

Guidelines for Master's thesis in ANSO

This document complements the Graduate "[Guidelines for Interdisciplinary MA Students](#)" and the "[Master's Dissertation Guidelines](#)" with suggestions geared more specifically to the disciplines of anthropology and sociology.

1. Selecting a supervisor and finding a research topic

The first step towards a successful MA thesis should be deciding on an approximate topic, case study, or broad area of interest. Once the student has a general idea of what s/he would be interested in studying, it is advisable to approach a potential supervisor on the basis of common interests, area of expertise, or shared affinity in terms of support and congeniality.

According to the Institute's regulations, a supervisor must be declared by September 15 (for students entering the third semester of their program). This should not deter students from approaching a potential supervisor earlier in the program and towards the 2nd semester of the program, if there is a well-defined idea of what will be the research topic and, preferably, having taken a class with the faculty member in question.

The choice of 2nd reader is the responsibility of the main supervisor, in consultation with the student. Under exceptional circumstances and with prior agreement from the Direction of Studies, students may choose a co-supervisor from ANSO (with equal supervision responsibilities) or a second reader from outside the Institute.

Students are expected to work closely with their supervisor to identify a suitable topic, develop the main research idea, and define the best strategies for the research, analysis and write-up stages. The topic should be primarily of interest to the student, but also relevant for the anthropological and sociological literatures, and manageable to investigate in the time and conditions allotted for research.

2. Structure

In general, the thesis can be written in French or English. It must contain a cover page, 150-word abstract, literature review, conceptual and theoretical framework, methodology or research design, analysis, conclusion, and bibliography. It is recommended that the overall thesis be no less than 15,000 words and no more than 25,000 words (excluding footnotes and bibliography). This is merely indicative, and there may be a justification for a lower or higher word count, to be negotiated with the supervisor. There is not a strict guideline for formatting or citation style, although Arial font 11, 1 ½ space is commonly adopted. In any case, the style of citation, references, and formatting should be consistent throughout the thesis.

3. Research strategies

Along with this common structure, there are three paths for original research:

i) Desk research or literature review-based thesis:

- A rigorous literature review focusing on a specific geographical area, theoretical corpus, or thematic area is a plausible approach for writing the thesis, oftentimes coupled with desk or archival research (grey literature, web-based, or other).
- This specific focus and orientation should be discussed with the supervisor, but a solid literature review rests on a compelling research question and argument that can frame the overall review and provide a novel orientation to the specific strands of research or sub-fields of the relevant discipline(s). The student may choose to conduct a systematic overview on the basis of specific keywords, or identify seminal articles or monographs around a specific debate, or construct a genealogy by identifying key articles of interest and retrospectively reading “backwards”.
- The remainder of the thesis should be adopted accordingly, including the methodological section: this should focus on the specific research strategies leading up to identifying gaps or offer an original approach to the existing literature.

ii) Ethnographic, interview, and fieldwork-based thesis:

- Alternatively, and conditions permitting, the student may plan to conduct an ethnographic or interview-based thesis. In this case, the research question should still be backed by a strategic review of the relevant literature without aiming to be comprehensive.
- The methodology or research design should be more detailed, situating the ethnographic context, conditions for accessing the field (either in person or virtually), and the specific methods deployed for ethnographic data collection. A discussion of the author’s positionality and ethical considerations for conducting research should be included. The remaining structure of the thesis, provided it includes a clear description and discussion of the main research question(s), core concepts deployed, justification for the applicable case study, and clear analysis of data, can be flexible.

iii) Quantitative analysis-based thesis:

- Students with sufficient prior expertise in statistical methods may also choose a thesis based on quantitative analysis of secondary data, such as survey data from the World Bank or other institutions.
- This approach should utilize existing data but analyze it in a novel way or to answer a novel question. As above, the research should be informed by a strategic review of the literature. The methodological section of the thesis should give clear and detailed information about analytic decisions and strategies, and results should be interpreted in clear language as well as presented numerically.

The final thesis may adopt a mixed research strategy by integrating elements from desk research, interviews, ethnographic data, or other data collection strategies not listed here. However, a high-quality thesis does not necessarily stem from the sheer

accumulation of different research strategies but, rather, from the engagement with the data, theoretical innovation, and overall contribution to the existing literature.

4. Evaluation criteria

Each supervisor adopts different grading and evaluation criteria, often in consultation with the second reader. These criteria, and the underlying expectations for the thesis, should be shared and discussed with the student prior to conducting research.

Although subject to different standards adopted by the supervisor, the evaluation of a master's thesis commonly follows these criteria:

- i) Relevance of the research question and framing of the problem;
- ii) Strength and comprehensiveness of the literature review;
- iii) Suitability of theoretical framework;
- iv) Originality evidence and critical analysis;
- v) Clear structure and quality of writing style;
- vi) Receptiveness to feedback and ability to integrate comments.

5. Feedback and timeline

Commonly, research takes place over the Summer (2nd to 3rd semester) and Winter breaks (3rd to 4th semester). This timeline is contingent upon a series of factors, including choice of topic and supervisor, feasibility of research access, and whether the student will attend an exchange program. It is advisable to take advantage of brief intervals over the course of the academic year to conduct preparatory work and / or brief research stints. The Direction of Studies sets the final submission deadline, usually by mid-June.

Each student may expect consistent and regular feedback from the supervisor at different stages of research and write-up. These should include:

- 3rd semester: Defining research topic;
- 3rd to 4th semester : Feedback on thesis outline (detailed dissertation plan);
- Prior to deadline: Review of complete draft.

These guidelines encourage both supervisor and student to define a reasonable set of expectations for preliminary assessment of the work leading up to the final thesis. Depending on the style of supervision and the agreement reached between student and supervisor, there may be other opportunities for feedback and discussion of preliminary results, partial sections of the thesis, or overall work progress. However, students are advised to allow enough time for providing feedback and revising the manuscript accordingly.

6. Concluding remarks

These are non-binding guidelines, and the final decision regarding the scope of research, deadlines, word count, and other elements pertaining to the writing and evaluation of the thesis should be discussed and negotiated between the student and the main supervisor.

These guidelines should also be adopted to suit the chosen topic of research, expected output (scientific article, PhD proposal), and desired professional goal (in academic or non-academic positions).

Lastly, we encourage ANSO students to reach out to different faculty and to tap into existing resources in order to strengthen the research inquiry, generate new research opportunities and access, and possibly help defray research costs through existing funding opportunities. In addition to the Ethnographic Writing seminar (4th semester), students are also encouraged to organize writing groups to share preliminary research findings with their peers.

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