

MASTER OF SCIENCE (MSC) IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE

GUIDELINES FOR THE MASTER'S THESIS

Steps to write a thesis:

I. Supervisor Contact and Topic Selection

The student must contact a prospective supervisor (who must be professor R. Bshary, Z. Triki, K. Zuberbühler from the Institute of Biology or A. Bangerter from the Institute of Work and Organizational Psychology) to establish a topic for the Master's thesis. Co-supervision by external collaborators (e.g. PhD students or researchers from other institutions) is possible but must be approved by the primary supervisor.

Topic selection should ideally be completed by the end of the first semester of the second year, to allow smooth preparation and potential permits or training needs.

II. Research Plan Submission

The student then submits a brief project proposal including:

1. A working title
2. A half-page summary explaining the research problem and main questions
3. A preliminary bibliography

The project is structured as a standard scientific study (see scientific writing courses), with a strong emphasis on learning scientific processes rather than achieving significant results.



III. Supervisor Feedback

The supervisor provides feedback on the research plan and guides the student in finalizing the structure and scope of the thesis project. The student is expected to work independently while benefiting from regular supervision.

IV. Research and Writing Phase

The student conducts the research and writes the thesis independently and consults the supervisor for one or more follow-up meetings if needed.

The thesis corresponds to **9–10 months of full-time research (60 ECTS)**. Students collect data (typically during semester 3) and perform analysis and writing during semester 4.

Work includes not only writing but documenting all steps taken (e.g., protocols, raw data, metadata, and code) in appendices or annexes.

V. Draft Submission and Revisions

The student submits a first full draft to the supervisor, who may provide one round of feedback. Based on the supervisor's remarks, the student finalizes the thesis for evaluation. Additional feedback rounds remain at the discretion of the supervisor.

If a co-supervisor is involved in a publication process with the student, the discussion section must remain entirely the student's original writing.

VI. Thesis Defense

Once the final version is accepted, the supervisor arranges the defense by appointing an examiner. The defense may take place at any time, but at least three weeks after the final version has been approved.

VII. Formal Requirements

1. **Language:** The thesis must be written entirely in English. Language revision tools or external proofreading are recommended for clarity.
2. **Length:** Typically 60–80 pages (excluding appendices).
3. **Formatting:**
 - Font: Times New Roman 12 pt
 - Spacing: 1.5 lines
 - Margins: 2 cm
 - Page numbers: top right corner



4. **AI Usage:** Use of generative AI is subject to supervisor approval. If permitted, specify clearly what sections were produced or supported by AI, and why. Students remain fully responsible for the scientific accuracy and integrity of the submitted work.
5. **Plagiarism check:** All theses will be reviewed using anti-plagiarism and AI-detection software.

✦ Important: There are no formal page limits, but clarity, structure, and transparency in scientific work are essential. Evaluation will also consider the student's independence during the research process.

VIII. Structure of the Thesis

1. Title page
2. Acknowledgments
3. Abstract (1/2 page)
4. Table of contents
5. Introduction: including background, hypotheses, and research questions
6. Literature review
7. Methods
8. Results
9. Discussion & conclusions
10. References
11. Appendices (datasets, code, permits, etc.)
12. A declaration of honor (mandatory), available at:
https://www.unine.ch/files/live/sites/systemsite/files/General/Plagiat/Declaration_honneur_fr.pdf

IX. Defense Procedure

Before the defense, the supervisor informs the student about the planned proceedings, which typically include:

1. The student presents the thesis in a **15–20-minute oral presentation**, covering key findings, motivations, challenges, and future perspectives.
2. The examiner and supervisor have **15–20 minutes** each for questions and comments.
3. The student leaves the room for deliberation.
4. The result is communicated, and the defense report is sent to the institute's secretariate for processing.



5. Fail grades (below 4.0) require a revised thesis and a second defense. A second fail results in definitive failure of the Master's thesis and, consequently, of the study program.

X. Final Submission

Before the defense, students must submit to their supervisor:

- One **PDF version** of the thesis (Lastname_Firstname_Thesis.pdf)
- A **ZIP** file (Lastname_Firstname_Data.zip) with:
 - Raw data and metadata
 - Code and protocols
 - Supplementary materials

After a successful defense, and after incorporating any modifications requested during the defense, the student submits **two copies** of the thesis (one bound copy and one electronic copy (PDF)) to the library of the Institute of Cognitive Science (*Pierre-à-Mazel 7, 2000 Neuchâtel*).

