

I. Introduction

Writing your thesis may seem challenging, but it is one of the most rewarding parts of your MA in International Relations. It allows you to demonstrate what you have learned, conduct independent research, and explore a topic that genuinely interests you. Along the way, you will sharpen your analytical thinking, academic writing, use of sources, theoretical framing, and methodological skills: competencies that will serve you well in both your career and any further studies.

This guide provides all essential information about the thesis process, from topic selection to final submission. For additional questions, consult the programme director or the programme administrator.

All communication regarding registration, supervision, and evaluation will take place via official platforms (Neptun, Teams, Moodle, student email). Please check them regularly to avoid missing important information.

This thesis guide is prepared for students of the International Relations Master's Programme and is based on the authorisation of the University's **Study and Examination Regulations (SER)**, specifically Sections 74-83 and Annex 3. In the event of any conflict or ambiguity between this guide and the current SER, the provisions of the SER shall prevail. This document pertains to theses submitted in the academic year indicated on the cover page.

II. Purpose and Type of Thesis

1. Aim of the Thesis

The thesis is a written work based on independent research on a topic from the curriculum, demonstrating the student's thorough knowledge of the field and ability to apply it. It should demonstrate the student's familiarity with the relevant academic literature and their ability to critically analyse, evaluate, and clearly summarise existing findings. It shall offer new and professionally meaningful results in the areas of fact-finding, and/or interpretation, and/or creation, and therefore it serves to document that the student has acquired the conceptual tools and methods of the relevant discipline (SER 74§ (4)).

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the student's knowledge and professional expertise in a topic of his/her own choice, in collecting scientific data related to the chosen topic, in systematising, analysing and processing them, in discussing the chosen phenomenon or problem, in developing hypotheses, in solving problems, in analysing alternative hypotheses, in reasoning and refuting counter-arguments, and in expressing his/her thoughts, views, positions and statements in a coherent, consistent manner writing in a clear, structured, and professional style (SER 74.§ (2)).

2. Thesis Type

The required type of thesis in the International Relations Master's Programme is: research-based thesis.

The **research-based thesis** is typically a written work addressing a research question and based on primary or secondary data collection following the structure of the scholarly works of the field of study. A paper relying on primary data collection typically includes the review of the academic literature of the topic, the argumentative presentation of the research methodology, then the presentation of the results and their interpretation/contextualisation (SER 74§ (8)).

The exact content and format requirements can be found in Section IV.

III. Thesis Writing Process

1. Topic Selection and Supervision

The topic of the thesis shall be selected within the framework of the programme and outcome requirements (SER 75.§ (1)). The students may choose one of the topics via Neptun by the date specified by the study programme leader. Students may also choose their own individual topic with the permission of the study programme leader (SER 75.§ (3-4)).

The thesis selection process proceeds as follows:

1. Available thesis topics

The list of available thesis topics and thesis supervisors (lecturers) will be published in Neptun (date to be specified later). Students can select their preferred topics from this list.

Students should select a thesis topic even if they do not plan to take **Thesis Seminar I** in the autumn semester of 2027. In this case, they will be able to apply for the course only in the **autumn semester of 2028**.

2. Applying for thesis topics

Students can apply for thesis topics in Neptun according to the schedule set by the University.

Students must select **at least five (5) thesis topics** in order of preference.

If a student does not apply for the required minimum number of topics, or is not assigned to any of the topics they selected, the Department will assign them to one of the remaining available topics.

3. Preparing the thesis application

Students must provide a **working title for their thesis** and a **research plan** in Neptun (under **Topic plan**).

The research plan must be **at least 10 sentences long**. Students are encouraged to provide enough detail to give the thesis supervisor a clear idea of their proposed research.

In addition to the research plan, students are encouraged to include, where relevant:

- their previous research experience or relevant academic background;
- relevant language skills; and
- their personal motivation for choosing the topic.

4. Thesis supervisor's assessment

After students submit their applications, the relevant thesis supervisors will assess each application as either **“Supported”** or **“Not supported.”**

Please note that a **“Supported”** assessment does not mean that the student will automatically be assigned to that thesis topic. The final allocation is determined through the assignment process described below.

5. Assignment of thesis topics

Thesis topics are assigned based on both **student preferences and the preferences of thesis supervisors**. The allocation takes into account the materials submitted by the student in Neptun, including the **working title, research plan, and order of preference**, as well as the rankings provided by the thesis supervisors.

