

**Guidelines for BA and MA Theses**  
**at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia**  
**November 2020, amended May 2021**

A thesis is a substantial and substantiated opinion about a certain issue that one writes down in a well-structured and logical and understandable manner following a clear and transparent line of argumentation. It is an exercise for the students to prove that they are capable of doing independent scholarly research within or on the basis of a conceptual framework and are able to convey the results in a clear and academic way. These Guidelines define the basic characteristics of length, content and form that we expect at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, University of Hamburg. Please note that in contrast to a BA thesis with its more limited scope a MA thesis needs to be the result of original research on a specific and clearly defined topic. The extensive use of primary sources and literature in the vernaculars (f.e., Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, and Vietnamese) is a requirement for any MA thesis. However, though a BA thesis can be based mainly on secondary sources and academic literature the student is also strongly recommended to make use of a sufficiently large number of texts in the vernaculars. As for details, see the following section.

**I. Finding a topic**

Students are required to find the topic for the thesis. This topic should inspire them to read extensively and thoroughly about it, in order to come up with questions that will problematise the topic. The student is advised to write an outline or proposal to discuss with the intended supervisor.

Searching and finding the right topic for the thesis is crucial as the student will occupy herself or himself at least two or three months intensely with this topic. We advise the students to start early and explore different topics and discuss the possibilities extensively with the supervisor(s), before deciding on the topic of the thesis. In general, a BA thesis examines a research topic based mainly on a critical examination of the existing literature and selected primary sources. A MA thesis has more ambitious goals as it aims at exploring a so far unresearched topic either by exploring new (or under-used) sources or new methodological approaches.

**II. Requirements**

**1. Procedure**

After successfully following the curriculum of at least 7 semesters in the BA (= 228 CP), or 3 semesters (= 90 CPs) in the MA programme, the student should register for the writing of the thesis with the Studienbüro of the AAI (<https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studienbuero/formulare.html>). The student is required to download the form (*Antrag auf Zulassung zur Bachelor- oder Masterabschlussprüfung*) and fill it out with the title of the thesis. Her or she should ask his or her supervisor and the second reader for consent in the form of their signatures. The first evaluator is the supervisor of the thesis, the second

person to sign is an evaluator from the University of Hamburg, or sometimes from another university. The student is advised to discuss the procedure and choice of second reader with her supervisor. It is important that the student has acquired all credit points in his or her Major (Scheinfreiheit im Hauptfach).

## 2. Formal criteria

a. **Language:** German or English (BA), English (MA)

b. **Length:**

The length of the BA thesis should be around 11-13,000 words, the number of words in the MA thesis should be 30-35,000. These are word ranges that translate into theses of about 30–35 pages (BA) and 75–85 pages (MA). These numbers refer to the main text and its required additions (including foot- or endnotes and the bibliography, but not including any appendices). They are not absolute as the quality principle weighs heavier than quantity. Please note that appendices (such as maps, illustrations, samples of questionnaires or sample translations of key sources) shall be kept to a minimum and only make sense if they are referred to in the main text.

c. **Typography**

The font should be 11pt or 12 pt of one of the often-used types, such as Times Roman, Calibri, Cambria or another common font. If you use vernacular scripts (such as Thai), please use only Unicode fonts (such as Angsana New) which are applicable both to Microsoft and Apple. Footnotes and indented citations should be smaller sized than the main text (e.g., main text: 12 pt; footnotes and citations: 11 pt or 10 pt). For the spacing between lines it should be sufficiently wide, such as 1.5, and with the normal left-, right-hand and top and bottom margins of 2.5 cm. The pages should be numbered in a clearly visible manner.

d. **Content**

The content of the thesis is divided into chapters and clearly numbered subsections. At the beginning there will be a Table of Content, a possible preface (possibly with acknowledgements) while the bibliography, (possible) endnotes, appendices and illustrations will be included at the end. There is also a note in which the students confirm that the content of the thesis is their own work and has not been plagiarized from other sources (Eidesstattliche Erklärung, which can also be downloaded from [www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studienbuero/formulare.html](http://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studienbuero/formulare.html)). The thesis should be provided with an abstract or concise summary of (max.) 1,000 words (see for a standard structure of the thesis Appendix 1)

The introductory chapter needs to discuss the State of the Art (on previous research related to the topic, its main results, strengths and shortcomings);

explore the theories and methods applied for the student's research; and define the leading research questions. It is evident that length and focus of the Introduction differs in BA and MA theses.

Please note that you should avoid too short and too long paragraphs, such as paragraphs comprising only one single sentence or running over more than one page.

If you find it necessary to divide a chapter into sub-chapters, make sure that a chapter needs to have at least two sub-chapters (f.e. 1.1. and 1.2). Dividing a sub-chapter into smaller units (though this should be avoided) needs to follow the same rule.

