Degree Programme in Information Studies and Interactive Media

Evaluation criteria for Master’s theses

Determination of the overall grade

The overall grade of a thesis is always based on an overall consideration. In other words, the grade of a thesis is not necessarily the numerical average of the different evaluation areas. The examiners’ statement includes a short written reasoning that describes the aspects that affected the grading. If necessary, the written description can also highlight facts that are not evident in the numeric grades (such as relating to the applicability of the results or their potential for publication). The primary aim of the written description is to link the numeric grades of the different components to the overall evaluation criteria for Master’s theses.

Evaluation areas

1. Research topic, purpose and objectives, research problem and research questions
   - Justification of the research topic
   - clarity of the setting of objectives
   - clear verbalisation of the research questions and accuracy of formulation
   - clear description and definition of the analysis perspective
   - clarity, validity and logic of the analysis perspective and problem setting
   - particularly important or innovative topic
   - clarity of the relationship between the research questions, literature review and findings.

2. Basing the research on the literature in the field, concept definition and theoretical framework
   - Linking the research to previous research on the topic
   - familiarity with previous research on the topic, summaries of previous research information
   - relevance of the selected previous research for the research question and linking the previous research to the current research problem
   - accuracy and appropriateness of the definition of key concepts
   - examination and analysis of theoretical approaches in the field
   - justification of the theoretical framework
   - building the framework on the basis of previous research
   - any hypotheses proposed on the basis of previous research and the framework.

3. Use of research methods
   - Suitability of the methods for the research problem
   - justification of the selection of the methods
   - accuracy of reporting the collection of materials
   - sufficiency of research material and its reliability in view of the research problem, clear definition of reliability criteria
   - presentation of the methods for processing and analysing the material
   - transparency, clarity and reliability of the analysis
- comprehensiveness and depth of the analysis
- use of tables, charts and summaries in the presentation of findings
- examination of the reliability and validity of the findings and tests of statistical significance.

4. Presenting findings and conclusions
- Presenting key findings and examining these in the context of previous research
- answering the research question
- analysing the nature of the findings (unexpected, new, expected results)
- interpreting the findings and analysing their significance (if the findings have scientific novelty value, importance for practical operations and the development thereof)
- pointing out the limitations of the research and analysing the need for future research
- evaluating the appropriateness of the selected methods.

5. Command of the scientific presentation conventions and of the research as a whole
- Ability to present scientific arguments and conviction of argumentation
- ability to analyse the research literature
- the relation between theoretical and empirical knowledge
- demonstrating familiarity with good scientific research practice
- demonstration of scientific imagination at different stages of the research process
- clarity, fluency and grammatical correctness of writing, mastery of scientific writing conventions
- correct marking of sources (references and works cited)
- effectiveness and logic of the structure of the thesis
- finishing (layout, typos).

A referential description of the grades
5=excellent; 4=very good; 3=good; 2=satisfactory; 1=sufficient

Fail
In order to be approved, a Master’s thesis must be at least partly coherent as a piece of research, refer to scientific literature – at least to some extent – and at least one element of the thesis must be mastered.

1 (sufficient)
The thesis has been written appropriately enough to merit its approval as an academic dissertation. However, the question setting is basic or unclear or the scope of the research is narrow. Typical features of a thesis receiving this grade:
- The thesis makes little reference to previous studies of discussions.
- The background information is based on few works that are written in Finnish, and the discussion of these is of a summarising nature.
- Most of the works cited are non-academic, such as course books, magazine articles or specialist texts.
- Concepts, the research mission and problems are not defined or they remain unclear.
- The description of the method is incoherent and inadequate.
- There is little empirical evidence or it is not used extensively enough.
- The author does not interpret the findings or present them in the context of the literature; there are few or no conclusions.
- The author struggles with the scientific manner of presentation.

2 (satisfactory)
The thesis is relatively coherent as a whole. However, the work is somewhat narrow in scope or the approach or perspective is routine-like. Typical features of a thesis receiving this grade:
- The topic is conventional or common in the field, but the author links it to previous research.
- The background section references theories and research findings that relate to the research problem, but the discussion is slightly mechanical or list-like.
- The definition of relevant background information should be linked more closely to the research questions.
- The author describes the basis of the research and specifies the research questions.
- The works cited are mostly appropriate, but not all of them are relevant and some important sources are missing.
- The author has a good command of the research method, but the reporting of methodological choices relies too much on a summary of the methodological literature, or the discussion of the material or reporting of the analysis method are inadequate.
- The findings are presented mechanically or their interpretation is slightly shallow.
- The findings are not linked to previous research or assessed in a sufficiently critical manner.
- The thesis is fairly good from a linguistic point of view.
- There are no major formal issues, such as structural ones.

3 (good)
The thesis is a good, coherent whole. It is well-structured, well-written and logical, and there are clear findings at the end. Scientific manner of presentation is appropriate and clear, and the author has good mastery of the research as a whole. Typical features of theses receiving this grade:
- The author has analysed the background thoroughly and provides a good presentation of the most relevant research on the topic.
- The definition of the research questions is clear, and the author explains the point of view and limitations of the research.
- The author describes the theoretical framework of the research.
- The methodological choices are reported well.
- The presentation of the analysis and findings is clear and appropriate.
- The conclusions relate the findings clearly to previous research and the theoretical background.
- The language is good, and the form of the thesis is flawless.

4 (very good)
The thesis is better than average or more comprehensive. The research has achieved new information in some area of the research process, or the work demonstrates an ability to discuss the research subject in a manner more expert and extensive than usual. Typical features of theses receiving this grade:
- The thesis discusses an interesting, important or new theme, or the perspective is of interest (for example, the author may conceptualise the research topic in a new way).
- The author defines his/her research problem precisely and links it with previous research.
- The author devises and develops the research problem independently.
- The introduction, theoretical framework and question setting demonstrate a familiarity with the field, and the contextualisation of the study reaches a synthesis with previous research to at least some extent.
- The author defines concepts precisely.
- Sources are relevant to the field and topic.
- The choice and discussion of sources have elements of critical research.
- The thesis demonstrates the author’s good command of methodology.
- Conclusions and the interpretation of findings are logical and well-reasoned.
- The author has a good command of scientific conventions and formal matters.
- The language is good, and the thesis is polished and finished on the whole.

5 (excellent)
The topic of the thesis is important or clearly more demanding compared to usual. The author has excellent mastery of the thesis as a whole. The approach is innovative or based on an extensive material
that is analysed thoroughly. The thesis demonstrates independent thinking and vision. The author is able to master large-scale problems and topics. Typical features of theses receiving this grade:

- The author shows profound familiarity with the topic or the theoretical tradition of the field of research.
- The background of the research is in synthesis with previous research.
- The basis of the research and the research questions are described and defined clearly and justified well.
- The author masters the research methods.
- Methodological choices are well justified, and their use is thoroughly documented.
- The analysis of the materials and the interpretation of the results is apt.
- The findings may have scientific value as such.
- The findings are assessed in relation to previous research in a laudable manner, and the assessment and discussion of the findings is consistent and critical.
- The thesis is written in high-quality academic prose.
- The thesis could be published as such or abridged as a scientific publication in the field.