SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR MASTER'S THESIS STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

The purpose of these guidelines is to give answers to some frequently asked questions about writing the thesis relating to the general format requirements, table of contents, body of the text, list of references, appendices and abstract.

You may also visit your own department's, study programme's pages on Into for more detailed instructions or you will learn more from the syllabus of your own thesis seminar and from your thesis seminar supervisors.

General format requirements

The overall length of the thesis is typically between 60-100 pages.

The general requirements regarding the typography of the thesis include clarity and undisturbed general outlook. Typography should make reading easy; the layout and design are good when nothing disturbs the reader. In academic writing such highlighting tools as *italics*, underlining and **bolding** are rarely used.

Language: English, in some cases the thesis is written in Finnish (eg. Yritysjuridiikka (Business Law)).
Paper: A4 sheets, printed on both sides of the paper
Font: Usually Times New Roman, 12 pt. In main headings usually bigger fonts are used.
Spacing: Text 1,5; Abstract and footnotes 1; Tables, indents and figure captions 1
Marginals: Top margins 2,5 cm – 4 cm; Bottom 2,5 cm; Left 3 cm; Right 2,5 cm
Page number: Top, right corner or bottom, centered

One example of Thesis Report Outline

TITLE PAGE
ABSTRACT
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (optional)
TABLE OF CONTENTS
LIST OF TABLES
LIST OF FIGURES

1 INTRODUCTION *(5-10 pages)*
1.1 Research objectives/questions
1.2 Structure of the thesis

2 LITERATURE REVIEW *(20-30 pages)*
2.1 Part 1
2.2 Part 2
2.3 Theoretical framework

3 DATA AND METHODS *(2-10 pages)*
3.1 Data
3.2 Methods
3.3 Trustworthiness of the study

4 FINDINGS *(25-40 pages)*

5 DISCUSSION *(5-10 pages)*

6 CONCLUSIONS *(5-10 pages)*
6.1 Research summary
6.2 Practical implications
6.3 Limitations of the study
6.4 Suggestions for further research

REFERENCES
APPENDICES

Table of contents

As you can see from the thesis report outline, the Table of Contents is preceded by the Title page and Abstract (possibly Preface and Acknowledgements). The Table of Contents is followed by the List of Tables and the List of Figures; Appendices are listed as the final item in the Table of Contents. The titles in the Table of Contents exactly match the headings used in the text.

Abstract and Title Page

The abstract format is available on Into Valmistuminen / Graduation. Note that the spacing for the abstract is 1 line spacing.

The title page is available on Into:
https://into.aalto.fi/display/enmasterbiz/Writing+and+handing+in+the+thesis.

Some programmes may request a departmental copy of the thesis. In this case the title page should include the following information: title of the thesis, university + school, master's degree programme, department, author's name, type of work (master's thesis), time: year. Check with your own department whether they require a print copy of your thesis.

Language of the abstract and title page

The title of thesis and the abstract are submitted in the language that has been used to write the thesis, and at least in one language translated from the original.

- If the language of the thesis is Finnish, the title and the abstract are submitted in Finnish and in English.
- If the language of the thesis is English and the language of student's secondary level education is Finnish, the title and the abstract are submitted in English and in the language of student's secondary level education.
- If the language of the thesis is English and the student has not studied the secondary level education in Finnish or Swedish, the title and the abstract are submitted only in English.

Body of the Text

When writing the body of the text, pay special attention to the following four issues: headings, tables, figures, and referencing in the text.

- **Headings**

Your headings should have stand-alone sense and be to the point. All the subheadings should be logically related to their main heading, i.e. they should be conceptually (and grammatically) parallel. Also, note that a subheading cannot logically follow the main heading without any intervening text; in English academic writing it is essential that the reader always knows what will be happening next. Under one section heading, place at least two lower-level headings. If it is impossible to separate more than one subheading within one section, the main heading should be sufficient. However, if two or more issues are dealt with in one section, each receives its own subheading.

Example:
> Chapter 2
> Sections 2.1, 2.2
> Subsections 2.1.1, 2.1.2; 2.2.1 etc.
> If a chapter contains only one section, it should not be numbered.
> Try to avoid four-numbered subsections 2.1.1.1. In this case you can mark the subheadings in *italics.* Subheadings in italics will not appear in the Table of Contents. The main chapter always begins with a new page.

- **Tables, figures and appendices**

Tables and figures are numbered independently and consequently (e.g. *Table 1 and Figure 1*). The tables and figures should make sense on their own and they should be commented on in the text. The captions must be placed consistently. Place the table captions *above the table* and figure captions *below the figure*.

All tables and figures that are not essential for the text can be included as appendices at the end of the thesis e.g. questionnaire forms, interviews. The title of the appendix (which appears in the List of appendices) is written on top of the page. Appendices are also numbered. Whenever an appendix is attached, it must be referred to in the text.

Referencing in the text

When you refer to somebody else's ideas or research, you always need to acknowledge it in your text. If you don't, it is a serious offence (plagiarism) and can have major consequences.

In general in English academic writing, the conventional method to cite an author is to give his/her name as early as possible so that the reader always knows "who is speaking", i.e. whose ideas are being discussed. For this reason, it is highly unusual to give citations referring to the whole paragraph at the end of the paragraph. Also, typically citations are given within the sentence structure.

If you copy an author's text word for word, it is called quoting. In this case place the words, sentences in quotes. Direct quoting should be avoided in scientific writing and rather use paraphrasing from sources (unless you quote frequently from the literature that is being analysed which is quite common in arts and humanities subjects):
> *It has been suggested that "the World Trade Organization still has many obstacles to overcome, particularly with regard to decision-making processes" (Kim, 1999, p. 10).*

Turnitin

If you do not feel confident with the idea referring or quoting to original authors' texts in a proper scientific manner use *Turnitin* already during the writing process. *Turnitin* is a tool for enhancing skillful writing and preventing plagiarism:
https://into.aalto.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=19833258

When submitting your thesis on MyCourses, your work is automatically checked with the *Turnitin* programme, and you can see the relevance results on MyCourses after submission.

Based on
Kankaanranta, A. & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2013). Guide for Thesis Work IBC