Master’s Thesis Manual
Department of Semiotics
Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics
Confirmed on 16.10.2017 by the Council of HVFI

A Master’s thesis is a written result of a student’s independent research, wherein the research object under examination is treated and presented in a scientific manner. The latter means that the object of study is treated and presented according to a standard of quality which adheres to that of peer-reviewed academic or scientific publications. This standard includes clear argumentation, systematic thought, the ability to contextualise the problem, and so on. A Master’s thesis may be empirical or theoretical in terms of its type of research. Regardless, the author of the thesis must specify in precisely what way their contribution is original or novel.

The main body of text in a Master’s thesis — from the introduction until the section on references — is approximately 108 000 (max 180 000) characters (with spaces).

A Master’s thesis is formally presented as either a bound manuscript, or as an article either published or confirmed for publication that is presented in bound form with both an introduction and conclusion added, as well as other complementary materials deemed necessary. The publishers of articles that fulfil the requirements mentioned in the Procedure for awarding doctorates of the University of Tartu (16) are acceptable for the purpose.

A Master’s thesis may be written in the Estonian, Russian, or English languages, or in another language on the basis of an agreement. A Master’s thesis must contain a summary written in a different language; in the case of a thesis not written in Estonian, the summary must be in Estonian. The Master’s thesis is to be written according to the criteria found in the Department of Semiotics’ Guide for formatting written papers.

1. Structure of the Master’s Thesis

1.1. Structure of the Master’s Thesis Draft

By the end of the third semester the written draft version (about 5 pages long) of the Master’s thesis to be defended must include the following components:

- title of the thesis
- explanation and delimitation of the research topic
- research objective, research questions, and expected results
- materials and methodology
- introduction to the structure of the thesis 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

1.2. Structure of the Master’s Thesis
A Master’s thesis consists of an introduction, descriptions of the research object and methodology, analysis, results, a conclusion, a foreign-language summary, and a list of references (works cited). A Master’s thesis presented as part of one or multiple publications should follow this proposed structure to the extent possible.

The **introduction** clarifies the choice of research object, delimits it, gives an overview of the research done on it so far, opens up the thesis’s theoretical and methodological starting points, states the research objective, research questions and hypotheses of the thesis, and introduces and justifies the structure of the thesis. The introduction contains historiography, or references to most of the important and relevant research done on the specific object of study, including in recent years and in both Estonia and elsewhere.

The section on **research object** and **methodology** describes the methodology of the thesis, wherein the chosen research methods are explained and their purposes made clear. The object to be researched is described, as is the choice of materials, the data collected, and the methods of their subsequent treatment.

The section on **analysis** and **results** presents analysis of the material, as well as its interpretation (the way the analysis is understood by the author). It also presents the results and solutions arrived at in the thesis. The results of the analysis are to be connected to the proposed theoretical model and the proposed research questions of the thesis, and are to be debated in relation to the research objectives or hypotheses proposed at the beginning of the thesis. Also to be discussed is what these results may offer in terms of future ideas possible to formulate on their basis, possibilities for future research, and the place of these results in a wider context.

Depending on the type of thesis separate sections for materials and methodology may not be present, in which case the corresponding information must be clearly formulated in the introduction. Also, aspects of analysis and/or research may be presented in separate chapters. If a section explicitly devoted to results is lacking, the corresponding information must be clearly formulated in either the section(s) relating to analysis, or in the conclusion.

The **conclusion** gives a compact overview of the Master’s thesis as a whole, mainly concentrating on its central or primary results. The relation between the results and the objectives/hypotheses posed at the beginning of research are to be discussed, as well as what new perspectives these results allow for. The conclusion is meant to point out the new knowledge gained from the research.

**References** or **works cited** is a list of bibliographic date of all of the sources used in the Master’s thesis. A coherent formatting must be used for this list (see the guide for formatting written papers).

The **summary** is a very brief overview of the Master’s thesis written in another language than the thesis (in the case of a thesis not in Estonian it is written in Estonian). The summary is not a translation of the conclusion, but a holistic and symbiotic overview of the thesis’s introduction, body, and conclusion. It includes an overview of the objectives, research problems, conclusions, results, etc., of the thesis. Also to be included is a translation of the title of the thesis.
A Master’s thesis may contain **annexes** (large-scale materials such as images, diagrams or schemes, interview transcriptions, etc.) which are not counted among the main body of the thesis.

