

# Preparing for your thesis

BA

International Relations 2023-24

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# Save these dates

- You will have to upload a draft of your thesis on...
  - mid November - TBC
  - mid December - TBC

# To be covered...

- Before we start
- Structural and content requirements
- Taking a look at research methods
- Using sources
  - Plagiarism
- Advices, dos and donts

# Before we start...

- Start by asking these questions:
  - How do we know that we do not know something?
  - How do we know that we do know something?
- Before you write, you need to read... a lot!
- We need to ask questions about what we know and what we... would like to know!
  - This is how we can develop our research question and the corresponding hypothesis.

# Before you start writing..

- How do we know that we are already doing the research?
  - What is that point in time, when read to actually do research and not to get ourselves better oriented in the topic?
- Doing research is (should be) a conscious activity.
  - We are doing it to find an answer to an exact question
- Research is a process of enquiry, exploration and explanation!
  - A process with self-reflection
  - A cyclical process
  - We are on the right track if we keep having doubts about, whether this is the right track.

# Requirements – content and structure

- More information on formal requirements: [Study and Examination Regulations](#) and [Regulations and procedures- Thesis Writing Seminar](#)
- Research-based thesis
- Length: 60.000-80.000 characters
  - Spaces included
  - Only the body, excluding references and annexes.
- Structure:
  - Title and title page
  - Table of contents – 3 levels break-down with numbering
  - Introduction - 5-10%
  - Main Body: developing arguments, dealing with main topics - 80%
  - Conclusion - 10%
  - References – Only cited sources!
  - List of tables, images (optional)
  - Annexes (optional)

# Introduction: 10%

- Defining the topic
- Why did you choose this topic?
  - Currency, lack of research, personal motivation?
- Why is the topic relevant?
- Mentioning the most vital sources
  - Primary and secondary ones, too
  - Why these sources?
  - Referring to the main ideas of these main authors
- Posing the research question, forming the hypothesis
  - With reflecting on the main sources
  - Remember to answer it in detail in the Conclusion

## Introduction – 2.

- Describing research methods
- Presenting the structure of the thesis.
- Dealing with limitations:
  - What will the thesis cover, and what will not cover?
  - Why?
- The introduction acts as a recipe for the thesis.
  - Based on this, you will be able to write the thesis.



## Main body: 75-80%

- The thesis itself
- Try to fit it into 4-5 chapters if possible
- Break it down into subchapters
- Historic overview should be as brief as possible. – could be part of the introduction...

## Conclusion: 10-15%

- Answering your research question in detail!
- What did you (NOT) find answers to?
- Main findings and results
- Limitations, prospects for further research
- Recommendations (optional)

# Briefly about research methods

- Elaborate it in the Introduction
- Facts and data – what is the difference?
- Positivist and relativist approach
- Timeframe
- Inductive and deductive research

# Briefly about research methods - 2

- The difference between positive and normative approach
- Ontology: What do we consider that exists for our research?
- Epistemology: What do we consider as relevant knowledge for our research?
  
- Descriptive, exploratory, explanatory research
- A research methods book – see slides in the back: only relevant chapters

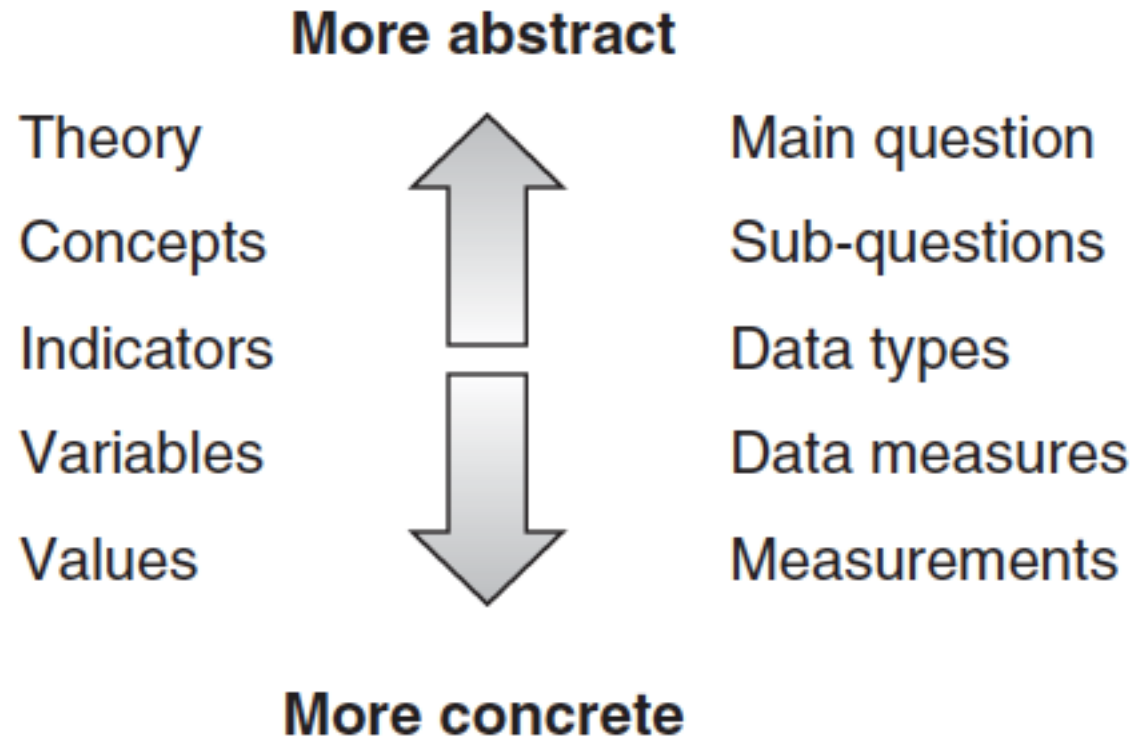
# Building abstract ideas

- Theory – abstract statements that make claims about the world and how it works. Research problems are usually stated at a theoretical level.
- Concepts – building blocks of the theory which are usually abstract and cannot be directly measured.
- Indicators – phenomena which point to the existence of the concepts.
- Variables – components of the indicators which can be measured.
- Values – actual units of measurement of the variables. Data in their most concrete form.

