Some Important Points on Thesis Writing

The dissertation or thesis is the most important piece of writing that a student will undertake in the masters programme. It is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and complex, providing the examiner with a bird's eye view of the *research skills* acquired by the student. Given its length and skill requirements, masters dissertations are often used as a key metric to evaluate students wishing to pursue doctoral studies.

The thesis is a coherent piece of work where a research question (identified by way of a thorough literature review) flows and links directly to the research objectives, methodology, and analysis of data. It should also have a concise argument that can be easily identified with the question. Excellent dissertations DO NOT cover all the literature associated with a concept/study, but selectively utilize the literature, bridging ideas from across sub-fields/disciplines, in order to provide a new answer to a question.

Importantly, in comparison to doctoral dissertations that are often written between 3 and 6 years, the masters thesis simply showcases mastery of literature review rather than providing an original answer to a question based on primary data collection. While it is not expected that the student will generate new data to proffer a novel answer, it is anticipated that the student can demonstrate his/her ability to bring together various conceptual ideas in order to provide a coherent argument.

In the GSID, masters theses are often expected to have empirical support, although the supreme level of internal and external validities are not necessarily required.

In terms of language, it is crucial that it is written in formal, academic language with minimal use of first person (except when used as "In this thesis, I argue that…") and in present tense form.

Caution! Different disciplines may have different models or standards.

Word count

Most dissertations are between 15-25,000 words, including bibliography, footnotes, and figures. Tables and appendices are usually excluded from the word count.
In the case of the GSID, a Master thesis may have around 40-50 pages. There's a limit for the availability of English writing check.

Referencing Style

In the social sciences, the standard referencing styles are either Harvard style (in-text citation using author-date system) or Chicago style (footnotes/endnotes citation).

Format of the Thesis

It is common to use double space for main text (single space in Tables and direct quotes) in A4 size paper.

Originality of the Thesis

The thesis is expected to illustrate independent and critical thinking, but an important criterion is originality or novelty of the dissertation. At the PhD level this is generated through new conceptual breakthroughs by bridging and synthesizing various literatures, the application of an existing framework into a new research field, and methodological innovation in answering key questions.

At the masters level, originality involves conducting primary data collection (e.g. going into fieldwork or creating a new database for a statistical model), synthesizing multiple secondary sources (e.g. newspapers, policy documents, interviews conducted by other authors), and/or demonstrating critical engagement and mastery of the literature on the topic. Oftentimes, the student must combine these different methods to show originality of their work. Given the relatively shorter time period in doing the research, it is NOT expected that ground-breaking research will be achieved at this level.

Using Figures and Tables

It is often the case that students would add tables and figures to offer visual presentation of the data collected. This is highly encouraged but they should be done carefully, ensuring that the tables and figures are explained, analysed, and discussed in the main text. Tables and figures, just like interviews, are not proof of the argument itself; rather they merely present the findings in a more systematic and orderly way.

[TITLE OF THE THESIS]

Submitted by

[NAME]

In Partial Fulfilment of

NAME OF MASTERS DEGREE

[DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTE]
[NAME OF UNIVERSITY]
[CITY/COUNTRY]

MONTH / YEAR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS (one page)

TABLE OF FIGURES (one page)

LIST OF TABLES (one page)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION (4-5 pages, 2-2,500 words)

The introduction needs to set out the context of the study, its significance, and the main literature to be synthesized and used in the research project. It is important that the introduction covers the following issues:

1) What is the study about and what is the potential contribution of the research. It should clearly state this, i.e., "The study is about the relationship between X and Y… / This research *examines* the institutional and political conditions that underpin Z… / The thesis *investigates* / *probes into* the role of A in B…"
2) Set out the research objectives and/or research questions of the study. The research objective is what the reader will learn *after* the research questions have been answered. The research questions, on the other hand, are specific points of inquiry that would allow the reader to understand the big contribution of the thesis. It is common that there is ONE big question (contextualized and based on the literature review), which can then be broken down into sub-questions (3 questions maximum). The sub-questions are *interlinked* with each other, and all together, provide an answer/argument to the main question of the thesis. It is often a mistake that students have many questions which cannot be answered by the thesis. ALL QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ANSWERED BY THE THESIS. If they cannot be addressed in the thesis, then they are too big for the thesis to cover, and therefore, should be revised
3) Set out the main hypothesis, arguments, and/or research questions of the project. The thesis, depending on how it is structured, needs to provide an indicative answer to the main query. It should be answered through a combination of literature review, primary data collection, and the use of secondary sources.
4) At some point in the introduction, it should also state the *research strategy* used in undertaking the project. This may explicitly say "The study utilizes a quantitative / qualitative / fieldwork-based / mixed methods approach to explain X".
5) What are the three or four main bodies of literature that the research intends to bring together. It should say this explicitly, for example, "The study *brings together* social movements, human rights and everyday politics literature in order to examine A", or "The research *draws from* new institutionalist perspectives and organizational studies to analyse Y".
6) A brief outline of the chapters to come. It should clearly indicate how many chapters there are and what are the order of chapters.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / LITERATURE REVIEW (6-7 pages, 3-3,500 words)

