

# Master Thesis Manual

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## 1. Introduction

This manual is for students participating in one of the pre-experience Master of Science (MSc) programmes at the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM).

During the MSc at RSM, students are required to conduct independent, individual research in the academic field of their chosen master programme. Students should be able to report the entire research process leading to the master thesis, from formulating problems to describing findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The aim of the master thesis is to provide students with the skills to conduct business and management research in an academically sound way. The master thesis and research methods course together account for up to 20 EC<sup>1</sup> and form an integral and important part of all MSc programmes.

This manual gives detailed requirements for the structure, content, and assessment of the master thesis.

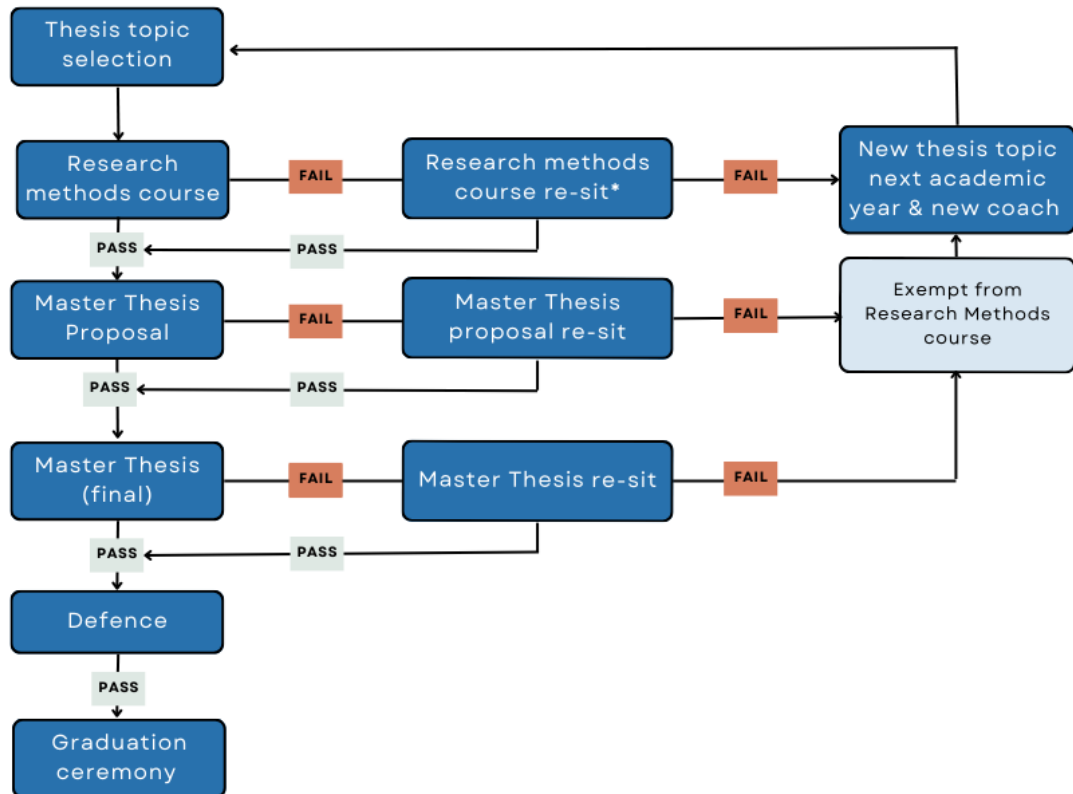
Students are referred to the website listed below for information, general procedures, rules, and regulations relating to the master thesis process. Master thesis coordinators can inform students of additional programme-specific rules and procedures<sup>2</sup>; see Appendix 1 for contact information. Also, research clinics and similar courses can provide valuable information.

### [Thesis Information](#)

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<sup>1</sup> For MSc BAM students the thesis counts for 18EC, in MSc MI/MBI the research methods course is incorporated in the master thesis.

<sup>2</sup> The MSc Programmes can set additional rules regarding their own subjects and registration deadlines / process for the thesis topic allocation.



**Figure 1: Schematic thesis process**

\* Only if a re-sit option is offered, this can be different per MSc Programme. Reach out to your Thesis Coordinator for more information (see appendix 1).

<sup>3</sup> Please note that admission to the oral defence means a preliminary pass of the thesis trajectory. *In order to graduate, the student should fulfil all curriculum components.* Note that this image may deviate for some MSc Programmes.

## 2. Structure

The number of pages for the master thesis may vary depending on the programme and can range from approximately 30 to 70 pages, excluding executive summary, literature list and appendices. The master thesis should be written in English<sup>4</sup>.

The master thesis should comprise the following elements.

**Cover page**, including:

- o master thesis title;
- o author's name and student number;
- o MSc programme that the student followed;
- o full names of the master thesis coach and co-reader;
- o date on which the master thesis is submitted.

**Preface**, stating that:

The copyright of the master thesis rests with the author. The author is responsible for its contents. RSM is only responsible for the educational coaching and cannot be held liable for the content.

**Executive summary** of approximately 1,000 words.

**Table of contents**.

**Introductory chapter** containing most of the information formulated in the research proposal.

**Theoretical chapter(s)** describing the literature review and the conceptual framework.

**Chapter(s) on the research findings** containing descriptions of research methodology, data collection and data analyses.

**Concluding chapter** with the answers to the research question, interpretation of the findings, recommendations, and reflections on the thesis research project.

**Reference list** in which all theoretical and practical sources are properly ranked and listed.

**Appendices** can be added to complete the master thesis.

For additional information on writing a thesis report, consult the [Skills Sheets](#)<sup>5</sup> and other sources, such as the APA Publication Manual ([www.apastyle.com](http://www.apastyle.com)) and the University Library's [Information skills modules](#) relating to citation and referencing. These explain suitable and consistent reference styles, for example quotations, reference citations in texts, and reference lists.

