

Supervision guidelines for final theses

Social Influence Lab

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Final thesis at the Social Influence Lab

As part of your thesis, you will work independently and according to scientific criteria on a narrowly defined question. This usually includes conducting your own study in order to acquire new knowledge and deepen your understanding of scientific work and research topics.. For example, you will learn about theories and findings in a specific subject area and how to explain, compare, integrate, and differentiate between them. You will then apply these theoretical findings directly to your study. You will also learn (more) about conducting psychological studies in general, construct your own study material, and conduct a study yourself. Building on this, you will expand your practical skills in data analysis and evaluation and learn to scientifically justify conclusions, classify findings in the research context, and critically evaluate your own approach.

Your thesis will be supervised by a member of the workgroup. Prof. Kai Sassenberg, Dr. Lena Hahn, Dr. Svenja Frenzel, or Dr. Claudia Araya will review and supervise your thesis. If the thesis is supervised by Dr. Svenja Frenzel or Dr. Claudia Araya, the student has to submit an informal application for external second supervision of the thesis. This informal application has to be signed by the applicant and the first supervisor and mailed to papsy@uni-trier.de. For Master's theses, the second supervisor can also be written by other authorized examiners outside the Social Influence Lab. Please consult your supervisor for this.

Process of the thesis

The following table shows an example of the process for a Bachelor's thesis (the process for Master's theses is similar). Before registering the Bachelor's thesis, 40 participation hours in experiments must be submitted to the secretary's office. Theses can be written in German or English. Please note: The durations given are only very rough estimates.

Phase	Initial consultation	
Duration	1 appointment, 30-45min	
Contents	First, the broad topic of the work is defined.	
Tasks	You... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate your interests • let us know immediately if you will not be writing the thesis in our workgroup after all 	Your supervisor... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explains the possible range of topics • informs you about the work process • gives you initial literature references
Result	Mutual commitment to cooperation	
Phase	Specification	
Duration	approx. 8 weeks	
Contents	Now you need to delve deeper into the topic of your thesis and specify your research question (in consultation with your supervisor). Then you need to find a possible answer to this question based on theories and findings from the literature - the hypothesis(es) of your thesis. When researching, you should concentrate on original papers; textbook chapters offer an introduction to a subject area at best. At the end of this phase, you may write an exposé. It summarizes the research question as well as the theoretical approaches and findings that you want to use to answer this question.	
Tasks	You...	Your supervisor...

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work independently in your subject area • take a critical look at the current status of research • write an exposé of your work if necessary • draw up a rough schedule, which you discuss with your supervisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is available for questions and discussions • gives further literature recommendations if necessary • provides detailed feedback on your exposé
Result	<i>If applicable, exposé (2-8 pages) & schedule</i>	
Phase	Registration of the thesis with the examination office	
Duration	1 week	
Contents	<p>The form for registering your thesis and all other formal information can be found at: https://www.uni-trier.de/universitaet/verwaltung/abteilung-ii-studentische-angelegenheiten/hochschulpruefungsamt-hpa/anmeldung-zur-bachelor-/masterarbeit</p> <p>Please note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need two reviewers for a Master's thesis. You must coordinate this with your supervisor. 	
Tasks	<p>You...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create suggestions for the title • if applicable: you submit the thesis for external second supervision (see p. 1) • request the form by email from the responsible person at the examination office 	<p>Your supervisor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinates the reviewers with you • forwards the registration form to the examination office via the secretary's office
Result	<i>Official registration, start of the official processing time</i>	
Phase	Operationalization	
Duration	approx. 4-6 weeks	
Contents	<p>Once the research question and the hypothesis have been determined, you must decide in consultation with your supervisor how these are investigated: How should theoretical concepts be measured or manipulated? What form should the study take? You can find approaches to this in previous studies.</p> <p>This is followed by the design of the study material (preferably in an editable file format to make it easier to provide and incorporate feedback).</p> <p>If you are conducting your study online, this is followed by its implementation.</p> <p>At the end of the operationalization phase is the (unofficial) pre-registration of your study.</p>	
Tasks	<p>You...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create and revise drafts for your study material • create the study online or prepare the survey in another way • create a pre-registration of your study in close coordination using the "Questions before the survey" questionnaire 	<p>Your supervisor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advises you on the operationalization of concepts and material design • Provides access to software or survey tools if necessary • Gives feedback on preregistration, if necessary, several times
Results	<p><i>Finished study material, possibly digitized experiment</i></p> <p><i>Completed questionnaire "Questions before the survey" as pre-registration</i></p>	
Phase	Data collection	
Duration	highly individual, no estimation possible	