In this chapter, the research outlines the main bodies of literature to be synthesized in developing the conceptual tools needed to answer the research questions. The question and the literature review are connected to each other. The questions, in order to be relevant, must identify a *research gap* that has been overlooked in previous studies. The gap can be produced by way of a thorough review of existing studies that deal with the concept or ideas to be used in the study. But, at the same time, the research question should clearly indicate the relevant literature to be used in the study.

In other cases, a dissertation might use an already developed/widely used theoretical framework, with the intention of *choosing concepts* within the framework. In the social sciences, it is often the case that students will choose one or two concepts that will be developed in the chapter. The student must identify how he/she intends to use the concept in order to adequately answer the research question, noting as well the pitfalls and shortcomings of the conceptual framework. In this way, it demonstrates independent thinking and critical thought by showing precisely how the concept will be useful for the research.

As a way to achieve this, some students might want to start with conceptual mapping: a process of clustering ideas and concepts with the aim of identifying the relationship of different concepts and how they overlap with each other. Using various sources, the student might be interested to *map out* how various authors used the concept either as independent, intermediate, or a dependent variable. By way of outlining the different uses and misuses of a concept, the student can have a better understanding at how he/she might be able to use the concept in the study.

As a starting point, the literature review should use a combination of books, journal articles, and edited collections. It is against the canons of scholarship to use newspapers, blogs, and Wikipedia as a baseline in developing the conceptual/theoretical framework. The student should also seek to go beyond empirical details often found in an article or book; instead, the focus must be on how an author used the concept to develop the study. It is good practice to see how a concept has been used across different regions, sectors, and case studies, which will then allow the student to find common patterns in terms of the use of the concept. As an exercise, the student can fill in a table that outlines each article (see Table below as an example) although it should be noted that the table should NOT be included in the thesis.

Authors	**Conceptualization of state capacity**	**Argument**	**Empirical reference**
1. Sekeris (2015)	Weberian notion of state capacity as "capacity to collect taxes (fiscal) and enforce property rights (legal)" (from Besley & Persson 2010) vs state power defined as the "ability to broadcast power"; Coercive capacity is distinctive from revenue raising capacity; State power as a precondition to the development of state capacity	State capacity is not uniformly distributed within national boundaries; the reach of the state is limited to the areas surrounding capital city or regional cities; geography is essential to the projection of state power but it does not deprive the central government from the capacity to broadcast power – state power is endogenous and distribution is a result of rational decision-making among elites.	Madagascar (very superficial)
2. King and Lieberman (2009)	Stateness and state-building need to be broadened beyond the Weberian understanding of centralized state authorities emerging in the process of state-building; State cannot be captured on a one-dimensional continuum or through a Weberian model based on coercive capacity located in centralized bureaucracies; to unlock the ironies of state-building without a bureaucracy, we need to look at the apparent emergence of state strength and capacity out of links with society rather than autonomy from it.	The American state was a 'segregated' state until early 1970s; understanding of the extent to which regulatory forms of the American state represent a distinctive state-society associational patterns. American state-building, strength and institutional capacity form through links with society – states are negotiated arrangements between the central government and powerful sub-national units , patterns of competition and contestation among political parties, and as relations among 'public' and 'private' providers of social welfare.	USA in comparative perspective with industrialized welfare states
3. Ziblatt (2008)	State capacity as the 'institutional capabilities of governance' (p. 274) as applied to subnational and city politics, or the level of development of a government's technologies of governance, the capability to implement its objectives. State infrastructural power is a broader concept referring not to the capacity of specific public agencies but to three dimensions of governments – its capability, its overall territorial reach and its weight or presence in the lives of citizens.	State capabilities determine political outcomes, i.e. public service provision, at subnational levels. Whilst most focus on demand side of policy formulation (income inequality, ethnic diversity, responsiveness of democratic regimes to voter preferences), these accounts over look the supply side of policy creation – whether or how governments respond to social preferences and whether the state is capable of implementing policy – which may determine the outcome. Governments with high institutional capabilities to implement policy help translate pre-existing social preferences into actual policy outcomes. "Governments with varying capacities to implement similar preferences might also have difference perceptions of threats, opportunities, and problems, helping to establish different priorities in the first place" (pp. 276). Thus, municipal governments with greater capacity will also pursue the creation of public goods.	Pre-1914 Germany using new dataset on 84 larger cities' municipal hospitals and infant health clinics using OLS probit regression model

