

GUIDELINES FOR MA THESIS PREPARATION

MA PROGRAMME

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL HISTORY

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the Humanities on 27 October 2020

These Guidelines have been developed on the basis of the *Regulations for Term Papers and Theses Prepared by Students of the Bachelor's, Specialist and Master's Level at the National Research University Higher School of Economics* approved by the HSE Academic Council, minutes No.08 dated November 28, 2014.

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1. Introduction

Writing a thesis is a distinct educational experience as there is no teacher who organises the student's activities. The student writing a thesis has to do most of the 'steering' and 'structuring' by themselves. This sometimes causes some confusion. The aim of these guidelines is to make sure that the students know both what is expected of them in writing their thesis, and what they might expect from their supervisors. Students have both rights and duties. These guidelines provide information on all aspects of writing a thesis, except for its contents.

1.1. The purpose of the MA Thesis

The purpose of the MA Thesis is to write a treatise according to the rules and methods current in the research field of MA programme. You will have to do this individually. During the first three semesters of your programme, you have become acquainted with the rules and methods in your field. You know the kinds of reasoning that are employed, and you have practised them in research seminars and other courses, both orally and in writing. The MA Thesis gives you an opportunity to show that you have sufficiently mastered the knowledge, rules and methods that are expected from graduates of the MA programme.

The thesis is the product of independent research; it assesses earlier work on a chosen topic and contributes to scholarly debate. It will normally be written in English. The document is based on independent research, refers to relevant literature and contains a comparative element. It includes a critical discussion of the findings of other research. The thesis should demonstrate that the student is able to produce new scholarly knowledge and insights, and can share their results with fellow researchers in a coherent way. The MA thesis may be written in such a form that it supports the student's research plans for a dissertation; it may also prepare the student for independent scholarly research in another context.

If you wish to continue your academic career after graduation, in many cases your thesis will serve as your passport to PhD programmes in Russia and abroad. That is why the teachers in your programme and outside examiners take assessing and grading your thesis very seriously. Apart from the opinion of your supervisor, there are an internal examiner and an external examiner, the latter usually chosen from outside the HSE, who are asked to propose a grade. To help prepare assessment reports, we provide all supervisors and examiners with a form and instructions (see **Appendix 3-4**).

1.2. What a Research MA Thesis ought normally to consist of

MA Thesis has to contain the formulation of a problem or the presentation of a question. Scholars tend to speak informally about their 'topic'. However, a topic is not the same as a problem or question. You need to show what is known about the topic of your choice, while adding your own comments, analyses and conclusions. Your research will consist of the systematic treatment of an as yet unsolved problem or an as yet unanswered question that you have come across while studying your topic. You need to delimit your problem or question thematically, considering time and place. In

your treatment you will refer to (published or unpublished) source materials and to the relevant scholarly literature.

MA Thesis therefore consists of:

- the formulation of a problem;
- a critical description of the knowledge concerning the problem, using the (most) relevant literature;
- a critical evaluation of the sources used;
- a description and justification of the research methods used;
- a discourse in which the materials are presented and analysed according to the logic suggested by the formulation of the problem;
- a conclusion and a consideration of the value of the research;
- references in the form of footnotes;
- a bibliography of the sources and literature used.

1.3 The size of the MA Thesis

Obviously, not all parts of the thesis are of the same size. Sometimes the formulation of the problem can be fitted on a single page. Sometimes it will take much more paper. Similarly, a description and justification of the research methods used may take only a page - or require much more ink. As long as you refer to the relevant literature and to 'what is current practice' in your field of studies. The conclusion, too, may be short. That which we have called the 'discourse' will usually take up most of the space.

The MA Thesis will normally be between 60 000 to 120 000 characters (with spaces) including notes and bibliography, but excluding appendices. This limit has been set because longer theses do not necessarily signify quality. The inability to order the materials may also lead to the increased length of the thesis. In most cases brevity is preferred. Do consult your supervisor about the maximum size of your thesis.

Many students write more than they ought to because they are unable to limit themselves in their research. Their problem has not been circumscribed well, and they collect too many sources and data. In their defence it has to be said, however, that it is often difficult to assess the necessary limitations beforehand. This needs to be done in consultation with the supervisor. It pays to continue to look for ways of limiting the problem, thereby limiting the size of the thesis. It is always possible to suggest avenues for further research in the Conclusion.

The MA Thesis is valued at a uniform 24 ECTS. This means a semester of full-time work. Planning your research and writing over a semester is difficult. Quite often the time set aside may prove insufficient. Nevertheless, it ought to be your aim to hand in your thesis near the end of the fourth semester. This will enable the supervisor and the examiners to write their reports, and will allow you to do the paperwork for your graduation in time.

To avoid planning problems, be sure that you start the preparatory work on your thesis before you start doing the research. Before your final semester you can start investigating possible topics and problems, talk to possible supervisors, and do bibliographical research.

2. Stages in writing the thesis

2.1 The choice of topic; the problem

The choice of a topic is a problem for many students. Sometimes there seems to be an abundance of attractive topics, from which it is difficult to choose. Sometimes attractive topics seem less suitable because you think that as yet you know too little about them. Quite possibly you have no idea as to what you might add to the knowledge of a particular topic. Few students realise that most topics will become 'attractive' once you start investigating them. It is therefore sensible to look for a problem rather than for a topic. There are no set rules for finding an interesting problem. Possibly the following suggestions may prove useful:

- There is always a problem when two (or more) scholars disagree about some question. In the introductions of scholarly publications or in reviews published in scientific journals you often find references to questions which are a 'problem' - or are likely to become one.
- Always try to consult more than one type of materials about any single topic. Between scholarly literature and sources, or between different genres of sources there are often significant differences in perspective. These differences help you to 'problematise' the topic.
- Try to develop a sensitivity for problems, e.g. when taking part in research seminars. During the courses you take many problems are discussed. Some of them may have been resolved during the course, but many more remain without solution. Quite often the most interesting and intriguing problems are those that you yourself have formulated in class as a question or as a request for elucidation.
- You will have come across incomprehensible aspects of the discourses of articles and monographs you have studied. You may have thought this was due to your own inabilities. It is possible, however, that your incomprehension stems from a problem that the author did not recognise themselves.
- Maybe you once presented a paper that resulted in the formulation of a problem that you could not go into. The MA Thesis gives you an opportunity to do so.

