

Guidelines for master's thesis at the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences

These guidelines apply to students starting work on their master's thesis from autumn 2022 onward.

A master's thesis may be an individual piece of work, or a collaborative project between two students, unless the course description indicates otherwise. The student is responsible for achieving the expected learning outcome for the course, for the format of the thesis and for their own time management.

1. Aim of the master's thesis

The master's thesis is an independent, scientific piece of work, in which the student illustrates their insight into applicable research, relevant theories and methodologies that have a bearing on the problem of the thesis.

The work on the master's thesis shall qualify the student to perform research and development work. The thesis shall reflect the learning outcome descriptor, as indicated in the study programme, in accordance with the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning](#).

The student shall use the master's thesis to perform an independent, defined assignment that is primarily an opportunity to go into more depth and specialize within their discipline and the subject of the particular master's programme.

The master's thesis shall comply with scientific principles and demonstrate understanding, reflection, and maturity.

2. Supervision

Appointment of supervisor

The head of the academic section offering the master's programme appoints the supervisors. The supervision appointment will be formalized in a supervision agreement that the student completes and sends to the supervisor as soon as possible after the master's thesis is expected to start. The agreement will be signed after the topic and methodology of the master's thesis have been chosen. The student, supervisor, co-supervisor (if relevant) and course coordinator shall sign the agreement. You can see the supervision agreement for master's theses on this website.

Who can be a supervisor?

The main supervisor must be from HVL, and as a general rule must be employed by the department and have a minimum qualification level of associate professor. The student may also have external supervisors. If a student has multiple supervisors, the supervision agreement for the master's thesis must indicate who the main supervisor is. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the project and supervision are in line with the [Regulations relating to studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences](#). The supervision shall cover the academic, scientific and practical aspects of completing the master's thesis.

Content and scope

Every student have the right to supervision consistent with the size of the master's thesis:

- up to 10 hours for a thesis worth 30 credits
- up to 13 hours for a thesis worth 40 credits
- up to 15 hours for a thesis worth 45 credits

Of these supervisory sessions, 5 hours are compulsory.

Supervision may be provided individually, in groups or in the form of seminars. For more details, see the course plan for the particular programme.

Supervision is a joint responsibility, and the master's student must play an active role:

- The student has a duty to contact their supervisor and arrange appointments for supervision

- The student must be responsible for the format and content of the thesis
- The student must send the supervisor a basis for supervision with specific questions no later than one week before the agreed supervision begins

The supervisor shall not be a co-author of the master's thesis. The master's thesis is the student's own work.

3. Topic, research question and project plan

The student shall select a topic and problem for the master's thesis that are relevant to the subject field, in line with the course plan for the master's thesis. The topic and problem shall be developed in consultation with the supervisor.

Drawing up the project plan is an important part of the work involved in a master's thesis. The student shall prepare a detailed and specific plan for the implementation of their master's project.

The project plan shall be up to 2,000 words (excluding references), be clearly formulated and contain the following:

- Title of master's thesis
- Background including theoretical perspective
- Research question
- Methodology
- Timetable
- List of references

The project plan must be approved by the supervisor before work on the thesis can begin.

4. Format

The student may choose various formats for their master's thesis, and here we briefly describe the three most common formats, including the length restrictions that must be met, regardless of which thesis format is chosen:

Monograph

A master's thesis in the form of a monograph shall be up to 15,000 words long, unless otherwise stated in the course plan. Title page, table of contents, list of references and any appendices come in addition to this. Although the credits awarded for a master's thesis vary, the word count is the same. The learning outcome of a master's course determines whether a master's thesis is entitled to 30, 40 and 45 credits respectively.

A master's thesis in the form of a monograph may have the following structure:

- Summary
- Introduction/background/theory:
 - describe the background and justify the choice of topic. This involves describing the knowledge platform, previous research, context at societal and individual levels, legislation, methodology, choice of topic and how this relates to the clinical/academic field, literature review (knowledge status and knowledge gaps)
 - purpose of a hypothesis, research question
- Methodology:
 - describe and justify the choice of method
- Results
- Discussion:
 - discussion of results/findings
 - discussion of methodological strengths and weaknesses
 - conclusion
 - implications in terms of practice and further research

Article-based manuscript with summary chapter

A thesis submitted as an article-based manuscript with a summary chapter shall include one article that complies with the authorship guidelines of a relevant scientific journal. The journal shall be chosen in consultation with the supervisor. The article must be ready for submission to the relevant journal in terms of authorship guidelines, specialist content and format. The included article shall comply with the journal's guidelines and authorship guidelines. The article's word count shall comply with the limits of the selected journal.

The summary chapter shall include a short presentation of the project in which the student can choose to focus on one or several of the following point(s):

- elaboration of, or critical reflection regarding the knowledge platform
- elaboration of, or critical reflections of the theoretical foundation
- elaboration of, or critical reflections regarding the method(s)
- elaboration of, or critical reflection regarding the result(s)

The summary chapter shall be up to 7500 words. The summary chapter can have an abstract up to 300 words.

Article-based manuscript without a summary chapter

A thesis submitted as an article-based manuscript without a summary chapter shall include one article that complies with the authorship guidelines of a relevant scientific journal. The journal shall be chosen in consultation with the supervisor. The article's word count in the authorship guidelines for the scientific journal is it not necessary to fill in. The article might be a maximum of/up to 7000 words. When the article is on a larger scale, it is expected a more broaden explanation regarding the theoretical perspective and the methodical assessment of which the work is based. Titlepage, table of content, reference list and eventual attachment are additional.