#### e. **Annotations and Citations**

The student can either use notes at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or at the end of the thesis (endnotes). These notes should contain information that is additional to the main text but not a crucial part of it. It may further contain bibliographic notes, references and other information (see referencing).

Citations are verbatim quotations or copies of passages from other primary or secondary sources. There are two types of citations, in-text and block citations. The former is defined as a short text passage given inside the running text which does not extend over 50 words but normally are very short phrases or single words. Students are required to italicise words and expressions in a language other than that of the main text. If it is in the same language as the main text, the quotation or phrase must NOT be italicised but placed between single or double inverted commas (quotation marks).

Block citations are longer citations that extend a few lines of text. These are indicated by indentation in the left-hand margin and by an empty line of spacing between main text and the cited text. Whether or not citations in a language different from that of the main text should be translated into German or English depends on the type of text, possible preferences of the supervisor and other considerations. The student should always think about who the target audience of the thesis is and base her or his decision on careful consideration.

#### **NB Citations from a foreign language in a non-Latin script (such as Thai or Lao):**

For short citations: insert the English (or German) translation into the running text and put the original into a footnote.

For longer citations: put the citation in the original script in an indented paragraph, followed by the English (or German) translation indented in the same way.

#### f. **Referencing or Citations**

**What is referencing?** In the writing about a certain topic in the academic tradition we indicate the sources on which we base our ideas, arguments or statements.

### **Why do we reference?**

1. Academic writing demands transparency from the student which means that it should be clear from the writing where the writer obtained the information from and how she came to a certain opinion, statement or answer. All writing is based on primary and/or secondary sources which need to be acknowledged by referring to them in a certain way. At least the title, year of publication and other basic information need to be listed in a section named **References** or **Bibliography**, in order to ensure a clear identification of the reference by the reader. If the writer of the paper, thesis or other type of writing fails to acknowledge her or his sources in the references, this can be considered as stealing ideas from others which will not be accepted. Such an act of plagiarism will render the academic writing invalid and sanctions will apply to the student who commits it. (For more elaborate information, see: <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism/warning-when-you-must-cite>).

### **Why do we reference?**

2. Giving complete and accurate references is also very important and a great service for readers who want to know the source so that she can study it as well. This is another form of imagining the audience the student is writing for and showing appreciation that people are willing to read it.

### **How do we reference?**

1. There are many ways to reference sources, the two most common are in-text references between brackets containing the author of the source ('author-date'), the year or date of publication and the page or other indication where the reader can find the passage: (Anderson 1996: 23) or (Anderson, 1996 p. 23)

### **How do we reference?**

2. The other common way is giving the author and details such as title and page numbers in a footnote ('notes and bibliography'). However, this method may expand greatly the number of footnotes that you have in the thesis and therefore we prefer the in-text way of referencing. The exact formulation of the references which the student must do in a CONSISTENT way can be following certain standards, such as the Chicago manual of style (please see <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>) or the Harvard style and other internet based guides. These organisations also have specific ways of how to formulate a **Bibliography**, for which we give an example below. However, we advise the student to use one of the automated reference managers like **Mendeley**, **Zotero** or **Citavi** to generate the references in a

certain style and a bibliographic list that the student includes at the end of the thesis.

**g. Bibliography**

Below please find a possible system to follow in the compilation of the list of references at the end of the thesis. Please be aware that there are different systems and that one is not necessarily better than the other. A good and accurate reference list enhances the transparency of the thesis and provides a good service to the reader who would like to find source the student has used.

**Books**

Grazer, Brian, and Charles Fishman. *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

Smith, Zadie. *Swing Time*. New York: Penguin Press, 2016.

**Alternatively:** Place the year of publication directly behind the author's name, example:  
Smith, Zadie 2016. *Swing Time*. New York: Penguin Press.

**Chapter or parts of books:**

Thoreau, Henry David, "Walking," in *The Making of the American Essay*, ed. John D'Agata (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2016), 177–78.

**Alternatively:** Place the year of publication directly behind the author's name, example:  
Thoreau, Henry David 2016. "Walking," in *The Making of the American Essay*, ed. John D'Agata, pp. 177–78. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

**Journal article**

Keng, Shao-Hsun, Chun-Hung Lin, and Peter F. Orazem. "Expanding College Access in Taiwan, 1978–2014: Effects on Graduate Quality and Income Inequality." *Journal of Human Capital* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1086/690235>.

LaSalle, Peter. "Conundrum: A Story about Reading." *New England Review* 38, no. 1 (2017): 95–109. Project MUSE.

**Alternatively:** Place the year of publication directly behind the author's name, example:  
LaSalle, Peter 2017. "Conundrum: A Story about Reading." *New England Review* 38, no. 1, pp. 95–109.