You have come across many research problems that might be treated in a thesis. However, because your attention was not yet directed towards your MA Thesis, those problems may have been disregarded. You might try to start a small collection of all those things you noticed in your field of study which you considered problematic. Take some time to consider these problems, to discuss them with others, or to read a book about them. If the problem does not go away, maybe it might be suitable for a thesis.

Asking a teacher for a research problem is not prohibited, but a problem you came across yourself is almost always more attractive, as you can identify with it more easily. Some teachers, however, work within research programmes in which themes are investigated which are mutually related in some way. Sometimes they may lead to the topics of theses. There are obvious advantages to such a research programme with its sub-projects. Much preliminary work has been done already, a research area has been demarcated, and the beginning of the formulation of a problem announces itself. Much of the relevant literature, too, may have been collected already, and there is some idea as to viable research methods. These advantages are

considerable. But working in this way somewhat limits your own inventiveness. Yet there are so many aspects that will allow you to use your creativity that this is hardly a decisive consideration.

2.2 Finding a supervisor

The MA Thesis is a compulsory component of the Research MA programmes and ought to be supervised by a teacher in your particular programme. The second reader or consultant can also assist in an advisory capacity, but the supervisor is responsible for the final result. A student is free to approach any teacher to act as supervisor. Quite often the supervisor is chosen because of the courses taught by the supervisor that the student has attended. As these courses are meant to prepare you for research, it is understandable that you approach your teachers to have a chat about your thesis. Usually a teacher will respond positively. In some cases, however, the teaching load has been divided in such a way that a teacher will have to say no. If this happens, you will need to find another supervisor.

If you will be spending the first semester of your study that you better start looking for a thesis supervisor.

Clearly, there is little to be gained from an initial conversation with your supervisor if you have no suggestions about possible topics or problems. The teacher you approach will most likely ask you about your ideas so far - and you better have something to say. You cannot, however, be asked to be eloquent at this stage. Do accept that your side of the conversation will be somewhat halting because you have not yet acquired sufficient knowledge of your topic. Do bring pen and paper, or a laptop, because your supervisor will mention authors and books, and ask you whether you have already come into contact with them. Most of them will be new to you. During the second supervision, however, this will be slightly different already, and from the third supervision meeting onwards you will most probably have enough background knowledge for an in-depth conversation about your topic.

Once you have found a supervisor, you first discuss your ideas, preferably on the basis of a written notice. You will take notes about the plan of your thesis and the suggested readings. Often a supervisor will then ask you to develop your ideas into a 'concept'. In this, you pay attention to the main lines of your research, together with a work plan.

2.3 Stating the problem

One of the first things to do when you are thinking about the choice of a topic or a problem is to read up on it. You need to acquire a global idea of the knowledge available about your chosen topic. To this end you need to look for the relevant literature. Your finds are the basis of your bibliography. Start collecting references in such a way that later, when you edit the bibliography of your thesis, you do not need to look up the same bibliographical data again. At this stage you will find out that some administrative order in your work saves much time and effort. When reading up on your topic, you will notice that your problem will be constantly changing; it will show aspects you had not thought of at the beginning. Do not be afraid: this uncertainty will remain with you until you hand in the definitive version of your thesis. Keeping a 'thesis diary' helps some students to control the changes in direction, which occur when working on your thesis.

Reading up on your topic is a necessary part of your work. Its purpose is, first of all, to allow you to form an image of the nature of the research necessary to solve your problem. As long as you are not collecting data or sources, you need to use this stage to define your problem in such a way that you can in fact investigate it. The formulation of the problem makes clear which information you need to collect. Once you start collecting information, you may need to adapt the formulation of your problem. Quite often the interaction between your materials and your formulation of the problem persist for quite a while. Only later on, in another stage, do all parts find a more solid form.

The formulation of the problem is much more than an academic exercise: it is the most incisive formulation of the question you are posing while studying your materials. Make sure, therefore, that do more than writing down a correctly formulated problem, so as not to investigate your materials without method.

Often it is possible to subdivide the formulation of the problem into a number of questions, which can be answered in the course of the research. In these cases, these partial problems determine the plan of your thesis. A list of questions may lead to a first table of contents, which in turn can be used as a guideline in ordering the materials and writing the thesis.

2.4 Collecting materials

Most research in the humanities requires the collection of data. They are needed to test your hypotheses. No clear-cut advice can be given on this matter, as there are many methods for the collection of materials. In any case you will have to ask yourself: 'Which primary or secondary sources can I use to check the answers to my problem I can think of?' A historian may have to visit archives or special collections in libraries, and may have to think of which ones are necessary. An anthropologist may need to conduct interviews and participant observation. It is important to know how to find your way in archives and libraries. And it is necessary to be aware of the methods you can use to solve your problem in an adequate way. In an early stage of your research, in consultation with your supervisor you will have to decide on the research method that seems most appropriate. Describe the method you propose on paper and discuss this with your supervisor.