Contents	<p>Now, the study is being carried out. There are various ways of recruiting participants (friends, family, forum posts, circular mail, personal contact, etc.), from which you and your supervisor can select the best strategy for your study.</p> <p>You can already start writing the theory and methods sections during data collection. Both are largely independent of the data (exception: some information on the sample and measures in the methods section). This saves you time later on.</p>	
Tasks	<p>You...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recruit participants for your study independently ensure that your study runs smoothly and in a standardized manner act as the first point of contact for participants who have queries 	<p>Your supervisor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gives you advice on suitable recruitment methods discusses with you a suitable procedure for conducting the study supports you in the event of any problems with participants
Result	<i>Raw data set</i>	
Phase	Data analysis	
Duration	approx. 3 weeks	
Contents	<p>Your data has been collected. Now, the analysis and documentation of your data and method begins. Please clarify with your supervisor to what extent they will support you in the process.</p> <p>The analysis is carried out in several steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Prepare data: e.g., go through exclusion criteria, recode inverse items, calculate scale means, check statistical assumptions 2 Carry out planned analyses 3 Carry out additional analyses if necessary <p>Please document your steps COMPLETELY in a syntax - regardless of whether you use R or SPSS for the analysis.</p> <p>Finally, your study is documented with a codebook.</p>	
Tasks	<p>You...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepare the data set for analysis analyze the data independently document each step on the way from the raw data to the results in an analysis script create a codebook in which you document which variable in your data set has which meaning 	<p>Your supervisor...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gives advice on problems discusses the results with you provides you with an example of a codebook
Results	<p><i>Prepared data set and analysis script</i></p> <p><i>Codebook</i></p> <p><i>Overview of the results of the study</i></p>	
Phase	Writing the thesis	
Duration	8-10 weeks	
Contents	<p>Now, you can (finish) writing your thesis. In this guide, you will find an overview of the structure and content of the individual chapters.</p> <p>Be prepared to read the literature again so you can place your results in the current state of research. You should be able to describe what your findings mean for the theory on which your study was based. Is it wrong or only valid under certain circumstances? How could you find out? Where are gaps in the theory? Which questions remain unanswered by your study? Be prepared for this phase to take longer than you thought in the beginning and for you to revise your text several times.</p>	

Tasks	<div>You...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write a preliminary version of your work 	<div>Your supervisor...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is available for queries
Result	<i>Preliminary version of your work</i>	
Phase	Pencil correction	
Duration	approx. 1 Week	
Contents	<p>This step should be taken once you have written a complete draft of your thesis, which may have been revised several times. This should be in a condition in which you could hand it in to the examination office if necessary.</p> <p>Your supervisor will read and comment on the text as part of a pencil correction. They will draw your attention to any major problems and give you preliminary feedback on your work, e.g., with regard to the structure, possible missing sections, or potential for shortening.</p> <p>You can use this to optimize your work; it is not included in the grading of the final paper.</p>	
Tasks	<div>You...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • send a preliminary version of your work to your supervisor (with specific questions on individual difficult passages if necessary) 	<div>Your supervisor...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gives you written feedback on your work
Result	<i>Annotated preliminary version of your work</i>	
Phase	Revision	
Duration	3 weeks	
Contents	<p>You now have time to go through the feedback from your supervisor, ask any questions, and revise the text accordingly. Please take your supervisor's feedback seriously and get in touch if anything is unclear. Allow time for proofreading, possibly by friends and family, as well as for formatting and printing the work.</p>	
Tasks	<div>You...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revise your text 	<div>Your supervisor...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is available for queries
Result	<i>Final version of your work</i>	
Phase	Final submission and grading	
Duration	approx. 2 days + 4-6 weeks	
Contents	<p>Have you completed your work? Congratulations! Now, you have to hand in your thesis. You can find information on the modalities on the website linked in the FAQ.</p> <p>Send the pdf version of your work, the raw data and the data set used, the corresponding codebook, and the commented syntax to your supervisor by e-mail (depending on the agreement with the supervisor).</p>	
Tasks	<div>You...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check the formalities for delivery • hand in your work to the examination office accordingly or send it there by post • send a pdf version of your work as well as the experimental program, data, syntax, and codebook to your supervisor 	<div>Your supervisor...</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grades your work as quickly as possible and forwards the grade to the examination office
Result	<i>Your degree 😊</i>	

Tips for a smooth process:

- Inform yourself in a timely manner - also about the currently valid regulations at the university.
- Start writing at an early stage. You can already write the introduction and methods section during data collection.
- Discuss deadlines (absences, submission of preliminary and final versions, etc.) with your supervisor in good time.

