

**Master of Arts Human Rights  
Thesis Guide  
2016**

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## Glossary of Terms

There are many terms used in the Master's program—and many countries use these words differently. Knowing each of these definitions helps. Here is a list of the most common terms, and some of their different meanings.

**Dissertation or Thesis (plural: Theses):** Basically these two words mean the same thing, and either can be used. The thesis is a written report on an independent research project undertaken by the candidate. These vary in length according to the degree and the subject - but can range from 50 pages for course work theses to 500 pages for doctorate dissertations. We will talk about the criteria for the Human Rights Masters later. The terms have changed over time: a thesis was once smaller than a dissertation (so one does an Honours Thesis and a Doctoral Dissertation). There is now a tendency for Americans to use dissertation and British/Australians to use thesis.

**Drop out and Failure:** There is quite a difference between these two terms. To drop out means to voluntarily leave the program. To fail is to either be asked to leave, or to have your final piece of work fail to meet the requirements. While the dropout rate for Masters is high in comparison to undergraduate degrees, the failure rate is extremely low—this only occurs in extreme circumstances.

**Research:** To research means, literally, to go back (re-) and look for something again (search). Research is a very common word, but the practice of research itself is often unfamiliar to the student. Research means the student works independently on a topic they have selected. Research can be done in a laboratory, in a library, or in a public place. It involves investigating, problem solving, and analysing. It differs from course work where the structure of the course, and the lecturer, guides the student.

**Supervisor and Advisor:** These words are the same, but Mahidol uses advisors (which tend to be the American term) while the British use supervisors. Advisors are the academics who assist the candidate with the research thesis. The number of advisors for a candidate can vary from 2 to 4. They are like a guide who suggests what to do and helps when the candidate has a problem.

**Thesis Advisory Committee:** This is the committee, made up of a main advisor and co-advisor, who direct and assess the thesis. If a candidate has more than two advisors this is sometimes called an Advisory Panel. These are more common in the United States, where the panel meets and examines the student. In the Program we use advisory panels.

**External Examiner:** The external Examiner is someone from outside the program who must assess the thesis. This person is normally selected by the Thesis Advisory Committee. They will provide an impartial view on whether the thesis has reached the necessary standard.

**Oral Defense:** The thesis is examined at Mahidol through an oral defense. This means that the written text is discussed in a public forum by the Oral Defense Thesis Committee. Students will be questioned about their thesis and must defend its findings, methods, theory, and so on.

## 1. Introduction: What is this guide about?

This guide will

- outline the requirements of the Master's thesis,
- suggest how to prepare yourself for the thesis,
- describe what to expect,
- detail common problems and ways to avoid or minimise them.

The guide is also provides information about:

- what work is involved for the thesis,
- what can be done to make sure the student graduates,
- what are the problems students normally face,
- what skills are needed.

The aim of the guide is to set up students who are about to embark on their thesis project.

This guide book is to introduce the process of thesis writing, from the idea to the completion and submission of thesis for Master of Human Rights students. The guide will help the student through the process of deciding the topic, developing a research plan, formulate the research, and then propose and defend the thesis. It has been written by the staff of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP) to assist students undertaking this demanding research project.

One of the main aims of this guide is to give a description of doing graduate research so the student is not surprised by what they must accomplish. Preparation means the student is more likely to succeed, and graduate with a degree that is useful, interesting and valuable.

The guide is intended to complement the research methods course, which will be undertaken by all the students. However, most details on methods, theories, and fieldwork will be gained from coursework, your advisors, and your own research.

Completing a Master's thesis is a demanding task and requires significant commitment. The student also needs to be aware of the educational and intellectual challenges of graduate work. Additionally, the student needs to be mindful of personal, financial, career and cultural challenges they might face along the course of their education. With good preparation, dedication, and commitment, a student will be able to complete this program without too many difficulties.

## 2. What is a Masters of Human Rights thesis?

### Definition of a Human Rights Thesis

The definition of the thesis according to the Mahidol University thesis handbook is: "the composition ... raising a topic for approval, considering the topic through systematic analysis and concluding by the final results in a report which conforms to the thesis requirements." As this definition is rather vague, we suggest you consider the thesis as:

The Human Rights Master's thesis is a major research project which provides a distinct analysis on a human rights issue and contributes to the understanding and/or contributes to the subjects of the human rights issue.

**Griffith University, Australia:** "A thesis should be a coherent exposition of a research study and follow an ordered sequence in which the research objectives, relationship to other scholarly work, methodology and strategies employed, and the results obtained are identified, analysed and evaluated. The main text should include a discussion of the conclusions or results arrived at. The thesis will be assessed by experts in the field who will have an expectation that the thesis meet the commonly accepted standards for a piece of academic research in their field."

Once the definition of a thesis was "new and original knowledge", but this has changed. Universities realised that with so much research being done now days, and so many theses already in existence, it is not possible to have all theses on 'new' topics. Theses can be written which are criticisms of old problems, reanalysis of other people's research, or applications of other original research. The definition of 'new' knowledge has changed to a 'contribution' to knowledge, or an original approach to the topic.

What does 'contribution' mean? There are two important factors of academic 'contribution.'

- Firstly, that your argument has not been done before (you will need to check up details of other theses to see if the topic has been done). While it does not have to be on an entirely new subject, it must do something which no one has done before. This point is discussed further in the section on topics.
- Secondly, the thesis must contribute in some way to knowledge, or to the subjects of the thesis (for example the people whose rights are being violated), or to some other group or community (e.g., an organisation, an interest group, teachers, and so on). This means that there is some use in doing the thesis. Most theses tend to contribute more to knowledge and the academic community by helping other researchers work out how to solve problems, or by collecting and presenting data on an issue that has little written about it.

When the students decide a topic, they do not really know if it is a significant contribution because they have not researched in the field. Here the advisors give advice. The advisor knows enough about the field to organise the topic into something that is a contribution. The key is to think how the thesis will contribute to society and to research. Think about who will benefit from the thesis, apart from yourself. It does not have to be all of society, but always think of how your work can help others in their research or their life.

### Context in the Program

The thesis is a major component of your degree and needs substantial organisation. The thesis is worth **12 credit points out of a total of 36**. It is equivalent of doing 4-semester long courses. In terms of credit points it should be worth a semester's work. However, the thesis is the most important component of a Masters and will be more work than simply a semester. Normally the thesis is done after the student has completed their coursework, during the third semester of the course.

### An ideal timeline for a student would be:

<u>By End of Semester 1</u> (December):	Complete concept paper (1-2 pages) on research topic. Students have started reading in topic area.
<u>During Semester 2</u> (January - April):	Work on research methods: plan research tools (documentary research, surveys, interviews, etc.), Change topic into a research thesis (formulate research questions, objectives, and suggested hypotheses), Continue to read related literature, Draft version of Thesis Proposal, Find Advisors for Thesis.
<u>End of Semester 2:</u> (April)	Proposal Defense, Apply for Research Ethics, Plan for field or archival research (clearance or exemption from Research Ethics committee is needed prior to any research related to the thesis).
<u>Semester 3</u> (May-July)	Field research or archival research: Leave campus for field, or research documents in library.
<u>Semester 1 of the following year</u> August-September	Final Write up, On campus, with assistance of advisors, write up chapters, Analyse field work, Structure thesis into chapters, Draft version of thesis.
Late October of the following year	Thesis defense, corrections if needed and submission to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS).

**To note:** Students pay a one-time fee for the thesis. After finished coursework, students must register 'thesis course' every semester till they get result "PASSED" from their thesis defense examination. This is to maintain thesis and student status.

Information on the academic calendar is available at

<http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/academic-calendar.php>

Students can also communicate with the Academic Coordinator for information on the calendar.

Not that many students, however, complete a thesis according to this timeline, and most need more time to work on their project. While there is no urgency to complete the thesis within three semesters, students should remember that the longer it takes to write the more difficult it becomes, and the more likely they are to drop out. **Also, students on scholarships need to comply with the timeline and are urged to keep to this timetable because they will find it difficult to write and research once their funds run out.**

### **Administrative Requirements for Graduation.**

- ✓ Pass all courses with an average of B (or a GPA of 3.00).
- ✓ Pass the thesis defense examination and correct all conditions to the satisfaction of the Oral Defense committee if there are conditions).
- ✓ English Proficiency Test (See <http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/mu-test.php> for test dates). Based on individual criteria and consultation with major advisor, students can apply for exemption from the test.
- ✓ Completion of Research Ethics Course (conducted by IHRP).
- ✓ Certificates from presentation at an International peer reviewed conference or publish in a peer-reviewed journal. Only conferences and publications **after the defense of the proposal and passing of ethics count for graduation requirement.**
  - Regulations regarding the publication can be found here:  
[http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/pdf/ThesisPublications\\_MasterDegree.pdf](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/pdf/ThesisPublications_MasterDegree.pdf)
  - IHRP does not have the authority to approve a publication. For any questions regarding the approval and/or processing of a publication please contact: **Wimon Dararattawee**, email: [wimon.dar@mahidol.ac.th](mailto:wimon.dar@mahidol.ac.th), call: 0-2441-4125 Ext. 109 or **Oranan Deeprom** , email: [oranan.dee@mahidol.ac.th](mailto:oranan.dee@mahidol.ac.th), call: 0-2441-4125 Ext. 110
- ✓ “Turn-it-in” Originality report with complete thesis (See Plagiarism section for more information).
- ✓ Required number of formatted documents and electronic file to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS). Please familiarise yourselves with the FGS requirements on formatting and documents. Information can be found at:  
[http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/formateng\\_en.html](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/formateng_en.html).

### 3. Research

Research is an essential component for quality papers, thesis writing, and hence is encouraged by professors as early as the first day of class.