It is possible that the problem cannot be solved with the method you have proposed. It is even possible that there is no method whatsoever to solve your problem. Sometimes it may be the case that it is worthwhile nevertheless to investigate the topic proposed. The question of your chances of success, however, needs to be discussed with your supervisor at an early stage.

2.5 Ordering the materials

There are fields of study in which the ordering of the materials poses certain problems, e.g. when the topics have been the object of much research in the past. It can be very complicated to have to order the results of earlier investigations, which may be contradictory, to distinguish between commonly accepted facts and specific interpretations, or to separate relevant data from irrelevant data. The question, which publications merit a central place in your discourse, and which ones had better be left aside, will require much attention. Consultation with your supervisor will prove beneficial in these cases.

2.6 Writing

Going through the stages described so far, you have already started to write your thesis. The formulation of the problem has been given a definite form while you were collecting and ordering your materials. You have put your method and its justification into writing, and they may now be further developed. From the start you have made drafts and outlines of individual chapters and discussed these with your supervisor. You are now in a position to start writing in earnest. Do not delay this moment too much: a first version of a chapter is easier to write than you may think. Try not to write as if the first version is the last one!

Which part of your thesis should you write first? On this matter there are roughly two schools of thought. According to the first, it is advisable to write an introductory text first, in which you explain once more the theme and method of the thesis. This text may serve as a draft for an Introduction, which can be finished after the other parts of the thesis have been written. The advantage of this method is, that you are forced once more to dot your intellectual i's and cross your t's. Afterwards, the agenda for writing the rest of the thesis is often much easier to set. But such an introductory chapter should not start to lead a life of its own: do not use too many words, for this text ought to remain subservient to the thesis as a whole. According to the second school of thought, it is preferable to start writing the more concrete, tangible parts of the thesis first, in which one's own research is presented. Many feel more secure here than in the wider-ranging general introduction - which can also be written at the end. No matter which order you adopt in writing your theses: Make sure to keep your subject clear and well-defined before your mind's eye, as this is the first necessity in writing. In all cases the Introduction and Conclusion will prove to be in need of considerable revision after you have written the main part of your thesis. While you have been writing, the accents are bound to change.

When writing, make sure to keep a distance between yourself and your materials and bibliography. Never copy long fragments from the literature. Think twice about direct quotations: they need to be given meaning through your subsequent analysis. It may prove useful to regularly write down partial conclusions, or to highlight one key word per paragraph. These highlights can be deleted at a later stage.

First produce rough drafts, which you can correct and refine later on. Do not hesitate to show these rough drafts to your supervisor. A supervisor knows that you need to discuss work in progress. However, make sure that rough drafts, too, need to be written in correct English and that your text needs to be presented down to the last detail. It may be useful to discuss a trial chapter that you think acceptable from all points of view, to avoid misunderstandings about the supervisor's expectations. Thus, you know well in advance what you need to do about your definitive version. Consult your supervisor about the frequency with which you will send (drafts of) chapters.

2.6.1 English

When you start your thesis, you will have produced written assignments for many courses. These had to be written in correct English. If you had adverse comments on your English, or if you felt insecure about writing in this language, you will have taken steps to increase your writing abilities. Your supervisor cannot be expected to

correct the English of your thesis - although some corrections will inevitably appear in the margins of your thesis. You will, however, be graded on your English as well. Use your spellchecker to avoid spelling mistakes. Unclearity due to grammatical or stylistic errors has to be avoided. Unclearity due to the use of words in a less than common meaning, or due to the use of uncommon words or jargon, can be avoided through an intelligent use of your spellchecker (unknown words are marked as if they had been spelled incorrectly) or a good dictionary.

If you write your thesis in British English, use, e.g., the *Oxford Dictionary of English* and *Oxford Thesaurus of English*. A useful summary of matters of grammar and punctuation is J. Seely, *Oxford A-Z of Grammar and Punctuation* (Oxford, 2004). You can opt for American English, but be consistent throughout your thesis.

In writing, you have to keep in mind the audience you are writing for, its expectations and knowledge. The MA Thesis will be read in its definitive form by your supervisor and the examiners, and later it might be read also by the committees that decide on applications to PhD programmes. The content, but also the language and presentation of the thesis will influence the opinion of these readers. Clearly, you will have to avoid relaxed, colloquial, chatty or friendly language.

2.6.2 Presentation

Considerations of the presentation of the definitive version of the thesis are often left to the end. This, however, is a mistake. It saves an inordinate amount of time when the rules for making references and the layout of the text are adhered to from the start of the writing stages.

No thesis is acceptable without footnotes in which reference is made to the sources and literature adduced to buttress an opinion or establish a fact. These references need to be transformed into a bibliography that is inserted at the end of the thesis. There are many ways of making references in footnotes. We use Chicago style for both.

You may wish to deviate from some of these guidelines after consultation with your supervisor.

2.7 The conclusion

Obviously, your thesis has to result in a conclusion. Here, you have to connect with the formulation of the problem as presented in the introduction. You have to make clear how your research contributes to the solution of - or the debate about - the problem under consideration. Usually, no new information is introduced in the conclusion. You need, however, to present your conclusion in a wider context. It is not sufficient merely to provide a summary!

Sometimes the problem could not be solved with the help of the available data. It is nevertheless conceivable that this can be seen as a positive result of the research carried out. This, however, is not always the case. You need to decide this matter with your supervisor. As we have said before, at an early stage you need to discuss with your supervisor whether the method you chose is likely to shed light on the problem you wish to investigate.

2.8 *The definitive version*

It is important to provide your thesis with a suitable title. It is not necessary to think of a catchy title. Avoid funny titles. Before your thesis has acquired its all-but-definitive form - a form, that is, with which you yourself at least are satisfied - several concepts or drafts will have been discussed. Keep in mind that your thesis is not your life's work! Before you hand in your thesis to your supervisor, you may consider asking a fellow student to read through your thesis with a critical eye. Although the comments will seldom be the same as those of your supervisor, you may nevertheless put them to your advantage.