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<sup>4</sup> Exemption requests must be submitted via the Online Request Form <https://request-eb.rsm.nl>. Except for PMiM students, PMiM students can write their thesis in Dutch.

<sup>5</sup> Tulder, R.J.M. van (2018). Skill Sheets: an integrated approach to research, study and management. Amsterdam, Pearson Benelux (3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

## 3. Content

### 3.1 Identify a research question and project design – the master thesis proposal

The proposal delineates a research idea that the research will pursue. The thesis subject, project design, theoretical approach, research question and research methodology should relate to the subject and field of the student's MSc programme.

The **master thesis proposal** serves as a starting and anchor point for the master thesis. The proposal gives the coach an initial idea of what to expect from the student.

It should identify a research question and project design. More specifically, the proposal should:

- set the scene and briefly describe the context;
- describe the research objective: what will the research contribute to theory and management practice? In practice-oriented research, is the contribution aimed at finding a problem, diagnosis, design, implementation or evaluation<sup>6</sup>?
- formulate a research question or questions which should be answered to achieve the objective;
- explain why the study is important and to whom;
- formulate a provisional conceptual model: what are the main concepts and how are they related in theory?
- describe and explain the research design, for example survey, experiment, and case study; measurement of concepts; detailed fieldwork plan; and the plan for analysis of data;
- provide a timetable for the thesis;
- make a provisional literature list.

### 3.2 Write a critical review

With the research question in mind, the student should critically review relevant theories and research from available literature in books and journals, such as consulting the Web of Science.

### 3.3 Define working concepts and conceptual frameworks

The conceptual framework should contain all theoretical concepts relevant to the research question, and how they are related (for example see Verschuren, Doorewaard, Poper & Mellion, 2010<sup>7</sup>). The conceptual framework can be used to organise and analyse research data in an effective way<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Keep in mind that a thesis is a publicly accessible document: research results must be publicly accessible in order to be verified, discussed and opposed. Therefore, a thesis may not include any confidential information. Only in very special cases an exemption can be made. Exemption requests (including the motivation of the external organisation and the consent of coach and co-reader) must be submitted at the Examination Board. For more information, please see the chapter on Confidentiality Policy.

<sup>7</sup> Verschuren, P., Doorewaard, H., Poper, R & Mellion, M.J. (2010). Designing a research project. The Hague, Eleven International Publishing (2nd edition).

<sup>8</sup> There is ample information available, for example in the university library, on quantitative research, qualitative research, observational studies, case studies, interview techniques, and literature review methods.

## 4. Collect and analyse research data

- 1) Research methodology and methods should be clearly visible throughout the whole master thesis. In this section, the student should:
  - display research data in a descriptive or summarizing manner;
  - discuss the nature of the questions asked and choose an appropriate methodological stance for answering the questions;
  - describe, explain and justify the research methods used;
  - outline the practical and technical aspects of conducting the research;
  - consider ethical issues connected with the project.
  
- 2) In the presentation and analysis of findings, the student should:
  - describe findings and their meaning;
  - refer back to the literature review and the conceptual framework;
  - use the literature to interrogate and evaluate own research material and vice versa.
  
- 3) Presentation and analysis may require several chapters, for example:
  - one chapter for presentation and one for analysis;
  - several chapters, each presenting a different case study.

Students should give only a description of actual findings at this stage of the master thesis.

## 5. Define, validate, and evaluate solutions and models, and interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations

When all data are collected and analyses are completed, findings should be interpreted. In case of design-oriented research, a decision model and problem solution should be generated, tested, validated and evaluated. Always refer back to theory findings and research material to present the relation between the outcomes of research related to those already existing.

- 1) In the conclusions and recommendations, the student must:
  - formulate an answer to the main research question;
  - summarise the main argument and its theoretical and practical relevance;
  - discuss the validity and reliability of findings and arguments;
  - frame the conclusions and recommendations if appropriate;
  - discuss any issues concerning the implementation of the conclusions or any recommendations;
  - reflectively critique the account provided in the thesis concerning theoretical approach and methodology;
  - make recommendations for future research.

Conclusions are drawn up at the end of the master thesis process. These are not the same as research findings or research analysis but should be an interpretation of the findings. For this section, it would be appropriate to discuss the key contribution of the research in the light of previous knowledge.

2) There are three types of conclusions:

- **research conclusions:** students' understanding of the processes and dynamics of the subject the researched;
- **strategic conclusions:** students' ideas about what actions should be taken in response to the strategic question,
- **recommendations:** practical steps that should be taken to implement the strategic conclusions.

## 6. Write a persuasive, well-structured report

The master thesis should contain essential elements in a logical arrangement. It should describe a clear line of reasoning and argumentation. The content should be clear and consistent.

There are three types of elements essential in a master thesis: the basic line of reasoning, the theoretical line of reasoning and the empirical line of reasoning. These elements should be aligned (see figure 2).

1) Elements relating to the **basic line of reasoning**.

- What is it about? What is the basic issue?
- Which questions should be asked? How should the student answer these questions?
- What data has the student found? What are the answers to the questions?

2) Elements relating to the **theoretical line of reasoning**. These elements constitute the methods or means of getting to the facts, the lens through which one sees them in practice (focus). The reasoning is funnel-like, from general to specific.

- What common perspectives already exist about the subject in the field of business administration?
- Which ideas or models tie in with the problem or development with respect to the subject? What is known about these ideas or models?
- What have other researchers had to say about the subject?
- What theoretical notions or concepts are selected and how do they answer the questions?
- How does the student make theory findings manageable in order to apply them in practice?
- How do these theoretical notions pertain to the subject and to the problem?

