



Aalto University  
School of Business

# Master's Thesis Seminar (26E99905)

## Session 2: Working on your research plan

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# Assignment 1

**Well done!**

**Key Insights?**

**Questions?**

**Comments?**

# Some feedback on assignment 1

- Summarizing a thesis vs. grading a thesis vs. evaluating it
- Substantiating your claims
- Academic writing
  - coherent story
  - writing style
  - referencing
- Continue applying the rubric to your own work

# Reflection point #1

(~10 minutes)

**Split into groups of 4-5 people and discuss the following question with regard to the Master's thesis you have read:**

***What was the motivation of the thesis?***

# Reflection point #2

(~10 minutes)

**Split into groups of 4-5 people and discuss the following question with regard to the Master's thesis you have read:**

***How was the empirical work done?***

# Reflection point #3

(~5 minutes)

**Split into groups of 4-5 people and discuss the following question with regard to the Master's thesis you read:**

***What are the key features of a good thesis?***



# Some reflections...

- Thesis for a company vs. thesis for the School
- Not solving all the world's problems
- "Shop list" literature review vs. critical thinking and synthesis
- Theory vs. empiria: you need to link these two through
- Methodology section: size and depth
- Guiding the reader
- Storyline and structure are important!
- Justifications for what is included and / or excluded
- Description vs. explanation
- Data presentation (amount and style)
- Language: style and quality

# Some reflections...(2)

*”... a good thesis doesn't require excessive intelligence or losing one's sleep for a year – it requires a well-formulated topic, interest in it and some stamina to build a cohesive and well-structured research” (A fellow student)*

