

INTRODUCTION TO THESIS WRITING

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WHO AM I?

Jonas Maibom, Associate Professor

Research interest: Labor Economics, Applied MicroEconometrics, Labor Market Models

Teaching: Labor Economics, MicroEconomics2, MicroEconometrics,

Supervision: Msc Oecon: 10+, PhDs: 4+



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OUTLINE

- What is a thesis?
- How to get started – choosing a topic
- Thesis supervision

WHAT IS A THESIS?

- A synthesis of everything you have done in the last 4-5 years
- An extensive written research paper
 - With a topic relevant to your study programme
- Based on the student's own individual research

- A report based on a relatively narrow topic which is to document the **student's ability** as regards formulating a problem statement, proper use of methodologies, critical evaluation and presentation.
- See also learning objectives: <https://kursuskatalog.au.dk/da/course/104898/Speciale>



WHAT IS A THESIS?

- Purely theoretical paper
 - Case study (in cooperation with a company)
 - Essay (a broad case study)
 - Empirical study
 - Other..
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- You can choose topics including theoretical, empirical and/or practical aspects
 - Important that the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis are coherent
 - **But irrespectively of topic chosen, the use of relevant theory, literature and potential data forms a fundamental basis for the thesis.**
 - **Independent work which illustrates analytical skills..**

OUTLINE

- What is a thesis?
- How to get started – choosing a topic
- Thesis advising process

HOW TO GET STARTED

- It all starts with a topic.. And YOU have to choose it..
- A (non-exhaustive) list of constraints:
 - Ideas
 - Feasibility
 - Time constraints
 - Human capital constraints
 - Data (more below)

<https://kursuskatalog.au.dk/da/course/104898/Speciale>

The problem that the thesis deals with must be suitable for developing and demonstrating the ability to independently use and produce knowledge using relevant scientific methods as well as the other qualifications developed through the study programme.

- Identify, describe, define and delimit a substantive, methodological and/or theoretical problem relevant to the study programme and suitable to the scope of the thesis.
- Select, justify and discuss the choice of relevant concepts, models and theories for analysing the problem.

HOW TO GET STARTED – CHOOSING A TOPIC

Choice of topic area can be based on:

- Interests (good)
- Perceived gap in study/world (good)
- What is new ... current topics (good)
- Topics that you know you are good at (perhaps good)
- Topics that you feel it would be easy to write a thesis on
~ “safe bet” (dangerous)

HOW TO GET STARTED – CHOOSING A TOPIC

- Look into yourself
- Look in newspapers, previous courses and academic journals
- Look in old MSc thesis'
- Look at Statistics Denmark, DA, BM, KRAKA etc.
- Look for topics offered by the academic supervisors
- Talk with lecturers in courses which fit your interest

HOW TO GET STARTED – DATA

Data – START EARLY!

- Public: Financial market data, Financial statements, Statistikbanken,
- Companies/cases
- Questionnaires/ Interviews – survey data
- Register data – limited access.

- Network/contacts?



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- <https://econ.au.dk/research/data-and-computational-resources/>
 - www.statistikbanken.dk
 - www.jobindsats.dk
 - ..

OUTLINE

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- Thesis supervision

FINDING AN ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR

Supervisors are different!

- Talk to your supervisor about the supervision process
- Align expectations early on in the process

STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

- Topic/idea
- Collecting, reading and understanding relevant literature
- Collecting data and implementing empirical methods
- Writing the thesis
- Initiate contact with the supervisor
- Submit inputs/agenda prior to supervisor meetings
- Be proactive

SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

- A guide
- Help narrowing in on the topic/idea
- Help ensuring alignment between level of ambition and topic/idea
- Offer advice if you run into problems with focus or structure of the thesis, data, the writing process or other general issues
- Examiner

IT IS NOT THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE TO...

- ...answer detailed questions regarding scientific papers
- ...assist you in collecting data and doing the empirical analysis
- ...read the thesis before submission
- .. answer detailed questions about the administrative process/deadlines etc.

FINDING AN ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR

- See the Supervisor list for Department of Economics and Business Economics (Study portal – Master’s thesis) or consider the teachers you already know
- Contact the supervisor you prefer (approach one at a time..)
- If no match, then try another supervisor or contact the coordinator - after 4-5 rejections

THESIS ADVISING PROCESS

- Before first contact: As a minimum a topic area and ideally some good ideas (initial impression matters!)
- Then discuss with your potential thesis supervisor:
 - Ideas for topics
 - Problems to be analysed
 - Choice of method
 - Literature and perhaps empirical data
- Your initial thesis synopsis / proposal may be revised on the basis of the discussions that you have with your thesis supervisor

THESIS ADVISING PROCESS

To ensure that your thesis supervision and the cooperation with the thesis supervisor are optimal:

- Make sure that you show up well prepared for all thesis supervision meetings
- Make sure that well in advance of each supervision meeting:
 - Prepare and send to the supervisor suggestions for questions and issues to be discussed at the meeting as well as material, drafts, etc. of relevance to these suggestions.

Process sketch (again remember supervisors are different):

- Examples of alignment
 - Do we meet on a regular basis (shorter meetings) or only when you reach out?
 - What is the aim of the thesis? What are the expectations from the student/supervisor?
- Tentative sketch of contact:
 - Supervisor meetings / email exchanges (weekly status) etc.
 - Synopsis (sketch of thesis)
 - Read and comment on a small selection of the thesis

SOME SELECTIVE ADVICE

- Choose a topic you find interesting
- Make sure you can get relevant data
- Position the thesis in the current academic literature
 - Use Google Scholar to search for literature (or library)
- Listen to your supervisor
- Draw up a synopsis early in the process
 - Continuously update the synopsis (work on your pitch of the project)
- Start as early as possible (in the best of all worlds you can take a break towards the end...)
- Criticise existing and own work

MY ADVICE - CONTINUED

- Start writing early in the process (do not underestimate this process)
- Give a broader perspective on your findings
- Proof-read your thesis (use your study group / family / friends)

- Have fun! (enjoy the process – it may be once in a life-time!)

WRITE REGULARLY!

- It becomes easier and it becomes a habit
- The longer you wait, the more immense a task it will seem
- Before it is written down, nobody can help
- It clears your thoughts

(Wichmann-Hansen, Gitte (2015), *Skriveprocesser og tekst feedback*, CUL, AU)



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