3) Elements relating to the **empirical line of reasoning**. These elements ultimately comprise the locus: the facts being examined. The reasoning is funnel-like: from general to specific.

- To which practical situation – sector, company or product – do the elements refer?
- In general, where can research data be retrieved at any given time?
- How should the data be arranged and compared?
- Considering the research question, what practical description can now be given?

Finally, the thesis document must be well-presented. It should not contain inaccuracies, typographical errors, spelling or grammatical mistakes, and it should have a clear and tidy layout.



## 7. Research ethics and management of relationships and processes

- 1) The thesis process is a learning track. In this process students are expected, under the supervision of their thesis committee, to abide by the ethical principles of research practice specified in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity<sup>9</sup>. This Code specifies that “within an educational setting scientific and scholarly research by students falls within the normative framework” of the Code. Guiding principles of the Code state that research should be conducted honestly, transparently and independently, while taking into consideration the legitimate interests of third parties in the research. Coach and/or co-reader can request the student to hand over the data their research work is based on for the purpose of assessing the data integrity of the data used for the thesis work by the students. Students can find more information about the procedure in the Appendix 3- Data Integrity. For Master theses these principles have specific implications for the confidentiality of thesis documents (see below under “Other master thesis issues,” paragraph 9).
- 2) Students are expected to show managerial skills and take initiative to ask for and receive feedback from their coach in order to graduate successfully. Clear agreements about regular meetings and consultations should be made with the coach. During the thesis process, students should be able to demonstrate the ability to conduct individual research and make coherent connections between theory and practice. Successful completion of the master thesis remains the responsibility of the individual student. Research data must be stored and made available for public scrutiny.
- 3) If you make use of Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to find participants for your research, you have to adhere to the rules and guidelines of MTurk<sup>10</sup>.

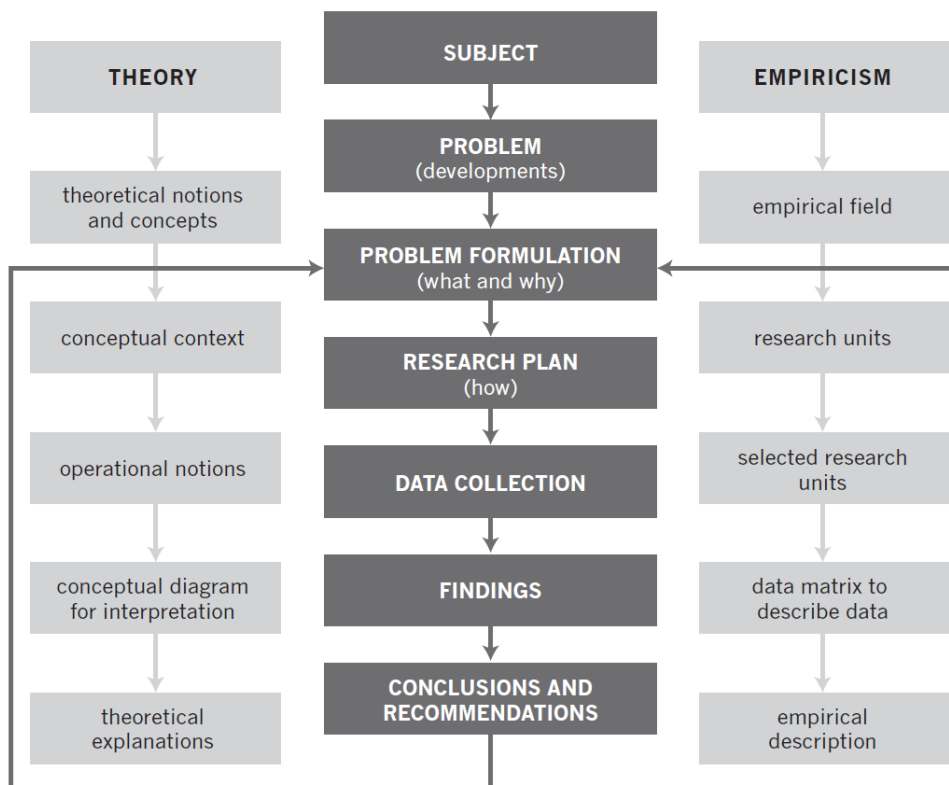


Figure 2: Alignment of basics line of reasoning (centre), theoretical line of reasoning (left) and empirical line of reasoning (right)

<sup>9</sup> KNAW 2018: <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl/ui/datasets/id/easy-dataset:110600/tab/2>

<sup>10</sup> MTurk requester guidelines.: [https://mturkpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/MTURK\\_BP.pdf](https://mturkpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/MTURK_BP.pdf)

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#### 4) Informed consent

It must be made clear to prospective research participants that they are free to decide whether or not to take part in the research, and whether any data collected from and about them is included in analysis. In most cases, this is secured through obtaining informed consent.

In some rare cases, the anticipated social benefits of the research are so significant that certain individual interests carry less relative weight by comparison. However, these are exceptions in social science research, and strong justification must always be provided.

More information about informed consent can be found on the [Research Quality Integrity page](#).

## 8. Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate

- 1) The master thesis must be defended orally by each student during the master thesis defence, which normally takes place in the office of coach or co-reader. Only in exceptional cases can the thesis defence take place online, provided that both the coach, the co-reader and the thesis candidate agree<sup>11</sup>. It is a public defence which means that the student can bring someone with them. Nevertheless, it is not a festive event: festivities with family and friends must wait until the graduation ceremony. During the defence, the student may give a short presentation containing a summary of the research and its main conclusions. Students can bring a laptop for this purpose but must realise there are no beamers available. Presentations should be in English. The oral defence lasts about one hour:
  - the coach opens the session;
  - the student presents the subject, findings and main conclusions of the master thesis;
  - the master thesis committee questions the student;
  - the master thesis committee consults in private to establish the student's final grade;
  - the coach and co-reader communicate the final grade to the student.

