

Master's Project Manual

Department of Semiotics
Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics
University of Tartu
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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 three parts: 1) practical solution, 2) theoretical-methodological argumentation, and 3) documentation of the process of the practical work. 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 20-30 standard pages (36 000-54 000 characters, with spaces).

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 is written English, or, upon an agreement with the Department, in another language. The Master's project follows the criteria found in the Department of Semiotics' Guide for formatting written papers.

The following timeline provides an overview of important milestones:

1st semester: Finding a topic for research

September: the instructors will introduce their own topics of research
Individual meetings with individual faculty members

2nd semester: Finding a supervisor

Finding a supervisor and agreements with them
Preparing research plans together with the supervisor
May: presentation of the research topic in the master's seminar

3rd semester: Preparations for the final project

November: Official confirmation of the topic and supervisor
3 days before the presentation – submitting the project plan
November: Presentation of the project plan

4th semester: Finishing the project

10 days before the pre-defence: presenting the project to the supervisor
7 days before the pre-defence: submitting the project

End of April: Pre-defence

10 days before the final defence: presenting the project to the supervisor

7 days before the final defence: submitting the project

1 working day before the final defence: the reviewer submits their review

End of May: Final defence

The grade will be announced within a working day after the final defence

1. The topic of the Project, and finding a supervisor

During the 2nd semester the student finds a responsible supervisor for their project from the Department of Semiotics, and if so agreed with the supervisor, also an additional supervisor, who can be a doctoral student or a person with relevant expertise from outside the university.

The topic of the master's project is decided upon by the student, in collaboration with the supervisor, based on their academic and/or professional interests and in correspondence with the competency of the supervisor.

The student will choose, in cooperation with the supervisor, additional courses (15 ECTS) that enhance their expertise in the chosen field of specialization and support the project.

Cooperation between the supervisor(s) and the student is based on the good practices of supervision of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Tartu.

The supervisor(s) of the master's project are confirmed by the head of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics six months before the final defence, and the topic of the project is confirmed at the meeting of the council of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics.

2. The Structure and presentation of the Master's Project Plan

The plan of the Master's project (about five pages in length) is to be presented during the third semester and must include the following components:

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

Before presenting the plan, it must be discussed with the supervisor.

The primary purpose of presenting the plan is to acquire feedback and suggestions for the future development of the project. As such, the plan may include questions and doubts.

The presentation of the plan lasts for 20 minutes (10 minutes for presentation, 10 minutes for discussion).

3. The recommended structure 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 (clients, informants, etc.), as well as the reviewer and the committee. It should be 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.

Description of the 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 (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 project may also include **appendices** documenting the work done during part (i), such as sizable pictorial material, diagrams, interviews, etc. 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.

The project as submitted for final defence must also include the following:

- **Title page** (see the *Guide for formatting written papers*, Appendix 1).

- **Annotation** (an abstract) in the same language as the project, with length of up to 100 words and 3-5 keywords. This is to be placed after the title page.
- **Table of Contents**, placed after the annotation and before the introduction. The table of contents will present the chapters and subchapters, their numbers, full titles, and initial page numbers.
- The **summary** is a brief overview (2000 characters with spaces) of the Master's project, written in a language other than that of the project (in 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, the practical part, the theoretical-methodological part, and the conclusion. A translation of the title of the project must also be provided. The summary is placed after the list of references.
- A **signed license**, which gives consent on the part of the author to allow the University to reproduce the Master's project (the purpose being 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.

4. Master's Project Defence Procedure

4.1. The pre-defence of the project takes place one month before the final defence.

4.1.1. The project is accepted for pre-defence at the discretion of the supervisor. The student must submit the project to the supervisor(s) 10 days before the pre-defence at the latest, unless agreed otherwise with the supervisor(s).

4.1.2. The student must submit the project as a .docx file to the Moodle environment one week prior to the pre-defence at the latest. If both the practical and the theoretical-methodological parts allow for it, the entire work will be submitted. If the practical part of the project does not allow for this, a representation of it will be submitted in a suitable medium.

4.1.3. For the pre-defence the body of the project must be complete (including both the practical and the theoretical-methodological part), so that the opponent 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, or parts of the practical work) may remain in outline. The primary purpose of the pre-defence is to find areas that need changing.

4.1.4. The procedure at the pre-defence is similar to the actual defence; the author's overview of the project is brief (up to 5 minutes) 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 the defence.

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

project is allowed to the project defence at the discretion of the supervisor, who must inform the academic affairs specialist that the project corresponds to all requirements.

4.2.1. The dates of the project defence and the membership of the board is confirmed by the head of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics at least two months prior to the actual defence.

4.2.2. The defence board is composed 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 regarding the project in question. If necessary, a broader board will be assembled, which includes competent specialists from outside the university.

4.2.3. The (primary) supervisor of the Master's project must be a member of the academic staff of the department, and must have a minimum of a Master's degree, and have competency on the chosen topic. The supervisor is chosen by the student; it is possible to have additional supervisors, who may also be doctoral students. The project topic and supervisors are approved by the council of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics 6 months prior to the defence of the Master's project.

4.2.4. The reviewer of a Master's project is appointed by the programme director. The reviewer must have at least a Master's degree and must be competent in the given field of research.

4.2.5. 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 10 workdays before the date of the defence at the latest. If both the practical and the theoretical-methodological parts allow for it, the entire work will be submitted. If the practical part of the project does not allow for this, a representation of it will be submitted in a suitable medium.

4.2.5.1. 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 on the web-based environments of the University of Tartu (exceptions for electronic publishing are regulated in the Study regulations of the University of Tartu).

4.2.6. Preferably three days prior to, and no later than one working day prior to the defence, the reviewer should submit 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, characterises the project in terms of both form and content, and serve as the basis for a subsequent discussion with the project writer.

4.2.7. The project defence is public. In the interest of protecting personal data, state secrets or business secrets, technological secrets, etc., the Vice Dean may — after receiving an application offering valid justification on the part of the writer — declare the project defence a closed procedure. The head of the defence committee may, if presented with substantial reasons, allow the participation at the defence online, with a two-way connection which allows for both sound and image.

4.2.8. 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 project defence, the chair of the committee is to read out their opinion(s).

4.2.9. The main stages of the project defence are:

1. a presentation on the part of the project author, briefly introducing both the practical and the theoretical-methodological part of the Master's project (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 project defence;
5. the final statements of the author of the project.

The final defence will last for 40 minutes.

4.2.10. The final grade of the Master's project shall be decided upon 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. If the Master's project has a specific client, their assessment or feedback will not be part of the review, but it may be taken into consideration by the board. The defence board has the right to decide on a grade only if over half of the board members are present.

4.2.11. 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.

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