Expectations: What we (can) expect from you and you from us - and what not

As part of the supervision of your thesis, **you can expect us** to provide you with professional advice and support throughout all stages of your thesis. We usually respond to your messages within a few days (and expect the same from you). We will support you with questions that you cannot find answers to yourself and are available for individual consultations.

During the course of your work, we will set milestones and look for solutions together if problems arise. In addition, we offer you differentiated verbal and written feedback on your work (see [feedback](#)). As part of these guidelines, we also make our assessment criteria as transparent as possible.

Please note, however, that there are some things **you can NOT expect us to do**, but which are your responsibility. This includes, for example, carrying out the literature research or data analysis for your work. Furthermore, you cannot expect us to read individual parts of your thesis repeatedly and discuss every paragraph of your thesis with you - after all, you are supposed to show that you are able to work independently in a scientific manner. Nor can you expect us to give you feedback on large amounts of text at short notice without prior consultation. We also do not spell-check your text.

For your work to be a success, **we expect you** to take your work on your topic seriously and approach it with motivation, and to contact us independently if you have any problems. Take your supervisor's feedback seriously and keep to agreements. Inform yourself independently about organizational matters (e.g., about current formal guidelines on the university website or about opening hours/holiday periods of the examination office) and try to find an answer to questions yourself first (e.g., How does this analysis work with R?).

If we have arranged a meeting, we expect you to prepare for this meeting (e.g., bring a list of questions or discussion points). Independence does not mean asking as few questions as possible. It means thinking along and being actively involved in the work with your supervisor. We recommend that you draw up a timetable for your work (you can coordinate this with us), as we expect you to manage your time independently.

IMPORTANT: If you realize in the course of processing that you need your grade by a certain date (e.g., for an application), we expect you to inform us immediately. We also ask you to reply to messages within a few days, as you would expect us to do.

It goes without saying that you must comply with the rules of good scientific practice, the duty of confidentiality, and the guidelines for ethical research and that you must not plagiarize. Violations of these rules can have serious consequences.

We do NOT expect you to "reinvent the wheel" in your work or to conduct a study that confirms your hypotheses. A hypothesis-compliant result is neither a prerequisite nor a guarantee for a

good grade. Nor do we expect you to be able to solve every problem on your own or that you are a specialist in programming psychological studies.

Feedback

While working on your thesis, you will receive feedback from us in the form of individual discussions during the individual work phases. You will also receive written feedback on your exposé (if applicable) and on a preliminary version of your thesis (e.g., in the form of comments on the text and global feedback by e-mail). We will point out the most important areas for improvement (e.g., structure, correctness, derivation of the research question, red thread) and explain our feedback in such a way that you can benefit from it in the best possible way.

Components, structure, and format of the written paper

Important **components** of the work are:

- A cover sheet. This should include the following information: Title of the thesis, type of thesis (BA or MA), university and department, information about the author (name, email address, matriculation number), information about supervisors and reviewers
- Table of contents
- Summary of the work
- Main text
- Bibliography
- Pre-registration
- Study material, if applicable
- Declaration of independence

The **structure** of the main text is based on the structure of a scientific journal article (see also [notes on scientific writing](#)):

1. **Introduction:** *Explanation of the relevance of the topic, naming the research question, brief preview of the work*
2. **Theoretical background:** *Consideration of the theories and findings from previous research relevant to the work, which leads to the hypotheses tested in the work*
3. **Methods:** *Participants and design of the study (incl. power analysis), course of the study (What was it like for the participants to take part in the study? What happened in which condition of the experiment?), measures used (incl. reliability)*
4. **Results:** *Testing of the hypotheses, if necessary exploratory additional analyses with reasons why these were carried out*
5. **Discussion:** *Brief summary of the results, discussion of the results against the background of previous research (to what extent do the results correspond, contradict or extend what we already knew before?), strengths and weaknesses of the work as well as derived indications for future research*
6. **Bibliography:** *Make sure that all the sources you cite in the text are named and that they contain all the necessary information*
7. **Appendix:** *Individual content, e.g., print version of the questionnaire, stimuli, complete scales, ...*

Please note the following information on the **format**:

- The paper should be written double-spaced in an easily legible font (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri).

- Formatting according to APA 7 (<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references>)
- The work can be printed single-sided or double-sided.