Research is one of most demanding tasks of graduate study. Research is also a solitary activity: the student must design, organise, initiate, and undertake all aspects of their research on their own, but with advice from the advisors. Good student researchers must be very independent, and self-sufficient. This chapter outlines what skills makes a good student researcher, and also what are the important activities of which a researcher must be aware.

There are three main features which distinguish a good researcher:

#### Independent

Research is mostly an individual activity and a good student will be able to organise their own time, decide which direction to take, and locate good resources, books, or experiments themselves. There is much more emphasis on the student taking the initiative in the Masters. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you need it, but remember you cannot always rely on the advisor. The good researcher is a problem solver, has initiative, creativity, and can teach themselves how to look at new material. The reason for having a research project such as a thesis is to enable the student to learn skills so that they can undertake research on their own after they graduate. Thus the skills learned during the thesis research should teach the student how to teach themselves.

#### Investigative

Good research answers a question that no one has answered before. You will be covering new ground, and looking at original problems. The student must be curious about the subject, and be attentive to details. Often the research does not come easily and the student will need to work hard to find data on the project. Hence, the skills of investigation are critical. These skills are asking questions (why does something behave as it does?, why did she write that?); inventing approaches or solutions (is this the best way to do find the answer?); and finding alternatives (is there a better place to look for this data?). Much like a detective or investigative reporter, the student must be a quick and original thinker.

#### Analytical

To analyse is to examine something to discover how it works. This is not merely describing it, or stating what it does, but outlining how and why it does what it does. The student must have a desire to know how something works. They cannot accept anything without question, and they should have a good enough knowledge to propose why something works as it does. Analysis is also a skill of observing, of seeing how things work, and of looking closely at details (either in a text or in the field). Also, a good observer quickly understands what they are seeing, and is able to detail and explain the observation. The skills of analysis are a combination of investigation and problem solving, with the student putting forward their own ideas and proposals.

There are more than these three skills of research, but these are most important. They are skills which are difficult to teach, but they can be learned by experience.

## Good research practices

A good researcher does these things:

- ✓ Writes often and writes early.
- ✓ Keeps extensive and detailed notes.
- ✓ Thinks critically about the subject: always questions why things are as they are.
- ✓ Knows the computer programmes.
- ✓ Talks to the advisor about progress.

While there are no real secrets to completing a Masters other than hard work and dedication, the following suggestions will assist the student.

### Write often and write early

A thesis is a written project, and the student is assessed on their written work. The writing is the most difficult part, and is also the skill the student must learn the most about. Therefore it is best to start writing early. It is much easier to redraft a document that is already 20,000-word long, than to write 20,000 in the final month. The earlier the student starts writing, the less they will have to write further on, the more practice they will get, and finally they will have more written material to show and discuss with the advisor.

The student should start writing during their second semester. They should also set aside time every week for writing (perhaps only 4 hours, but this should be enough).

### Always take careful notes and keep a bibliography

The bibliography for the average Masters consists of around 100-200 titles. Managing this large number is a serious task, and misplacing some vital information can take days, perhaps weeks, to locate again. The student needs to have a well-developed system of note taking, bibliography, and referencing.

Whenever you read an article, read with pen and paper and take notes; you cannot be expected to remember everything. Make sure to detail where all your quotes come from, and the page number. From the first day the student should begin organising their bibliography, starting by learning the official system. The required bibliographical system is the Harvard style, which is an in-text **last name of author, year of publication** referencing system (e.g., Smith, 2015). There are many versions of the Harvard style (Harvard Australia, Harvard U.K, and so on) but the important thing is to keep the style consistent especially in the final Bibliography. Please see [https://library.uws.edu.au/uws\\_library/sites/default/files/cite\\_Harvard.pdf](https://library.uws.edu.au/uws_library/sites/default/files/cite_Harvard.pdf). A good system performed at the earlier part of writing will save weeks of hackneyed work at the end of the thesis.

### Know your computer programmes

The Masters candidate should expect to spend a great part of their lives during the thesis in front of their computer (perhaps 8 hours a day for three months). They should have access to a computer, at all times—you cannot rely on the university to provide you with one. The revolution in computing— with word processing, bibliographic programmes, statistical packages, and spreadsheets—means the production of a thesis now is far easier than it was 10 or 20 years ago. It is essential that the student knows basic programmes like Word, Excel, End notes, Microsoft mail, Explorer, and PowerPoint. *Students also have access to some software which are free to download through their University-based email. Please check with IT department at the President's building for more details on this.*

Talk to your advisor about your progress and be honest with your progress

The advisors are the guides for the research project. It is crucial that they know exactly what is going on. The advisors can do nothing if you do not admit that you do not understand, that you need more help, or that you are confused; because the advisor does not know that you are having trouble. You need to make sure you are honest with your progress. If you cannot understand what your advisors want you to do, they must know. If you do not pass on this information it may be too late to fix the problem. If you are having difficulties the advisor will need to reassess the project and find ways to assist you. Similarly, if you find the tasks too simple, or the advisor is too strict about what you must do, you must let him/her know.

## **Key features of Research**

### **Arguments and Theories**

A thesis cannot simply be a description of a topic because a description does not show your engagement with the topic. Rather a thesis must argue a particular point. For instance, you must state why you think something happens as it does, or argue what you consider is the best way to fix, or to understand, a problem. Argument is not necessarily emotional or forceful, but it is a thoughtful evaluation or assessment about your topic. The argument will help you read and critically analyse material related to the research because you consider the material based on your argument.

An argument is the organising principle of thesis, and this is where you offer an explanation or an evaluation of your topic. Students can have great difficulty deciding what their argument is going to be. A thesis must say something about what you, the researcher thinks of the topic. That is, an argument is always a personal engagement with the topic. By personal, we are not talking about opinions or emotions; we are talking about your reasoned evaluation. This concept is critical: you must reach your argument and your explanation of the research problem by a well-researched and evaluated analysis.

Wayne Booth (*The Craft of Research*) gives a clear and detailed outline of an argument. A central point he makes is that an argument is made up of three parts:

#### 1. A Claim

The claim is what you consider to be the most appropriate explanation.

Claims are substantive: they must make a contribution because this is the basis of a thesis.

Claims must be contestable: you cannot argue that if you stand in the rain you will get wet. We all know this already and you cannot contribute anything by arguing for something that we already know.

#### 2. Evidence for the claim

Evidence is the facts, theories, and previous research you use to justify your claim. This is all the background information you use to inform your claim.

#### 3. Qualifications

Qualifications limit and specify the argument.

Qualifications give opposition points of view and deals with them.

When planning a research topic it is important to think about these three parts of the argument. It can be useful to think about what the three parts are in your own topic. If you have a clear idea

this will greatly help you develop both your research proposal but also plan your research itself. It also means that from an early stage you are well-prepared to search, and research, on the specific issue.

### **Theory**

Closely related to the argument is the theory. A theory is the explanation of why something occurs. Arguments and theories are almost the same things. In fact it could be said they are two different aspects of the same thing: an argument is why you believe a certain thing occurs, and the theory is the explanation of why this thing occurs. The main difference is that your argument is more personal, and the theory is based on more formal explanations. Most often the theory you use is derived from other theories which you adapt for your own project.

A theory is made up of concepts which describe and classify the events or objects studied, and the relationships between concepts. For example, a thesis on foreign aid and human rights involves the two central concepts of human rights and foreign aid, and the relationship between them can be the positive (or negative) impact aid has on human rights. An argument may be that the more aid is available, the greater chance for respect of human rights because of the theories that are useful lead to higher levels of education and more government accountability.

Theories always occur in a context. Students must examine other theories from previous research and adapt these to their own research. Much theory is determined by schools of thought, such as Marxist or Feminist theory. Sometimes theories are quite explicitly stated, for example Marxist theories mostly work on the theory that the main division in society is the class system. Other times the theories are more subtly implied and the student needs to read the article closely to understand what the theory is. The main point, however, is that a student need to put their theory in a context of other people's work, and justify why their particular theory is the best one for the situation.

At the early stages it is not crucial for the student to locate their arguments and theories. However, the sooner it occurs, and the clearer these two aspects are, the easier the research and writing will be.

## 4. Getting started

### **Register.**

An important administrative procedure is registration for the thesis course HPHR 698. This is done by students online through e-registration. Please note that students pay a one-time fee for the thesis. As noted before, after finished coursework, students must register 'thesis course' every semester till they get result "PASSED" from their thesis defense examination. This is to maintain their thesis and student status.

You do not need to provide any details of topic, advisors, research methods, and so on. Under special circumstances you can take a study leave of absence, where you do not have to enroll for a year—this is in instances of illness or other serious personal problems.

### **Deciding a Topic**

You should decide on a topic while you are doing your coursework. This will mean during the first two semesters in the programme. Choosing a topic is something that is either very easy, or very hard. Some students have a quite clear idea of what they want to research even before starting the programme, others are undecided for most of their coursework. Selecting an appropriate topic is a critical aspect of your research. You chose the topic, manage the research, and design the research methods.

### **What is active and passive reading?**

Reading is critical to choosing a topic for your research and one can read passively or actively. A passive reader believes all that is written, and does not consider what the implications of this are.

An active reader thinks whether the writer's views are correct; they also wonder why the author wrote this, what the implications of the argument are, and how the writing relates to the thesis. Clearly, active reading is far more work than passive, and takes longer. But the student must be an active reader to understand the material for the thesis.

Remember a topic is specific. Subjects like 'Human Rights in Thailand,' 'South East Asian International Relations and Human Rights,' or 'Human Trafficking' are not specific enough. These are large areas and there are too many potential topics in them. You need to think of a specific event, idea, or issue such as "Thai Women's Rights in the 1997 constitution," "Malaysia-Singapore relations on Human Rights, 1990-2000," or "The Trafficking in Children in Cambodia." Notice how each of these topics has a more specific geographical area and time frame. Even these topics themselves are too broad, but the research itself will focus on one aspect within each of these.