After the session, coach and co-reader will record the grade and their deliberations in the Thesis Online Platform (TOP).

- 2) Coach and co-reader both take part in the assessment of the thesis. Therefore, both are expected to be present at the thesis defence.
  - In case a member of the thesis committee foresees being unable to attend the defence, she or he is expected to arrange replacement in time in consent with the thesis coordinator. The substitute should be a member of the same department.
  - In case one of the members is unexpectedly unable to attend the defence, the department concerned is expected to provide for replacement.
  - If the department cannot be reached or cannot find a substitute, the defence can take place only if the coach is present or if the coach has explicitly authorised the co-reader to replace them<sup>12</sup>.
  - If the coach is absent while no arrangement for a substitute from the same department has been made and the co-reader has not explicitly been authorised by the original coach to act on their behalf as coach, the thesis defence will be cancelled.

The coach or co-reader should always inform the Examination Board of the substitution by e-mail: [eb@rsm.nl](mailto:eb@rsm.nl).

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<sup>11</sup> If all parties agree to an online defence, there is no approval required from the Examination Board. Oral tests don't need recording in the case of two examiners are present.

<sup>12</sup> In this case the defence must be recorded according to Article 4.3 TER. The Examination Board will archive the recorded file for seven years after the defence.

## 9. Assessment

### 9.1 Eight dimensions to evaluate and assess a master thesis

Each master thesis at RSM will be assessed and evaluated according to the criteria formulated in the diagram in Appendix 2. Each column in the diagram represents a dimension of performance in the master thesis. Please note that the dimensions correspond to the eight paragraphs of the content chapter. Each row corresponds to a level of achievement. The thesis committee will use the diagram to help determine the grade of the master thesis. To determine the grade, the diagram is not imperative but rather guiding. The assessment of the quality per dimension is expressed in scores as “unsatisfactory”, “satisfactory”, “good” and “excellent”. Those scores do not necessarily or automatically translate into a grade. Although the combined scores of the dimensions constitute the basis for the final master thesis grade, the thesis committee may decide that one (or more) of the partial scores bears more heavily on the final grade than do others. Hence, the scores per dimension do not imply simple summation and averaging of partial scores or grades. The thesis assessment is a contextual judgment on aspects of the work done. Students are advised to check the assessment diagram in the early stages of conceptualising their master thesis.

### 9.2 Assessment time, important end of academic year deadlines, graduation ceremony

The master thesis committee is required to assess the proposal and the thesis within two weeks at the latest, to ensure that the trajectory does not suffer delays in terms of student progress and/or administrative processes. The thesis trajectory will be assessed within three working days after the oral defence unless postponement of the assessment is necessary due to special circumstances such as an investigation to establish or rule out the suspicion of fraud. The final thesis re-sit deadline may vary per MSc Programme but is usually set to **15 August 2025**.

To safeguard the graduation within the Academic Year (AY) and avoid having to reregister for the next AY, the **thesis defence and the grading** must be done on **31 August 2025** at the latest. The status in TOP should read ‘Thesis Done’. If not, the student cannot graduate in that AY. Note that it may take between 5-10 working days before the grade is processed in Osiris. This does not have an effect on your graduation date as long as the status in TOP was “Thesis Done” on 31 August 2025.

To join the festive MSc graduation ceremony in October (or November), the thesis defence and the grading must be done before **15 September 2025**<sup>13</sup> at the latest. If not, the student **failed the Thesis Trajectory** and cannot join the graduation ceremony. If the **defence is scheduled in September**<sup>14</sup>, the student needs to **re-enrol for the next academic year and pay the corresponding tuition fee as long as they are registered as a student**. To join the graduation ceremony, the student needs to register as participant before the respective deadline, which is usually around mid-August, even if their defence is scheduled for later. The student will receive several calls to register via e-mail, including the deadline. **IMPORTANT:** If a student misses the registration deadline for the graduation ceremony, including cases of absence during the registration period, incomplete registration via the registration form, late graduation, family members who already made travel

<sup>13</sup> The grade **must** be registered in **OSIRIS** on 15 September 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Note that the defence is always scheduled in collaboration/agreement with the thesis coach and co-reader. Scheduling the defence before 15 September is only an option when the coach and co-reader are not available for a defence in August due to holiday plans or force majeure. Defences scheduled after 15 September means a *fail* unless you have approval from the Examination Board.

arrangements to attend the graduation, or any other personal reasons, we will not be able to include the student as graduate in the ceremony under any circumstances.

### **Final version = Final version**

The assessment must be based on the version that is submitted in the Thesis Online Platform and not on any other version. Students should take care that this version is indeed complete and are therefore strongly advised to do a final check on spelling, grammatical mistakes, typographical errors, and tidy layout, as this is considered when grading the thesis.

The final thesis that is uploaded in the Thesis Online Platform will be stored in the thesis repository<sup>15</sup> and will be used by the accreditation bodies to judge the trustworthiness of the administration and the quality control systems, respectively. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the final version of the thesis is used.

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<sup>15</sup> If the thesis contains confidential information and should be restricted, a confidentiality form needs to be requested, completed, and submitted at the [Examination Board](#). See paragraph 9 of the section "Other master thesis issues."

## 10. Roles and Responsibilities

### 10.1 Thesis coordinator

Help and general advice on all aspects of the master thesis can be provided by the MSc programme master thesis coordinator. You can find their contact information in Appendix 1.