It is often the case that your supervisor asks for ameliorations in the penultimate version. At this stage you may ask the supervisor for his provisional opinion of your work. This will make clear how important the changes are that you are asked to make. Make sure that you agree with your supervisor which version will be graded. Changes made afterwards will not make a great difference to your grade.

2.9 *Examiners reports*

After you have handed in the version of your thesis that will be marked by your supervisor and two examiners: the internal and the external. Your supervisor needs to make sure that the examiners receive a copy as well. The role of the examiners is to make sure that the thesis conforms to the standards of the MA Thesis work. The examiners are chosen as independent experts on the topic of the thesis. The internal examiner is appointed from the academics of the HSE, and the external reader has to come from outside the HSE. Your supervisor also provides a mark and a brief report; but these are not taken into account in calculation of the final mark.

2.10 *Grading your thesis*

The MA Thesis final mark is awarded by the State Examination Committee (Exam Board) which consists of no less than 3 members of HSE faculty and 3 external academics. A Head of the Committee should not be a member of HSE faculty. The Committee considers the grade by the thesis supervisor but is not bound by them. The Committee also considers the quality of the oral viva of the MA student, and their ability to defend their approach and materials. Students in effect get three individual marks: the two are by the examiners (submitted before the viva), and the third one by the Board.

The grades proposed by your supervisor and your examiners will not normally differ very much. Together, they will usually be able to decide on the mark to be awarded. If, however, a significant difference of opinion were to arise between supervisor and the examiners, the matter is brought to the particular attention to State Examination Committee. You need to know that this Committee has the authority of giving you the final theses mark.

The mark is calculated by the following bases:

FM (final mark) = (1 internal examiner mark + 1 external examiner mark + 1 State Examination Committee Mark)/3

There is also an Appeal Committee where you can question your thesis mark. If all goes well - and it almost always does - you will be able to hand in the mark of your MA Thesis at the MA Office as part of the file which you need to submit for your graduation.

2.11 What to do if you are stuck?

Writer's block is an ailment that even renowned authors may suffer from. Many authors of theses wrestle with situations in which the blank page they stared at in the morning is as blank in the evening. There are no remedies that will help in all cases. Sometimes it helps to 'cut up' a large task in a number of smaller ones. Have yet another look at the provisional list of chapters and paragraphs, which forms the framework of the thesis. Try whether a slightly different framework of the part of the thesis that is causing you trouble may solve the problem. Often problems of writing are due to an ill-considered arrangement. A clear order makes the small 'jumps' from one item to the next that much easier. Do realise that when you put pen to paper you are not, as yet, working on the definitive version. Your supervisor does not expect a literary MA piece, but a solid written report. It may also help to talk to an interested fellow student about your research. This forces you to put into words the nature of the problem you are wrestling with. You can also ask your supervisor for advice, e.g. when you make changes to the arrangement of the materials. You might also ask, which part of the problem you could start to write on first.

2.12 Summary

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| Stage 1: | Start the preliminary work in an early stage, preferably before the beginning of your second year. |
| Stage 2: | Make a list of - loosely formulated - topics and problems that might be developed. |
| Stage 3: | Choose a supervisor, make a first appointment, and discuss your ideas for your thesis. Note suggestions for literature, and make a second appointment. |
| Stage 4: | Try to formulate the problem to be investigated in a well-defined way. Summarize the opinions of the main authors who worked on the topic in a few sentences or paragraphs. Add your own provisional analysis. Try to work out the synopsis of your thesis, if possible in the form of an annotated table of contents. Discuss this with your supervisor. Note comments and suggestions, and make a new appointment. |
| Stage 5: | At an early stage, discuss the research method to be used. Write this down in a proposal and ask your supervisor for an opinion. |
| Stage 6: | Do not delay the actual writing of the thesis too much. Produce rough drafts, which can be refined later on. |

- Stage 7: Determine, in consultation with your supervisor, which version will be the basis for your grade. Agree on the dates for handing in, correcting, revising and grading the thesis. Make sure the second reader is informed of these dates and agrees to them.
- Stage 8: After you have received your grade, prepare the file for your graduation.

3. Supervision

3.1 What can you expect from a supervisor?

It has become clear from what has been said before, that you may ask your supervisor assistance with many things:

- A reaction to the proposed formulation of the problem.
- Assistance with the selection of a problem.
- Suggestions for the way in which the formulation of the problem may be developed.
- Suggestions for additional sources and literature.
- A reaction to the proposed research method, to the way the research will be conducted, assistance with the limitation of the materials to be used in the thesis.
- Comments on preliminary sketches and versions.
- Some assistance and counsel when you experience setbacks.

You have a right to supervision by someone teaching in your MA Programme. You also have the right to propose a supervisor. There are, however, some conditions. Some teachers supervise many theses, and therefore will sometimes say ‘no’ to a request. Once a teacher has accepted to act as supervisor, you may ask for help and advice. Every supervisor has ideas about the organisation of thesis supervision. Some ask you to come to their office during office hours; others want you to make appointments. Some devote much time to you, others value brevity.

Supervision is efficient when you provide written proposals, ideas and sketches, and if you prepare the conversation by formulating questions.

