

Master's Project Manual

Department of Semiotics

Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics

2022

Master's project (15 ECTS) is an applied or creative research project dedicated to solving a specific task from a semiotic perspective. Master's project consists of two parts: i) practical solution and ii) theoretical-methodological argumentation. The practical part is an independent whole whose form and scope correspond to the aim of the project. The main body of the text in the theoretical-methodological part from the introduction (included) until the section on references is 27000-36000 characters (with spaces) or 15-20 standard pages (1800 characters per page).

The Master's project aims to encourage students to employ the skills and knowledge acquired during their Master's studies to analyse and solve practical problems. The practical part can consist in an applied analysis, a curated exhibition, a film, a photo essay, a translation, etc.

The project's theoretical part may be written in Estonian, Russian, or English, or, upon an agreement with the Department, in another language; the project must contain a summary in a language that is different from that of the project (in case of a project in a language other than Estonian the summary must be in Estonian). The Master's project should follow to the criteria found in the Department of Semiotics' Guide for formatting written papers.

In consultations with the supervisor, the student chooses the topic of the project according to the student's academic or professional interests and the supervisor's competencies; in addition, the student chooses courses (15 ECTS) that enhance their expertise in the chosen field of specialization and support the project.

1. Structure of the Master's project and its plan

1.1. Structure of the plan of the Master's project

The plan of the Master's project (about 5 pp. in length) is defended during the third semester and must include the following components:

- the title of the project
- the name of the supervisor
- explanation and delimitation of the research topic
- the objective of the project, the planned approach, and expected results
- materials and methodology
- an introduction to the structure of the project as well as an explanation of it (choice of chapters or sections, the expected scope of the work, etc.)
- a list of references or works cited.

1.2. Parts of the Master's project

The Master's project consists of two parts: i) the practical part and ii) the theoretical-methodological argumentation.

(i) The practical part consists in the applied or creative work done to achieve the aims of the project; its form and size are in line with the scope of the project. The practical part of the project must be accessible to the public or at least to the people whom it concerns, as well as the reviewer and the committee; as well as re-presentable in a suitable form. If the project is meant for a wide audience, it should also include a dissemination plan.

(ii) The theoretical-methodological part includes the following parts.

The **introduction** explains the choice of the topic, sets the objectives for the project, describes the problem focused on, introduces and justifies the structure of the project.

Theoretical explanation of the project involves the theoretical explanation of the chosen topic, an overview of previous research and of the most important applied work done on the topic.

Introduction of methods applied and analytic discussion on their application.

Reflection on the process and the results assesses the suitability of the selected approach to the project's aims, discusses how the practical as well as the theoretical-methodological parts correspond to the initial aim and what results can be drawn from this; outlines alternative perspectives to the objective and sets the results in a wider context.

The **conclusion** gives a compact overview of the Master's project as a whole, mainly concentrating on the initial problem and its solutions and foregrounding the new knowledge acquired, and involving further perspectives, practical suggestions

References or **works cited** are presented as a list of bibliographic data on all the sources used in the project. A coherent formatting must be used in compiling the list (see the Guide for formatting written papers).

The **summary** is a very brief overview (2000 characters) of the work; it is written in a language other than that of the project (in the case of a project in a language other than Estonian, the summary must be in Estonian). The summary is not a translation of the conclusion, but a coherent overview of the project's introduction, body, and conclusion. It includes an overview of the objectives, research problems, conclusions, results, etc. The title of the project should also be provided in the translation.

A signed license giving the consent on part of the author to allow the University to reproduce the Master's project (with the purpose of electronic preservation of the project as well as electronic publication of it through the University's web-based environments) is added as a separate document appearing at the end of the Master's project.

An opinion on the work process and results from the institution or person that has commissioned the work or an extra-university supervisor can be added to the project.

2. Defence Procedure of the Master's Project

2.1. Stages of the preparation and defence of the Master's Project

2nd semester: presentation of the topic in the Master's seminar

3rd semester: confirmation of the research topic and supervisor; defence of the plan of the Master's project

4th semester: a preliminary defence of the Master's project a month before the final defence; final defence of the Master's project.

