

Master's Thesis Seminar: General Advice

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Master's Thesis in Economics: The Purpose

Master's thesis = “Demonstration of learnedness” (opinnäyte)

The purpose of the thesis is:

Demonstrate your proficiency and analytical skills in *Economics*

Good personal goals for MSc thesis

- Learning by doing. Acquire/deepen skills and knowledge in a topic area that interests you
- Project management. Your project, from beginning to end
- Good place to *really* teach yourself **coding**
Statistical software: R or Stata
Pro-level word processing with LaTeX, maps with QGIS
Tip: Command **estout** formats Stata tables for LaTeX or Excel
Tip: Read **Gentzkow & Shapiro** esp sections 2, 4-7, A
- Acquiring and managing data. E.g. web scraping (R or Python)
- Communicate your findings at different levels of background knowledge (non-economist friends, peers, professors)
- But: this is not the right place for improving your English. I recommend using Finnish if both you and your advisor are native speakers. Slides and presentations in English.

Focusing

- *Research is motivated by questions.* Focus on one
 - Policy questions are easiest to motivate, nice-to-know questions hardest
 - What would be the use of a credible and precise answer if you (or the literature that you review) obtained it?
- Surface layer: broader topic area to show understanding of economic issues in context
- Deep layer(s): tightly focused area to allow you to show depth in understanding and particular skills
- Focus on the economics of it. What are the trade-offs?
- Focus on quantitative over qualitative where possible
- Focus on what you find interesting - it makes work less arduous

Topic presentations

- Get to the research question on first content slide
- Explain why it is interesting / important
 - “other people have/have not studied this” is no motivation
 - usually requires background info (institutions, terminology)
- How do you plan to answer the question?
Or how has the literature tackled the question?
- What type of findings are you after (e.g. estimates of what)
- Anticipated challenges / limitations / additional questions (if time)
- Do not assume the audience has read your research plan
- Bonus for practical relevance:
Which economic decision could be affected by your findings?

Presentations: common pitfalls

- Too much material, too many slides
 - Practice your talk with a timer
 - Separate spare slides from must-see slides
- Bullet points with paragraphs of text
 - Display points, not sentences
- Illegible copy-paste tables and figures
 - Slides usually require specialized versions
- Getting stuck with questions from the audience
 - If you can't answer something, say so and move on

Presentations: minor points

- Start with business, not with apologies or small talk
- Title slide: topic title, your name, occasion
- Use page numbering, so audience can refer to particular slides
- If you have to cite do it concisely (Jones & Smith 2000)
- End in a summary slide or a final result, not in greetings or references
- Anticipate questions with longish answers?
Tack unnumbered “spare slides” onto the end.
- Audience: clarifying questions anytime, other questions in the end