The supervisor also has expectations of the students. We have already stressed the importance of independence in doing research for your thesis. The supervisor will give directions and suggestions, but will never ‘pre-cook’ the thesis. You are meant to use the comments provided to continue independently; the comments are never ready solutions. Take care also to continue the logic of the supervisor’s comments on one part of the thesis in the other parts. This concerns also minute details: once corrected imperfections in a bibliographical reference, e.g., you can easily correct in the rest of your text. You are responsible for the English of your text, and cannot expect the supervisor to proofread it. You are also meant to keep your appointments. If by chance you prove unable to meet a deadline, make sure your supervisor knows in advance.

You may expect your supervisor (and the examiners) to grade your thesis within 10 working days after handing in the definitive version. You need to make allowance for this when you wish to meet the deadline for the handing in of all data necessary for your graduation. Make sure that you and your supervisor agree on the date for handing in the penultimate version of the thesis, the time allowed for reparations, and the dates of the 10 working days' period in which your grade is determined.

It is possible that something goes wrong in the relationship between student and supervisor. Writing and supervision lead to a rather personal relationship; usually this works well, sometimes problems occur. If you have the merest suspicion that things are not going as they ought to, make sure to note carefully the decisions arrived at during each meeting. Refer to these agreements at the next meeting. Keep the contacts as business-like as possible. If you are unable to find a *modus vivendi*, ask your programme coordinator, the MA Coordinator, or the student advisor. They will mediate or suggest another supervisor.

3.2 The roles of the examiners and 'second supervisors'

As we have said before, the role of the examiners is limited to giving a judgement on the written version of thesis. Sometimes a supervisor will suggest you contact a specialist on the topic of your thesis. Sometimes this specialist will agree to read and comment (part of) your thesis in such a way that in effect he or she becomes a 'second supervisor'. There is nothing against asking the advice from specialists in your field. Indeed, when this benefits the quality of your thesis, such contacts are to be applauded - provided your thesis remains an independent piece of work. However, there is only one supervisor who is responsible for your work and can grade it - in consultation with the second reader. If the second reader has contributed towards your thesis in the capacity of a 'consultant', it is imperative that this will not interfere with the grading of your work.

4. MA Thesis marking criteria

A grade will usually be assigned for a combination of reasons and the final grade is based therefore on the overall impression rather than on isolated features. The main categories are represented below.

Deficient (0-3):

The thesis does not have a central research question. It shows poor knowledge of the scholarly context and little evidence of independent thought. The research is superficial, unsystematic, and shows little effort. The argument lacks structure and the writing is vague or incorrect (the expression is poor at best, incoherent at worst.) It makes inadequate use of primary and secondary sources. The presentation does not meet professional standards.

Pass (4-5):

The thesis has a central question and attempts to answer it. It shows knowledge of the academic context. It shows evidence of independent research in the relevant field using appropriate methods. At the same time, its grasp of the issues involved in the question is limited and it demonstrates a limited grasp of the academic context. The

selection and understanding of primary evidence and the secondary discussion is haphazard. The argument shows considerable degree of irrelevance and the structure is weak. The writing falls short of correctness and clarity; the presentation of sources is not up to professional standards.

Good (6-7):

The thesis formulates and attempts a solid answer a central research question in a satisfactory way. It demonstrates a good basic understanding of the topic and of its complexities. It shows a good knowledge of the relevant academic context. It demonstrates solid coverage of the relevant secondary and primary sources, using appropriate methods. The presentation and discussion of sources is generally professional. The language is correct and the main points are made explicitly and in a structured way. However, the analysis may be derivative and lacking in discrimination. It exhibits some problems of relevance and structure. The evidence presented does not fully support conclusions, and it lacks detail and nuance. Expression may exhibit some deficiencies. It shows little evidence of independent thought or of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Excellent (8-10):

The central question is innovative and sharply formulated. It is shown to have considerable relevance for the scholarly discussions in the field. It is very clearly situated in the relevant scholarly discussions and the writer shows an above average level of familiarity with the relevant scholarly context. It addresses all aspects of the topic and demonstrates careful and systematic research in appropriately selected sources. It demonstrates critical reflection on methods and theories. It shows evidence of independent thought, knowledge of the field, and high-level insight and powers of analysis. The argument is balanced and well-structured and effectively expressed, with specific, detailed and accurate use of evidence. It is scrupulous in citation of primary and secondary sources and in adherence to bibliographic conventions. It shows evidence of original and independent thought but also of systematic, broad-ranging and thorough research in the field using appropriate methods. It shows exceptional insight and powers of analysis that fully reflects the complexity of the topic. It demonstrates an engagement with and critical approach to the scholarly debate. The argumentation is thorough, the examples always precise and relevant, the selection and synthesis of secondary literature polished. The handling of bibliography and footnoting is up to professional standard and the style is precise, correct, and highly readable. Top work in this field is of a publishable standard.

5. Relevant dates and deadlines:

15 November 23:55	Deadline for theses topics submission via LMS
26 November	Thesis topic and supervisor approval by the Academic Council
30 November	First chapter or case study submission
1-5 December	First chapter or case study discussion at the Research Seminar
24 January	Second chapter or case study submission
25 January - 5 February	Second chapter or case study discussion at the Research Seminar
25-27 February (TBC)	Thesis Presentation at the HSE Saint Petersburg Winter School
3 April	Thesis Full Draft Submission to the Supervisor
10 April	Feedback from the Supervisor and MA Academic Coordinator
17 April 23:59	Deadline for submission the thesis for the pre-viva (pre-defence)
21-30 April	Theses pre-viva (pre-defence)
30 April	Deadline for submission a request for changes in the title of MA thesis and its supervisor
30 April	Appointment of MA Thesis Examiners
22 May 23:59	MA Thesis submission via the LMS and to the Examiners
31 May 18:00	Deadline for MA theses' Supervisors' Reports
31 May 18:00	Deadline for MA theses' Examiners' Reports

4 June 18.00	Deadline for submission of MA Thesis printed version to the Study Office
6-10 June	MA Thesis viva voce (oral defence)

6 A checklist of mistakes often made in theses (and some suggestions on how to avoid them)

I. The structure of the argumentation

General:

- 1 absence of indications of place and time or a delay in introducing such indications;
- 2 lack of clarity in the terminology used;
- 3 lack of accuracy.