The **Programme Director gives the final approval** after all students have been assigned to topics.

Please note that, due to capacity limitations, we cannot guarantee that every student will be assigned to their first-choice topic.

6. Final allocation

The final allocation of thesis topics will be published in **Neptun** once the assignment process has been completed.

Thesis preparation is guided by the supervisor as consultant. During the period of student status, and until the thesis is submitted, the supervisor provides professional and methodological guidance, encouragement, and support for the student's independent work. The supervisor also assesses whether the topic is relevant and whether the data and findings are well-founded and defensible. The timeline for preparing the thesis is agreed upon jointly by the supervisor and the student. The supervisor shall be obliged to provide the student with at least three (3) consultation opportunities if the student has taken the corresponding thesis seminar or an equivalent subject for the semester. The student shall be obliged to appear at those consultation opportunities well-prepared. In the case of absence, the rules applicable to other sessions shall be followed (SER 77.§ (4)). Consultations may also be organised online.

In case of a need to change the thesis topic or the supervisor, please contact the study programme leader to guide you through the SER rules (SER 78.§).

2. Thesis Seminars and Deadlines

Thesis preparation is supported by the following mandatory course(s):

Autumn semester:

- Thesis Seminar I
- Research Methods in IR
- Methodology class

Spring semester:

- Thesis Seminar II
- Presentation Seminar

These courses serve to help students focus on delineating the topic, performing a literature review, preparing a thesis draft, formulating research questions/hypotheses, and outlining the work plan, and subsequently, focus on carrying out the analysis, completing the final drafting, editing, and submission preparation.

Additional requirement: Progress report in Autumn Semester

By the end of Thesis Seminar I, each student must submit a written report demonstrating the progress made toward the thesis.

Submission deadline: 8 December 2026 (Tuesday), 12:00 a.m.

Required content:

- A detailed outline of the thesis structure
- An introduction to the methodology applied in the research
- A bibliography and reference list, categorized as follows:
 - *Primary sources*: Original material that provides direct evidence about the subject of research. Depending on the research question, this may include treaties, laws, official documents, diplomatic records, speeches, interviews, survey data, statistical datasets, archival material, or other original documents/data.
 - *Secondary academic sources*: Scholarly works that analyse or interpret primary material or existing research. They are peer-reviewed, authored by a subject-matter expert, identify the sources or evidence on which the analysis is based, and provide sufficient information to allow those sources to be checked. E.g. peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and book chapters.
 - *Secondary professional sources*: Analytical or professional publications that do not meet all of the criteria for secondary academic sources, e.g., because they are not peer-reviewed or the review process is not sufficiently independent. Examples include think-tank analyses, policy reports, and publications by IGOs, NGOs, government bodies, and other professional or specialist organisations. These sources can be useful, particularly for policy analysis and current developments, but should be used critically.
 - *Secondary other sources*: Secondary material that does not meet the criteria for either academic or professional sources. E.g. newspapers and magazines, general-interest websites, blogs, opinion pieces, non-specialist commentary, and other publicly available material. Such sources may be useful for background, public discourse, or specific factual information, but should generally not form the main basis of the academic argument.
- Additional elements as specified by the supervisor (e.g. a draft chapter of at least 10 pages containing the research question and methodology).

Method of submission: submit via email, Teams, or another platform as specified by your supervisor.

Additional reports

At the start of the semester, supervisors will inform students about any additional reporting requirements, including deadlines and format. Students are expected to follow these instructions closely.

The student is obliged to present his/her thesis awaiting finalisation to the supervisor for approval by the deadline set by the supervisor, but no later than ten (10) working days before the submission deadline (SER 79.§ (1)).

The supervisor approves the submission of the thesis by signing the supervisor's declaration. The approval process takes place in Neptun. The thesis may only be validly submitted if approved by the supervisor (SER 79.§ (2)). The exact deadlines for submitting the theses are specified in the calendar of the academic year (SER 79.§ (3)).

