52 points on writing a master thesis

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# Title

1. Does the title clearly and in an interesting way signal what the thesis is about? (Is it a single-level title, or is there a shorter, more selling main title, and a more descriptive subtitle?) Think about the title five minutes a day. Does it well describe the intended focus? Is what I am currently working on in line with the title?
2. Do you have keywords for the thesis? Does the title reflect the most important keywords?

# Text and writing

1. Do you have informative headings and subheadings – and (preferably) ones that kindle the readers interest – or are they generic (method, frame of reference)?
2. Do you start each chapter with a clear introduction, telling the reader what is in that chapter, why, and why in that order of presentation?
3. Do you provide the same type of reader service in each subchapter?
4. Do you finish each subchapter and chapter by summing it up?
5. Do you use the word processor’s spelling and grammar check?
6. Do you have linguistic quality assurance over and above what the program provides you with?
7. Do you use commonly accepted terms? If not, do you clearly define terms that you introduce, and terms that you try to load with a meaning that diverges from the common one? (Try to avoid the latter; it is difficult to get people to adopt new meanings of terms they are well-acquainted with.)
8. Do you make the reading slow and cumbersome by using company-specific or topic-specific abbreviations?

# Thesis introduction

1. Does the thesis introduction provide a clear description of why the studied area is worth studying from both a practical and an academic perspective?
2. Does the introduction naturally lead up to the purpose statement?
3. Does the purpose statement provide a clear declaration of what the thesis is really about, or does it give rise to expectations that you do not fulfil? (When you start writing the thesis, the purpose is, naturally, an intention or ambition, but in a finished thesis, the purpose should be a clear declaration of the content. When the content cannot be adjusted to the purpose, the purpose should be adjusted to the content.)
4. Does the purpose statement catch the wider scope of the thesis, or is the formulation specifically tailored just to your empirical investigation? (Presumably, the thesis also is based on literature, so there should be something to compare your empirical findings with.)
5. Do you provide a clear image of the steps needed to fulfil the purpose? (Conceptual ones, not process steps: that is, not “read up on”, “interview”)
6. Who do you view as intended reader? Do you write in such a manner that this/these reader(s) will easily grasp the content?

# Method

1. Does your methods description clearly present important choices of direction, and (anchored in literature) motivate how you have chosen and the consequences of your choices? (Remember to write about your thesis, not write a general methodology handbook.)
2. Do you describe how you have gone about grounding your theory in literature? What are the strengths, weaknesses and consequences for your study of your way of dealing with literature? Are there different “schools” regarding how to study the phenomenon you are investigating? Are they perhaps incompatible? Which one do you align with – or do you find a way of staying neutral and use more than one?
3. How have you chosen your own empirical material? Why is that a sensible way of underpinning your investigation? What problems have you met and how have you tried to deal with them?
4. How do you handle that everyone – authors you have read, people you have talked with, producers of reports and collections of internal and external material – has their own agenda and considerations when they write, talk, collect and assemble? Do you assume that everyone is honest, forthright and exhaustive, or are you trying to understand what their concerns are and what angles they take, and how do you then try to handle that?
5. How do you handle that you are writing right now, today? What are you – and people you meet – blind to, because it right now seems self-evident and is taken for granted?
6. How does literature (theory and others’ empirical data and accounts) interact with your own empirical material? Do you use the literature to direct (and screen out)? Does the literature provide you with suggestions for things to look for and be attentive to? Is your empirical material in the lead, and you use literature to find parallels to what you find in your own empirical material? What are the consequences of this aspect of your method?
7. Do you use people as indirect sources (for example, ask managers about what their employees think, consultants about what their customers think)? What are the consequences? Should you talk with someone else?
8. How do you handle that different people present different images of “the same thing”?
9. Are you in love with certain literature, and look for support of its views, or do you allow yourself to also see that which runs counter to it?
10. Are you in love with certain parts of your empirical material, or do you equally try to assess the quality, and question all of it?
11. Do you clearly describe how you analyse your material, and why you analyse it in that manner?

# Presentation of literature / frame of reference

1. Do you start by providing a clear picture of what areas of literature you bring up, and their relevance to your study? Do you treat different schools within each theme, or do you get caught in a one-eyed view?
2. Do you provide your readers with an image of the bases your sources build on (enabling your readers to assess how trustworthy or well-founded the views, statements and models that you present are)? Do you in your text refer to other literature in a manner that conveys to the reader how you view the source, perhaps using words such as “claims”, “shows”, “suggests”, …?
3. Do you differentiate between theories, views and empirical investigation results, or do you assume that everything that is written in your sources is true and relevantly describes how the world is constituted?
4. Have you processed your sources, so you summarise, analyse and comment relevant ideas and observations, rather than just list points from each source one after the other? (Retell, relate, reflect)
5. Have you grouped and structured material that your sources have not processed sufficiently (or do you happily present 12-point lists of important factors, without having tried to determine if they should reasonably be sub-grouped)?
6. Have you assessed if classifications you borrow (or construct) are complete and have clear delimitations (are MECE: Mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive)? How do you handle shortcomings?
7. Do you keep connecting your literature section to your specific investigation and your purpose, so that the readers constantly can see why they are reading what they are reading?
8. Do you summarise your frame of reference in a research model that makes it clear to the reader how the literature has been used in the gathering of empirical material and in the analysis? Do you mainly use the literature to guide your observations, test it on your case, develop it through your investigation … In other words, what role is it to play in your study?

# Empirical material

1. Do you provide the reader with a good overview of where and from what sources your empirical material is gathered and what it is intended to describe?
2. Does your empirical account provide a vivid and interesting image of the material you have collected?
3. Can the reader easily trace where different parts of the empirical material come from, for example see if statements in different places in your presentation come from one and the same interviewee, and if the account rests primarily on a small portion of your empirical sources, or if it utilises and presents many or all?
4. Does the empirical account (well) present what you use in your analysis?
5. Does your analysis use what you have presented in your empirical account, or do you present it because you have collected it?

# Analysis

1. Do you analyse what you have promised in your purpose statement?
2. Is the analysis clearly grounded in your empirical material?
3. Is the analysis clearly (and precisely) connected to the literature you have presented?
4. Does your analysis utilise the research model that you presented above?
5. Is the analysis skewed to drive a certain line of argument even when your material could be interpreted as pointing in another direction?
6. Does your analysis capture what is interesting in your material?

# Conclusions

1. Do you summarise what you have found in such a way that it can be meaningfully and informatively read without reading the rest of the thesis?
2. Do your conclusions answer what your purpose statement promised?
3. Is it clear how your results relate to the (relevant) literature? What diverges from what previous literature has suggested? What supports one of the competing sides in a debate in the literature? If you have conclusions that you cannot relate to literature, have you then finished looking for relevant literature?
4. Do you declare the strength and applicability of your conclusions – what rests on firmer or less firm ground, and for what “universe” do you consider your conclusions applicable.

# Discussion

1. Do you discuss the consequences of your conclusions? What do they mean in the context that you painted in the introduction to the thesis? Did they, for example, lend support to your preunderstanding; do they lead to suggestions for how someone should act (and in that case, who, when and how); or is the benefit mostly an increased theoretical understanding of the investigated phenomenon?
2. Do you present interesting and relevant ideas for future research that can build on or complement your study?