Start from the assumption that all personal names and place names need to be dated and localized. Expressions that are not commonly used in English, or expressions which are used with an unusual meaning, need to be explained.

Title:

- 4 insufficient.

The title ought to refer to the contents of the paper. Whenever a ‘gripping’ title fails to make clear what the paper is about, use a subtitle to explain the title.

Introduction:

- 5 the question under discussion has not (or insufficiently) been put into words;
- 6 absence or insufficiency of the explanation of the question:
 - chronologically;
 - geographically;
 - as far as the terminology is concerned;
- 7 no indication of the ‘order’ (the parts of the argumentation and their sequence);
- 8 no explanation of the reason for this order;
- 9 superfluous information.

Middle:

- 10 the question is not treated in the order promised in the introduction;
- 11 the links between the several parts (‘paragraphs’, ‘chapters’) are not or not sufficiently indicated;
- 12 data belonging in one part are presented in another part of the argumentation;
- 13 statements in different parts of the argumentation, the relevant links between which are not clarified;
- 14 lack of generalization (e.g. enumeration of events without giving a clue as to what they are supposed to illustrate);
- 15 excessive pleasure in copying (copying, paraphrasing, etc.);
- 16 superfluous or senseless information;
- 17 statements that are clearly untrue;

18 unsubstantiated statements.

Conclusion:

19 no sufficient summary;
 20 no sufficient answer to the question posed in the introduction;
 21 an answer that does not (or not evidently) follows from the foregoing arguments;
 22 absence of a wider perspective.

II. The presentation of the text

Language:

23 mistakes in spelling;
 24 stylistic errors;
 25 unclear punctuation;
 26 use of words with a wrong meaning.

Annotation:

27 no annotation where needed;
 28 annotation where it is superfluous;
 29 insufficient references (no indication of page numbers; only the first page of an article is mentioned; no mention of the place of an article in a collection of essays, etc.);
 30 inconsistency in the references.

In general notes are meant for references to sources and literature only. Disquisitions in notes are anathema. One ought not to address new problems in the annotation. Whenever mention is made of a publication for the first time, give full references. Avoid abbreviations such as *ibid.*, *op. cit.* etc. Cross-references are also to be avoided.

Bibliography:

31 absence or incompleteness;
 32 inadequate bibliographical references;
 33 inconsistency.

Only titles that were used in the writing of the paper are to be included.

7. Summary of the formal MA thesis requirements:

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS ON THE MASTER THESIS

1. The MA dissertation, or thesis, is a compulsory part of the MA curriculum. It is an academic MA Thesis in the form of research paper ideally of publishable quality;
2. Thesis submission falls on Module 4 during the 2nd year of study.
3. The submission and defence of the thesis have a combined value of 24 ECTS.
4. MA thesis should be a work of independent research reflecting one's ability:
 - formulate a problem or research question,
 - undertake and complete a piece of independent research and analysis,
 - collect, analyse and interpret historical sources,
 - adequately use the methodology or theoretical framework relevant to the research question and historical sources,
 - demonstrate knowledge of the historiography and other analytical traditions relevant for the chosen subject,
 - produce an academic text with appropriate structure and idiomatic use of language,
 - discuss coherently the outcome of the research, its relevance for the public, possible implications and applications for non-academic spheres (where applicable).

2. SELECTION AND APPROVAL OF MASTER THESIS TOPIC

- 2.1. The supervisor of student's MA thesis may be HSE staff member. In exceptional cases where student has an external supervisor, the HSE appoints a curator from the HSE staff. The supervisors and curators should hold international PhDs or Russian 'Candidate of Sciences' or 'Doctor of Sciences' degrees.
- 2.2. Student submit the Thesis Topic and Supervisor's name via LMS system not later than 15 November of the 2d academic year.
- 2.3. Upon the approval of the chosen topic by the MA's academic, the programme manager issues an order on the topic and supervisor for each student. The academic council may recommend that the student makes changes to the topic. The order is prepared by 15 December of the 2d academic year.
- 2.4. The student may request change of Thesis Title and/or Supervisor no later than in 30 days before of submission of the definitive (final) version of the MA Thesis.

3. THESIS SUPERVISION AND SUBMISSION

- 3.1. The student and the supervisor agree on the time table for thesis completion. According to HSE regulations the main elements are:
 - Thesis Research proposal (the first year paper) which is prepared and defended by the student during the 1st academic year (there are separate guidelines for this);

- Submission of a first version by 2 April of the 2nd academic year and feedback on it by the supervisor in 1 week after submission;
 - Final text submission of the thesis to the supervisor and the external reviewer by 23 May;
 - “Turnitin” or other relevant English-language anti-plagiarism software text check- up by 25 May and attached to the thesis;
 - Feedback from the external reviewer and the thesis supervisor no later than 5 days before the thesis oral viva;
 - Thesis viva takes place on the second week of June of the 2nd academic year.
- 3.2. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the thesis meets the standards described in Clause 1 (above), and the duty of the supervisor and the MA Programme to ensure that the student takes the necessary steps to meet these requirements.

4. THESIS CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

4.1. General requirements

- 4.1.1. The length of the MA Thesis is between 60 000 to 120 000 characters (with spaces).
- 4.1.2. The MA Thesis should be written in English. Words and phrases in other languages, such as ‘*videlicet*’ or ‘*raison d’état*’ should be put in italics. Titles of the bibliography entries should appear in their original language, however, titles in Cyrillic should be transliterated according to the Library of Congress style in parentheses.