**Dissertations**

Bounleuth Sengsoulin. 2016. "Buddhist Monks and their Search for Knowledge : an examination of the personal collection of manuscripts of Phra Khamchan Virachitto (1920–2007), Abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang", PhD dissertation, University of Hamburg.

**Website content**

Google. "Privacy Policy." Privacy & Terms. Last modified April 17, 2017.  
<https://www.google.com/policies/privacy/>.

Yale University. "About Yale: Yale Facts." Accessed May 1, 2017.  
<https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/yale-facts>.

### **Social media content**

Chicago Manual of Style. "Is the world ready for singular they? We thought so back in 1993." Facebook, April 17, 2015.  
<https://www.facebook.com/ChicagoManual/posts/10152906193679151>.

### **Remarks:**

1.) Publications of any kind have to be put in alphabetical order according to the author's surname. However, Malay, Thai and Lao authors are put in alphabetical order according to first names mentioned: Thongchai Winichakul (**not:** Winichakul, Thongchai), Badriyah Haji Salleh (**not:** Salleh, Badriyah Haji or Haji Salleh, Badriyah)

2.) Regardless which system of citation you use it must be done in a consistent manner. Do not mix different systems within your own thesis.

For more information about Referencing and the construction of Bibliographies or lists of used References see:

### **Citation Style**

- APA: <https://apastyle.apa.org/>
- Chicago: [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)
- MLA: <https://style.mla.org/works-cited-a-quick-guide/>

### **Common citation software**

- EndNote: <https://endnote.com/>
- Mendeley: <https://www.mendeley.com/>
- Citavi: <https://www.citavi.com/en>
- Zotero: <https://www.zotero.org>

## Appendix

### The Format of the BA/MA Thesis

**1. Title page:** The thesis should start with a title page based on the following example:

<p>(Title of the Thesis)</p> <p>Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines Bachelor of Arts / Master of Arts</p> <p>der Universität Hamburg</p> <p>vorgelegt von</p> <p>(Student's Name)</p> <p>aus (name of your city or origin)</p> <p>Hamburg (year of submission)</p>
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### 2. Table of Contents / List of figures

**3. Abstract or Summary:** The student will sum up the key arguments of the thesis in German and English

**4. Introduction:** normally this section will contain a general introduction to the topic, the background of the issue and the problem which triggered the candidate to question them, research questions, relevance, scope and structure of the thesis. The introductory chapter of the thesis often provides a concise critical overview of the State of the Art (the research that has already been carried out on the topic, by whom and with a concise impression about the main results), in which the student identifies the gaps of knowledge which she intends to fill with the thesis. She must also clarify the source material and identify a set of leading research questions necessary to structure the following chapters. In case this discussion of the existing literature, source materials or other parts mentioned here, constitute a major part of the thesis and its research, the student may consider to develop this part of her thesis into a separate chapter.

**5. Background / Literature Review:** this part will contain a more thorough discussion about the context of the issue and/or a literature review of the prominent and relevant works that have discussed the topic of research. The candidate will position herself towards the topic and the angle from which she approaches the topic. It will contain a thorough discussion of the concepts used to analyse the issue and formulate the research questions. These concepts will also return in the further discussion of the subsequent parts of the thesis. The candidate will also need to explain and defend her choice for the certain methodology and/or approach applied to this topic, at least if this is relevant (e.g., a literature researcher does not need to explain and defend the fact that she decided to go to a library and brilliantly check out books to study!).

**6. Arguments / Discussion / Analysis:** A systematic elaboration of the research questions and the student's ideas and sets of argumentations about matters such as cause and effects, historical roots and possible future ramifications, or thorough classification and analysis of the topic of research. The presented ideas need to be grounded in the conceptual spadework

of the previous section. This section ideally will be divided into several chapters that each deal with the elaboration, discussion, analysis and/or argumentation surrounding a certain Research Question.

**7. Conclusion:** A short round-up of the main points of the thesis with an emphasis on the outcome of the Research Questions and the validity of the possible hypothesis that may have been stated in the section with the RQs.

**8. Bibliography:** A list of references that have been used in the construction of the thesis. Only those references that were *used*, should be mentioned, not all the book and other writings that the student *knows* on the topic or possibly has even *read* on it! This may also include data retrieved from internet sites, newspaper articles, blogs, films, interviews and other sources. If there are many of such ‘alternative’ sources, headings such as manuscript sources, internet sources, newspaper articles, etc. may enhance the transparency of this tool.

**9. Appendix:** This may contain sources that have not been published or are extremely difficult to access, such as texts in manuscript form in a certain language, or additional information that the student finds, enhances the overall argument of the thesis, may fill in details that are too big for a foot- or endnote but seem interesting for the reader to know, etc.

**10. Statement:** By including this statement the student declares that the thesis is original and un-plagiarised work done fully by the student herself.