# Making sense of all this: Operationalization

- Theory – Nuclear proliferation decreases international stability
- Concepts – Nuclear proliferation, international stability
- OPERATIONALIZATION – Finding a way to measure and test our theory.
  - Indicators: conflictual international relations, intensification of nuclear research
  - Variables: number of protests by foreign ministers by ambassadors, number of centrifuges, amount of yellow cake, amount and concentration of fission material, number of clashes on borders, military drills near conflict zones, etc.
  - Values...?
  - OR? Operationalize with other indicators!

# Levels of abstraction



# Using sources

- At least 20 academic sources are necessary.
- Use a critical approach to sources!
  - CRAAP method recommended!
  - „Predatory Journals” - BEWARE
- Relevant and irrelevant sources
- Use international sources, but use sources of the local language, as well, if needed
- Try to find fresh sources – the fresher the better
- BUT do not ignore the core - the good old ones!
  - Necessary theoretic fundamentals



# Using sources

- Break down reference list into 3+1 categories:
  - Primary sources
  - Secondary sources: academic sources, non-academic sources , other sources
- Referencing styles:
  - Use the Harvard or Oxford styles
  - Harvard: for common IR topics
  - Oxford: international legal topics
  - Consult your supervisor on the desired style

# Plagiarism.....?

- Citation is necessary!
  - If not sure whether you need to use citation, then...
  - YOU NEED TO USE CITATION!
  - Always indicate page numbers!!! - if possible.
- What is plagiarism anyway?
  - Using certain parts of a text without indicating the source.
  - Paraphrasing without indicating the source.
  - Writing about information or facts that is not common knowledge – without indicating the source.
    - What you would not know without prior research
  - Not using quotation marks when quoting.

# Pay attention

- Use academic language!
  - Try to avoid colloquial expressions.
  - Check spelling, avoid typos!
  - Use the given discipline's special vocabulary.
- Make sure your sentences are not too long.
- Pay attention to structure
  - Break down the text into paragraphs, subchapters etc.
  - A new thought, a new idea a new paragraph (at least)

# Dos and donts

- Read and then write.
- Make notes. Electronic or paper-based
- Where did you read it – indicate page numbers!
- Allocate enough time for writing and post-writing activities
- Ask for help, if not sure about something.
- Save the material to multiple places and devices.
- Ask somebody to read the test before submission

Thank you!

Any questions?

WHEN WAS THE ARTICLE WRITTEN?

## CURRENCY

**WHEN WAS THE INFORMATION PUBLISHED OR LAST UPDATED?**

**IS YOUR TOPIC CHANGE RAPIDLY (TECHNOLOGY, HEALTH, SCIENCE OR POPULAR CULTURE)?**

*Topic example:*  
MONSANTO'S HARVEST OF FEAR

Ex:  
<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/05/monsanto200805>

Ex:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nioshtic-2/00077140.html>

DOES RESULT RELATE?

## RELEVANCE

**DOES THE INFORMATION HELP ANSWER YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION?**

**DOES THE SOURCE ADD SOMETHING NEW TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR TOPIC?**

*Topic example:*  
The rise of isis

Ex: Isis  
Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion, 1999  
From World History

Ex:  
Life under ISIS  
Macleans, December 26, 2016 (from GALE)

THE RELIABILITY AND CORRECTNESS OF THE INFORMATION

## ACCURACY

**ARE THERE STATEMENTS BASED ON FACTS, AND ARE CITATIONS INCLUDED?**

**WAS THE INFORMATION REVIEWED BY EDITORS OR SUBJECT EXPERTS BEFORE IT WAS PUBLISHED?**

*Topic example:*  
Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division

Ex:  
<http://www.dhmo.org/>

Ex:  
<http://www.snopes.com/science/dhmo.asp>

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

## AUTHORITY

**WHO IS THE AUTHOR/PUBLISHER/SOURCE/SPONSOR OF THE SOURCE?**

**WHAT ARE THE AUTHOR'S CREDENTIALS OR ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS?**

*Topic example:*  
Monsanto

Ex:  
The author's contact info includes an email such as boss@monsanto.com

Ex:  
<https://www2a.cdc.gov/nioshtic-2/Build-Qyr.asp?s1=pesti->

THE REASON ITEM EXISTS

## PURPOSE

**IS THE PURPOSE OF THE SOURCE TO SELL, PERSUADE, ENTERTAIN OR INFORM?**

**ARE THERE BIASES? ARE VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW PRESENTED?**

**DOES THE AUTHOR USE EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE?**

*Topic Example:*  
Vaccines

Ex:  
<https://www.voicesforvaccines.org/mmr-and-au->

Ex:  
<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/research/vaccines>

# Research methods book

- Larry B. Christensen, R. Burke Johnson, Lisa A. Turner: Research methods, design, and analysis Pearson: Boston 2015
- Babbie, Earl R : The practice of social research Belmont: Wadsworth 1995
  
- Books available in the library

- A pages dealing with predatory journals
- <https://predatory-publishing.com/>
- <https://beallslist.net/>
- <https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-hijacked-journal-checker/>
- Content is not carved in stone, subject to constant change