



Aalto University
School of Business

Master's Thesis Seminar 26E99905 Session #1 – Introduction

*Spring 2019
January 9, 2019*

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Today's Agenda

Introductions and practicalities

What is the Master's Thesis work about?

- What does a good MSc Thesis look like?
- What's the process like?
- What do you need to do next?

Next steps

Introductions

Who are you?

What's your (provisional) topic?

Initial feelings about the Thesis process?

What is this seminar about?

- This is **not** a seminar about methods, theories, frameworks, epistemological positioning, etc. in your thesis.
- YET, the seminar is meant to help you get started with your thesis.
- Motivates you to start thinking about what, how, when and why.
- Forces you to evaluate the feasibility and the scientific potential of your topic.
- The goal is to produce a professional research proposal.
- Allows you to get some self-confidence and motivation.
- Helps you to find a thesis topic and suitable supervisor.

Course Practicalities

Some clarification

- There are/might be two types of students:
 - *Degree regulations of 2005 and 2013*
- 2005 & 0 credit units:
 - *you need to attend the three sessions and complete assignments 1&2*
 - *If you wish you can change to 2013 regulations. Contact your study coordinator if you wish to do so ASAP.*
*MIB: MIB-coordinator-les-biz@aalto.fi, CS: CS-coordinator-les-biz@aalto.fi, IDBM: IDBM-coordinator-les-biz@aalto.fi,
Strategy: Strategy-coordinator-les-biz@aalto.fi*
- 2013 & 6 credit units:
 - *Check the syllabus – you have to do everything!*
 - *You cannot change to 2005 regulations.*

Thesis seminar

Seminar lectures

- 3 joint compulsory seminars
- Understanding of the process - Guided first steps
 - *Assignment 1 (20%): Analyzing and evaluating an existing thesis*
 - *Assignment 2 (20%): First draft of research proposal*
 - *Assignment 3 (10 %): Learning from the supervisory meetings*
 - *Assignment 4 (50%): Professional research proposal*

One-on-one supervision – individual attention

- *6 months of active support, what, where & how decided between supervisor & student*
- *Good idea to always book next meeting and set clear working goals!*

Course and Thesis Language

In the Master's Thesis Seminar Course (26E99905):

- Assignments 1, 2 and 3 **must** be written in English. Assignment 4 will be written in the language that you write your thesis in (English/Finnish)

In writing the Master's Thesis itself (26E99901/21E99901) :

- The school encourages you to write in English; however, some programs also allow you to write in Finnish. Discuss this with your supervisor.



Joint seminars

- 1. Introduction to thesis process (Jan 9)**
- 2. Planning a research proposal (Jan 16)**
- 3. Reading and Writing (Jan 30)**

Seminar Schedule

Session	Date	Place	Topic	Assignment Due Date
Seminar #1	9.1.2019 09:15-12.00	E-127, Arkadia	Introduction to thesis process, posing research questions	
Seminar #2	16.1.2019 09:15-12.00	E-127, Arkadia	Planning a research proposal	Assignment 1 15.1. at 23.00
Seminar #3	30.1.2019 09:15-12.00	E-127, Arkadia	How to review literature and write	Assignment 2 29.1. at 23.00
				Assignment 3 1.3. at 23.00
				Assignment 4 15.3. at 23.00

Requirements for Master Thesis seminar

- Thesis seminar course will be accepted as completed if all **compulsory meetings are attended**.
- **Exceptionally**, the absence of one compulsory meeting can be compensated
 - Talk to me if you need to be absent
- All assignments are returned in time and passed.
Late submissions are failed.



Compensation

To compensate you will have to write:

- a one page summary each for 3 pre-selected articles on methodological aspects of doing academic research in Management Studies (i.e. 1 page for each article)
- Plus a page where you provide your reflections concerning why (or why not) and how the summarized articles can be useful for / applied to your own project
- The assignment is evaluated as pass or fail → You need to **pass!**

Articles for the Compensation Assignment

Compulsory readings

Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550

Alvesson, M. Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing Mystery: Empirical Matters in Theory Development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4): 1265-1281

Plus one of the following:

Gioia, D. Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change Initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12: 433- 448

OR

Mantere, S. Schildt, H. Sillince, J. (2012). Reversal of Strategic Change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(1): 172-196

OR

Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. 2011. Theorising from case studies: towards a pluralist future for international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42: 740-762.