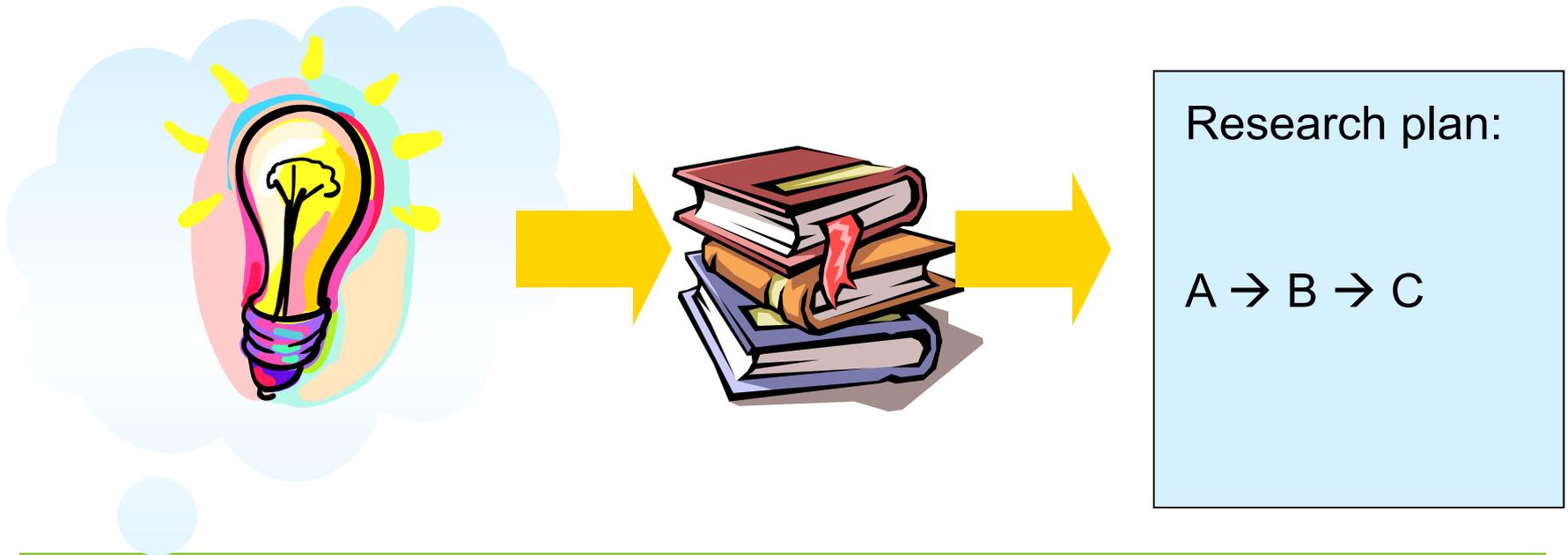
# Today's agenda

- **Now you have an idea of what a good thesis looks like**
- **Next step in the process: Devising a research plan**
  - Plus begin / continue scanning and reading!
- **What is a good research plan?**
  - Research plan workshop



# Why research plan?

- From a loose idea to a concrete plan
- A holistic picture of what you are trying to do
- Iterative!



# Why research plan?

- Gets you started!
- Allows you to find your focus / arrive at the core of your research idea
- Provides you with a structure and a game plan (both mental and formal)
- Allows you to communicate your research idea(s) to others (e.g. your supervisor)



# Structure of the Research Plan

TITLE	must be interesting & crispy
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	why it will be conducted
RESEARCH GAP	spell out a research gap
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	what do you want to find out/show/prove/tell/modify
RESEARCH QUESTIONS, SUB-PROBLEMS, OBJECTIVES	what secondary purposes need to be accomplished
DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS	relevant to the study
OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE	literature → your framework (link between theory and data).
THEORETICAL FRAME OF REF.	Good to illustrate with a figure
APPROACH, DATA AND METHOD	to be used in the study
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5-7 main chapters
LIST OF REFERENCES	scientific referencing

# Write down the title of your research

## Make it interesting!

# Formulating a research problem

Three main components:

1. Motivation: why is the topic important, why your study is needed
  - Your study can be motivated by e.g.:
    - Mixed empirical results (A says it's X and B says it's Y)
    - Unexplained empirical phenomenon (e.g. a new phenomenon or a new factor emergence)
    - Change of empirical conditions (A leads to B in X, but how is it in Y?)
2. Research gap
  - To formulate your research gap you have to:
    - **acknowledge** the work of others in the relevant research areas, and
    - **justify** your study in terms of a knowledge gap or a need for the research.
3. Your intended contribution: how you intend to fill the identified research gap

# Background and motivation of the study

## Write down

1. Motivation: why is the topic important, why your study is needed, why is it important to you.
2. What is the scholarly discussion you are engaging with? Articulate a research gap if you can.
3. Imagine what your intended contribution could be.

# Formulating a research question

- Draws on an interesting phenomenon and asks a relevant and interesting question regarding this phenomenon
- Guides you to collect all the relevant information to solve the background problem
- Gives you general guidance/direction throughout the research and writing process
- Carries conceptual assumptions



# Research question(s): some criteria

- Clear – There is no ambiguity about what you mean
- Defined scope – You have drawn boundaries on the phenomenon and the question you try to address concerning the phenomenon
- Reasonable – The question can be resolved by one person in a reasonable period of time
- Focused – Tries to solve one problem rather than multiple
- Based on a clear problem – Will create interest

# For instance...

## Is it a good question?

- *Are female employees doing better than their male colleagues?*

## What about this?

- *Are newly hired female employees doing better than their male colleagues in Finnish consulting firms during the first three years of their employment?*

## And what about this?

- *Are newly hired female employees more satisfied with their job than their male colleagues in Finnish consulting firms during the first three years of their employment?*

# Write down your research question

- Think about the process of developing the question
- And do not forget the evaluation criteria:
  - Clear and specific
  - Not too narrow or broad
  - New and needed
  - Interesting to you and others
  - Researchable

# Check!

## TITLE – OBJECTIVE – RESEARCH QUESTION

- Check that these are in line with each other

# Let's try!

## **Group work:**

- divide into groups of 4-5 → present your thesis to others in your group (~10 mins)

## **Title**

## **Research problem/objective**

- The objective of this thesis is...