### 10.2 Thesis committee

Each master thesis will be assessed by a master thesis committee. This committee consists of a coach and a co-reader who are appointed as an examiner by the Examination Board. The coach must be a member of the academic RSM personnel associated with the department offering the student's MSc programme, unless otherwise approved by the Examination Board. At least one of the two members must be a tenured or tenure track faculty member (category 1 examiner). Hence, pairs consisting exclusively of category 2 and 3 examiners such as PhD candidates and/or untenured lecturers and/or external examiners are not allowed. The composition of the thesis committee must ensure that the thesis will be assessed independently, objectively and without bias. Some combinations of coach and co-readers are deemed unsuitable. Specifically, coaches and co-readers are not allowed to sit on a thesis committee with their own PhD students, and supervisors are not allowed to form a committee with their direct reports without a PhD degree.

Furthermore, at the request of the thesis coordinator, an internal or external expert may be temporarily appointed as a co-reader of a thesis committee. This person must meet the following requirements: a completed PhD, or a university master's degree with demonstrable extensive experience in performing scientific research. This examiner may act as co-reader only. The thesis coordinator must submit a request to appoint the external co-reader as an examiner to the Examination Board via [eb@rsm.nl](mailto:eb@rsm.nl).

### 10.3 Coach

Once a student has chosen a subject, a coach will be appointed, usually in consultation with the master thesis coordinator. The student and coach should meet multiple times over the course of the trajectory (usually about six meetings).

The **coach** has the responsibility to:

- approve the thesis proposal;
- agree with the student on the planning of the trajectory, such as (resit-)deadlines, drafts, and feedback;
- provide guidance on all activities in the context of the master thesis;
- offer regular assessments of draft versions of the proposal and thesis;
- be available to provide timely feedback and document the highlights in the Thesis Online Platform;
- approve the thesis and admit the student to the thesis defence, together with co-reader;
- conduct the final defence and award the final grade, together with co-reader.

### 10.4 Co-reader

In some programmes, students should actively search for a co-reader themselves, in other programmes the co-reader is assigned to the student by the thesis coordinator. Thesis coordinator will inform students about the procedure. A co-reader must be an RSM examiner as described above in the section "Thesis Committee". The co-reader is an independent assessor of thesis.

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The **co-reader** has the responsibility to:

- Read and approve the thesis and admit the student to the thesis defence, together with the coach;
- conduct the final defence and award the final grade, together with the coach (including providing insightful feedback, independent from coach's feedback).

The student will usually not personally interact with the co-reader over the course of the thesis trajectory, except during the defence.

## 10.5 Student

The **student** has the responsibility to:

- take active charge of their own thesis process;
- dedicate themselves fully and invest sufficient time for their research;
- communicate timely to coach when feedback or guidance is required and initiate meetings to this end;
- adhere to deadlines;
- abide by the Examination Board's Fraud regulations and to the EUR Code of Integrity;
- successfully complete the master thesis.

## 11. Rules on research integrity, cheating and plagiarism

Whichever research methodology or method is used, students intending to gather empirical material should always announce they are master students from RSM in the process of preparing their master thesis. Students must avoid giving the impression that data collection is for research by RSM faculty. Students cannot use RSM's logo, letter headings or stationery. The thesis cannot be used towards the purpose of any other degree programme, at RSM or otherwise.

For further information on research integrity as well as cheating and plagiarism, students should peruse the [EUR Code of Integrity](#) and the [EUR brochure Cheating and Plagiarism](#).



## 12. Fraud

The thesis must consist exclusively of the student's original work and must be unique to the student and programme in question. In all cases, the thesis' author assumes responsibility for its content. Fraud is the action or negligence of a student because of which it is impossible, entirely, or partially, to form a correct judgment about the knowledge, insight, and skills of the student. Examples of fraud are plagiarism, ghost-writing, unauthorized use of generative AI, data falsification.

In cases where the work cites, builds on, paraphrases or uses research or data provided by others, the report should acknowledge and reference this in accordance with recognized reference styles such as the APA Publication Manual ([www.apastyle.com](http://www.apastyle.com)) and the University Library's [Information skills modules](#) relating to citation and referencing. In case of doubt as to whether how to reference, please consult with the thesis coach. Inadequate referencing will be considered plagiarism. Please note that all theses (final proposal and final thesis) will be scanned for plagiarism. Every case of plagiarism shall be reported to the Examination Board. The Examination Board may impose a sanction, which varies from reprimand to exclusion from examinations for up to one year.

Outsourcing such as ghost-writing and use of generative AI can also lead to a fraud conviction. However, not all forms of outsourcing are prohibited: having someone else check a text for the quality of the English does not necessarily constitute fraud. Likewise, helping each other in a thesis group or talking about your thesis with housemates is not immediately a problem. In case of doubt as to whether input from third parties is permitted or not, the student must consult with the coach.

Note: when a student has already been admitted to the defence and the coach or co-reader suspects during the defence any form of fraud, such as unauthorized use of AI, ghostwriting, data manipulation etc., grading can be put on hold. This means that the thesis is not yet graded and therefore the student cannot yet graduate.

Relevant digital documents towards communicating the rights and obligations of students are:

- [EUR Code of Integrity](#)
- [Scientific Integrity: EUR.nl](#);
- [Cheating and Plagiarism](#);
- [Student Charter: EUR.nl](#).
- [Examination Board's website on Fraud](#) (under Fraud/Plagiarism).