Course communication

Use the course **MyCourses** page to turn in all assignments.

Got questions? Ask them during and after class or use **MyCourses** general discussion site so that others can see the answers. The questions tend to be rather similar.

Virpi.outila@aalto.fi

Marcellinus.dike@aalto.fi for all practical queries

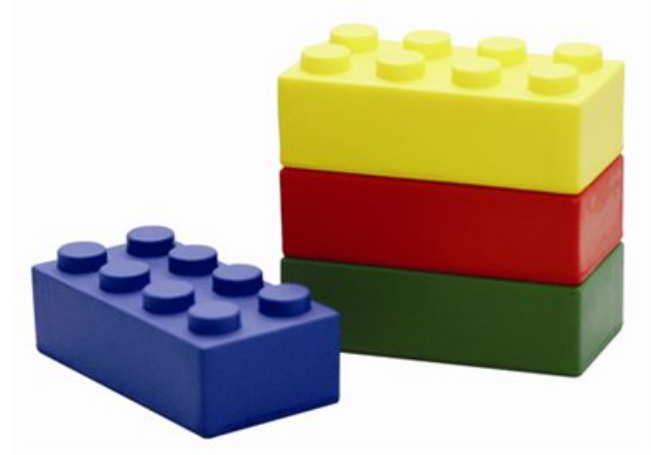
Joint thesis

It is possible to do the thesis together with someone.

- Longer
- More data
- Explicate individual contributions
- Negotiate with your supervisor

Splitting thesis credits

- 6 credits for thesis seminar
- $10 + 10 + 10 = 30$ credits for thesis
 - *10 – literature review*
 - *10 – data collection and analysis*
 - *10 – final product - Graded*



Master's Thesis

Why the Master's Thesis?

Perhaps the most important part of your studies

- Individual work & responsibility
- Deep work, getting a taste of academic work

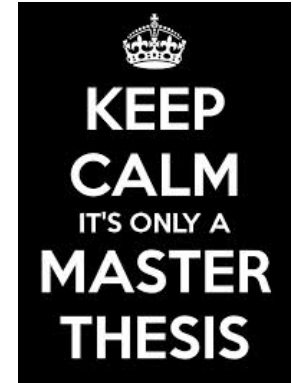
Working on a topic that interests / is valuable to you

- An enjoyable, personal journey

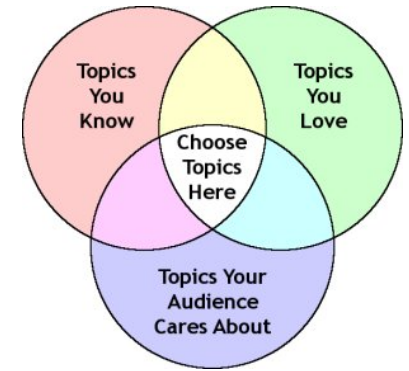
Learning analytical & methodological skills, and critical thinking & argumentation skills → useful beyond the thesis

Your “business card” to the world: valuable contacts, CV, even future employment

→ *Make the thesis your top priority! Don't delay it!*



So how about the topic?



- **Topic relevant for your area – many different topics apply**
- **Your own interest is key**
- **Topic/contribution does not have to be “entirely novel”**
 - New context/industry, new aspect/perspective, combination of different perspectives, methodological contribution
- **You can still change / modify the topic**
 - Happens often
- **Think about potential data collection & its feasibility right from the start (e.g., where, how, access)**

And what is expected of you?

Work independently!

Solve a research problem by going through the stages of a research process

Present and defend ideas using principles of written academic English

Let's take a Break

Thesis process

The research process



What does a good thesis look like?

- In pairs discuss the following (15 minutes):
 - What sections should a thesis include?
 - In which order would you write each section?
 - What should the relative weight / length of each section be?

What does a good thesis look like?