## **Background**

- Motivation: why is the topic important (for theory, practice & me)
- Positioning in literature: research gap (if known at this stage)
- Your intended contribution

## **Research question(s)**

- The research question(s) of this thesis is/are...

# Next

## Start drafting the other sections

- Title
- Background
- Research problem/objective & research questions
- Definitions & limitations
- Overview of the literature, leading to
- Theoretical framework of your thesis (figure!)
- Data & methods
- Table of contents & list of (key) references

## **THIS IS AN ITERATIVE PROCESS!**

- Keep on updating your plan

# Assignment 2: First draft of research proposal

Follow the instructions available on the MyCourses page

1200-1500 words, excluding references

- Also, be ready to show it to your supervisor in your first one-on-one session
- Keep on updating as you continue your reading & thinking process → this REALLY helps!

# Check

**Typical pitfall No. 1:**

**Trying to solve the  
whole world at once**



# Remember this!

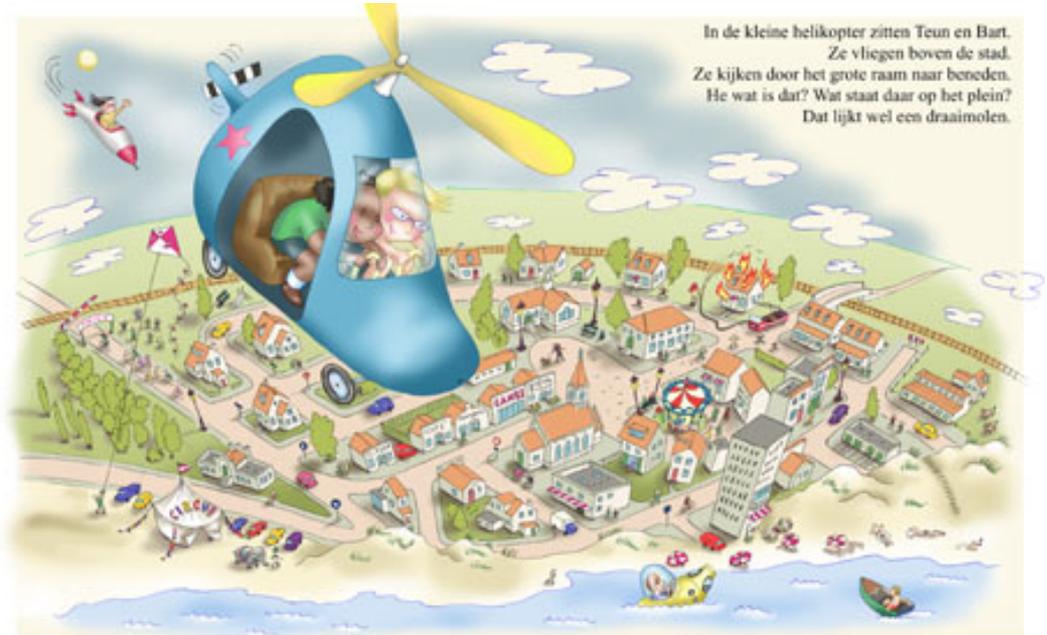
Typical pitfall No. 2:

Getting lost in the (literature) forest!



# Remedy

**A helicopter view!**



**The research plan really helps!**

# Next steps

- Begin / continue scanning/reading the literature
- Write the first draft of your research plan (Assignment #2)
  - Skeleton as soon as possible after today
  - Continue iterating as you scan/read
  - Submit it to MyCourses and bring with you to the first supervisor meeting
- Next joint session 30.1. → Literature review, writing
- REMEMBER: Book 1st meeting with your supervisor when you get confirmation concerning your supervisor.