## 13. Complaints

If a student is dissatisfied with the guidance of a coach it is important to address the issue directly with the coach and/or thesis coordinator as soon as possible and well before the thesis will be graded. After grading, nothing can be adjusted anymore. Also keep in mind that the management of the process is a component of the thesis assessment plan: the student is supposed to take charge of the thesis process and to plan sufficient meetings with the coach (in consultation and with approval of the coach (and co-reader) in case of the thesis defence).

If the issue is not resolved by the informal approach, a student can submit a [formal complaint](#) to the Examination Board via its [web portal](#). All relevant applicable documents, such as the coach and/or co-reader's and/or thesis coordinator's response, must be attached to this submission. The Examination Board will

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investigate the complaint based on the submitted documents and will conduct its own research in conjunction with these. Both the complainant and the involved examiners will be heard in the following investigation. Within six weeks of lodging the complaint, the Examination Board will inform the complainant of its subsequent findings and any conclusions that may have been drawn.

Please note: A complaint with the Examination Board cannot concern the grade awarded. If the grade does not live up to expectations, the student may lodge an appeal with the Examination Appeals Board via [cbe@eur.nl](mailto:cbe@eur.nl), [legal.protection@eur.nl](mailto:legal.protection@eur.nl). The appeal must be submitted within six weeks of the announcement of the grade.

## 14. Other master thesis issues

### 14.1 Thesis Online Platform

RSM makes use of an online platform to support the thesis process, called Thesis Online Platform (TOP): <https://top.rsm.nl>. Students will submit their final proposal and final thesis in the system. Coaches will approve or disapprove the documents in TOP and provide qualitative feedback to motivate their appreciation. At the end, after the defence, the final assessment and grading is also recorded in TOP by coach and co-reader.

### 14.2 Student evaluation of the thesis trajectory

Upon submission of the final thesis in TOP, students are asked to complete an evaluation of the thesis trajectory, and their coach. All students should complete this survey, which will be used to continuously improve the thesis trajectory. Students are encouraged to give their honest opinion but should keep their comments in line with the [EUR Code of Integrity](#), particularly the section *Diversity and Language*. The results will only be made available to the coaches and co-readers after the final thesis grade has been registered in Osiris. Students thus need not fear for their thesis grade when being critical.

### 14.3 Timing and deadlines

The thesis trajectory is offered only once a year<sup>16</sup>. There will be no thesis supervision outside the trajectory, nor any additional thesis supervision for a thesis re-sit. The trajectory is divided in three stages: the research methods course, the proposal, and the final thesis. Students can fail in each of these three stages. When this happens, the student must retake the trajectory the following year and has to choose a new thesis topic and will have a new coach. Please see figure 1 on page 4 for a schematic overview of the thesis trajectory. Note that not having completed the thesis trajectory, even without having failed, will have the same consequences as failing the thesis trajectory: the student must retake the trajectory the following year and has to choose a new thesis topic and will have a new coach.

Each master programme will set its own deadlines for the submission of the proposal and final thesis. The deadlines will be communicated by the thesis coordinator.

### 14.4 Exemptions from deadlines

Only in the following exceptional situations, deviations from thesis deadlines are possible:

1. *An ambitious or extensive thesis*

An extension may be granted by the relevant MSc-programme (by the Academic Director and/or Thesis Coordinator) on the following grounds:

- The student is an excellent student who has undertaken a research project of which the importance transcends a conventional MSc thesis;
- This research project is too ambitious or extensive to be completed within the normal deadlines;
- Coach needs to agree upon the necessity and desirability for an extension, referring to the talents of the students, the context in which this research takes place and the significance of the endeavour either for RSM or for the research field as a whole.

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<sup>16</sup> For most programmes it is offered in spring. For the MSc IM-CEMS, it is offered in autumn.

## 2. *Special circumstances*

The Examination Board may grant an exemption from the final thesis deadline in case a student has been met with detrimental circumstances beyond his/her control. The Examination Board will only take requests into consideration which include positive advice of a student adviser in case of [personal circumstances](#) as well as the confirmation of the coach and co-reader that:

- the student has worked hard during the spring trajectory and has been on time with deliverables (if possible, given the circumstances);
- the extension in order to finish the thesis is no longer than approximately one month;
- the coach and co-reader are willing and have the opportunity to supervise the student for the extension period

## 3. *Extension of thesis proposal deadline*

- The thesis coordinator may grant an exemption from the thesis proposal deadline.
- In the event of personal circumstances, the Thesis Coordinator can consult the student advisers for advice.

Timely and well-documented requests will be ruled upon as soon as possible, preferably within two weeks, and ultimately within four weeks. When the new deadlines after the extension are taking place in the new academic year, the student needs to re-enrol in the programme and pay the corresponding tuition fees, as long as they are registered as a student.

## 14.5 **Judicium: classifications of the Master of Science degree**

A master thesis can be graded from 5.5 to 10 in half-point increments. All master core courses and master electives, including the master thesis, and other courses that appear on the list of grades, will be factored into the determination of the grade point average (GPA). The GPA is calculated by multiplying the grade of an individual course by the number of EC of that course and then dividing the total by the total number of EC. Courses for which no grade is determined, such as tests assessed with a 'pass' or 'fail', are excluded from the GPA calculation.

The *judicium* is a classification of the GPA. The classification *cum laude* will be awarded if the student has fulfilled at least the following conditions:

- a. the average of the grades for the examinations (thesis trajectory included) under the Dutch grading system as displayed on the list of grades, weighted on the basis of the credits, is 8.25 or higher;
- b. the grade for the examination of the thesis trajectory is at least 8.0;
- c. no more than one examination or test (i.e. an officially recorded grade – including pass/fail assessments - in Osiris) has been taken more than once (this applies from cohort 2013-2014 onwards). The thesis proposal is excluded from this rule. Note: if the final thesis report has been referred to the thesis resit deadline, this is considered a resit. Also retaking the Thesis Trajectory next year is considered a re-sit.

