretical section.

Theory chapter: The theory chapter presents previous academic research relevant to your topic and positions your thesis within that theoretical field. It should not merely summarize existing knowledge but critically discuss concepts and models in relation to your research focus.

Key principles:

- **Dependent on purpose and approach:**
 - If testing hypotheses: the chapter should lead to well-founded hypotheses.
 - If generating theory: explain how your study relates to existing theories.
 - If using theory as an analytical framework: clarify how it will guide the analysis of empirical data.
- **Argumentation:** A strong theory chapter includes your own reasoning and interpretations, connecting prior research to your thesis topic. Avoid the misconception that this chapter should only present others' work.
 - **Literature:** You are responsible for finding relevant sources within Business Administration. Prioritize **scientific articles** over course literature. Use academic databases and systematic keyword searches. For databases, see Umeå University Library. <http://www.ub.umu.se/en/search/articles-databases>.

Method chapter: This chapter explains and justifies the research approach, design, data collection, and analysis methods. It should allow readers to understand and critically assess your methodological choices.

Key principles:

- **Purpose and rationale:** Present what you have done and why. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of your chosen approach and compare it with alternative methods, explaining why these were not selected.
- **Connection to previous research:** Advanced-level theses should reference methods used in earlier studies on similar topics. Avoid relying solely on general methods textbooks; instead, use scientific articles and specialized methodological literature.
- **Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Authors **must include** a statement clarifying whether or not AI tools were used during the thesis process. If AI was used, specify **which tools** were involved, **how it was used**, and provide a **justification** explaining why AI was used and how academic integrity and student independence were maintained. If AI was **not** used, clearly state this in the methods chapter.
 - Please note that your supervisor may request more detailed information regarding any use of AI.
 - For guidance on appropriate use of AI – see the *Academic integrity, cheating, plagiarism, and AI* page in Canvas.

The chapter may cover:

- Scientific approach (e.g., research philosophy, hypothesis testing, theory generation).
- Research design (e.g., case study, interviews, survey).
- Literature search strategy and source criticism.
- Data collection: sampling approach, who was included, and how access was obtained.
- Data quality: discussing missing responses and their impact.
- Operationalization: explaining how theoretical concepts were translated into interview guides, questionnaires, experiments, or observation protocols.
- Analytical methods: describing and justifying your analysis techniques, including limitations.
- Review of the quality criteria (e.g., validity, reliability).



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ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

- Ethical considerations: addressing informed consent, confidentiality, and other relevant issues.

The empirical data/ results chapter: This chapter should present the empirical findings in a way that aligns with the study's design and theoretical framework. The structure must help readers follow your argument and see how the data supports your analysis.

Key principles:

- Consistency: The presentation should reflect the methodological approach described in the methods chapter.
- Selectivity: Include only data that is relevant to your research questions and analysis. Always indicate the source of the data.
- Logical flow: Organize the material so that the reader can easily identify key points and understand the connection between data and interpretation.

Advice for presentation:

- Qualitative studies:
 - Use quotations from interviews to illustrate findings and make the text engaging.
 - Avoid overloading the chapter with quotations – use them selectively.
 - Tables can be helpful for summarizing information and highlighting patterns.
- Quantitative studies:
 - Present descriptive data and analysis results clearly, using graphs and tables.
 - Comment on the data rather than simply repeating what is shown in tables or figures.
 - Ensure that visualizations are easy to interpret and support your argument.

Analysis/discussion chapter: In this chapter, the empirical findings are interpreted and connected to the research question. It should not repeat raw data or theoretical content but instead provide a clear, systematic discussion that follows the methodological approach outlined in the methods chapter.

Key principles:

- **Structure and clarity:** Organize the analysis so readers can see how findings answer the research questions.
- **Consistency:** Ensure the analytical approach aligns with the methods chapter.
- **Depth:** Identify patterns, relationships, or causal connections. Compare interpretations if the study aims to describe phenomena.
- **Integration with literature:** Explicitly reference earlier studies and discuss how your findings relate to existing research.

The Conclusions Chapter: This chapter revisits the purpose and research questions, explaining how they have been addressed. It should:

- Summarize the most important and interesting findings.
- Clarify the study's contribution to existing knowledge.
- Avoid vague statements like “this study contributes to theory”, explain how.
- Include recommendations for practitioners under a separate heading.
- Discuss societal and/or ethical implications.
- Reflect on limitations of the study.
- Suggest areas for future research (empirical, theoretical, methodological).