***Table prepared by J. Nem Singh for his own research.

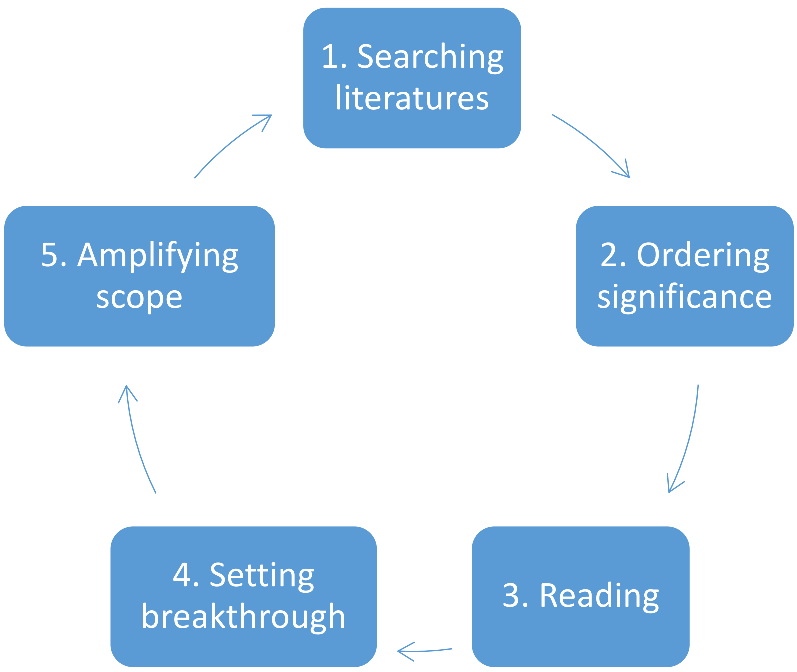
Different meanings of literature review

Reviewing literatures have several meanings and completely different purposes. The first meaning of literature review is to explore the field. This might be triggered by a curiosity-driven walkabout in University library, suggestion by professor, or reading through a standard textbook. Literature reviews logically have no end. It can be continued until clear understanding of the indicated field is achieved (this might be achieved by reading a standard textbook, but not always the case).

The second meaning of literature review is to build up the strategy by clearing up all related literatures in the field. The purpose of this is to figure out a breakthrough for one's study and to make sure that it is really a promising breakthrough. This task is systematized, which will be explained in the following part.

The third meaning of literature review is to develop a hand-made conceptual toolbox for an argument. Concepts, terminologies, models, etc. must be clearly defined and carefully scrutinized in relation to previous usage by scholars.

How to collect literatures?



Collecting literatures

- List of literature for a related field of study is not easily found. Searching literature requires a multiple iteration of bibliographical collection.
1) You can start looking at a book or an article on its title and abstract, which probably match your interest. You can use ProQuest, Web of Science, EBSCO databases or other e-journal database, as well as google scholar, besides your nearest library (some databases need licence to access).

2) Make your decision to read or not that literature. Should you have any faint doubt that there's something closer to your interest, you'd better keep on searching other literature instead of taking time to read through the one in your hand.
3) Before you start reading, you also need to check what literature are included in its bibliographical list. You might find there another one to which you should direct your time and efforts. Please also pay attention to publication year because only what available previously are covered in bibliographical list.
4) When you read, take notes as detailed as your time allows to figure out how you may contribute to the field.
5) You also need to check keywords to repeat the searching process once again with amplified scope.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (3-4 pages, 1,5-2,000 words)

This chapter outlines the general research strategy and the key methodological issues of the project. Methodological description can be included in the Chapter 1 or next to the analytical Chapter.