The thesis must be submitted as one (1) **electronic copy** on the dedicated electronic interface. The student shall simultaneously

- 1) declare that the submitted thesis is the result of his/her own work, as well as
- 2) confirm that the overlap between the theses of a student participating in two or more simultaneous programmes at the University does not exceed 10%. In case of an overlap exceeding 10%, the student may not take a final examination, and
- 3) include a declaration detailing the use of any AI tools, listing the tools employed and describing their purpose. (see Section VI for more details)

The submission is accompanied by a text match (plagiarism) check. The detailed rules for submitting the thesis are contained in provisions issued by the Vice-Rector for Academic Programmes. (SER 79.§ (8)-(9); 6/2025 provisions of the Vice-Rector for Academic Programmes on the use of generative artificial intelligence systems in education)

IV. Content and Format Requirements

1. General Requirements

- **Language:** The language of the dissertation is the language of the programme, it being understood that if the language of the programme is Hungarian, the thesis may be prepared in English, but in the case of studies pursued in an English or German language subspecialisation delivered in Hungarian, the language of the thesis may also be the language of the subspecialisation (SER 75.§(7)).

- **Length (Core Text):**

Research-based thesis:

The main body of an MA thesis must contain between **135,000 and 175,000 characters**, including spaces and footnotes (approximately 21,000 to 27,000 words). This limit applies only to the core text. **Fringe sections**, such as the abstract or preface, table of contents, indexes, summary, reference list, and appendices, are excluded from the word count.

Important: Exceeding the maximum word limit **may** lead to a deduction of marks during the thesis assessment.

2. Expected Standard Structure

a. Research-Based Thesis

Element	Purpose / Key focus
Title page	Thesis title, student's name, institution, programme, supervisor, and submission date.
Table of contents	Main sections and subsections with page numbers. Use consistent hierarchical numbering and a maximum of three heading levels.
List of tables and figures (optional)	Include if applicable; list all tables and figures with titles and page numbers.
List of abbreviations (optional)	Include if applicable; define abbreviations used repeatedly.
Introduction <i>Approx. 5–10%</i>	Establish the research problem and its significance. Define the explicit research question(s) (RQs), topic/scope, justify relevance. Briefly introduce the methods, data/sources, methodological justification and key limitations. Conclude with a brief overview of the thesis structure.
Literature review/Theoretical and conceptual framework <i>Approx. 15–25%</i>	Critical review and synthesis of key academic literature/theory. The paper must identify the research gap. Define the key concepts and present and critically discuss the relevant theoretical framework, including its assumptions and implications. Explain how the framework guides the analysis and addresses the research questions. Focus on theories that are analytically relevant, rather than providing a general overview.
Main chapters: Empirical findings and analysis <i>Approx. 50–75%</i>	Present and analyse the empirical material systematically, directly addressing the research questions and applying the theoretical/conceptual framework. Organise the chapters around the research design and overall argument. Integrate findings, analysis, and interpretation, with claims supported by appropriate evidence.
Conclusion <i>Approx. 10–15%</i>	Provide a clear answer to the research questions and summarise the key findings and overall argument. Discuss the academic/substantive significance and implications, acknowledge the main limitations, and suggest directions for future research. Do not introduce substantial new evidence or arguments.
List of references	Include all and only sources cited in the thesis. Ensure consistency, accuracy, and completeness according to the chosen referencing style.
Appendices	Optional. Include supplementary material that supports but is not essential to the main argument (e.g., additional tables, figures, or source material). Label and reference appendices clearly; essential material should remain in the main text.

3. Technical Format

- **File Name Format:** Must follow the convention: NAME_NEPTUNCODE_thesis_study programme_year.
- **Text Formatting:** The research-based thesis shall be submitted in 12-point font with a decorative stroke (“serif”), using 1.5 line spacing in justified paragraphs (with the exception of lists), the structural levels shall be marked consistently, page numbering shall be continuous, with the appropriate indication of the appendices. (SER Annex 3, 2.§ (1) (da))
 - Margins should generally be 2.5 cm.
 - Chapter/subchapter numbers should be consistent (e.g., 1.1, 1.1.1, max 3 levels).
 - Main chapters shall start on a new page.
 - Each paragraph should contain at least two sentences and usually should not extend to more than 6 sentences or 10 rows.
 - No chapter/subchapter titles may follow each other directly.
 - Use spell check, grammar check, and UK spelling at all time.
 - Page numbering must be continuous, typically starting from the first page of the main text (Introduction) and located in the centre of the footnote area.
 - Numbering of tables and figures: Should be consistent and continuous. All illustrations shall have their own title, source reference and at least one reference to them by their number in the main text. No sub-chapter should end with an illustration. Figures and charts should be edited using the same font type as the main text. Font size must be at least 10 points.}