### 2. Master’s Thesis Defence Procedure

#### 2.1. Stages of the preparation and defence of the Master’s Thesis

1st semester: choosing the topic and thesis supervisor  
2nd semester (May): presentation of the topic and a draft version of the Master’s thesis in the Master’s seminar  
3rd semester (November): confirmation of the research topic and thesis supervisor  
3rd semester (end of the semester): defence of a draft version of the Master’s thesis  
4th semester (April): preliminary defence of the Master’s thesis  
4th semester (May): defence of the Master’s thesis

#### 2.2. The (primary) supervisor of the Master’s thesis is to 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. Thesis topic and supervisors are confirmed by the council of the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics 6 months prior to the defence of the Master’s thesis.

#### 2.3. During the defence of the draft version of the Master’s thesis at the end of the third semester the student shall give an overview of his or her research so far. A written draft (about 5 pages long) must be submitted through the online environment for theses submission three days prior to the defence. The defence of the draft 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 draft version of the Master’s thesis may contain questions and doubts. Prior to the defence the draft must be discussed with the supervisor.

#### 2.4. Preliminary defence of the Master’s thesis occurs a month before the actual defence. The thesis is accepted for pre-defence at the discretion of the supervisor. The student must submit the thesis as a PDF file through the online environment for theses submission as well as a hard copy (single copy, soft binding) to the departmental secretary and to the reviewer (either as a PDF file or a hard copy or both, according to the reviewer’s preference) one week prior to the pre-defence at the latest. For the pre-defence the body of the thesis must be complete, so that the opponent and the committee are able to receive an overview of the thesis on which to give constructive feedback. Minor parts of it (such as the introduction, the conclusion or a subchapter) may remain outlined. 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, the author’s overview of the thesis is brief and the reviewer provides suggestions for improvements in a written form. No grade is assigned to the Master’s thesis at the pre-defence, but it is determined whether the Master’s thesis is allowed to the defence.
2.5. The precondition for being allowed to the thesis defence is successful completion of all other study subjects (courses), and passing the preliminary thesis defence. The Master’s thesis is to be submitted to the thesis defence at the discretion of the supervisor, who confirms their consent to have the thesis submitted to the thesis defence by signing on the back (verso) of the title page.

2.6. The dates of the thesis 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. The defence board is composed of at least three members. If the board includes the supervisor of a Master’s thesis to be defended, the supervisor shall have the right to comment, but not to vote.

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

2.8. The student shall submit the Master’s thesis — formatted according to the requirements — as a PDF file through the online environment for theses submission, as a hard copy (one hardbound copy) to the departmental secretary and to the reviewer (either as a PDF file or a hard copy or both, according to the reviewer’s preference) one week before the date of the defence at the latest.

2.9. A Master’s thesis presented at the thesis defence also contains the following components: (1) a license, which gives consent on the part of the author to allow the University to reproduce the Master’s thesis (the purpose being electronic preservation of the thesis as well as electronic publication of it through the University’s web-based environments) as a separate document appearing at the end of the Master’s thesis; (2) the author’s signature on the back (verso) of the title page confirming that the Master’s thesis has been written independently; (3) the thesis supervisor’s signature on the back (verso) of the title page confirming that the Master’s thesis is allowed to the thesis defence.

2.10. The bound copy of the Master’s thesis stays preserved in the library of the Institute following its successful defence. The Master’s thesis and any multimedia components of the Master’s thesis are published electronically on the web-based environments of the University of Tartu (exceptions for electronic publishing are regulated in the Procedure for Publication of Graduation Theses and Dissertations).

2.11. Three days prior to the thesis defence — or at the beginning of the thesis defence at the latest — the reviewer submits a written review to both the board as well as the author of the thesis. The review must elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of the Master’s thesis, characterise the Master’s thesis in terms of both form and content, and serve as the basis for a subsequent discussion with the thesis writer.

2.12. The thesis 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 a validly-justified application on the part of the writer — declare the thesis defence a closed procedure. Both the thesis 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. The chair of the board may — on the basis of a validly justified application — allow the use of real-time bidirectional
audiovisual connections at the thesis defence. In the absence of the reviewer and/or the supervisor from the thesis defence, the chair of the committee is to read out their opinion(s).

2.13. The main stages of the thesis defence are: (1) a presentation on the part of the thesis author briefly introducing the main positions of their Master’s thesis (up to 15 minutes); (2) the reviewer’s assessment of the thesis, 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 thesis defence; (5) the final statements of the author of the thesis; (6) a closed discussion of the board and decision made regarding the final grade. If necessary, the thesis supervisor will be given the right to speak or comment.

2.14. The final grade of the Master’s thesis shall be given by the thesis 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 over half of the committee’s members are present.

2.15. The result of the defence of the Master’s thesis is made known soon after the formulation of the defence protocol, but no later than one workday after the actual thesis defence.

2.16. A second defence of the Master’s thesis is possible only in the next semester, at the earliest.