

TPO: SELF-PACED ASSIGNMENTS

ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-24

MUO-E0023 Thesis Plan Orientation (TPO) provides practical information that you need to write your thesis plan and manage your thesis process. TPO can be studied independently in a self-paced manner. 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 are submitted in MyCourses.

After completion of pre-assignments, TPO continues with 6 more assignments designed to further support thesis plan writing and process management. Doing the assignment is supported with materials in MyCourses and elsewhere and with optional tutoring with TPO teachers and/or other Aalto faculty.

You can do the assignments in your own time and pace. Notice, though, that TPO should be completed before thesis plan proposal approval in your MA major or programme.

After completion of assignments, the student is ready to take an exam. The exam is a quiz in MyCourses. The quiz is an “open book exam”, meaning that student can have their assignments and other materials with them during the exam. In other words, assignments instructed in this paper are *not* submitted to MyCourses, and when doing the assignments, the student does not need to care about the design of assignments and can do them in a manner that makes sense to them but not necessarily to others.

TPO is graded from 0-5. The grade is based on pre-assignment and exam performance. More information about evaluation is in the course MyCourses ([link](#)).

Below you will find instructions for the six assignments:

1. MA Programme Greetings

1. **Listen to** a recorded interview with the director of your MA major/programme. Recordings are in MyCourses (section [Major/Programme Podcasts](#))
2. **Summarise** your learnings by making notes about all points relevant to you. If, after careful listening, reflection and information retrieval in, for example, [Student Guide](#), you have questions, write them down and email them to TPO teacher heidi.paavilainen@aalto.fi.

2. Academic Self-help

1. **Study** a handbook, essay, slide deck or any other publication that informs, discusses and instructs how to write an academic thesis, research paper, literature review or other relevant academic publication.
2. **Summarise** your findings by making notes about all information and tips relevant to you. Remember to write complete references about your sources.

Some examples of relevant sources:

Ahrens, S. (2017). *How to take smart notes. One simple technique to boost writing, learning and thinking — for students, academics and nonfiction book writers.*

CreateSpace. (This is about how to conduct literature research and develop an argument)

Becker, H. S. (2020). *Writing for social scientists. How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article.* Updated third edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2007). *“They say/I say”.* The moves that matter in persuasive writing. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Jensen, J. (2017). *Write no matter what. Advice for academics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Newport, C. (2007). *How to become a straight-A student. A chapter about how to write college-level 30-50 pages research paper.* New York: Broadway Books (This is available on the [“Useful stuff” page](#)).

Roxburgh, M. (2015). *Depiction as theory and writing by practice: the design process of a written thesis.* In P. A. Rodgers & J. Yee (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to design research* (pp. 346-363). London: Routledge.

Silvia, P. (2015). *Write it up. Practical strategies for writing and publishing journal articles.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Webster, J., & Watson, R. T. (2002). *Analyzing the past to prepare for the future. Writing a literature review.* *MIS Quarterly*, 26(2), xiii-xxiii. (This is available on the [“Useful stuff” page](#).)

You can find several University-based thesis writing advice sites (e.g. [How to write your thesis](#)). Finnish readers find University sites and books by googling e.g. “graduopas”. For example, Jyri Hakala and Kimmo Svinhufvud have written books on the topic.

3. Thesis Plan Explained

1. **Watch** the lecture by Professor Turkka Keinonen, where he explains what there should be in a good thesis plan and why. The video is available on the [“Useful stuff”-page](#).
2. **Summarise** by making notes about all information relevant to you, such as notes about the length and structural tips.

4. Thesis Evaluation

1. **Read** two recent (no older than 2020 graduation) Master’s theses relevant to your thesis topic. These can be the same that you located in pre-assignment 2. Also, if the theses that you have read are not Department of Design theses, now is a good time to take a closer look at them. Browse topics, structures and, for example, layout to get an idea of how students in the department, in general, have solved the problem of the thesis.
2. **Review** both theses with the help of the evaluation matrix published at the end of the Master’s Thesis Guide (which you can find on the [“Useful Stuff”-page](#)).

3. **Reflect** on your thesis interests and aspirations vis-à-vis the ones you have evaluated. Write a note about the advice you can take away and utilise in your own thesis process.

5. Methodology

1. **Think** about your research questions and your options and interests in collecting data and analysing it. Look into your notes from the Design Research course and study different takes on methodology. For example, [How to write research methodology](#) offers a short, concise introduction.
2. **Write** a reflective essay where you describe and justify your methodological choices. Explain what sort of data you plan to collect, why the sample is better than something else that could be collected, how such data meets your research interests and how you plan to analyse your data in order to make it resonate with your research questions. Remember that also artistic works and activities, as well as autoethnography are valid bodies of data.

6. Visual Thesis Process

1. **Study** the [list of future thesis hand-in deadlines](#).
2. **Visualise** your thesis process in a manner that makes it clear to you how much time and effort you plan to put into each of the thesis phases, including plan writing, research, analysis, documentation and presentation. Add dates when appropriate. Keep in mind that while a thesis typically takes about 5 months of full-time work, it does not need to take that long.