You need to be specific because, primarily, you cannot write a thesis about such a broad area. It will be about everything and nothing. Also, the programme will need to find an advisor who knows about the topic to assist you do the research, so they need to know what you will study. Remember, you can, and probably will, change and adapt the topic. However, begin thinking and talking about your work in terms of research topics because this will both make it easier to find a good advisor and plan your research work.

Another good suggestion is to look over previous research topics to see how students have focused their research on a specific issue. There is a list of research topics available in the Office.

Some considerations and advice:

When you are looking for a topic some people are just lucky and they find a topic that interests them, and that the Programme will support straight away. Others have to go through two or three different proposals and are still unsure when the coursework finishes. Generally students know what they want to research, but they do not know how to turn this into a manageable research topic. Do not worry as this is expected. Before you commit yourself to this topic, consider the following things:

**Advice for choosing a topic**

The topic must interest you.

This does appear obvious. However, be careful if you are doing a topic because someone else told you to, your work wants you to, or you think it is the right thing. If you are not interested in the topic, imagine how you will feel after concentrating on that one issue for a year. Chances are you will dislike the topic, find it hard to motivate yourself to do study, and also be unwilling to put in extra time to make the thesis good. However, if the topic is interesting, then you will enjoy researching and talking about the topic. At this level of research the student is expected to be highly self-motivated, an even passionate about the subject. If you are not interested, then you cannot become passionate about it.

The topic must be a manageable size.

The most common problem at the beginning of Master research is that the student picks a topic which is beyond the possible work load. Often research projects start out as potentially three or four PhDs, and gradually the student cuts out the unnecessary work and research before finding the most manageable thesis topic. This is a normal process of research called 'refining your topic.' From the start, be aware that you cannot do everything, and some ideas or investigations must be ignored. When you have to drop out part of your research, be pleased rather than disappointed. Similarly, be careful that you have picked a topic which can, if necessary, be expanded if you are short of material. While this is a very uncommon outcome, and one which the advisor nearly always picks up early in the project, it is good to start on a topic that can move either way (that is grow into a bigger project, or be cut down into a smaller one).

The topic must be within range of competence

Remember that if you are completing a Masters, this is the very start of your research career, and that you are a novice in the field of research. You will be learning all the skills of research as you go. However, it is expected that you have completed an undergraduate degree so you know all the basics. The student should not commit to undertake field research in which they have no knowledge or need skills are beyond their capabilities (for instance language or travel). It is good to develop already learned competencies, but still include new knowledge and activities. If you want to do a thesis on corporate law but have a degree in Biology, and have never studied law, then you will be working in a field which you have no background. This does not mean that you only research what you know. Rather, design your topic in awareness of your competencies. Similarly, if your reading or analysis skills are limited do not take on a detailed theoretical or philosophical topic.

The topic must demonstrate student's mastery in an area

Related to the above point, it is best to have a research project in the areas that you are good at. The project should show off your skills, so look at ways to highlight them. If you are good at field work, then base the research projects on field work. If you are good at archival research, then do a project that involves archival research. If you have access to certain groups or areas (say,

minority groups or INGOs), use this access well. Skills such as textual analysis, legal analysis, statistics, philosophy, or field research can be highlighted if the student is good in these areas. Additionally, if you are doing something you are good at, and doing it well, then this will have a very positive effect on you.

The topic must be a contribution to knowledge

A good thesis will impact people's lives in a positive way. You should think about who and what your thesis will contribute, because the more it contributes the more important the thesis will be. By definition a thesis must be a contribution to knowledge. This means the research to some extent must be new, and could be used by different people. It is difficult at this early stage to know if your topic is a contribution, but your advisor can help you here. This is not as difficult as you think; for you will be making your own opinions and own experimental or research findings. However, there must be some elements of critical analysis, or the application of some judgment by you.

## 5. The Student and Advisor relationship

The student-advisor relationship is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the research. The quality of the relationship between you and your advisor is critical to the quality and difficulty of your Masters. The role of the advisor is significant to the progress of a student's thesis and not exclusive to only academic progress. Advisors can act as a support system for the students in multiple ways and hence, establishing a mutually agreed on working strategy and subsequently maintaining communication is important. The success is not really about how good the advisor is, but how good the **relationship** is and how well the needs are communicated by both parties.

### Choosing an advisor

Students can refer to the IHRP website to get a general understanding of the research interests of the Faculty in IHRP and students can directly approach the faculty member they want to discuss their topics with.

Each student needs an advisor and a co-advisor before the proposal writing stage. The main advisor must come from within the IHRP itself. This is to ensure the advisory committee undertakes all the proper administrative and academic requirements, and that the standard of theses from the Programme. Please see Section on Thesis Committees for information on external examiners.

Students can directly approach the faculty members and request them to become advisors (main and co). Faculty members usually give verbal confirmation, and no paperwork is required until the proposal defense. However, the IHRP tracks advisor/advisee information, and the students should inform the Academic Coordinator once they have confirmation that the faculty member can accept them as an advisee.

The roles of the major advisor and co-advisor are varied and hence, it is practical for students to establish and negotiate with the advisors at the very beginning. Every student has a different set of needs, skills, strengths, and weaknesses making the active communication with the advisors all the more important. The role of advisors is crucial in thesis writing but it is important that terms are stated and negotiated at the very beginning for accountability.

Informal negotiations on the following can be made by the advisor and the student:

- frequency of meetings,
- timetable of expected workload,
- specific accomplishments (either books to read, field trips to undertake, or writing to accomplish),
- Reading the student expects the advisor to do,
- Other activities the student should undertake, such as courses, training, or conference papers.

Some students may need more contact time early in the supervision to assist with the reading, learn new concepts and getting familiar with the university system. They should organise this with their advisor and also discuss potential problems they may encounter. The advisor may have some special requests of the student as well.

## The responsibilities of the advisors

**Major Advisors** has primary responsibility for the thesis.

They determine the main objectives of the thesis.

They are the main resources for the student.

They will decide when the proposal and thesis is ready to defend.

They will manage the administrative tasks associated with the thesis.

They will read all the drafts of the thesis.

**Co-Advisor(s)** will provide feedback on drafts.

They will provide an alternative point of view to the major supervisor.

They will assist the student with certain aspects of the project.

They will read material requested by the student.

They will examine the proposal and final thesis of the student.

Sometimes the advisors work closely together and they do not clearly separate their tasks.

However, it is fair to not rely on the co-advisors to do work which the major advisor is also doing.

## Supervision styles

<b>Close supervision:</b>	<b>Supervision at a distance:</b>
Regular meetings and regular submission of work in progress. Structured timetable.	Student decides when to meet, and what work to hand in.
Advisor has input on most student decisions: the project outline and plan is determined by the advisor, who will also decide on experimental or research models.	Student works independently from advisor: Advisor will allow the student make all the decisions on how to structure and manage the research project.
Structured programme: A timetable is made early in the supervision, and the student must stay within this plan.	Unstructured programme: There is no overall plan and the student decides what action to take as events arise
Professional: advisor and student keep to formal agreements about the supervision.	Sociable: The meetings are informal, and the student and advisor are friendly, perhaps meeting off campus.
Attention to details: Advisors closely monitor all the details of the project and reads all the drafts.	Relaxed: Advisor leaves the minor details up to the students

## Student expectations from the Advisors

A good advisor is key ingredient to the completion of a Master's thesis and hence should:

- assist in the research process from the formulation of the hypothesis to the research design and identify the strengths and weakness in the student, the argument, and the research work,
- observe, monitor, guide and supervise research to ensure that the research is of the necessary standard,
- commit and follow through with student appointments and provide adequate quality time for the student depending of the stage of the research project and the needs of the student,

- maintain regular communication with the students and provide constructive criticism of the research project in a timely fashion,
- act as coaches and guide students who lack the confidence due to language and cultural barriers and/or need motivation due to personal or emotional issues related to the project,
- know and manage administrative procedures, codes of Conduct for Research, research ethics, regular progress reports, and submission of the thesis. They must inform the student of all the necessary obligations at the university regarding enrolling, intellectual property, and so on,
- Strengthening networks for students through encouraging participation in programme seminars, speaking at conferences, or meeting academics studying in similar areas.

### **Advisor expectations of their students**

Of course the advisor is not the only one providing inputs. Some things the student must do include:

- Clear and honest discussion of the progress of the research and communication of the any hurdles the student is facing. If the project is in trouble, it must be the student who addresses the issues and asks for help. The student should not wait for the advisor to step in and sort out a problem, but should seek help. The advisor cannot be blamed for any major problems.
- Timely submission of the parts of the research project for the advisor to review and provide feedback; also, the only measure the advisor has of the student's progress.
- Respecting the advisor's time and schedule by making appointments ahead of time and showing up for the meetings. Also, establishing clear ways of communication especially if the students are not in Thailand.
- Be responsible and take accountability for the research, compilation of research, proposal and thesis defense, applying for research ethics and administrative requirements to graduate.
- Balance originality to contribute an original idea and conformity to incorporate the views of the advisors especially in sensitive human rights issues where the expertise and experience of the advisor will be more of benefit than loss.
- Have multiple sources of advice including peers, academics, conferences and colleagues apart from the main advisor to brainstorm ideas and get constructive inputs to contribute towards the quality of the research project.
- Show some initiative, enthusiasm, and originality towards the direction and ideas of the project. Also, be motivated and have a genuine interest in the research project as the advisor can guide a project and cannot contribute original ideas towards it.

### **Common problems students have with their advisor**

A common question for students at the start of their thesis is “What happens if I start having problems with the Advisor?” While major problems are not that common, they do happen. The actions depend on the nature of the problem. With academic differences of opinion, these are expected during a candidature, and should be resolved with the advisor. If this fails then a third party may be necessary—the third party may be someone from the programme or a neutral academic. With personal problems, such as personality differences can be reported to the Programme Chair who can then determine the best way to deal with the differences.