The article must be ready for submission to the relevant journal in terms of specialist content and format. The exception is the number of words, which must be revised and adjusted before a possible submission. The article must comply with author guidelines for the specific journal

The master's thesis shall have a systematic format such as an IMRAD structure, and shall contain the following points:

- HVL front page with title of the master's thesis, course/academic section, candidate number, date of submission and number of words. See [website on home exam and thesis](#) for more information
- An abstract in English
- Table of contents with chapter headings and page numbers
- Source references and bibliography in accordance with APA; cf. [Searches and writing](#)
- Figures and tables must be positioned and referenced in the body of the text, be numbered and have explanatory titles. Figures and tables must be included in a list that comes immediately after the table of contents

- Appendices must be numbered and listed in the table of contents. Appendices of more than one page must have page numbers
- The work must comply with the criteria for the selected thesis type

5. Research ethics

Any study that uses personal data or medical data is subject to a notification requirement and requires approval, either by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) or by the Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics. The student must find out the application deadlines and ensure that the project plan takes these into consideration. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that questions of research ethics will be addressed when they approve the project plan. Furthermore, the supervisor shall quality-assure applications or notification forms before these are submitted to the relevant approval body. The NSD's website provides information about whether a project is subject to a notification requirement.

Students at master's level may participate in major research projects alongside researchers at other educational or research institutions. In such cases, the student must familiarize themselves with the relevant guidelines, and the supervisor must ensure that the research project has the appropriate clearance and that the necessary approvals have been obtained. If the project involves collaborative research, it is the supervisor who signs the contract with other institutions, not the student.

For more information, see the guidelines on research ethics and data archiving for master's theses.

6. Format of monograph and summary article

The following format may be used:

- Margins: 2.5 cm for top, bottom, left and right margins
- Line spacing to be 1.5 – for quotations, line spacing is 1
- Font – 12 points in Calibri or Arial
- Table of contents with chapter headings and page numbers

- Paragraphs are to be separated using two-line breaks, i.e., there will be one blank line between one paragraph and the next. The next paragraph starts at the left margin
- Page numbers shall be stated both for direct quotations and indirect quotations, and for other instances in which there is a reference to a limited portion of a major source
- Direct quotations shall be clearly indicated with quotation marks or indentation
- Quotations and the list of references shall comply with the latest version of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system; see [Searches and writing](#) for guidelines on the use of this system. The APA system is mentioned in Section 4 Format and Section 7 Layout.
- As a general rule, the use of secondary references should be avoided. If, exceptionally, you refer to a source that you have not read yourself, this must be made clear in the quotation and bibliography; see example of secondary reference in [Searches and writing](#)
- Figures and tables shall be placed and referenced in the body of the text, be numbered and have individual titles. Figures and tables must be included in lists that come immediately after the table of contents
- Appendices must be numbered and listed in the table of contents. Appendices of more than one page must have page numbers

7. Submission

Theses must be submitted on [WISEflow](#). The student must enter the number of words on the front page of WISEflow before uploading the master's thesis.

The title of the thesis will appear on the diploma, and students are responsible for registering the title on [StudentWeb](#).

If they wish to have their work published on HVL Open, the student may tick the publication option when submitting the thesis on WISEflow. See more about publication under Section 9.

Submission deadline

The deadline for the submission of master's theses is usually 15 May for students finishing in the spring semester and 1 December for students

finishing in the autumn semester. If the submission date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or other public holiday, the deadline is then the first subsequent working day. Some study programs have different deadlines, and these will be shown in HVL's annual examination timetable. If the master's thesis is not submitted by the deadline, unless this has been agreed and approved by the department in advance, the thesis will be recorded as "not received".

8. Grading and examination

Please refer to Chapter 13 Grading and appeals in the [Regulations relating to studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences](#)

The faculty must have at least one examiner qualified to associate professor level. The department is responsible for ensuring that the grading deadline of up to six weeks is met.

Failed master's thesis

See Section 11-19a *Revised versions of the bachelor's thesis and master's thesis* in the [Regulations relating to studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences](#)

In the event that the grade of F (not passed) is awarded, a new or rewritten thesis with significant changes may be submitted once more for grading. The course coordinator for the master's thesis, in consultation with the student and supervisor, shall set a new submission deadline of up to six months ahead. The head of department decides how much supervision the student is entitled to receive for the second attempt (approximately 10 hours).

9. Publication

Theses that have achieved a passing grade may be published on HVL Open. The student decides whether the thesis may be published or not, unless otherwise agreed with the project owner. Publication in HVL Open may have consequences for future publication in reputable journals (plagiarism). Therefore, it is encouraged to agree more closely with the supervisor if it is to be ticked for this.

You can find more information about terms and conditions of publication on HVL's website on [Publication of theses](#) and [Terms and conditions of publication on HVL Open](#).

Students who have prepared the master's thesis in collaboration with specialist or municipal health services, including data registers, must check this in WISEflow under: Is the master's thesis written at a company / business in the business or public sector? The name of the institution must be entered. The college must report collaboration on the master's thesis to Kunnskapsdepartementet.

10. Intellectual property rights

The student has the intellectual property rights to their master's thesis. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the agreement on ownership of data has been discussed and agreed before work on the master's thesis starts. This also includes collaboration on data after the master's thesis has been submitted. If a party other than the student owns the data for the master's thesis, different rules apply.