4.2. Thesis content

- 4.2.1. The thesis must include substantial original content produced by the student, including the empirical part as its core.
- 4.2.2. Historical sources should be accurately cited

4.3. Thesis structure

- 4.3.1. Sections of the thesis should be ordered in the following way:
- Title page
 - Abstract (between 300 and 500 words), including a statement of the problem, the methodology used and the major findings
 - Table of contents with chapter headings, section headings and sub-headings
 - List of Figures, Tables or Illustrations
 - Acknowledgements
 - Tables of measures (where applicable)
 - List of Abbreviations
 - Body of the thesis
 - List of sources
 - Bibliography
 - Appendices, e.g. formulae, maps, diagrams, interview (where applicable)
 - Glossary of special technical words or acronyms (where applicable)
- 4.3.2. MA Thesis should be submitted in one single file.
- 4.3.3. The thesis should be computer printed on white A4 paper in Times New Roman 12pt, 1.5 space intervals, either single-sided or double-sided. Single spacing should be used for block quotations, footnotes, and bibliography. Margins should be 2.5 cm on all sides. Paragraphs should be indented, or an empty line left between paragraphs. Pages should be numbered at the bottom in the centre using Arabic numerals starting with the first page of the

first page of the introduction. Each chapter should start on a new page.

- 4.3.4. The title page should have the full title of the thesis, the student's name, the department and name of the university, the supervisor's name, the place of submission, and the year of submission.
- 4.3.5. The thesis should be structured as chapters of its main body with an introduction and a conclusion.
- 4.3.6. The bibliographic citations are provided in the footnotes, supplemented by a final bibliography. The final bibliography must include all works cited in the footnotes throughout the text. The reference style is one and the same for both the First Year Paper (research proposal) and MA Theses, and it is also the same for the footnotes and the final bibliography and should be made according to Chicago style http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

5. SUBMISSION, GRADING, RE-EXAMINATION AND APPEAL

- 5.1. **State Examination Committee:** The MA Thesis final grade is awarded by the State Examination Committee which consists of no less than 3 members of HSE faculty and 3 external academics. A Head of the Committee should not be a member of HSE faculty. The Committee considers the grade by the thesis supervisor and the opinion of the internal and external examiners but are not bounded by them. The Committee also considers the quality of the oral viva of the MA student.
- 5.2. The **supervisor** assessed the final version of the thesis on a ten-point scale and gives more detailed feedback according to a review template (Appendix 2).
- 5.3. **Internal examiner** is appointed by head of MA programme from the HSE faculty and assesses the final version of the thesis on a ten-point scale also giving more detailed feedback according to a review template (Appendix 3).
- 5.4. **External examiner** is appointed head of MA programme from scholars outside the HSE and assesses the final version of the thesis on a ten-point scale also giving more detailed feedback according to a review template (Appendix 3).
- 5.5. The student submits both a hard copy and an electronic thesis file to the MA Office and the LMS. The report from the "Turnitin" or other relevant anti-plagiarism software is attached to the final version.
- 5.6. Marking basis for the State Examination Committee, the supervisors and the examiners are:
 - Adequacy of thesis topic and the contents of the research, both of which should lay clearly in the field of comparative sociology
 - Fulfillment of goals and objectives of the research project
 - Originality and novelty of the thesis
 - Adherence to professional ethics and citation standards
 - Level of student's personal contribution into the topic development
 - Thesis formatting
- 5.5. In the case where the thesis is graded less than 4 on a ten-point scale the student will not get awarded ECTS points. The student is expected to resubmit the thesis in the next module. The student

may resubmit the thesis only once.

- 5.6. The student may contest the grade for the thesis following the accepted appeal procedures. The student may file an appeal to the academic supervisor of the program within 3 working days upon receiving the grades with detailed grounds for appeal. The appeal committee will make a decision within 3 working days.

The mark is calculated by the following bases:

FM (final mark) = (1 internal examiner mark + 1 external examiner mark + 1 State Examination Committee Mark)/3

6. FORMATTING

Text format

1. Headings of sections
 - Table of Contents, List of Abbreviations, Introduction, Conclusion, References, Appendices, and Annexes: Times New Roman 16, bold, aligned left, not numbered.
 - Headings of chapters: Times New Roman 16, bold, aligned left, numbered (1, 2, etc.).
2. Headings of sub-chapters and sub-sub-chapters
 - Times new Roman 14, bold, aligned left, optionally numbered (1.1, 1.1.1, 1.2, etc.).
3. Paragraphs
 - Each paragraph should be from 10 to 15 lines (on average). There should be no spacing between a paragraph and the following one.
4. Main text:
 - Times New Roman 12, spaced 1.5, justified, each line indented left.
5. Footnotes:
 - Times New Roman 11, single-spaced, aligned left, no first line indentation.
6. Page numbers: All the pages of the file should be counted and listed
7. Margins: Left – 3 cm, right – 1 cm; Bottom, top – 2 cm.
8. Bibliography
 - Entries should be categorized and alphabetized.
 - Times New Roman 12, aligned left, single-spaced with spacing between each entry and the next one.
 - No first line indentation, no numbering, no bullet points.
9. Page numbering
 - starts from the Table of Contents (page 2) and end with the Bibliography.
 - appears at the bottom of the page, centred.
10. Page break between sections and chapters:
 - Page break between sections, e.g. between the Table of Contents and the List of Abbreviations (if included), between the List of Abbreviations, list of tables, list of figures and Introduction, between the Introduction and the Main Body, between the Main body and the Conclusion, between the Conclusion and the Bibliography, between the Bibliography and the Appendixes or Annexes (if included).
 - Page break at the end of each chapter (i.e. start each chapter on a new page).