The best rule is to sort out the problem sooner rather than later and always keep your advisor fully informed of your ideas. Try to deal with difficulties as they emerge rather than letting them overwhelm you. Here are some other common problems:

- Advisors busy schedule, infrequent presence on campus, and non-commitment to organise meeting times,
- Long waiting time to receive feedback from the advisor (2 weeks is a reasonable time for a 30-page document) and no resolution of the problem despite communication on the part of the student,
- Insufficient quality feedback from the advisor,
- Lack of communication and/or inefficient communication for resolution of problems.

The Australian National University student handbook gives some good advice for personal differences between student and advisor:

try to determine the specific areas you feel you are unable to communicate about. Is it just a personality difference or do you feel you are getting inadequate feedback on your ideas or research? Be creative. Have an informal lunch. Remember that communication can take many different forms. Try to encourage intellectual interaction by structuring meetings differently. For example provide written agendas or minutes of the meeting for comment. Make sure that you are being understood! Ongoing inadequate feedback suggests a change of panel might be in order.

### **Common problems advisors have with their students**

Remember that just as many advisors have trouble with their students. Here is a list of common problems for advisors:

- Overdependence on the advisors for ideas, direction, and extensive help on every facet of the research project.
- Unrealistic research plan and the lack of supporting available resources.
- Too broad a research plan and over-optimism about the timeframe, commitment of work and availability of funds.
- Disregard of the feedback from the advisory panel and resubmitting work without any amendments suggested by the advisors.
- Lack of confidence in themselves and their project and a decrease in quality work as per the standards of IHRP.
- Complete silence on the whereabouts and the progress of the research project.

Remember, it is the student's responsibility to keep the advisors informed of any events posing as hurdles for completing the research project. Personal issues can arise and delay plans for everyone making it all the more important for timely communication to renegotiate a manageable timeframe for the student to complete their thesis.

## 6. Thesis Committees

Each student has three panels. Often the panels consist of exactly the same people, but have different tasks and duties. The student is informed of both the thesis proposal defense and thesis defense committees ahead of time. Mahidol University has requires specific qualifications for external examiners and all examiners have to be approved by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. If you are picking an advisor and examiner external to Mahidol University, please see information on qualifications needed at

<http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/pdf/academic57/outsourcEN57.pdf>.

### 1. Thesis Advisory Committee:

Consists of: Major and Co-Advisors for thesis.

Duties: advise student on all stages of research project.

Meetings: meet often but no formal meetings and the advisor and co-advisor do not have to meet together with the student.

### 2. Thesis Proposal Committee:

Consists of: Major and Co-advisor, and an external examiner—from outside IHRP (See Section below).

Duties: Decides the outcome of the proposal defense.

Meetings: meets once formally at the proposal defense.

### 3. Oral Thesis Defense Committee:

Consists of: Major and Co-Advisors, and at least one external (outside Mahidol) examiner.

Duties: Will determine if the thesis is accepted or needs revisions for the student to graduate.

Meetings: meets once in formally at the thesis oral defense.

### Selection of Examiners

The selection of the examiners will be decided by the advisors, with input from the students. Students can recommend experts in the field but the final decision is made by the main advisors as there is certain criterion that needs to be met. External examiners:

- Be **recognised** in the field they are representing
- Should have **expertise** with topic to accurately assess the thesis and experience in grading a thesis. It is well known that first time markers on certain areas of science are often much stricter than people who have marked works related to the areas before.
- Must have a PhD degree as a minimum, and must have expertise in the area.
- Must not be biased about the topic you are presenting as human rights can be a very divisive and political arena.
- Has the time to provide critical feedback, comments and assessment for the student to better their research project.

## 7. The Proposal

### What is a Research Proposal?

The research proposal is a document of the research you **intend** to undertake.

The proposal is to ensure that the research you intend doing is of a suitable standard and size for a Masters. It is also to check that you are capable of doing the research and are suitably prepared.

The proposal must do the following:

- Prove the research is of an appropriate standard. That is, the topic is at the level of an international degree, and the topic fits the definition of a thesis: it is a contribution.
- Prove the research is feasible
- Prove the student is capable of undertaking the research
- **Detail your research methods:** The University must approve all research before it is undertaken. This is to ensure that research ethics are obeyed, and that there is no risk in undertaking the research.

### Structure of the Proposal

- The proposal should be Times New Roman 12 point, spaced at 1.5 lines.
- No special binding is needed.
- You need a cover page.
- The proposal should be about 15-18 pages.
- Harvard-style citation.

The structure of the proposal contains the following **compulsory** sections.

#### Introduction

This is an overview of the topic you will study. The introduction is around 1-2 pages and provides the context of the issues and a general overview of the main points.

This section should answer this question:

- What is the issue I'm looking at?

#### Statement of Research Problem

Here you locate the question or issue you intend to answer. This section gives the reason **why** the research needs to be undertaken. The research must answer a problem (or a question). The Statement of Research Problem gives you the opportunity to outline why you need to study the area you are studying.

Be careful not to confuse a problem in the 'real world,' for instance violence or any other violation, with a research problem. A research problem is a theoretical or conceptual problem which your thesis should provide an answer for. A problem in the real world is something that is going wrong and that your thesis will address indirectly. A research problem does not mean something is going wrong, it means there is some issue which nobody knows the answer to, and you plan to find this answer.

In this section you may need to introduce your theoretical frame which assists understanding of the topic. The statement of the problem is generally about 2-3 pages.

This section should answer the questions:

- What further do we need to know about the issue?
- What is going wrong?
- Why is there no answer to this problem?

### **Objectives of research**

The objectives section is very similar to the statement of problems. However, in the objectives section you discuss exactly what the research will do and what the potential outcomes will be. The objectives are a crucial aspect of the thesis as it summarises the whole direction you will be taking, and the key issues you will address. The objectives will state what the outcomes of the thesis will be if the research is undertaken, hence it is important to keep the objectives focused. The objectives are generally stated in terms such as:

- To identify ...
- To compare ...
- To evaluate...
- To analyse ...
- To define ...
- To assess ...
- To criticise ...
- To determine ...

You cannot use broad terms like ‘to explore,’ to understand, or ‘to think about’ because these are your personal objectives, and not the research project’s objectives. Also, be careful with using terms like ‘to suggest’ or ‘to propose’ because these may be recommendations coming out of the research, and not research findings. Objectives are normally done in point form. Generally a proposal has around 3-6 objective points.

This section should answer the questions:

- What will the thesis achieve?
- How can the problem be solved?
- How will I go about solving problem?

### **Research questions**

The questions summarise the direction of your research. When you undertake your research, your thesis will answer these questions. The easiest way to write questions is to restate your objectives points in the question form. Generally, you will have 3-4 questions which focus on the central concerns of your research. Once the student has narrowed down the research design, it is beneficial to discuss your research questions with your advisor. Their experience and expertise with research can be highly advantageous for a focused proposal.

This section should answer the questions:

- What questions does the research answer?

### **Hypothesis/Expected Outcomes**

You are expected to give a brief assessment of what you expect to find. This enables you to guess what your research will show, and to provide a theory about why the results will be as they are. It is not necessary for your final thesis to agree with the outcomes, they can be totally opposite (and in fact many good theses disagree with their original hypotheses). The purpose of this section is for you to think ahead to how you will analyse your findings. This may only need 1-2 paragraphs.

This section should answer the questions:

- What do I think the research results will be?
- Why will the results show this?

### **Literature Review**

Here you must detail what has been written on the field to demonstrate that you know the field, and have done some thinking about what you want to study. The literature review should demonstrate that you have read and researched what literature is already available, and what research has already been done. **You must provide descriptions of relevant texts, analyses of important research, and criticisms of work related to your research.**

The literature review will be probably the largest section of the proposal, and will need about 10-15 pages. It is too difficult to determine how many texts you should refer to, but 30 is generally a reasonable number. If you find yourself getting lost in additional sources, a good strategy is to revisit the objectives of the research and sift through the resources that best address the objectives.

This section should answer the question:

- What have other people written and said about the topic?
- How does the literature relate to my research?

### **Research Methods**

There are various research methods such as documentary research, questionnaires, surveys, field study, and so on, which will be taught in your research methodology class. The research methods class can be a mode for students to design a well-focused research.

Given the importance of research methods **you must** detail your research methods so the Proposal Defense Committee can decide if your methods are:

- **valid** for the research you will undertake;
- **adequate** to address your research problem and objectives;
- **specific** for data collection and analysis;
- **ethical** for research to continue.

The length of this section varies and depends on the type of methodology but normally about 2-4 pages is sufficient. However, purely legal or textual analysis need only be one page.

This section should answer the question:

- What research tools will I use to answer the research questions?
- How are the research tools suitable for the collection of data?
- How will the research tools help in data analysis?
- Are these research tools ethical? (e.g., interviewing children or vulnerable groups)
- What are the possible challenges in collecting data or data interpretation?)

### **Ethical Issues**

You need to announce if you may have any ethical research concerns. This may be researching vulnerable subjects, or if there is any risk involved in the fieldwork. This section may be 1 paragraph, and generally less than a page.

This section should answer the questions:

- What are the ethical issues of my research?
- Is there a need for supplemental documents or assistance? (e.g., confidentiality forms, translators),
- How will the ethical issues be resolved?

## **Non-compulsory sections**

These sections can be added to further clarify your proposal. They are not essential.

### **Research Scope**

Many students include a section on the scope of the research. The scope describes the area that you will research. It may be the conceptual, physical, subject or temporal (time) area. The scope will detail the exact limit of the issue under research.

This section should answer the question:

What is the size of the subject area I am researching?