Assessment criteria

We follow standardized criteria when evaluating final theses. These include:

- Are theories, findings, methods and results presented precisely and systematically?
- Is the literature considered appropriate in terms of content and quantity?
- Are different approaches from previous research meaningfully integrated with each other?
- Do the hypotheses tested follow conclusively from the literature presented or your own arguments?
- Does the methods section of the paper meet scientific criteria (sample description, documentation of procedure, and materials used)?
- Is the experimental design for testing the hypotheses appropriate, and were the correct statistical methods selected?
- Were the analyses performed correctly and their results interpreted correctly?
- Do the individual analyses and results clearly relate to the research question and the hypotheses?
- Are the results appropriately summarized, evaluated, interpreted, and placed in the context of previous research in the discussion section?
- Are the theoretical conclusions and recommendations for future research comprehensible?

The colloquium

You must present your work in a colloquium.

The presentation in the colloquium has important advantages. If the work is presented before the actual data collection, important information can be gained from the discussion about how the introduction should be written and which aspects should be mentioned there. It also helps to improve the study material. If the paper is presented after the data has been collected, the discussion can provide valuable input for writing the discussion section and interpreting your own findings.

Attendance is always mandatory when other students present their work; you can attend all other sessions on a voluntary basis (if you are writing your Master's thesis with us, we strongly encourage you to attend the sessions).

FAQs

Where can I find formal information about the work, such as the application form?

Current information from the Department of Psychology can be found under the following link:

<https://www.uni-trier.de/universitaet/verwaltung/abteilung-ii-studentische-angelegenheiten/hochschulpruefungsamt-hpa>

Does my work have to have the same name on the application form and on the title?

No. But should match if possible.

How long must or may my thesis be?

Your thesis should only ever be as long as necessary. A longer thesis does not mean that you will get a better grade. For Bachelor theses, the usual length of the main text (beginning introduction - end discussion) is 20-30 pages (maximum 40 pages), in the case of Master theses, the length of the main text should not exceed 40 pages (maximum 80 pages).

I need the grade at a certain point in time, is that possible?

Under certain circumstances. If you need your grade by a certain date, you must communicate this to your supervisor in good time (at least 6 weeks in advance or immediately after the need arises) - the sooner, the better. Your supervisor can then clarify with any reviewers when the final version of your thesis must be available. A timely grading cannot be guaranteed if you do not meet this deadline.

What if the study comes to nothing?

There are very, very few studies in which "nothing" comes out. A hypothesis-compliant, significant result has no influence on the grading of your work.

Which statements in the text do I have to substantiate with a source?

In principle, all statements in the text should be backed up with sources where you are relying on observations, reflections, or the findings of others. This also includes statements about the world (e.g., "There are more and more...", "Students feel particularly stressed during exam periods", "People who believe in conspiracy theories are...").

The "paperwork"

You will most likely conduct an empirical study with humans as part of your thesis. This involves creating experimental materials and collecting data. To clearly regulate the handling of this data for all parties involved, we have prepared a declaration (see next page). Submitting this declaration is a prerequisite for us to be able to supervise your work.

Please read the declaration carefully and speak to your supervisor if you have any questions or if anything is unclear.

Agreement on final theses

Data protection and confidentiality

All data that I collect or become aware of during my thesis is subject to a strict confidentiality obligation. I undertake to treat all personal information that becomes known to me in the course of my thesis as strictly confidential. Disclosure of personal data is also not permitted in inter-collegiate discussions (e.g., with fellow students).

I further undertake to comply with the data protection guidelines set out in the ethics vote for my study or project.

I may use all data and project materials exclusively for the thesis and may under no circumstances pass them on to third parties or use them for other purposes.

Breaches of confidentiality will be reported to the relevant university authorities and will result in severe consequences.

Upon submission of the thesis, I am obliged to delete all personal data from my private computer and other storage media (e.g., email addresses, subject codes, log files). I am also obliged to hand in all documents containing study data and any borrowed work materials to my supervisor (e.g., paper-pencil questionnaires, consent forms).

Data utilization

The Social Influence Lab (or the client in the case of third-party funded projects) owns all intellectual and industrial property rights to the results obtained in the thesis. This includes data, software, hypotheses, theories, operationalizations, ideas, research design, stimulus material, evaluation, methods, questionnaires, and models.

I may only publish the results of the thesis in consultation with my supervisor (including presentations, posters, etc.). This means that I refrain from publishing all or part of the results of the thesis, as well as the thesis in its entirety or in a modified form, without the prior, explicit and written consent of the project leader.