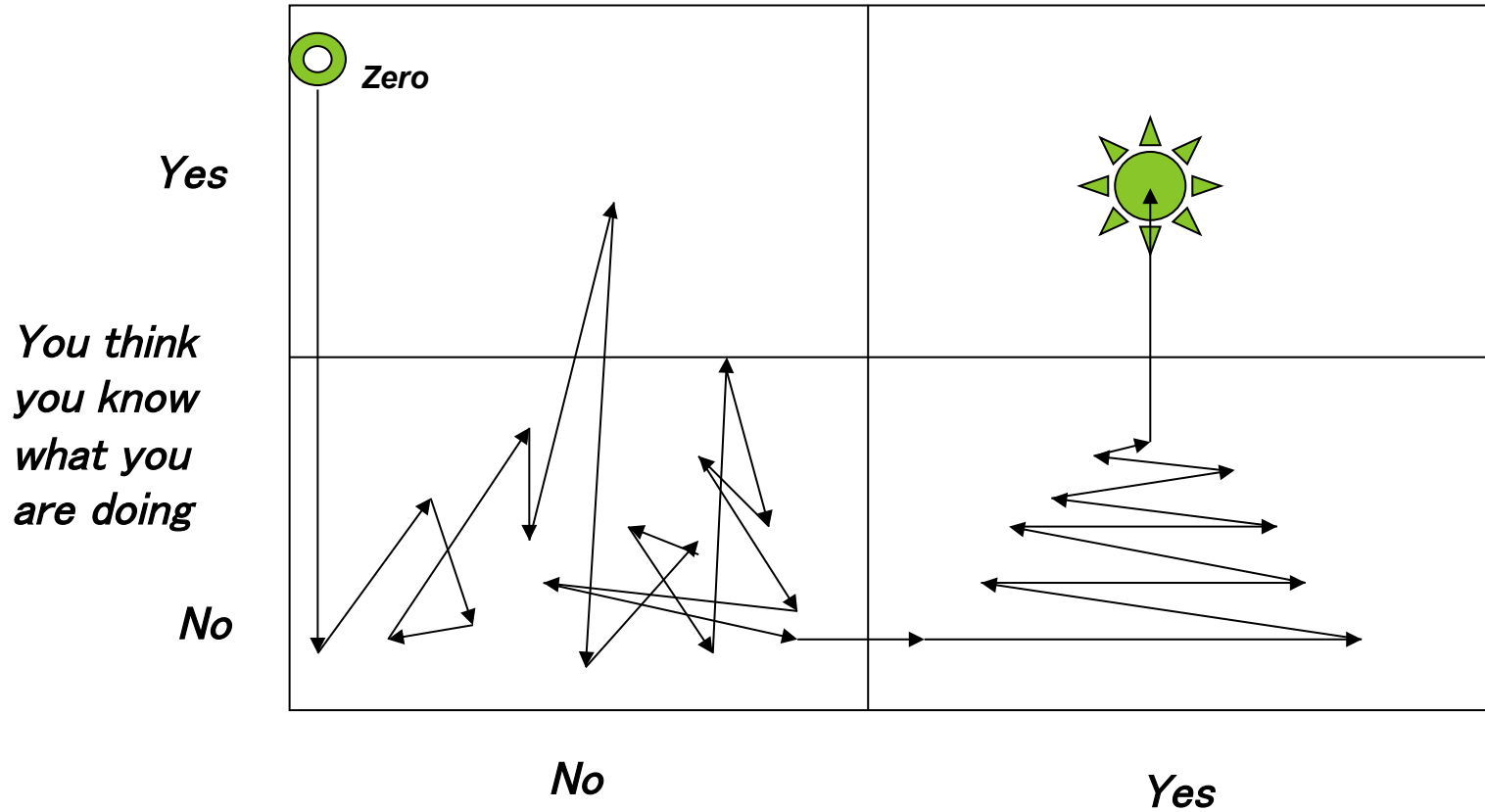
Includes all of these:

- Motivation & research gap
- Research problem/objective
- Definitions & limitations
- Literature review -> your theoretical framework
- Research context/data & methodology
- Empirical analysis & findings
- Conclusions and implications

And...

- Presents a coherent argument, a coherent story
- Well structured, clearly & concisely written
- Well-informed (& well-referenced) AND shows **own synthesis/thinking**
- Rigorous methodology
- Provides a contribution
 - Descriptive → **Explanatory**

It's both fun AND frustration



Tips!

