PRE–ASSIGNMENTS
Academic year 2021–2022

MUO-E0011 Thesis Plan Orientation (TPO) provides practical information that you need to write your thesis plan, and to manage your thesis process. Course will take place in the Orientation week. Alternatively, TPO can be studied independently, in a self-paced manner. Whichever way you'll choose, the course starts with 4 pre-assignments. In the pre-assignments, you are guided through doing an inventory of your thesis ideas and options.

Pre-assignments can be written in English, Finnish or Swedish. Submit the assignment(s) in MyCourses in PDF format. You can submit 1-4 files. In other words, you can do these assignments as one file or submit all or some of them separately.

TPO is graded with 0-5. Grade is based on assignment performance. More info about evaluation in the assignment instructions and course syllabus.

Below are the 5 pre-assignments, of which you'll do 4 based on your needs.
- If you don't have a specific thesis topic in mind, do pre-assignments 1a, 2, 3 and 4.
- If you do have an established thesis topic already, do pre-assignments 1b, 2, 3 and 4.

1a. Topic Development

This pre-assignment is beneficial to the students who do not yet have clear idea about their thesis topic. Assignment consists of 4 steps instructed below.

1. **Inventory of your interests.** Keep a careful diary about what draws your attention for <u>at least three (3) weeks</u>. What articles, books, chapters, headlines and social media posts are you reading with interest? Which movies, pictures, events, lectures, products and topics of discussion draw your attention? Try to keep as careful as possible record about media consumption that you find interesting. If possible, reflect briefly what especially is the thing that actually interests you in each of your records. Format and method is free. Notice that you don't have to record all of your media consumption — just the ones that actually feel interesting and make your heart beat a bit faster.

2. **Categorise your interests.** After careful collection of this nearly <u>autoethnographic</u> data, the next step is to organise data so that you can begin to make sense of it. We suggest that you do the organisation based on relevance to your personal and professional development. For example you can draw a 2x2 matrix to map your data into four categories (Picture 1 in the end of this document) or you can make long list of your data and mark each of the pieces of interest with appropriate category (Picture 2). Common spreadsheet programmes such as Microsoft Excel and Apple Numbers are useful especially with the long list-option. You can also come up with your own version of the categorisation if you find our recommendation to categorise your data not working for you, or if you want to make organisation of data more detailed by adding categories.

3. **Make sense.** If you have done the assignment so far carefully, you should have four categories of interests:
    1. *Professionally relevant and interesting.* Your best options of topic are here, focus on this category.
    2. *Professionally relevant but not interesting.* These are also very good options, especially if someone would be willing to offer you a paid thesis work contract and provided you know you will be able to work passionately even though the topic itself does not particularly excite you.
    3. *Interesting but not professionally relevant.* Maybe not. It is usually good idea to have professionally relevant context in the thesis.
    4. *Not professionally relevant and not interesting.* Maybe your interests have already changed during data collection. This is a good thing! Now you know you can stop thinking about these things.

    Select one of the categories ("Professionally relevant and interesting" is recommended) as your thesis topic development playground. First organise the items of the category into topical groups and then into topical subgroups. Let say that you have been consuming with great interest stuff relating to food and eating. That is then one of your topical groups. On closer look, you might notice that some items in this topical group relate to "Future of food"; some items relate to "Sustainable eating" and some are discussing "Cultural practices of dining out". These are the topical subgroups. Do this subgrouping to all the topical groups in the category that you are playing with.
4. **Reflection.** Finally, write short descriptions and reflection of each of the topical subgroups in the for example "Professionally relevant and interesting" category of your interests. If you are lucky, you may already realise that the topical subgroups have a joint overlapping area that suggests a very good thesis topic. In the food-example above such a topic could be "Sustainable future dining", which would allow you discuss all that you are interested in, with a clear focus on the visioning sustainable practices of culturally and humanly important activity of dining. In any case you'll have a small set of very potential topic candidates that you can start to discuss with for example department teachers and professors.

SUBMISSION: hand in the results from the steps 2-4 as one PDF-file. Otherwise format of expression is free. As a feedback we may for example recommend literature or comment analysis of data.

1b. Literature Safari

This pre-assignment is beneficial to the students who already have a clear idea about their thesis topic. Pre-assignment consists of 3 steps instructed below.

1. **Locate** at least 30 peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings and/or books and book chapters potentially relevant to your topic. Good platforms to find literature are Aalto-library database (Primo) and Google's Scholar (scholar.google.com). To decide whether an article or paper is peer-reviewed, you can check Julkaisufoorumi/ Publication Forum (julkaisufoorumi.fi) for their database and ranking of peer-

reviewed journals and conferences. For books, check publishers name. In general, universities are reliable publishers, in addition to academic publishers such as Routledge and Gaudeamus. If you don't know the peer-review status of your finding, mark them in your list.