The results of the theses written in the Social Influence Lab may be included in a publication. Depending on the extent of my direct contribution to the development of the study and the writing of the manuscript or other activities involved in publishing, I may be invited by my supervisor to become a co-author.

Declaration of consent

I have read and understood the agreement on final theses, and by signing it, I undertake to comply with the points listed above.

Student (first name, surname / signature)

Supervisor (first name, surname / signature)

date / place

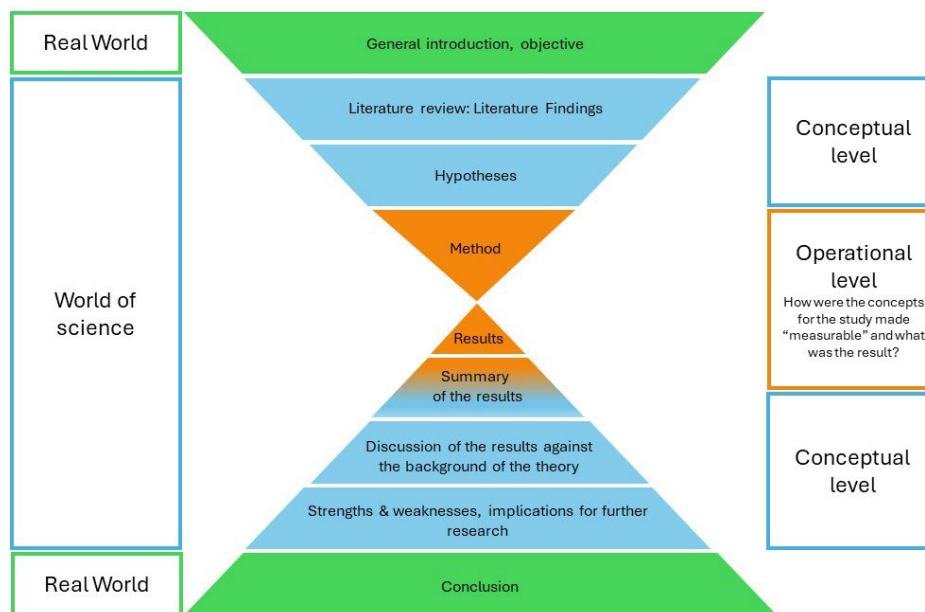
Appendix

Further information on academic writing

This appendix section contains information on the general structure of scientific texts, the language used in them and some tips on scientific writing in general.

Academic texts (in empirical studies) in psychology always have a similar **structure**. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:
(typical) structure of academic texts



Your thesis should be easy to read and understandable for people with a basic knowledge of psychology. Since this is a scientific paper, the **language** used should also be based on language used in science (regardless of whether you write your paper in German or English). *Scientific language*, in general, is neutral and distanced, statements are backed up with sources, and all evaluations (which should be used sparingly) are well justified. In *psychological jargon*, it is also important to define key terms precisely, use technical terms correctly, and always use the same (technical) term for a concept. When *writing*, you should also make sure that references between arguments are unambiguous and that you use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Word's proofreading tool, for example, can help you here.

Some **tips** that you should consider when writing (scientific) papers (for further information, see, e.g., Wagenmakers, 2009, APS observer, https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/883121/79473_313070.pdf):

- Make sure you use an appropriate level of language - avoid colloquial language.
- If there is no good German translation for an English technical term, use the technical term and explain it the first time it appears.
- Make the aim of your text clear - and early on!
- Use specific examples and metaphors.
- Avoid being long-winded.

- Avoid nouns that could also be a verb ("The findings were in contradiction to theory X" vs. "The findings contradicted theory X", "Concept A is in relation to concept B" vs. "Concepts A and B are related to each other")
- Avoid "statistical language" or translate it (even in the results section) into generally understandable language. Explain clearly in the results section what your results mean.
- Use consistent structures.
- Use subheadings.
- Use transitions (note: reader guidance according to the principle "In the next section we will deal with..." is ONLY necessary if there are branches in the argumentation. As a rule, the common thread should be so clear that the reader can already guess what the next paragraph will be about).
- Describe only one or two ideas per sentence.
- Divide long sentences into several short but complete ones.
- Begin sentences with old information, end them with new information.
- For each chapter, section, and paragraph, ask yourself what it contributes to the core message of the work. If the answer is "nothing", leave it out.
- Present only those parts of a theory or the approaches of other researchers that are relevant to your text.
- Make it clear when you are referring to theories ("XY assume...") and when to findings ("YZ showed...").