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UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

4. Language and formatting

The language in a thesis must be clear, correct, and academic. Supervisors are not responsible for proofreading, and theses with poor language must be corrected before grading. Frequent spelling or grammatical errors will prevent a thesis from receiving a “Pass” grade.

Key guidelines:

- Use precise academic language. Include theoretical concepts (e.g., isomorphism, cognitive dissonance) when relevant but avoid unnecessary complexity.
- Write as simply as possible while maintaining clarity and precision.
- Avoid spoken language, slang, or informal expressions.
- If writing in English, choose British or American English and use it consistently throughout (citations remain unchanged).

Tips for clear writing:

- Make the key message of each paragraph explicit.
- Avoid long sentences and repetitive wording.
- Use spell-check – even for drafts.
- Revise multiple times to improve quality.
- Exchange proofreading with peers.

Support services: Umeå University Library’s [Academic Resource Centre](#) offers writing tutorials and lectures (more information can be found on the library websites). These resources can help improve academic writing skills.

4.1 Headings

Each chapter should be divided into sections using subheadings and paragraphs. Use no more than three heading levels: 1, 1.1, and 1.1.1. The use of Word’s headings will make it easy to create a correct table of content.

Important rules:

- Use subheadings only when there is more than one subsection.
- Third-level headings (e.g., 5.4.1) should only be used if a corresponding section (e.g., 5.4.2) follows. If not, the second level heading (5.4) is sufficient.

4.2 Layout, font, etcetera

Page layout and formatting guidelines:

- Page format: A4.
- Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt.
- Line spacing: single.
- Margins:
 - Top and bottom margins: 2,5 cm.
 - Left and right margins: 3 cm.
- Footnotes: 10pt, single line spacing.
- Headings: Font of your choice.
- Paragraphs:
 - Separate paragraphs with a blank line.
 - No indentation.



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ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
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4.3 Page numbering

- It is advisable to use “hard” pagination, (Insert, Break, Page break)
- The summary and the table of contents use Roman numerals (if numbered at all).
- If the front page is included in numbering, the number should **not** be visible.
- From the introduction chapter onwards, use Arabic numerals, starting 1 on the first page of the introduction.
- When exporting electronically:
 - Summary, table of contents, acknowledgements, first chapter and reference list should always begin on a **right-hand page**.
 - Each new chapter starts at **the top of a page**.

4.4 Table of contents

- Include up to three heading levels.
- Do not list the summary or table of contents itself.
- Appendixes are listed after the table of contents, e.g.:
 - Appendix 1: Interview guide.
 - Appendix 2: Introduction letter to respondents.
- If the thesis includes tables and/or figures, add:
 - List of tables and List of figures., showing item number, title and page number.

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

- If many abbreviations are used, include an alphabetical list of abbreviations after the table of contents.

4.5 Figures

- Figures include graphs, diagrams, photos, and illustrations.
- Number figures consecutively with Arabic numerals (not by chapter).
- Caption format:
 - Place **below** the figure.
 - Starts with “Figure X” followed by title/text.
- If based on external data, cite the source and include it in the reference list.

4.6 Tables

- Tables present data systematically for clarity.
- Number tables consecutively with Arabic numerals.
- Caption format:
 - Placed **above** the table.
 - Includes a descriptive title.
- Large tables (spanning several pages) should be placed in an appendix.

4.7 Referencing

Referencing serves several key purposes:

1. **Acknowledgement:** Recognizes others’ contributions and allows readers to verify interpretations.
2. **Credibility:** Supports your arguments and enables readers to explore topics further.



UMEÅ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

3. Academic skill: Demonstrates your ability to independently search, use and relate to previous research.

General rule: All claims should be supported by references unless they are considered common knowledge. Note that there are three basic formats for referencing: summarizing and paraphrasing (using your own words) and quoting from the literature.

Referencing style:

- Use the Harvard system for in-text references, **but include page numbers.**
- The reference list builds on the recommendations by the American Psychological Association (APA).
- If using reference management software (e.g., Endnote Web), ensure settings match the requirements stated below.

Reference list principles:

- Include **all sources referenced** in the text – and only those you have read.
- Cover **all types of sources** (printed and electronic).
- Arrange references **alphabetically** by the first author's last name in a single list (no subheadings).
- Insert a **blank line** between references.
- Include DOI-numbers.

For detailed instructions, see the Reference Manual.