

Preparing for your thesis

BA
International Relations 2026
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Save these date

- Upload a progress report of your thesis on...

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

- Content:
- A detailed outline of the thesis structure
- A bibliography and reference list, categorized as follows:
 - Primary sources
 - Secondary academic sources
 - Professional sources
 - Other relevant materials
- Additional elements as specified by the supervisor (e.g. a draft chapter of at
- least 10 pages containing the research question and methodology).

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

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: [here](#) (p69 and p106)
- Good tips: [here](#)
- 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 is the topic relevant?
 - Currency, lack of research, personal motivation?
- Describing the research problem, or research puzzle (So what...?)
- Posing the research question
 - Remember to answer it in detail in the Conclusion
- Mentioning the most vital sources
 - Primary and secondary ones, too
 - Why these sources?
 - Referring to the main ideas of these main authors

Introduction – 2.

- Defining the limitations of the thesis
- Research methods – create a 0.5-1-page section in the Intro
- 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.
 - All parts of the introduction should be elaborated in the later parts of the thesis

Main body/Discussion: 75-80%

- The thesis itself
- Try to fit it into 4-5 chapters if possible
- Start with a review of relevant secondary literature
- Break it down into sections and subsections
- Historic overview should be as brief as possible. – could be part of the introduction...
- Make sure, you will have at least one analytical chapter

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

Briefly about research methods

- Create a separate section it in the Introduction
- 0.5-1 page length
- Facts and data – what is the difference?
- Relevant actors
- Geographical scope
- Timeframe
- Relevant actors and level of analysis
- Inductive and deductive research

Briefly about research methods - 2

- The difference between:
 - positive and normative approach
 - positivist and post-positivist(relativist) approaches
- 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
- Use research methods literature – see slides in the back: only relevant chapters

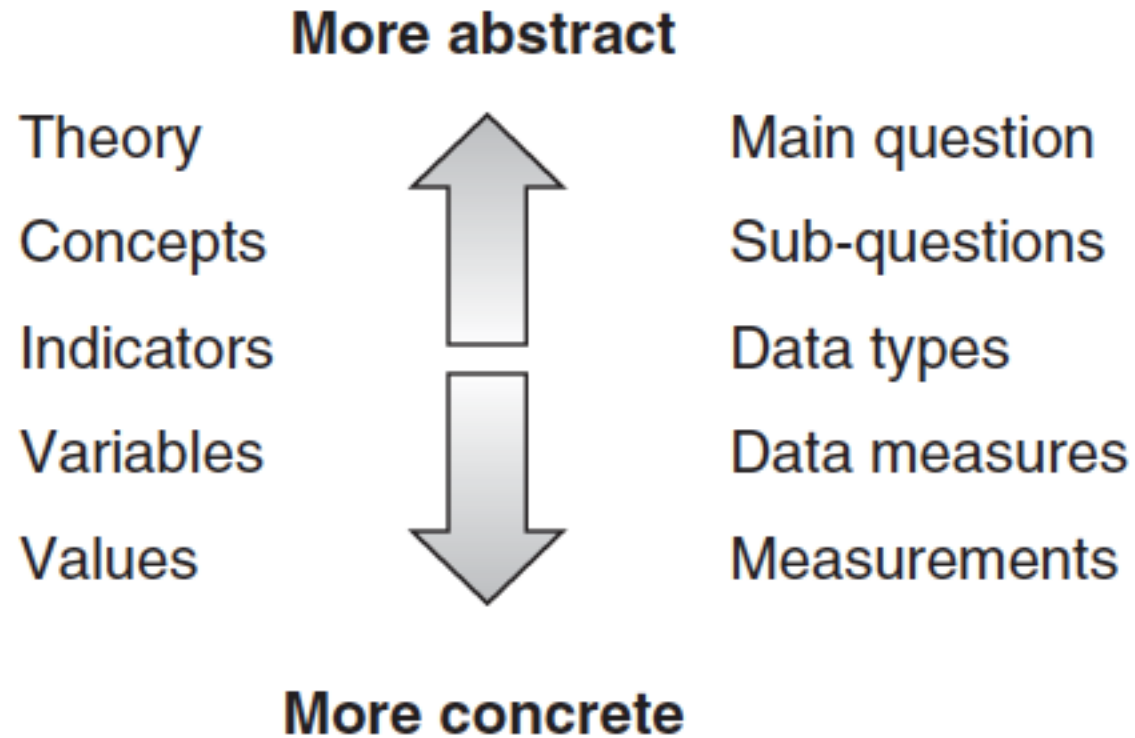
Building abstract ideas

- 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



What makes a good research question?

- “A research question is a **clear, focused, concise, complex and arguable** question around which you center your research. You should ask a question about an issue that you are genuinely curious about.” (George Mason University, 2009, n.p.)
- A **good RQ is focused** (not too broad), **challenging** (not too bland) **grounded** (not too speculative).
- Try to pose a RQ that allows for deeper analytical work
- There are different types of RQs:
- Descriptive – Please do not
 - What sanctions were imposed on Russia following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine?
 - How has NATO membership expanded since the end of the Cold War?
- Explanatory
 - How did the idea of taking back sovereignty influence the United Kingdom’s leaving the European Union?
 - What explains differing responses to Chinese Belt and Road investments in Central and Eastern Europe?

What makes a good research question?

- Comparative
 - How do Chinese and American foreign aid strategies differ in Africa? (Descriptive)
 - Why did Germany and France respond differently to the Iraq War in 2003? (Explanatory)
- Evaluative
 - How effective have EU sanctions been in changing Russian behaviour?
 - To what extent has the Paris Agreement contributed to international climate cooperation?
- Theory testing
 - How well does democratic peace theory explain relations between India and Pakistan?
 - How can constructivist theory explain China's behaviour in the South China Sea?

Reviewing of secondary literature

- Can be called: Literature review, Academic context, State of the Art, Overview, etc.
- What is theory?
- Why do we need theoretical background for a thesis?
- Placing/Positioning your work in an existing academic conversation about the topic
- Which theories do you need to describe and review in order to analyse your research problem?
- Which events and processes do you need to present and explain to make the reader understand the context of your topic?

Using AI

- Use it, do not abuse it!
- Remember the ethical usage of AI
- Remember: the AI declaration – place it at the beginning of the thesis
 - Explicitly acknowledge the use of AI tools
 - Clearly explain the purpose and nature of their use
 - Identify the specific sections of the thesis where AI assistance was applied
- Do not let AI do the cognitive work for you!
- You need to be responsible for the added value of the thesis

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

Referencing

- INDICATE PAGE NUMBER IN THE TEXT!
- Referencing styles:
 - Use the APA or Oxford styles
 - Harvard: for common IR topics
 - Oxford: international legal topics
 - Consult your supervisor on the desired style
- Reference list: Break it down into categories:
 - Primary sources
 - Secondary sources: academic sources, non-academic professional, other

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?

C R A A P

WHEN WAS THE ARTICLE WRITTEN? DOES RESULT RELATE? THE RELIABILITY AND CORRECTNESS OF THE INFORMATION SOURCE OF INFORMATION THE REASON ITEM EXISTS

CURRENCY RELEVANCE ACCURACY AUTHORITY PURPOSE

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 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
Maclean's, December 26,
2016 (from GALE)

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 Re-
search Division

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

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

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->

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

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:	Failed (1)

Final assessment

[Written assessment of the thesis]

Questions for the defense

Question no. 1

Question no. 2