### **Significance of research**

In this section you detail what contributions the thesis will make. Reasons include practical applications (for example advances in NGO monitoring), contribution to knowledge (for theoretical or social topics), or social benefits (for example in education, politics, or health). Here you need to think of potential outcomes of the research topic, or where the thesis will be practical. The contributions occur in three areas: contributions to knowledge, to the research subjects, and to the community in general. While Masters Research tends most to contribute to the academic community, the student should consider any other ways the thesis may contribute to groups, communities, or organisation. This may only need a page.

This section should answer the question:

To whom will my research make a difference?

What will this research contribute academically?

## **A Good Research Proposal**

### **What makes a good research proposal?**

While there are many different research proposals, there are some basic ingredients which make a proposal good. The committee will be looking at four main aspects of the proposal

#### **1. That the topic is suitable for a thesis.**

The topic must be of a suitable size—neither too big nor small.

The topic must be a thesis: it must contain an argument. You cannot describe an event, as this is not a contribution.

The topic is a contribution to knowledge. You will offer some new analysis of a research problem.

The topic is a social contribution: stakeholders in the topic will benefit from the research

#### **2. That you are going to find what you are looking for.**

Here the committee will determine if the research methods you suggest will allow you to locate what you are looking for. Without accurate research methods you may not be able to find your data, or to analyse your material.

3. That you know enough about the field to enter it.

This is determined from the literature review. Here you must demonstrate that you have done enough research to show that you will not get lost, and that you can find your way about the issues, concepts, and people; also, that you will be able to stay out of trouble.

4. Project is well coordinated. The objectives of the research, the questions, the literature review and the methods are all focusing on the same aspect of research. You must make sure that the methods answer your research questions, not other questions, and the literature review provides information on your objectives, and so on. A good proposal is closely focused on you thesis topic.

## 8. Proposal defense

This is a formal academic stage where you must publicly discuss and defend your proposal. The purpose of the defense is to present what you wish to study, and how you are going to study it. The purpose is also to ensure that the research which you will be undertaking is feasible, is of a suitable standard for a Masters, and is ethical.

**Please note that** regarding to the FGS regulation, the student must defend the proposal within two semester after they enrolled in thesis course, e.g. if student enroll in thesis course semester 1/2015, student must defend the proposal within semester 2/2015.

### Pre-Proposal Defense

**Effective August 1, 2015, defenses for proposals will take place at arranged times throughout the year, EXCEPT blackout period: Dec 16-31 and April 1-May 15 (Application review period).**

### Administrative steps

**First step: One month notification**– the student must check the following information with MA (International Programme) academic coordinator 1 month prior to the proposal defense:

**1. Registration and fee payment status**

- Check if the student register for the thesis course and make payment already.

**Note:** Students need to be registered in order to defend and students must register ‘Thesis course’ every semester until they get result “PASSED” from their thesis defense examination. This is to maintain thesis and student status as long as students have not “passed” thesis defense examination.

**Second step: Two weeks confirmation**—students must confirm the proposal defense date and make sure CV of External Examiner is submitted to the MA (International Programme) academic coordinator two weeks prior to the proposal defense.

### **Forms required:**

#### Before Proposal Defense

- *Once students start consulting with major advisor on their thesis (advisor begins their advisory duty), students fill in GR44 and submit it to academic coordinator via email or in person*
- *Students fill in GR39 in consultation with major advisor and submit it to academic coordinator via email or in person at least 2 weeks before the exam. The CV of external examiner should also be submitted at the same time. It is the responsibility of the advisor to request the CV from the external examiner.*

#### After Proposal Defense

- *If ‘passed’, GR 1 and GR 33 should be submitted to academic coordinator on the day of proposal defense (after the defense).*

- *If 'passed with condition', GR 33 should be submitted to academic coordinator on the day of proposal defense (after the defense). Later, GR1 and GR 37 should be submitted to academic coordinator via email or in person on the day students receive result 'passed' from proposal defense committee.*
- *If 'not passed', student have to re-defend.*

**TABLE 1: FORMS RELATED TO MA THESIS**

NO.	TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PDF FILE	WORD	APPLY ONLINE
1	GR.1	Thesis title and thesis advisory committee / Thematic paper title and thematic paper advisory committee	Thai  English 		Online Application Form  Instruction Manual
2	GR.2	Oral thesis defence and committee / Oral thematic paper defence and committee	Thai  English 		Online Application Form  Instruction Manual
3	GR.26	Submission of Bound Volumes of the Thesis/Thematic paper	Thai  English 		
4	GR.27	Comprehensive examination and committee	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
5	GR.28	To ask permission to collect research data	Thai  English 		
6	GR.3	Evaluation of the oral thesis / thematic paper defences	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
7	GR.30	Request for Qualified Specialist (s) to Assess a Research Instrument	Thai  English 		
8	GR.33	Evaluation of the thesis/thematic paper proposal examination	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
9	GR.35	Qualify examination and committee	Thai  English 		Online Application Form  Instruction Manual
10	GR.36	Evaluation of the comprehensive examination	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
11	GR.37	Result of a revision of thesis/thematic paper proposal examination	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
12	GR.38	Evaluation of the qualifying examination	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
13	GR.39	Oral thesis proposal defence and committee / Oral thematic paper proposal defence and committee	Thai  English 		Online Application Form  Instruction Manual
14	GR.4	Result of a revision of thesis / thematic paper	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
15	GR.40	Publication of Thesis on Mahidol's Website	Thai  English 		
16	GR.42	The Report and Assessment of a Student's Progress and Research Performance for Thesis / Thematic Paper	Thai  English 		Online Application Form
17	GR.44	Appointment of Thesis/Thematic Paper Proposal Advisor	Thai  English 		Online Application Form  Instruction Manual
18	GR.49	Requirements for Thesis/Thematic Paper Revision Form	Thai  English 		
19	GR.5	Requesting degree	Thai  English 		
20	GR.50	Turnitin Originality Report	Thai  English 		

Total : 20 Forms

*ALL GR Forms can be downloaded from the Faculty of Graduate Studies' website where the description of all the forms is given along with the form code. Download forms: <http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/application-form-thesis.php>*

Once your proposal is completed, you need to submit it your major advisor for feedback. The reviewed version can be submitted to your co-advisor as well for comments. The external examiner does not need to provide any comments before the defense but the revised version (edited after comments from main- and co-advisor) needs to be submitted to the external examiner and is the version used at the defense.

While preparing the proposal, it is also important that the student speaks to the major advisor and co advisor to determine their availability for the proposal defense and to be sure an external examiner is identified and available. Please visit the website to check the most up-to-date regulations on scheduling proposal defenses. The Academic Coordinator also needs to be notified 15 days in advance to prepare for the defense. The student should also inform the Academic Coordinator ahead of time if any technical equipment is needed so it can be booked for the day of the defense.

### The Day of the Defense

The Proposal Defense is open for all to attend. An email is sent by the Academic Coordinator publicly announcing the defense date and time. Students should be mindful of the time of the defense and arrive early as there are certain administrative procedures that need to be completed before the defense.

The Academic Coordinator will prepare a set of forms for the student, which needs to sign by the advisors and external examiner at the end of the defense. **It is important that the students get the signature of the external examiner as they can be hard to track down after the defense.**

### Proposal Defense

*The Proposal Defense Committee* will be at the defense. This comprises your advisors, and an external expert.

The student normally prepares a brief 15 minute presentation about their topic, which covers:

- the key issues of the topic,
- research questions,
- objectives or hypothesis,
- research methods.

*It is a good idea to run your presentation ahead of time to make sure there are no glitches. When you prepare your presentation, keep in mind that the proposal defense committee will have already familiarised themselves with the contents. Choose the points that should be emphasised so you do not go overtime.*

The presentation of your proposal should focus on the conceptual framework and research methodology. Though important, presentation on the literature review should be concise.

After your presentation, the advisors and external examiner ask questions and clarify any doubts they may have regarding the research. The floor is then open to the public for any questions they may have. Once the committee is satisfied with your proposal defense, you will be asked to leave the room so they can deliberate the outcome.

The outcomes of the defense are:

- Pass without condition: the student can apply to the research ethics committee and proceed with research.
- Pass with conditions: Defenses can result in varying degrees of required/recommended revisions so with conditions can vary for students. The student must revise their proposal within the stipulated time (1-3 months) and resubmit to their major advisor. Once, the advisor approves of the revisions, the revised proposal and the rest of the paperwork can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee.
- Fail. **Notice that failure is very rare** and, in such a case students must re-write a proposal. Advisors generally will not let their students defend if there is a chance of failure.

## 9. Research Ethics

Ethics can be defined as the “Principles or standards set by a community which regulates what is considered legitimate or acceptable behavior.” Ethics are principles or guidelines, not rules. So sometimes there is no clear answer to an ethical decision and the student and advisors must address the problem by finding a balance between the importance of the research, and the impact of the research.

According to University regulations, there are two requirements pertaining to Research Ethics:

- 1) **All M.A students must take the Research Ethics course, taught through the IHRP. The awarded certificate of completion is required when submitting the application to the Research Ethics Committee.**

At the IHRP, we are very serious about research ethics, and insist all students and research committees closely address ethical considerations of research. Because students are studying rights, it is logical that they themselves should place emphasis on their respect of other people’s rights, in particular the rights of their research subjects.

- 2) **All students must apply to the Research Ethics committee after passing the proposal defense (if passed with conditions, after making needed changes and getting approval from advisor).**

Clearance from the Research Ethics Committee is very important for any researcher to proceed with their research. The certificate issued by this committee is also needed as a graduation requirement.

Once passed and in case of conditions approved by the advisor, the student can apply to the Research Ethics Committee. Students should notify the Academic Coordinator when their papers are being submitted so communicate in advance with the Academic Coordinator for preparation of the letters.

There are a few Ethics Committees at Mahidol University and each of them has their own fee and schedule. **Students are advised to read the requirements of each of the committee and align their proposals defenses with the nearest committee meeting dates as the field research can only commence after approval from the Committee.**

IHRP recommends students to use IPSR for Ethics Review.