Table of contents (Template)

- 1 Chapter 1: Introduction (style: heading 1)**
 - 1.1 Summary of earlier research (style: heading 2)
 - 1.1.1 Subchapter title, if applicable (style: heading 3)
 - 1.1.2 Subchapter title, if applicable (style: heading 3)
 - 1.2 Research objectives and questions (style: heading 2)
 - 1.3 Research methods and structure of the thesis (style: heading 2)
- 2 Theoretical or conceptual framework (style: heading 1)**
- 3 Findings chapters, 3-N (style: heading 1)**
- 4 Conclusion (style: heading 1)**

List of References (style: heading 1)

Further information (style: heading 1)

For more information on editing headings and the table of contents, please refer to [here](#) and [here](#).

V. Citation and Referencing Requirements

The thesis constitutes a scholarly work, and adherence to scientific ethics and citation standards is mandatory.

1. Required Citation Style

The **APA (American Psychological Association) citation standard** is the required system for academic writing in the theses for any thesis type (SER Annex 3, 2.§).

- **Consistency:** The APA citation standard must be applied **consistently** throughout the document.
- **Footnotes:** Footnotes should be mainly avoided or reserved for adding further details and additional notes and **not used for referencing**.

2. In-Text Citation Rules

- **Standard Citation:** References must clearly distinguish the author's intellectual contribution from the work of others. Citations must be placed within parentheses, listing the author's surname(s) and the year of publication (Surname, Year).
- **Multiple Authors:** For three or more authors, the abbreviation "**et al.**" should be used after the first author's name.
- **Direct Quotations:** For **verbatim quotations**, lists, translations, tables, or figures, the citation must **obligatorily include the exact page number** (e.g., Surname, Year, p. X). Short quotations (under 40 words) must be enclosed in quotation marks.
- **Continuous Reliance:** It is prohibited if the thesis is based on only one source **continuously for several pages**, even if the source is properly cited.

3. List of References (*Bibliography*)

- **Inclusion:** The list must contain detailed bibliographic specifications for **every source cited** in the thesis text and must **not contain sources that were not cited**.
- **Order:** Entries must be arranged in **alphabetical order** by the first author's surname, without academic titles (e.g., Dr.).
- **Format:** The list must strictly adhere to the detailed format specifications of the APA citation standard.

Your supervisor will advise you on the preferred referencing style. Regardless of the chosen system, you must maintain consistency and prioritize clarity for the reader, enabling them to easily locate your sources.

Next to APA you can use:

- Harvard or OSCOLA

Note: Whichever referencing system is used, you must always indicate page or paragraph numbers for all references, whether you are quoting directly or paraphrasing.

VI. Academic Integrity and AI Use

1. Plagiarism and Source Usage

The thesis requires full compliance with scientific ethics. The work is subjected to text match checks. Plagiarism includes literal or near-literal copying without citation, translating texts without attribution, or continuous reliance on one source.

2. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

The use of generative AI (GAI) tools is permitted provided that the principles of transparency, ethics, and accountability are observed.

Permitted Uses (Must be Declared)

Idea generation and brainstorming.

Language refinement, spelling, and stylistic checking (post-editing of the student's original work).

Facilitating analysis/evaluation of statistical or other data series.

Production of results in co-creation under the student's active intellectual control.

Prohibited Uses (Subject to Sanctions)

Generating **any part of the text**, abstract, literature review, or visual representation and claiming it as the author's own work.

Adapting another author's work using AI and presenting it as the user's own.

Disclosing statistical or data series generated by a GAI tool as original data.

Large Language Models (LLMs) are **not recognised as authors**; the student is fully accountable for the content.

Mandatory Declaration: The student must include a declaration detailing the use of any AI tools, listing the tools employed and describing their purpose. Available templates can be accessed here (Annex 1 and Annex 2): [Templates](#)

The International Relations Master's Programme expects students to use the following declaration type:

Annex 1

I, the undersigned student _____ (Neptun code: _____), declare that I have not used any generative artificial intelligence system or service to complete the *assignment / exam / project* related to the subject _____ (subject code: _____).