- **Most typical pitfall No. 1:**

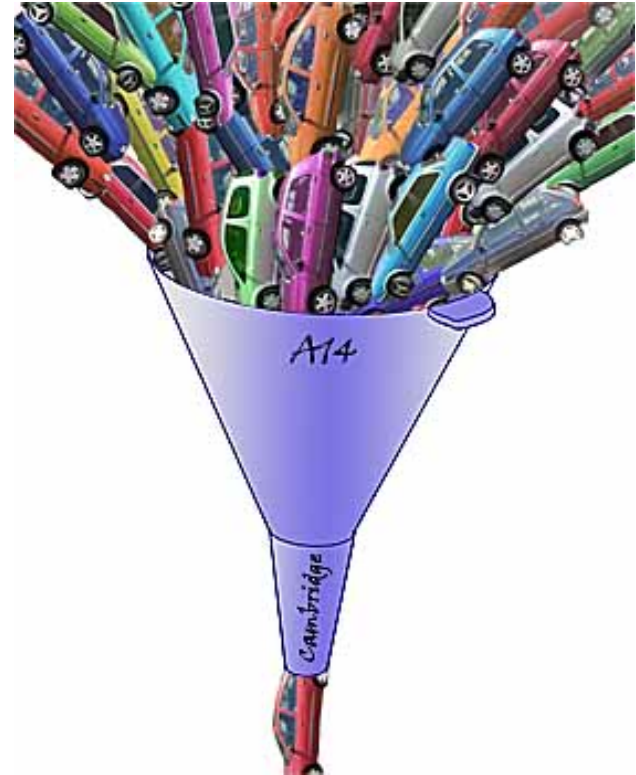
*Trying to solve the
whole world at once*



Remedy

- **Focus!**
- **Be pragmatic!**
- **Do not make your thesis your lifetime project!**

Use a funnel approach



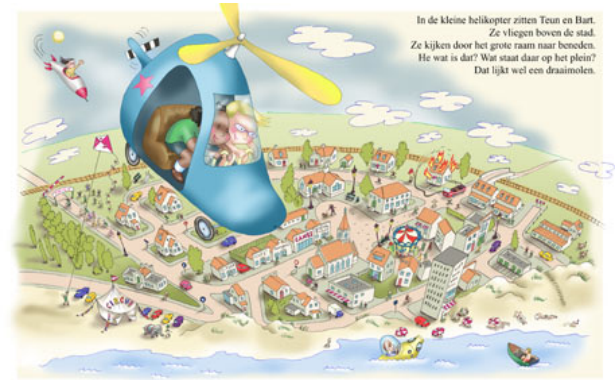
Tips!

- Most typical pitfall No. 2:
Getting lost in the (literature) forest!



Remedy

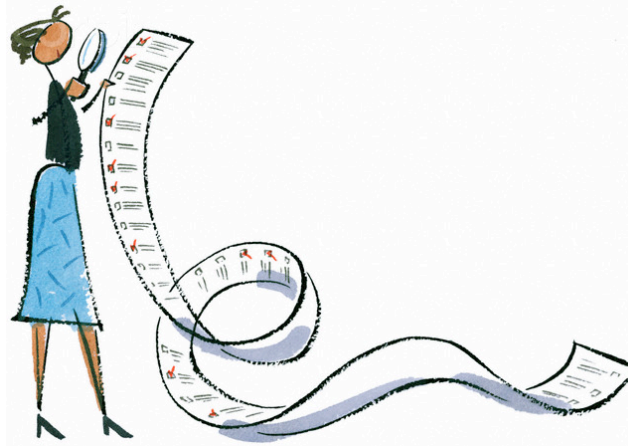
- **A helicopter view!**



- Scan literature first – start broad → narrow down
- Use recent lit. reviews & key articles to map the literature
- Good thesis can be helpful
- Get an overview of the field – e.g., mindmap
- Then start reading in more depth
- Pay attention to the variation in using concepts

Tips!

- Most typical pitfall No. 3:
Including too much:
15 concepts, 5 theoretical perspectives, 4 frameworks...