- 1) **Institute of Population and Social Research Ethics**  
(<http://www.pr.mahidol.ac.th/IRB.htm>)

The fee for thesis/dissertation for students is THB500. The benefit of this Research Ethics Committee is that all documents can be submitted online especially beneficial for students who plan to travel after their proposal defenses. Make sure the fee is paid in full and all the documents are submitted per the regulations. The Committee meets once a month so be mindful of the time the committee can take (See Schedule of meeting times at <http://www.pr.mahidol.ac.th/IRB.htm>).

**2) There is also this option for students:**

**Mahidol University Institutional Review Board (MU-IRB)**

([http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/document\\_MU-IRB\\_en.php](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/document_MU-IRB_en.php)).

All researchers must apply to the MU-IRB in person so students need to be mindful when making travel plans right after proposal defense. Getting all the relevant documents can be time consuming so allow at least a week to gather, fill, and submit all the documents. The documents required for submission are listed at [http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/document\\_MU-IRB\\_en.php](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/document_MU-IRB_en.php).

This Committee is beneficial for students who have no human subjects in their research as they can apply for exemption but there is extensive paperwork involved. All the paperwork needs to be submitted but MU-IRB will issue a Certificate of Exemption (COE) and the researcher can proceed with their research.

Please see

[http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/pdf/research\\_project\\_en.pdf](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/academicinfo/pdf/research_project_en.pdf) for more information.

## 10. Thesis Writing

After completion of data collection, students spend a majority of time in writing their thesis. All students have individual styles and processes of writing thesis; hence, there are no procedures laid out for this stage. According to University regulations this means the student should be dedicating around 36 hours a week to the research project.

### Demonstrating Progress

As thesis research and writing is self-directed process, it is important that the student communicates regularly with their advisors and keep them informed of their progress. A common problem during research is that students disappear. They finish course work, return to their jobs or home countries and cut communication with the IHRP or their advisors; a reason why the IHRP insists on regular progress reports. The university also requires the IHRP to record the progress of all students enrolled in the thesis course. Even if you have not progressed, we still want to know about it. The progress report is a form you fill out with your advisor about how your research is progressing.

### What is a Progress report?

The Faculty of Graduate Studies requires a progress report to be filled out every three months. The progress report has to be filled out by both the student and supervisor. The student will have made a timetable for the project with the advisor, and satisfactory progress can be demonstrated by keeping up with the proposed plan. The programme requires the student to regularly provide details of their progress. Questions include:

- Schedule of your planned completion,
- Brief summary of what you have achieved in past 3 months,
- Plan of what you will achieve in the next 3 months,
- The advisor will report on progress,
- Detailing goals from you last progress report,
- Listing any difficulties.

### Common problems student face during thesis writing

Losing focus on topic: This occurs because of the vague guidelines of study, or lack of advisor direction, or the student covering too many topics in their research. The beginning of the thesis is often a very exciting time as there are many possibilities and the student has the freedom to research how they like. Sometimes the student is too liberal in their research and they wish to research every area, cover all topics, and investigate all possible theories. Many early versions of the thesis proposal are enough work for 3-4 Masters, and the student needs to decide what areas to discard from the project. This enthusiasm is good, but unless the student learns to define the topic and locate the specific issue, the thesis will become too broad and not possible to complete as a thesis project. If the student feels they are not sure what they are doing, then this is a problem that should be discussed with the advisor. Perhaps the advisor needs to give more direction, perhaps unimportant research needs to be dropped, or perhaps the objectives need to be more clearly defined.

Difficulty writing: Many students often find written English difficult, even students whose first language is English. A lot of practice and learning needs to be put into writing academically. Like learning to speak English, the best way to learn how to write is practice. Never avoid writing, as it is a bad idea to put the writing off to later in the project

Poor relationship with advisor: This is a problem which some students face and it is important to acknowledge it here.

Student is too casual: In these cases the student is unaware of the required standard of research. They are willing to conduct poor research, not accurately catalogue research and readings, and put little emphasis on the written product. The advisor will mention the shortcomings of the thesis, and the student must start work again to a higher standard.

Student is too hard to please: The reverse of the above case, especially when the student is unaware of the required standard and quality of research work demanded. Many students consider the thesis is the pinnacle of a research project. They are precise about their topic of research to the point of being fussy, and want to read every book on the topic, interview all the relevant people, and conduct numerous experiments. The student is not willing to submit the thesis until it is nearly perfect. Unfortunately, this doesn't work. All research is limited by academic, experimental, or physical factors. The student must recognise when a thesis is of an acceptable standard even if it is not the best possible thesis.

Not balancing research and writing: Reading and taking notes is easy. Writing is more difficult. A golden piece of advice for students already stated is to start writing early, and write a lot early in the project. It takes some time to get use to writing academically. But once this skill is mastered writing becomes easier. By writing early, and writing a lot, the student will not be left in the troublesome position of having to convert 6 months of notes (which could hundreds of pages) into 20,000 words in a month. Also it is far easier to edit than to write. Some students consider 1000 words a day as an excellent output, and others say they can write 2-3,000 words a day regularly. The best practice is to not be in a situation where the student must put out a sizeable amount of words, but rather have the luxury of editing already written work.

Too long in the making: A very interesting study some time ago of research theses showed that the longer one spends on a thesis, the less likely it will be completed. The reasons are that the initial interest is gone, the topic has probably changed, and there will be more new research in the area forcing the student to start the literature review again. This is not to say that the thesis will not be written. However, it is better to seriously plan for a 1 year Masters, and keep to this plan or else the student will risk losing interest and losing focus of the field.

Too independent: While independence is a valuable skill for the Masters student, too much is detrimental. Often students who have not produced as much work as they wanted will hide out and lose contact with the Programme. Or, in other cases, sometimes students just do not listen to the advice from their advisors. However, if they do not follow the advisor's advice, ignore suggestions from other researchers, and follow their own ideas they risk submitting work which is not appropriate for a Masters. While the student may have a great knowledge of the field, they are not familiar with the academic requirements. They may also become too independent from the university and not keep in contact with fellow students, or the academic community. In this case they lose contact with the research and the field, lose interest, and drop out.

From these common reasons for failure it is easy to see the difficulties of the student. The student must balance perfection with casual research, independence and dependence, speed and slowness of research, initiative with advice. Managing these differences is a crucial skill for the student.

## 11. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is to copy someone else's work and imply that it is your own. Universities are very serious about plagiarism. A student who has found to have copied someone's work and claimed it as their own may fail the course, or be asked to leave the university. There are very strict rules about copying other people's work. You should be aware of rules about plagiarism, for if you copy another text and claim it is your work, and do not acknowledge the original work, this can result in punishment. It is important to see there are two vital components of plagiarism, and two things you cannot do:

1. *Claiming others' work as your own.* This means you are lying about the work you have done. You are expected to read and discuss other people's work, but distinguish their work and ideas from your own. If you copy what someone says without adequately stating that it is someone else's idea, then the lecturer will assume you did this work. Hence it is important that the reader of your work knows what you have written and researched, and what other people have done.

2. *Not acknowledging other people's work.* This often happens when the student is not familiar with quoting and referencing systems. Other people's work must be cited in your work using the approved bibliographic system. You can get help from your advisor, the library, or the internet on how to reference correctly.

The full six elements of plagiarism are (1) an object (language, words, texts, etc.), (2) which has been taken (or borrowed, stolen, etc.), (3) from a particular source (books, journals, Internet, etc.), (4) by an agent (student, person, academic, etc.), (5) without (adequate) acknowledgement, and (6) with or without intention to deceive. The sixth element is very important to know because students are encouraged to check their sources carefully to avoid unintentional plagiarism that might bring them troubles without necessity.

### University policy

“Turn-it-in” originality reports are a University mandated requirement. The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) and the Mahidol University Library and Knowledge Centre organise training courses for the use of “Turn-it-in” Programme for lecturers and students to detect acts of plagiarism. The “Turn-it-in” manual is available at <http://www.li.mahidol.ac.th/service/manual/Turnitin.pdf>.

All students, who defended on or **after June 3, 2013**, must submit GR 50 - “Turn-it-in” Originality Report with their completed thesis to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. According to FGS requirements:

- When the students submit their request for the thesis defense, they have to provide the major advisor with the “Turn-it-in” originality report no less than 15 days before the examination date.
- The Major advisors of the thesis shall present the result of their consideration of the “Turn-it-in” originality report to the thesis paper committee on the defense date. According to University policy, the result of the “Turn-it-in” originality report consideration should not bear any influences on the result of the defense.
- The Major advisors of the thesis shall report the result of “Turn-it-in” originality report consideration in the form GR 50 - “Turn-it-in” Originality Report.

## 12. Thesis Defense

At the stage of thesis defense, many drafts of the thesis have been reviewed by the advisor and amended by the student. Once the advisor is satisfied with the quality of the thesis—meets international standards, strong argument, theoretical/conceptual framework, demonstrates originality, valid research methodology, distinct analysis on a human rights issue and contributes to the understanding and/or contributes to the subjects of the human rights issue, potential of becoming academic publications, comprehensible and clearly written (especially for students for whom English is a second, third or fourth language) and properly referenced (Harvard style), the student gets a green light for thesis defense.

At Mahidol University all theses are examined by the Oral Defense Committee. This means the student must write a thesis, submit this to the examiners, and then publicly defend the findings and arguments in front of the examiners.

Thesis defense is stressful for a lot of students and the main focus is on the oral defense. To note, there is extensive after-defense paperwork for students and FGS has strict regulations about the paperwork so getting it right the first time can save students a lot of time.