The classification *summa cum laude* will be awarded if the student has fulfilled at least the following conditions:

- a. the average of the grades for the examinations (thesis trajectory included) under the Dutch grading system as displayed on the list of grades, weighted on the basis of the credits is 9.0 or higher;



- b. the grade for the examination of the thesis trajectory is at least 9.0, and
- c. no examination or test (i.e. an officially recorded grade – including pass/fail assessments – in Osiris) has been taken more than once. The thesis proposal is excluded from this rule. Note: if the final thesis report has been referred to the thesis resit deadline, this is considered a resit. Also retaking the Thesis Trajectory next year is considered a re-sit.

## 14.6 Graduation in pairs

A master thesis is considered an individual project. Students may not complete a thesis project jointly with a classmate or fellow student.

## 14.7 Combining the thesis with an internship

Combining the thesis with an internship is not recommended, as internship obligations will compete with the very strict timeline for the thesis trajectory and elective requirements. Some programmes offer the possibility to substitute a 6 EC free elective with a company-based project or internship<sup>17</sup>. Students are advised to pursue an internship in the summer, or after finalising the thesis.

## 14.8 Master thesis repository

After graduation the master thesis is stored in the Erasmus University Thesis Repository and is publicly accessible via <https://thesis.eur.nl/>. The user can view the title, name of the author and keywords. ERNA login credentials are required for the document download.

## 15. Confidentiality Policy

The principles of scientific integrity state (amongst others) that publications should be honest, transparent, and independent, and that researchers should take into consideration the legitimate interests of third parties involved in the research. According to the [Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity \(2018\)](#) this implies that scientific research should be open to public scrutiny and criticism. To test for these qualities of scientific work, to which master theses are generally counted just like PhD dissertations, public accessibility of the work is considered an indispensable requirement.

Students who want to submit a request with the Examination Board to keep their thesis from being published in RSM's Master Thesis Repository for a maximum period of two years need to send an e-mail to [eb@rsm.nl](mailto:eb@rsm.nl). The Examination Board's Office will then open a Request for the student in Osiris Case in Osiris Student. The student needs to upload the approval from the coach and co-reader and provide the contact details of the company contact person.

Preferably, the request must be submitted before the deadline of the thesis proposal, but ultimately one month before the thesis submission deadline. By then you should be aware whether the sensitivity of information on which you rely in your thesis should warrant an embargo on publication for a maximum

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<sup>17</sup> Please check with the thesis coordinator of your MSc programme if this is possible. At the time of writing the following six programmes offer this possibility: Business Information Management, Finance and Investments, Global Business & Sustainability, , Management of Innovation, People, Organisations & Change and Supply Chain Management.

duration of two years<sup>18</sup>.

Students can submit a request with the Examination Board (in case specific information would still be harmful after this confidentiality period has expired, then such information should have no place in the thesis to begin with and claims or conclusions in the thesis should not depend on such information. It is the responsibility of the student and the coach) to ensure that the feasibility of a thesis project is not hampered by such circumstances). Some projects, topics or research questions, therefore, however intriguing from a business or even scientific point of view, should not be initiated in the context of a master thesis at all, if their potential sensitivity would resist publication. In the project design stage, the intake of a master research project should reflect, in mutual consultation between the coach, the student, and participating organizations, that sufficient care is taken in advance to mitigate excessive risks to publication of the thesis and therewith to the integrity of the research. Failing to do so may ultimately jeopardize the defensibility of the thesis, if findings cannot be supported due to the non-disclosure of relevant data or information because of their sensitivity.

## 16. Thesis defence is not graduation

Finishing the thesis does not necessarily mean that a student also graduates. To graduate, a student must fulfil all curriculum components. When this is done, the student can apply for the diploma by following instructions outlined on the University's page. The Student Administration will send a notification e-mail once the degree is awarded and a second message when the diploma is ready with details on when & where the diploma and grade list can be collected.

Please note that the Examination Board is under legal obligation to actively issue the degree once all curriculum components are met.

If students wish to pursue an internship after finalizing the master programme, a postponement of issuing degree can be granted. More information about it is available on the [Student Knowledge base](#).

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<sup>18</sup> Students are copyright owners of their thesis. Based on that, they have the right to request removal from visibility. Requests for removal should be submitted to the [University Library Frontdesk](#).

Note, in case the request is granted, the thesis will be stored in the Repository's 'deep archive'. It is no longer publicly accessible, but it will still be approachable for RePub admins, Examination Board, coach and co-readers and accreditation committees (at least NVAO) for a period of 7 years. During this period, for example, the Examination Board can scan the thesis to detect fraud such as plagiarism, use of AI, ghost-writing etc. Or the NVAO can assess the quality of the thesis.



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## Appendix 1: Find your master thesis coordinator

Accounting & Financial Management	<a href="mailto:thesis.ac@rsm.nl">thesis.ac@rsm.nl</a>
Business Analytics and Management	<a href="mailto:bam@rsm.nl">bam@rsm.nl</a>
Business Information Management	<a href="mailto:thesis.bim@rsm.nl">thesis.bim@rsm.nl</a>
Finance & Investments	<a href="mailto:thesis.fi@rsm.nl">thesis.fi@rsm.nl</a>
Global Business & Sustainability	<a href="mailto:reshef@rsm.nl">reshef@rsm.nl</a>
People, Organisations and Change	<a href="mailto:thesis.poc@rsm.nl">thesis.poc@rsm.nl</a>
Marketing Management	<a href="mailto:thesis.mm@rsm.nl">thesis.mm@rsm.nl</a>
Management of Innovation	<a href="mailto:thesis.mi@rsm.nl">thesis.mi@rsm.nl</a>
Medical Business & Innovation	<a href="mailto:thesis.mi@rsm.nl">thesis.mi@rsm.nl</a>
Strategic Entrepreneurship	<a href="mailto:thesis.eship@rsm.nl">thesis.eship@rsm.nl</a>
Strategic Management	<a href="mailto:thesis.sm@rsm.nl">thesis.sm@rsm.nl</a>
Supply Chain Management	<a href="mailto:thesis.scm@rsm.nl">thesis.scm@rsm.nl</a>
International Management	<a href="mailto:crabbia@rsm.nl">crabbia@rsm.nl</a>
Master in Management	<a href="mailto:mim@rsm.nl">mim@rsm.nl</a>