Remedy

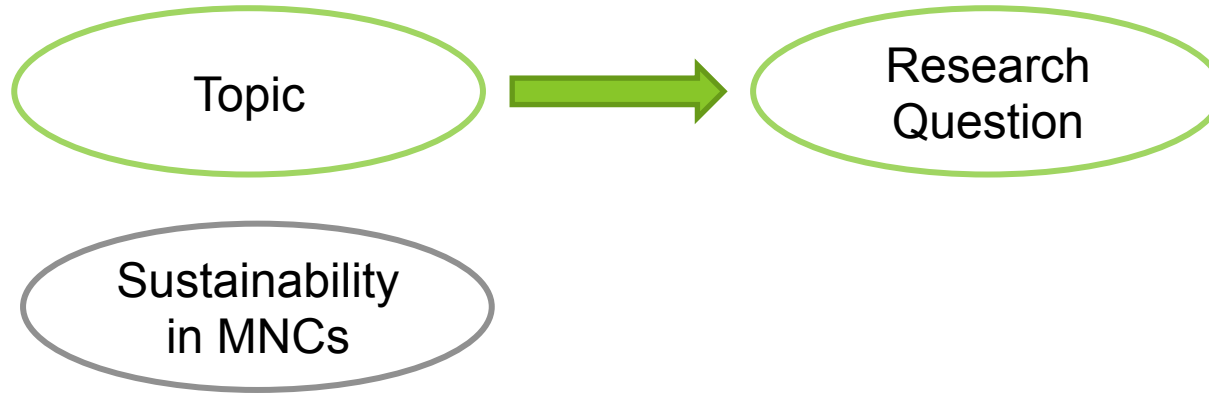
- Take time to find your focus
- Get feedback before drowning in the literature
- Link everything together into **one** storyline:
And guide the reader from start to finish



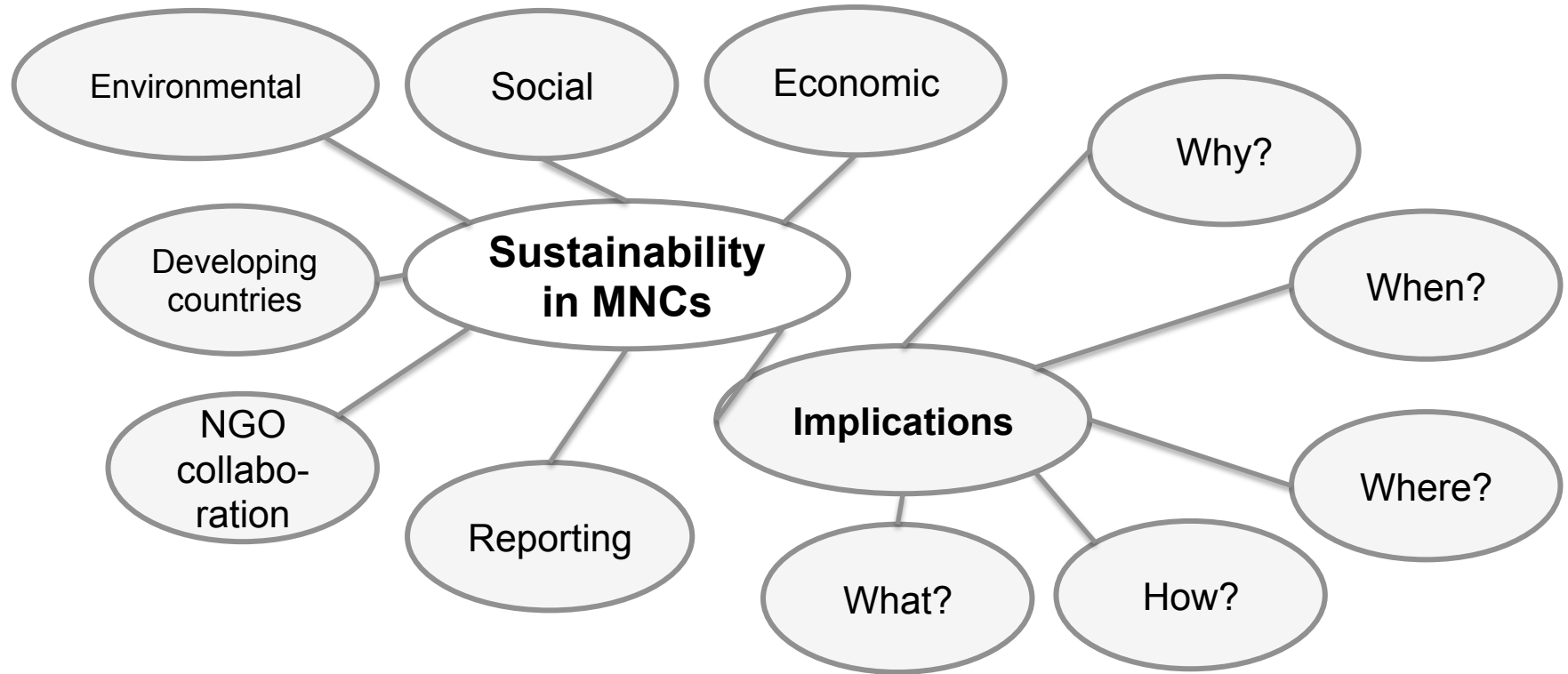
The process of developing a research question



