

INTRODUCTION TO THESIS WRITING

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WHO AM I?

Jonas Maibom, Associate Professor

Research interest: Labor Economics, Applied MicroEconometrics, Labor Market Models, Public Finance, Welfare State etc.

Teaching: Labor Economics, MicroEconomics2, MicroEconometrics,

Supervision: Msc Oecon: 12+, PhDs: 5+



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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 research paper written by you
 - With a topic relevant to your study programme
- Based on the student's own individual research
- **Independent work which illustrates analytical skills..**
- 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/Special>



WHAT IS A THESIS?

- Purely theoretical paper
 - Case study (in cooperation with a company)
 - Essay (a broad case study)
 - Empirical study
 - Theory and Empirics..
 - Other..
- 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.**

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.
- Perform a clear and precise analysis of the problem(s) identified using relevant concepts, theories, data and methods.
- Explain the contents of the thesis and engage in a discussion of the thesis as a whole and its constituent elements in the oral defence in both specialist and layman's terms.

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

- **Think about constraints..! .. Start now!**
- **.. You have to spend a lot of time on the thesis so you might as well pick something interesting! (.. And spend time looking for ideas...)**

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/START NOW!.

- Network/contacts?



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- <https://econ.au.dk/research/data-and-computational-resources/>
 - www.statistikbanken.dk
 - www.jobindsats.dk
 - <https://users.nber.org/~rdehejia/data/.nswdata2.html>
 - <https://sites.google.com/site/econrunevejlin/teaching>
 - 1 % random sample (often used in BA thesis... less suited for master thesis)

ACCESS TO REGISTER DATA

Access via IFØ (only relevant if you already work as an RA or so).. Otherwise access to register data through IFØ is very hard

Publicly advertised: “Speciale pladser”

[DØRS:](#)

<https://dors.dk/node/2016>

[DST:](#)

<https://www.dst.dk/da/OmDS/Job/studerende>

Ministry of finance? Ministry of Education? Etc...

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

In some cases it might be possible to use already existing “exchange deals”..
Talk to relevant lecturers in your area of interest to know more..

For example in the field of labor economics there may be options:

- Ministry of employment, NFA
- to use already existing deals please reach out to me.. (**do not approach by yourself**)
- for these deals you have to expect screening based on GPA, topic etc.

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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 (A NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST)

- 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

- Examiner
- 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
 - Remember advice is not always a final answer, but rather direction: ... try to look at these papers... think more but focus on...
- ... sometimes it may even be the role of the supervisor not to help.. 😊

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 lecturers you already know
- Contact the supervisor you prefer
- If no match, then try another supervisor or contact the coordinator - after 4-5 rejections
 - Approach one at a time
 - Do not spray and pray! Supervisors are people also with constraints 😊
 - There is no casting! Don’t expect long meeting with many supervisors before selecting your preferred supervisor

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
 - Problem statement (needs to be handed in and approved!)
 - 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)
 - Write regularly.. It becomes easier and it becomes a habit
 - Before it is written down, nobody can help
- Give a broader perspective on your findings
- Proof-read your thesis (use your study group / family / friends)
- Have fun! (enjoy the process – it is likely once in a life-time!)
 - => spend time on something that matters!



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