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

Student should submit **the Cover Page, Titled Page, Approval Page, Acknowledgements Page, and Abstract Page** to the staff of Academic Services Section, FGS, to have those checked before the defense examination date. **The students need to make sure that the above Pages have been checked for FORMATTING from FGS Academic Services Section and have been APPROVED by them.** This helps student to be able to bring the right format of **Titled Page and Approval Page** to the Thesis Advisory Committee and the Thesis Defense Examination Committee to sign on the day of their thesis defense. If the title of thesis has to be changed on the recommendation of the thesis defense committee, all of this will need to be redone. But, if there are not going to be any changes to the title, the recommendations about getting things formatted before the defense are intended to save the extra steps of finding the External Examiner in person (for a signature) weeks or perhaps months after the defense has taken place

**LINK to Download the THESIS FORMAT SAMPLE from FGS website:**  
[http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/index\\_en.html](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/index_en.html)

### Preparing for the defense

The student must give a presentation of around 30-45 minutes, detailing the major aspects of the thesis. The core components will be the followings.

- Description of the research topic,
- Outline of the research methods used,
- Discussion of the principal findings.

The main task of the defense is for the student to defend the academic quality of the thesis: this means defending its importance, the findings, and the theoretical or conceptual frame. The student should think about what questions are likely to be asked, and how to defend them. The answers in the defense can persuade the examiners that an issue does not need to be modified.

There will be questions taken from the audience as well as the examiners. The defense will go for about two hours. Afterwards the examiners will meet and decide on the result. This may not come immediately, as it may take some time to decide upon conditions, but expect for no more than a week.

### **Pre-Thesis Defense**

**Effective August 1, 2015, thesis defense will take place at arranged times throughout the year, EXCEPT during the blackout period: Dec 16-31 and April 1` May 15 (Application review).**

#### **Administrative steps**

**First step: One month notification**–the student must check the following information with MA (International Programme) academic coordinator 1 month prior to the thesis defense:

##### **1. Student's status**

- Before trying to schedule the defense the student should have submitted at least three core chapters to the main advisor. The main advisor can then design if the defense should be scheduled.

##### **2. Research status**

- Check if the student conduct thesis at least 90 days after the thesis title and thesis advisory committee had been appointed by the FGS. If the student has not done so, there is a need to wait until the student meets that required 90 day-period.

##### **3. Registration and fee payment status**

- Check if the student register for the thesis course and make payment already.

**Note:** Students need to be registered in order to defend and students must register 'Thesis course' every semester until they get result "PASSED" from their thesis defense examination. This is to maintain thesis and student status as long as students have not "passed" thesis defense examination.

##### **4. English Competence Standards status**

- Mahidol University's Academic Regulation of Graduate Studies B.E. 2010 that all graduate students (student ID 58XXXXXX and after) must pass English Proficiency Standard of Graduate Studies prior to their thesis defense.
  - an IELTS with a minimum of 4.5 or
  - a TOEFL iBT score with a minimum of 54 or
  - a TOEFL ITP score with a minimum of 480 or
  - a TOEFL Paper-based score with a minimum of 480 or
  - A MU GRAD TEST score with a minimum of 45
- Mahidol University's Academic Regulation of Graduate Studies B.E. 2016 that all graduate students (student ID 59XXXXXX and later) must pass English Proficiency Standard of Graduate Studies prior to their thesis defense.
  - an IELTS with a minimum of 5.0 or
  - a TOEFL iBT score with a minimum of 54 or
  - a TOEFL ITP score with a minimum of 480 or
  - A MU GRAD TEST score with a minimum of 70

Please note that the Program will issue a letter to the Faculty of Graduate Studies asking for exemption for native speaker students and students from the country that uses English as official language prior to the defense.

If a student feels she/he ought to be exempt from this requirement for reasons such as having a Bachelors degree in English or having previous degree taught in English, please notify the MA International Program Coordinator at least 3 weeks in advance before the thesis defense date.

**Second step: Two weeks confirmation**—students must confirm the thesis defense date and make sure CV of external examiner is submitted to the MA (International Programme) academic coordinator two weeks prior to the thesis defense.

***Before Thesis Defense*** students need to fill in GR2 in consultation with major advisor. Then submit the form to academic coordinator via email or in person at least 2 weeks before the exam. The CV of external examiner should also be submitted at the same time. It is the responsibility of the advisor to request the CV from the external examiner.

**After Thesis Defense**

- If **'passed'**, GR 3 should be submitted to academic coordinator on the day of thesis defense and students will have to submit complete thesis to the Faculty of Graduate Studies within 21 days after the passed date.
- If **'passed with condition'**, GR 3 should be submitted to academic coordinator on the day of thesis defense and students will have maximum 90 days (timeframe is made by thesis defense committee members, some cases students are given less than 90 days) to revise the thesis as per suggestion from thesis defense committee. Later, GR4 should be submitted to academic coordinator via email or in person on the day students receive result 'passed' from Thesis defense committee. Afterward, students must submit complete thesis and other required form for graduation (GR5, GR 50, GR40, GR 26, thesis Checking form, GR 14, GR 16-A, Questionnaire "TURNITIN") within 21 days after the passed date.

**\*In case student want to change Thesis Title: Submit GR49 to academic coordinator.**

**ALL GR Forms (as shown in TABLE 1: FORMS RELATED TO MA THESIS Page 26) can be downloaded at: <http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/en/current-students/application-form-thesis.php> where the description of all the forms is given along with the form code.**

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The thesis defense is much like the proposal defense. The student prepares a presentation of around 30-45 minutes, explaining their research and findings. Here they detail their objectives and how they were completed.

The Thesis Defense Committee will decide the outcome of the defense. This consists of the advisors, and an outside examiner (from outside the programme). The defense is announced publicly, so anyone can go. This ensures that the research contributes to the public.

## Results

There are three possible results the examination committee will award for the oral thesis defense.

Pass Without conditions: This means the version the committee examines is ready to be submitted. The thesis does not need to be in its final form, but must be very close. The thesis may still have minor editing, or other technical faults to correct. There may be some minor theoretical or argument issues to correct. The main criterion for no conditions is that any changes must be minor, and must be completed within two weeks.

Pass with condition: The student is given a list of the conditions necessary for the thesis to pass. Conditions can vary greatly, from significant re-writing of chapters, to minor conceptual, theoretical, or other modifications. If the conditions are minor the advisors may consider giving a pass without conditions.

- The conditions must be completed in a set time (between 1 and 3 months).
- The conditions must be done to the satisfaction of the major advisor.
- The conditions are determined by consensus of the members of the Oral Thesis Defense Committee. If there is no consensus the decision may go to a vote between the members (which is the official Mahidol policy), and if this fails to reach a conclusion, the final decision rests with the Chair of the thesis advisory committee (the major advisor). Examples of conditions include redrafting chapters, correcting methodology, or rewriting conceptual or theoretical arguments.

Fail: A fail is a very unlikely outcome. The only time this could happen if a student insists on an examination against the advice of the advisors. A fail means a re-write, and re-defense of the thesis.

## **Students whose research involves human beings must officially notify the termination of the project to the Institutional Review Board Committee.**

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### **13. Thesis requirements for submission**

After passing the defense exam, it is recommended that students bring the original copy of thesis (hard copy and electronic file) to the staff of Academic Services Section, FGS to have the thesis format checked and allow at least two working days for service. There are some very strict regulations on the format of the thesis, and also some things (like size) are unregulated. There are specific ways for printing and electronic prescriptions by the FGS; it is important that students familiarise themselves with these requirements.

Please see [http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/writing\\_en.html](http://www.grad.mahidol.ac.th/grad/ThesisWriting2009/writing_en.html)

#### Size

The Master of Human Rights thesis should be approximately 20,000 words. This is excluding the bibliography, appendix, etc. The thesis should not be fewer 18,000 words or more than 25,000 words.

#### Page layout

Thesis pages are strictly defined, and all your chapters must be of a particular font size, margin-size, pagination, and layout. It is very important that students follow these guidelines strictly and to the standards of the Faculty of Graduate Studies to avoid any delays.

### Thesis Content

The structure of the content will be determined by you and your supervisor. You may choose to have a traditional structure of: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methods, Findings, Analysis, and Conclusion. Or you may choose, as most students do, to organise structure around dominant issues and themes.

### Referencing

The thesis must be referenced accurately using the **Harvard Style**, which is in-text referencing with authors last name and year (e.g., Smith, 2008). Although the in-text referencing is the same for all Harvard styles, the style may vary in the final reference list. The main idea is to keep the referencing consistent regardless of the country from which you are using the Harvard guide.

### Using non-English texts

As most students speak and read in another language, they can still use these texts. You must, however, translate the references into English. If you quote from the article or book you must translate the quote. If it is your translation, note this in the footnote (by stating “translation by the author”). If the book is in the bibliography the title will need to be translated into English.

### Sections

There are a number of compulsory sections a thesis needs to have.

The **compulsory sections** are:

1. Title Page,
2. Documentation: includes signatures, ISBN numbers, statements,
3. Abstract (student should have the Language Centre Staff at the second floor of Graduate Studies Building, Salaya Campus) to check English Grammar; the English Abstract should be in a double space format),
4. Contents page,
5. Bibliography.

Please note that:

1. The thesis Title Page requires the signature of MA Programme Director (Chair) while the approval page (in which the thesis defense ‘passed’ date is written) requires signature of the Institute Director,
2. Lecturers’ academic discipline can be found from the Institute website:  
[//www.ihrp.mahidol.ac.th/index.php/en/our-institute/faculty](http://www.ihrp.mahidol.ac.th/index.php/en/our-institute/faculty).

The **non-compulsory** sections are:

1. Acknowledgement,
2. Lists of tables, figures, abbreviations,
3. Appendixes.

### Printing

This seems like a small job, but the university will require four copies (2 for FGS and 2 for IHRP) of the thesis. Also, you will want some copies for yourself, some spare copies, and it is expected that you will give a copy to your advisors. You may need to print about 10 copies. Remember, getting 10 copies of a 100-page document together can be time-consuming so be mindful of the time it may take to print and bind.