2. **Document** your literature findings by recording full reference and very short description what the source is about, if it isn't clearly stated in its title. Additionally, for your own use, you should also save abstracts whenever possible. To remind how to record references, see for example "Lyhyt opas viittaamiseen" or "instructions to Harvard referencing" in TPO Materials-section in course's MyCourses space. At this point it is also high time to consider using reference management software such as Zotero (free browser-based tool), Bookends (paid Mac app) or Paperpile (inexpensive, tailored to work best in Google environment).

3. **Categorise** your literature findings into topical groups and subgroups. Give each group and subgroup expressive, sensible title and organise them into logical order. Could you write thesis's literature review based on these titles? Is something missing? Finally, write couple of sentences reflection how your literature work is now looking like.

SUBMISSION: hand in the results from the step 3 as one PDF-file. Otherwise format is free. As a feedback we may for example recommend literature or comment the structure.

2. 100 Thesis Ideas

We designers are the lucky ones in a sense that we rarely run out of ideas and interests, quite the contrary. Indeed, probably the most common source of anxiety (and consequent procrastination) in the beginning of thesis process is that students feel they have way too many candidates for a thesis topic. Everything is interesting so how to choose? However, on closer inspection the mass of interests often boils down to one or two grand themes of interests. Here's how Howard S Becker advices his students:

> "I ask [my students] to write down, in no more than one or two sentences, one hundred different thesis ideas. Few people get past twenty or twenty-five before they see that they only have two or three ideas, which are almost always variations on a common theme." (Becker, 1986: 55)

This pre-assignment consists of 3 steps.

1. **Write** down as many your thesis ideas and/or expanded titles (main title + subtitle) that you can come up. Be honest. This is an exercise in self-reflection and critical analysis of your own thoughts, so for this pre-assignment to be useful, do not settle on just randomly generating vaguely artistic or designerly thesis titles. Reserve half a day for this work. Coming up with accurate ways of expressing *your* true interests is hard work.

2. **Analyse** the results. What recurring themes can you identify? Which ideas could be clustered?

3. **Reflect** with couple of sentences the results. What sort of ideas are you actually interested in as your thesis topic, and in which scholarly or designerly context?

SUBMISSION: hand in the results from the step 3 as one PDF-file. Otherwise format is free. As a feedback we may for example express our excitement or which of your results we find exceptionally potential thesis idea.

Source: Becker, H. S. (1986). *Writing for social scientists. How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

3. Department of Design Theses

This pre-assignment consists of 3 steps.

1. **Study** the general character and style of the Department of Design Master's theses available at Aalto University Master's thesis database.
2. **Identify** at least two recent (no older than 2017 graduation) Department of Design Master's theses relevant to your interests.
3. **Summarise** in 1-2 pages of text: your impression of Department of Design theses; list the authors and titles of the theses that you chose; and explain how the two theses are relevant to you.
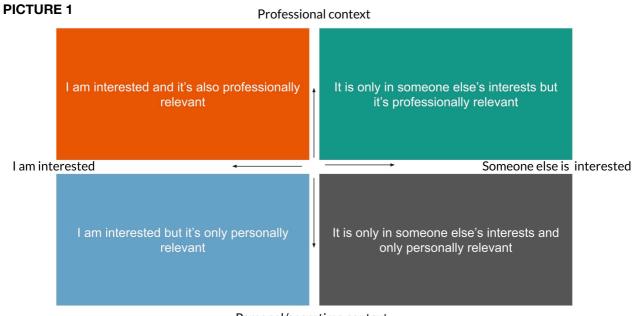
SUBMISSION: hand in the step 3 as one PDF-file. Otherwise format is free.

4. ARTS Thesis Guidelines

This pre-assignment consists of 2 steps.

1. **Read** Master's Thesis Guide or Opinnäyteohje, both available in Thesis seminar MyCourses Materials-page, and in your Master's Programme Into page, in section "Completing your master's thesis". (Because we cannot at the moment link to non-existing MyCourses spaces, here's link to CoID's thesis completion Into page: link)
2. **Summarise** by making notes about all information relevant to you, such as minimum length, contents of the title page and requirements of advisory work. You can also write down questions that you still have after careful reading of the guide. We may add your questions to TPO FAQ and reply to you in the comments to your assignment submission.

SUBMISSION: hand in the step 2 as one PDF-file. Otherwise format is free. As a feedback we will notify you about misunderstandings and answer to questions if they are clearly highlighted in the submission.

PICTURE 1

Professional context

I am interested and it's also professionally relevant	It is only in someone else's interests but it's professionally relevant
I am interested but it's only personally relevant	It is only in someone else's interests and only personally relevant

I am interested

Someone else is interested

Personal/sparetime context

PICTURE 2

	Professionally relevant and interesting	Not professionally relevant but interesting	Professionally relevant but not interesting	Not professionally relevant, not interesting
Article about circular economy			X	
Book about flying carpets		X		
BBC document about future food	X			
Podcast about history of eating	X			
TED about yoga				X
Article about eating out	X			
Book about oriental rugs		X		