Developing a research question



Narrowing down the topic & listing questions



Evaluating the research question

- Is the question **clear & specific** i.e. one issue requiring analysis?
- Is the question **too narrow or too broad**?
- Is the research question **of interest** to you and to others (researchers/practitioners)?
- Is it a **new issue** or problem that needs to be solved or is it attempting to shed light on previously researched topic.
- Is the question **researchable**?
 - Is there existing literature on the topic?
 - Is the chosen methodology feasible?
 - Can you gain access to the data?
 - Do you have the resources to conduct the study?

Tips!

- **Be proactive in finding a thesis supervisor!**
 - While I or the persons responsible for your specializations will find a supervisor for everyone, some supervisors don't take many students. Slots tend to go to the early birds. If you find one by yourself, let me know.
- **Keep a research journal!**
 - Develop a habit of reading “with” your journal
 - Not so much for traditional notes
 - But for ideas, insights, things to remember, thinking on paper, drafting figure
 - Also think of practical considerations; schedule!
- **When you feel stuck...**
 - Take time to think
 - Talk to others or your supervisor
 - Take a break or focus on something else, e.g. other sections of your thesis
 - But move on and persevere → you will get there!

Parkinson's law

- **“Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion”**
- **If you think that it takes a year to complete a thesis, then it takes a year.**
- **If you think that it takes three months, then it takes three months.**
- **Set a date for submitting your thesis and stick to it!**

What next?

Assignment 1

Purpose: to get an idea of what a (good) thesis looks like

- Find an Aalto Management, International Business, IDBM, or Creative Sustainability thesis relevant to your topic/methods/interests/level of ambition
 - Read, Analyze & evaluate the whole thesis
 - Using the MSc evaluation rubric: What was good? What could be improved?
 - What did you learn from reading this (and other) theses?
 - <http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/en/ethesis/>
 - The length of the assignment is 1200-1300 words.
 - Due by **15.1 . 23h**, submit to MyCourses (note: all return boxes are turnitin boxes)
-

Employ the MSc Evaluation Rubric!

- You can find it in MyCourses. It is the same evaluation sheet that your own Thesis will be graded with one day!
- 14 criteria that assesses e.g.:
 - Problem setting of the study: the topicality and interest to the scientific and business community;
 - Contribution and the use of scientific methods;
 - Presentation and integration of the study;
 - Style and format of the study;
 - Quality of the underlying research process
- Use the structure and components of the Rubric to structure your assignment #1. This helps you to understand what is expected of you.

Next steps

- Thesis Evaluation → Assignment#1, submit to MyCourses
- Choose a topic and let us know about it → so we could find you a supervisor
 - Start scanning the literature → Mindmap
 - Do I need/want to revise topic?
- When you have a supervisor:
 - First one-on-one supervisory meeting straight after the third session
 - Come to the meeting with your completed research plan (this is Assignment #2, due for lecture 3, so you will have it 😊) and questions that puzzle you. Send the plan to the supervisor in advance.

YOU CAN DO IT!