Appendix 2: Master thesis assessment matrix<sup>19</sup>

	Identify research question and project design	Write a critical review	Define working concepts and conceptual frameworks	Collect and analyse research data	Define, validate and evaluate solutions and models, interpret findings sensitively as a basis for making recommendations	Write persuasive, well-structured master thesis	Research ethics and management of relationships and processes	Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate
Excellent	Well-balanced and innovative composition of research question, project design and research method.	Literature review itself is a significant contribution, well described and evaluated from new or complex perspectives.	Significant additions to the theoretical and conceptual understanding of the subject.	Contribution to development and methods for collecting and analysing research material and methodological debate.	Sophisticated interpretation of the material. The conclusions are based on the findings but transcend them.	Work of art written with style and with strong arguments.	Student has independently managed the project extremely well, <i>with careful consideration for potential conflicts of interest</i> , and has maintained excellent relationships with its stakeholders, including coach and co-reader.	Superior mastery and power in defending the research in its setup, methodology and execution.
Good	Well-defined research question, sensible project design and clear plans for conducting research.	Literature cogently evaluated using positions already available in literature.	Attempt, maybe not wholly successful, made to theorise beyond current state of literature.	Modifies and develops research methods reflecting methodological understanding.	Sophisticated interpretation of findings and conclusions are firmly based but show a creative spark. Conclusions based well on findings.	Clear, persuasive and well-structured document.	Researcher manages the project carefully and sensitively with open mindedness in the face of interests of parties in the research (including the thesis committee).	Under scrutiny managing to defend or justify choices, methods and conclusions made, while showing proficiency in transparent communication.
Satisfactory	Explicit ideas but there are some doubts about relation between question, design and methods.	Good description of appropriate fields and some general criticisms made, but no close evaluation of concepts.	Concepts defined and conceptual framework is developed. Or existing conceptual framework adapted, in context of evaluated literature.	Methods for gathering and analysing research are used competently.	Uses techniques for interpretation in a mechanical way. Findings are treated as straight forward and unproblematic. Conclusions have some connection with the findings.	Expressed well or technically correct, but not both. Clear structure adequately argued.	Research is managed straightforwardly but has not explicitly addressed issues of contextual interests and concerns.	Answering questions but not always confident and well-prepared.
Unsatisfactory	Identified interesting topic but research question is too broad, while design and methods are vague.	Limited description of literature, or no criticism or evaluation.	Definition and use of theoretical concepts is confused and no attempt made to theoretical synthesis or evaluation.	Methods for gathering data and analysing research material are confusing and unsystematically used.	Occasional insight takes the place of interpretation and conclusions have a tenuous link with findings.	Adequate expression but several mistakes. Argumentation sometimes replaced by assumption or assertion. Using bullets to disguise lack of arguments.	Student has managed the project poorly or unethically, with little contact with or concerns for the parties involved, including coach and co-reader.	Taking effort in answering questions sometimes loses focus and tendency to enter into irrelevant issues. Showing lack of abstract argumentation.

<sup>19</sup> Fisher, C. (2004) Researching and writing a dissertation for business students. FT Prentice Hall.





## Appendix 3 – Data Integrity

According to the [EUR Student Charter 2024-2025](#).

*Copyrights for papers, reports, theses, visual materials, products etc. produced by students are held by the relevant student, unless otherwise agreed. As an author, for example of a thesis, a student can decide whether or not to make this public and to permit reproduction of their work, and is responsible for its contents and for what they do with it. The university's responsibility lies in the supervision and assessment of whether the work complies with the set requirements. However, the student does not hold the copyrights if they produced the work as an employee or on commission from another party.*

*If students publish their own works online, they are encouraged to state in each case the conditions on which other parties may make use of these works. The Creative Commons licences (see: <http://creativecommons.nl/uitleg>), for example, are suitable for this purpose.*

Therefore, university coach and co-reader are responsible to supervise and assess the data integrity of the data used for the thesis work by the students. Within this framework, RSM has drawn a policy to clarify how the supervision and assessment is conducted by RSM faculty involved in the thesis trajectory of the pre-experience master students.

Below, the description of the guidelines used for the purpose of assessing research integrity of student's thesis work:

- Upon request of the coach the thesis student is obliged to hand over the data their research work is based on.
- The delivery of the data to the coach has the sole purpose to assess whether the student's work meets the established standards of the educational programme.
- The data will remain intellectual property of the respective student; any other use of the data by the educators is not allowed without explicit permission of the student and possibly third parties with who further agreements relating to the data exist.
- Both students and coach/co-reader keep data safe from unauthorized access.
- [SURFfilesender](#) is used for data sharing between the student and coach/co-reader.
- The data need to be deleted from the coach/co-reader's storage places (online/offline) 3 months after the completion of the thesis of the respective student. When a student collaborates with educators and gives explicit permission to use the data for academic research, the data should be retained in line with the [Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#).
- Please use the resources offered by Erasmus University Library related to Research data management. You can find them [here](#).