2.2. The (primary) supervisor of the Master's project must be a member of the academic staff of the department; the supervisor is chosen by the student. It is possible to have additional supervisors, who may also be doctoral students or persons related to the field from outside of the university. The project's topic and the supervisors are approved by the council of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics six months prior to the defence of the project.

2.3. During the defence of the plan of the Master's project (3rd semester) the student is expected to give an overview of his or her research so far. A written plan (about five pages in length) must be submitted three days prior to the defence. The defence of the plan consists of a 10-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute discussion. The primary purpose of this defence is to give feedback as well as advice for the future. This means that the plan of the Master's project may contain questions and uncertainties. Prior to the defence, the plan must be discussed with the supervisor.

2.4. Preliminary defence of the Master's project occurs a month before the actual defence. The project is accepted for pre-defence at the discretion of the supervisor. The student must submit the project as a .pdf and a .docx file one week prior to the pre-defence at the latest. For the pre-defence the body of the project must be complete, so that the reviewer and the committee are able to gain an overview of the project on which to give constructive feedback. Minor parts of the project (such as the introduction, the conclusion or a subchapter) may remain in outline. The primary purpose of the pre-defence is to find areas that need changing. The procedure at the pre-defence is similar to the actual defence, but the author's overview of the project is brief and the reviewer provides suggestions for improvements also in a written form. No grade is assigned to the Master's project at the pre-defence, but it is determined whether the Master's project is allowed to proceed to the defence.

2.5. The precondition for being allowed to the project defence is successful completion of all other study subjects (courses), and passing the preliminary defence. The Master's project is allowed to the project defence at the discretion of the supervisor.

2.6. The dates of the project defence and the membership of the board are confirmed by the head of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics at least two months prior to the actual defence. The defence board consists of at least three members. If the board includes the supervisor of a Master's project to be defended, the supervisor shall have the right to comment, but not to vote.

2.7. The reviewer of the Master's project is appointed by the defence board. The reviewer must hold at least a Master's degree and must be competent in the given field of research.

2.8. The student shall submit the Master's project — formatted according to the requirements — as a .pdf file through the online environment for theses submission, and as a hard copy (one hardbound copy) to the secretary of the department one week before the date of the defence at the latest.

2.9. Following a successful defence the bound copy of the Master's project will be preserved in the library of the Institute. The Master's project is published electronically via the web-based environments of the University of Tartu (exceptions for electronic publishing are regulated in the Study regulations of UT).

2.10. Preferably three days prior to the project defence, and no later than one working day prior to the defence, the reviewer submits a written review to both the board as well as the author of the project. The review must elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of the Master's project, characterise the project in terms of both form and content, and serve as the basis for a subsequent discussion with the author.

2.11. The defence is public. In the interest of protecting personal data, state secrets or business secrets, technological secrets, and so on, the Vice Dean may — after receiving an application offering valid justifications on the part of the writer — declare the project defence a closed procedure. Both the supervisor as well as the reviewer take part in the defence, except in cases in which they are not able to participate due to compelling reasons. In the absence of the reviewer and/or the supervisor from the defence, the chair of the committee is to read out their opinion(s).

2.12. The main stages of the defence are: (1) a presentation on the part of the project author, briefly introducing the practical part of the project and the main positions of its theoretical-methodological part (up to 15 minutes); (2) the reviewer's assessment of the project, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses; (3) the reviewer's questions to the author, followed by an academic debate between the author and the reviewer; (4) questions and comments on the part of the board members and other people present at the defence; (5) the final statements of the author; (6) a closed discussion of the board and decision regarding the final grade. If necessary, the supervisor will be given the right to speak or comment.

2.13. The final grade of the Master's project shall be decided upon by the project defence board, who will take into account the assessment from the reviewer, the assessments of the board members, as well as the opinion of the supervisor. The defence board has the right to decide on a grade only if more than a half of the board members are present.

2.14. The result of the defence of the Master's project is made known after the finalisation of the official defence protocol, but no later than one workday after the actual project defence.

2.15. A second defence of the Master's project is possible only in the following semester, at the earliest.