I, the undersigned student _____ (Neptun code: _____), declare that I have used a generative artificial intelligence system or service to complete the *assignment / exam / project* related to the subject _____ as follows:

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– ...

I declare that I have reviewed all contents generated with a critical eye, and have verified their appropriateness, factual accuracy and legality.

No generative artificial intelligence system or service has been used during the completion of this assignment / examination paper / project.

I have used the following generative artificial intelligence systems or services to complete the *assignment / exam / project*:

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– ...

I acknowledge that I am responsible for the quality and accuracy of the content generated.

I have used the following generative artificial intelligence systems or services to complete the *assignment / exam / project*:

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– Name of system: _____, purpose: _____;

– ...

I have indicated the details of the use of the GAI tool(s) as expected in the subject syllabus (or as informed in writing by the lecturer).

I acknowledge that I am responsible for the quality and accuracy of the content generated.

VII. Thesis Evaluation

Please note that the Master's Programme applies certain threshold criteria for thesis evaluation, which will result in failing the thesis if the conditions are met. Cases of failing the thesis are the following:

- the score received based on the evaluation grid means failing
- the main parts of the thesis cannot be identified
- the thesis is based on another work in more than 1 paragraph (approx. 3-4 sentences) in verbatim form or in a manner that is close to it without indicating the original source in the appropriate text and in the bibliography (plagiarism);
- the thesis is based on only one source continuously for several pages (even if the source is indicated in the appropriate text and in the bibliography by the author of the thesis);
- the thesis contains a series of fundamental factual errors in relation to either the theoretical or the empirical part;
- the length of the thesis differs from the specified one;
- the references are missing or very incomplete in the thesis.

The International Relations Master's Programme is using the following thesis evaluation grid.

Criteria of acceptance

Criteria	Passed/Failed
The thesis does not contain part(s) based on other sources, which are not referenced properly.	
The thesis does not contain long blocks where the Author references one sole source through several pages.	
Referencing is professional.	

In case the Opponent deems that the Thesis does not meet any of the above criteria, the Thesis cannot be accepted

Evaluation

1. Topic selection and introduction (total 11 points)

The topic outlined in the Introduction is in accordance with the topic outlined in the title. (0-2 points)	
In the Introduction, the Author clearly defines the aim and the main question of the thesis. (0-3 points)	
In the Introduction, the Author discusses the most important sources (primary or secondary sources, key thinkers, etc.).	
The Author outlines the structure and logic of the research. (0-2 points)	
The introduction contains the necessary delimitations and research methods. (0-2 points)	

2. Methods (total 10 points)

The chosen method(s) are relevant and appropriate for the research. (0-4 points)	
The Author detailed the chosen method(s) appropriately. (0-3 points)	
The Author applied the chosen method(s) consistently throughout the thesis. (0-3 points)	

3. Academic quality (total 12 points)

The argumentation is clear, the structure is logical, the Author attempted to add his/her own opinion. (0-4 points)	
The Author analyzed the chosen topic appropriately and reached the aim of the research. (0-3 points)	
The Thesis is professionally appropriate, does not contain factual errors. (0-5 points)	

4. Review and utilization of the relevant professional literature (total 10 points)

The thesis reviews the most significant professional literature. (0-5 points)	
The Author analyzes and assesses well the most significant professional literature. (0-5 points)	

5. Overall quality (total 11 points)

The structure, logic, discussion of the subtopics and the weight given to them in the text are appropriate. (0-5 points)	
The cohesion and overall quality meet the requirements. (0-3 points)	
The Thesis reaches its goals, draws appropriate conclusions and contains the Author's own views. (0-3 points)	

6. Language and style of the Thesis, references (total 6 points)

The language and style of the paper, including use of terminology and spelling, is of high quality, the Thesis is easily understandable. (0-3 points)	
Referencing is professional. (1-3 points)	

Total:

Grade:

Grade points/grades:

54 – 60 points:	Very good (5)
47 – 53 points:	Good (4)
38 – 56 points:	Satisfactory (3)
30 – 37 points:	Pass (2)
0 – 29 points:	Fail (1)

Final assessment

[Written assessment of the thesis]

THESIS

Jane Doe

2027

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST
MASTER'S IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This is the Title of the Paper

Jane Doe

2027

Supervisor: Sam Sample, PhD