### Binding

The thesis is bound according to strict university regulations. The Office has a list of bookbinders, and the candidate must make sure that there are necessary numbers of copies, with all the pages. This takes a couple of days.

### Editing and Proofreading

If you are a native English speaker, you should still get a friend to proofread your thesis for typos and other mistakes. For non-native speakers often you will need to get an editor to do this. The editor should fix up all grammatical and expression mistakes; they should not contribute in any way to the argument or ideas of the thesis.

Please note that the advisors are not allowed to edit the thesis. You will need to find someone, preferably outside the programme.

### **The process of preparing the original copy of thesis/thematic paper and request for thesis/thematic paper checking format service.**

1. Student must prepare the original copy of thesis/thematic paper in the format required by FGS.
2. **Checking thesis format after receiving FGS administrative order appointing the thesis defense examination committee**, student should submit the first 5 pages of thesis including the Cover Page, Titled Page, Approval Page, Acknowledgement page and Abstract Page to the staff of Academic Services Section, FGS, Salaya Campus to have those checked for **format** before the defense examination date. This provides student to be able to bring Titled Page and Approval Page to the Thesis Advisory Committee and The Thesis Defense Examination Committee to sign after the defense exam (result: PASSED).

**Note:** At this stage student can also have the original copy of thesis/thematic paper (hard copy and electronic file) checked by the staff of Academic Services Section, FGS to have the thesis/thematic paper format checked. Otherwise please have its format checked later. Allow at least two working days for service.

3. **Checking English abstract after receive the result ‘passed’ for the thesis defense**, student must have the English Abstract checked by the Language Centre Staff, and having corrected, student should submit the final version of the abstract together with Titled Page and Approval Page to the Academic Services Section, FGS, Salaya Campus, for the Dean to sign. The Dean of FGS will be the last person to sign after the other Committee Members, Programme Director, and Dean of Faculty have signed these documents.
4. Student must submit the complete thesis or thematic paper (one original and one copy)\* plus CD in word file and PDF file and the required following documents in hard copy—**GR5, GR 50(\*\*), GR40, GR 26, thesis Checking form, GR 14, GR 16-A, Questionnaire “TURNITIN”**—to the FGS within 21 days (**including weekend and holidays**) of passing the defense exam with "passed" result. A fee will be charged for late submission THB 200

per working day. The "delayed submission" cannot last more than 90 days (**including weekend and holidays**) counted from the end of the 21 days.

(\*) IHRP library require 2 hard-bound copies.

(\*\*) Students need the report from TURNITIN website enclosed with GR 50.

To get report from TURNITIN, please visit website ([www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)) and follow the following steps to check your thesis's originality

- First time user, please create your own account (fill in email address and your own password).
- Later you enroll with class ID and password as following:  
  
**Class ID:** 12341955  
**PW:** ihrpcheck
- After log in, just upload your final thesis. They will calculate the similarity in percentage. What Mahidol University requires is the report that shows the Similarity Index (in proportion of cited materials in the whole text).

Getting the Originality Report can be done in other three ways: by having and using students' own account of Turn-it-in (already explained above), by asking staff or lecturers to produce such Report, and by asking a Librarian in Central Library (Khun Wanida at the second floor). Since the first and second methods are riddled with problems like technicalities, privacy, or unavailability of service, the third method should be the most convenient method that needs no extra cost except for printing the first page of the Originality Report for students' main advisors to comment and sign.

**For more information:**

**Student QuickStart Guide**

[www.turnitin.com/en\\_us/training/student-training/student-quickstart-guide](http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/training/student-training/student-quickstart-guide)

**Student User Manual**

[www.turnitin.com/en\\_us/training/student-training/student-user-manual](http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/training/student-training/student-user-manual)

5. Cancellation of thesis or thematic paper examination result if the delayed submission of the complete thesis or thematic paper and CD has not been received by the FGS within 90 days (**including weekend and holidays**) after the "passed" result, the FGS will cancel the thesis or thematic paper examination result. If the student still wants to receive the degree, the student must register and start the entire processes of the thesis or thematic paper again.

## 14. The most common study problems

### **The culture of learning**

While every student faces unique problems with research and study, there are some common and recurring problems. By knowing these problems it may help the student find solutions to some difficulties they are having. One of the most significant problems for Master's candidates is academic differences. In one of the best books written for Asian students coming to Australia, authors Ballard and Clanchy state, and this point needs emphasis, that "Intellectual Demands are greater than Language demands." This is not to say that language problems are unimportant or small, but that intellectual demands are often ignored or down played and this has a significant impact on the effectiveness of the student's research and study.

This section will look at some of the intellectual demands which a master's student must be competent in.

### **Learning**

Discussion based learning. Learning in the Human Rights Program is based more on seminars where students are made to discuss ideas. The advisor will expect the student to discuss ideas, and have much to say on the topic. Meetings with the advisor are not small lectures but a conversation; they are not about learning specific facts but about debating ideas, detailing progress, or working through problems. Discussion based learning can be difficult at first for some students because of language. But also students find difficulty in putting their ideas in front of the advisor because of *kreng jai*, shyness, or not understanding the topic.

Wide list of reading. Advisors will expect their students to spend much time reading. This can mean around 15 hours a week minimum of reading, and this could entail one book and perhaps 5 articles. Further, the advisor doesn't want the student to only read the texts, but to understand them enough to comment and criticise them. The student must have a close understanding of what the texts are about and form opinions on them. Much Masters learning is based on reading and analysing many books and articles. You will find the amount of reading and analysing daunting, but with practice it is not that difficult.

Vague outlines of studies. There is sometimes little or only vague direction from the advisor. It is up to the student to initiate the work. At first this can be confusing, because you are unsure if you are doing the correct research. But this is all part of the learning process, for you need to discover individually how to research, and teach yourself how to research. The self-learning process, again, gets easier through time. Students should see the vague outlines as freedoms rather than limitations for they can research, explore whatever topic they want, and fully manage their own project.

### **Cultural Variations in Styles Of Thinking**

Reproductive versus original. Many educational systems train students to reproduce valued sources of knowledge. A good student will find the most accurate information for their research and reproduce this information. Often it is better if they do not criticise this work, as that can be considered insulting to the academic who wrote it. However, for your thesis you are expected to develop your own ideas about the subject, and to express these ideas. The student is expected to analyse all ideas, regardless who wrote them, and if they only agree with what they read it is seen as poor research. Students are expected to comment, evaluate, and analyse other thinkers when

they give their opinion. They are judged by their unique, individual, and original approach to the topic.

Correct versus Creative. Masters research often is not clear or neat. Sometimes answers to questions cannot be accurate, or methods to find data may be unusual because graduate research is influenced more by individual approaches, and is more interested in original and creative responses. Correctness, while a factor, is not the most important way to assess a response. Thus an approach which may be totally wrong, but uses original ideas, may be rewarded. Your research should be based on asking questions and only sometimes on finding answers.

Following the advisor versus self-initiated work. An important study skill for Master's candidates is to initiate, organise, and carry out their own research. Sometimes the advisor will have little advice to give, and expect the student to discover research ideas on their own. During research the student must learn to teach themselves, and organise their own research and work plan. They will come to the advisor with details of how the research is going, questions, and suggestions how to improve the research. The advisor will give suggestions and opinions, but will not organise the student's research for them. A student may ask for advice on a topic and the advisor will not offer assistance but suggest a book to read. Also the advisor will expect the student to come up with alternative ideas and arguments. The advisor may organise very little for the student and expect to student to be self-motivated and self-organised.

Summaries versus analysis.

The balance between description and analysis is one of the most difficult tasks for any student. While descriptions, literature reviews, and summaries are necessary in a thesis, these must be balanced with an analysis of the subject.

To analyse means to break down something into the pieces, and discover out how it all works. Analysis does not happen by repeating other people's opinions but by criticising them. Hence many lecturers prefer student to minimise the amount of summarising or 'glossing' of other writers and get the students to write their own ideas.

Supportive versus critical. Criticisms are expected of the student. The student must look for where ideas or methods do not work, and criticise their failures. The student is expected to offer negative views of well-respected thinkers, and give suggestions for improvement. Criticism means to evaluate something. While not all criticism is negative, the student is expected to take a negative stance on a number of occasions. Some students can find the critical approach difficult because they are forced to think and say negatives ideas, and thus showing a lack of respect to other academics. Advisors, on the other hand, will be disappointed if poor ideas or poor arguments are not criticised because it means nothing is being improved, and the student is not reading and thinking about the topic closely enough.

### **General Study Problems**

All students face study problems. Most reasons why students have trouble are not to do with study, but events in other parts of their lives. However, there are some reasons why students do have trouble finishing their theses.

Non-academic reasons: By far the most common reasons for study problems have nothing to do with academic work but are as simple as starting a job or taking a holiday. Other pressures such as financial, employment, family and or personal reasons are also why students quit. Students find a well-paying job and decide not to stay a poor student. Or else they do not have enough money to continue studying and decide to work.

Employment: Many students are working full time and think they can continue to study part time while working. They plan to work on their thesis at night or on the weekends. In reality, away from the campus, the discipline of the advisor, and the support of fellow students, it is difficult to keep interest in the thesis. Further, this can be very tiring, giving the student little free time to spend with friends or family. It is advised to plan leave from your work for at least 6 weeks when writing a thesis. As yet no student has been able to produce a thesis while working full time, the demands are too great. Much safer is to plan a work break ahead so you can concentrate fully on your research.

Isolation: Because of the lack of class structure, regular contact with other students and with focussing so much on the research project, the Masters student can become isolated from the Program and fellow students. This is a problem that should be avoided. The student should keep in touch with other students in similar situations and work through their problems together. Isolation is a common problem faced by all students, but it is also the easiest to avoid.

As of 25 May 2016