The research should be clear and concise in terms of strategy, i.e. "The research employs a single case study approach in order to analyse the relationship between X and Y"; "The study uses a multi-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to establish Z"; or "The study uses the OLS probit regression model to analyse A".

The chapter should contain the following points:

1. A justification as to why the methods chosen are appropriate to answer the research question. This can be done either by citing several credible studies that have employed similar techniques (with a clear explanation how the present study will be using it); or by explaining how the approach will provide specific answers to the question. The main question to ask here is: "what difference in terms of findings will I get if I used an alternative research method?" In asking this question, the researcher is able to justify why the chosen approach will provide the best chance and most comprehensive way to answer the question.
2. Very specific discussions of the *research techniques*, i.e., structured/semi-structured interviews, use of existing database, primary/archival documents needed for the study, access to respondents, specific data to be collected in a fieldwork-based research, how to do comparative studies (how variables were chosen, database used, etc).
3. A discussion of the scope and delimitation of the study, i.e. what does the study cover and what does it not cover, and whether there are specific limitations in the approach and how the student intends to address these limitations.
4. Very specific details (e.g. list of interviewees/respondents, descriptive data from survey, tables/figures needed to contextualize the study) should be included as an appendix. The student should choose very carefully what is to be included in the main text of the chapter and in the appendix.
5. In quantitative studies, it is common that the hypotheses and null hypotheses are discussed extensively in this section. It usually proceeds after the literature review.
6. The chapter should have appropriate references/citations using research methods and social science techniques, as well as studies that similarly employed the techniques in the present study.

CHAPTERS 4-6: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS (15-20 pages, 7,500-10,000 words)

In many cases, data presentation and analysis are integrated because presenting empirical evidence and showing its relationship with social science theories are inter-connected processes. For this reason, it is advisable to instead divide the chapters into "thematic sections" that corresponds to the research questions outlined in the introduction.

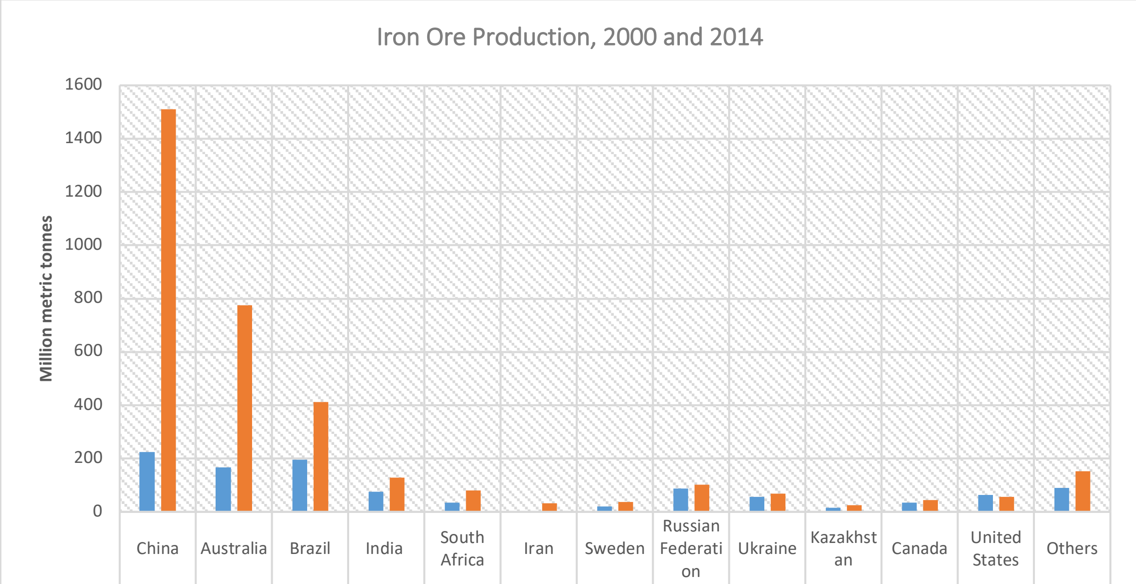
There are many ways to present the data collected. In qualitative studies, the direct use of quotes from interviews is an effective way to present the data but it should be carefully done so and in a way that demonstrates key points of the argument. In policy analysis, for example, it might be a good idea to present the argument as stated by a policy-maker or bureaucrat interviewed in the study. In studies on livelihoods and development, an interview with the local chief or regional elites is usually a good method to demonstrate the justification of a chosen policy strategy/approach. In studies that use surveys, data can be presented in figures and tables, which can then be explained in the main text as part of the analysis. Statistical analysis usually discusses the findings of the regression model. Across all the cases, the most salient point is to link the empirical findings with the theory.

Hence, the student must be able to corroborate the empirical work with the theoretical arguments. Some guide questions to ask when doing data analysis are as follows:

1. What is the expected relationship between variables according to the main theory? Do the findings of the study reject this relationship? For example, it is often argued that democracy thrives and becomes consolidated after the country reaches a threshold income level (which implies that higher levels of income leads to more consolidated democracies), does the case study confirm this relationship? If not, what explains the case?
2. What is the logical flow of the argument, which the chapters follow? It is expected that one chapter should provide a <u>context-setting</u> that would explain the empirical and theoretical background of the study, which is then followed by the <u>body of the argument</u> where evidence is presented and explained in relation to the theory/conceptual framework. In some cases, there is a section/chapter analysing the <u>implications</u> of the argument to the broader theory. In this case, the section usually explains whether the theory should be altered, whether it should consider additional conditions (necessary, sufficient, or both conditions must be met for X to be causally related to Y), or if we should think differently about the relationship of concepts based on the empirical investigation (i.e. The study found an alternative mechanism that causally explains the phenomenon).
3. In studies that use statistical techniques, the model is usually presented (if not done in the methods section), followed by a detailed explanation of the table that explains the key causal relationships between variables, and then possible explanation as regards the findings.

All figures and tables must also be cited properly. See examples below.

Figure 1 Key Iron Producers in the World Economy



	China	Australia	Brazil	India	South Africa	Iran	Sweden	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Kazakhstan	Canada	United States	Others
2000	224	168	195	75	34	0	21	87	56	16	35	63	89
2014	1510	774	411	129	81	33	37	102	68	25	44	56	153

Source: ECLAC 2016: 85 (adapted).

Table 3.1: Economic Impact of the Philippine Mining Industry (in US$ million)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012[1]
Mining Contribution to GDP[2]	$1.205	$1.381	$1.955	$2.237	$1.724
	0.70%	0.80%	1.00%	1.00%	0.70%
Total Mining Investment	$604.2	$719.5	$1,053.1	$1,149.7	$791.7
Export Share (Metal Mining)	$2,498	$1,470	$1,929	$2,840	$2,265
	5.2%	3.9%	3.8%	6.0%	4.9%
Export Share (Non-metallic)	$211	$156	$162	$177	$145
	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%

Source: Mines and Geosciences Bureau (2013), Adapted.
Notes: (1) Preliminary figures (2) In US$ billion

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS (1-3 pages, 2,000 words)

The chapter contains the main summary of the empirical work, the theoretical implications of the study, and future research gaps that can be explored in light of the present research. When making recommendations for future study, it is common to reiterate and draw from the literature review the main gaps that are worth studying, and then corroborating the existing study and its main contributions. In this way, it strengthens the relationship between the present study and the broader set of theories and literature.

The salient point here is that the chapter should NOT contain new analysis, but instead, should focus on bridging the detailed analysis from previous chapters and the broader theories and arguments in the literature. It should also draw out more clearly the theoretical implications of the study and why it was worthwhile undertaking a thesis. Finally, if there are methodological innovations and/or new theoretical insights, these should be highlighted and repeatedly mentioned throughout the thesis and emphasized in the conclusions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The student must ensure consistency and preciseness when formatting the reference list. All references mentioned in the thesis should be included. Primary documents, interviews done by other people, and secondary sources (newspapers, list of archives, etc) can be separated from the academic sources.

APPENDIX 1, 2, 3…

The appendix should be mentioned and discussed in the main text of the thesis. If there are sources needed, please ensure that there are sources at the bottom of the tables and figures.

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