7. MASTER THESIS PAPER STORAGE

The Study Office of the MA Programme stores copies of MA Thesis in the form of hard copies and electronic file.

Appendix 1 Request to change your supervisor/thesis title

TO: Academic Supervisor of the MA
Program in Applied and Interdiscipli-
nary History/ Global and Regional
History/

Nikolai V. Ssorin-Chaikov
(full name)

FROM: (full name)

_____ Year

_____ student, group

No. _____

R

I hereby request to change
the supervisor/title of my thesis

(title in English)

(title in Russian)

from

(full name, academic degree, position, subdivision of the current supervisor)

to

(full name, academic degree, position, subdivision of the new supervisor)

(Student's signature)
“ _____ ” _____ 202_

(Supervisor's signature)
“ _____ ” _____ 202_

(New supervisor's signature)
“ _____ ” _____ 202_

Appendix 2 Thesis title page template

FEDERAL STATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION OF
HIGHER EDUCATION
NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

**Saint-Petersburg School of Arts and Humanities De-
partment of History**

Last name First name Middle name of the author
name of the topic of the master's thesis, MA thesis

In the field of 'History'
MA Applied and Interdisciplinary History "Usable Pasts".

Saint Petersburg 2021

Appendix 3 Supervisor's report template

**Federal State Educational Institution of Higher Education
'National Research University Higher School of Economics'**

**Saint-Petersburg School of Arts
and Humanities Department of
History**

Report of the supervisor on the master's thesis

Student

Last name, first name, middle name

Of the 2nd year of the educational programme Applied and Interdisciplinary History "Usable Pasts"

On the theme: ' _____ '

Please characterise (following these points or in your own terms):

- **The general characteristics of the thesis:** clearly defined research question or hypothesis; the correspondence of the research question to the topic of the thesis; the presentation of the material on the topic and the thesis' logic
- **The methodology and methods:** how appropriate methods are, how the methodology is justified in light of the goal of the thesis and its research question
- **The theoretical and empirical foundation of the thesis:** how thorough is the discussion of relevant theory; how well-grounded the thesis is empirically
- **Conclusions:** if they correlate to the research question and provide an answer to it; and if they are substantiated empirically
- **Formatting:** the thesis's correspondence to academic standards in style
- **Strong points and weak points of the thesis**
- **Whether the thesis should be admitted to defence**
- **Recommended evaluation on a ten-point scale**

Supervisor (degree, position)

Faculty/department

(Place of work) _____/signature/ _____ Initials Last name

Date

Marking criteria: Note that a grade will usually be assigned for a combination of reasons and the final grade is based therefore on the overall impression rather than on isolated features. The main categories are represented below.

Deficient (0-3):

The thesis does not have a central research question. It shows poor knowledge of the scholarly context and little evidence of independent thought. The research is superficial, unsystematic, and shows little effort. The argument lacks structure and the writing is vague or incorrect (the expression is poor at best, incoherent at worst.) It makes inadequate use of primary and secondary sources. The presentation does not meet professional standards.

Pass (4-5):

The thesis has a central question and attempts to answer it. It shows knowledge of the academic context. It shows evidence of independent research in the relevant field using appropriate methods. At the same time, its grasp of the issues involved in the question is limited and it demonstrates a limited grasp of the academic context. The selection and understanding of primary evidence and the secondary discussion is haphazard. The argument shows considerable degree of irrelevance and the structure is weak. The writing falls short of correctness and clarity; the presentation of sources is not up to professional standards.

Good (6-7):

The thesis formulates and attempts to answer a central research question in a satisfactory way. It demonstrates a good basic understanding of the topic and of its complexities. It shows a good knowledge of the relevant academic context. It demonstrates solid coverage of the relevant secondary and primary sources, using appropriate methods. The presentation and discussion of sources is generally professional. The language is correct and the main points are made explicitly and in a structured way. However, the analysis may be derivative and lacking in discrimination. It exhibits some problems of relevance and structure. The evidence presented does not fully support conclusions, and it lacks detail and nuance. Expression may exhibit some deficiencies. It shows little evidence of independent thought or of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Excellent (8-10):

The central question is innovative and sharply formulated. It is shown to have considerable relevance for the scholarly discussions in the field. It is very clearly situated in the relevant scholarly discussions and the writer shows an above average level of familiarity with the relevant scholarly context. It addresses all aspects of the topic and demonstrates careful and systematic research in appropriately selected sources. It demonstrates critical reflection on methods and theories. It shows evidence of independent thought, knowledge of the field, and high-level insight and powers of analysis. The argument is balanced and well-structured and effectively expressed, with specific, detailed and accurate use of evidence. It is scrupulous in citation of primary and secondary sources and in adherence to bibliographic conventions. It shows evidence of original and independent thought but also of systematic, broad-ranging and thorough research in the field using appropriate methods. It shows exceptional insight and

powers of analysis that fully reflects the complexity of the topic. It demonstrates an engagement with and critical approach to the scholarly debate. The argumentation is thorough, the examples always precise and relevant, the selection and synthesis of secondary literature polished. The handling of bibliography and footnoting is up to professional standard and the style is precise, correct, and highly readable. Top work in this field is of a publishable standard.

Appendix 4 Examiner's report template (internal and external examiners)

Federal state educational institution of higher education
National Research University 'Higher School of Economics'

**Saint-Petersburg School of Arts
and Humanities
Department of History**

Review
of the master's thesis

Student [Last name, First name, Middle name]

2nd year, educational programme 'Applied and Interdisciplinary
History "Usable Pasts".' ____
on the theme:

,

,

Please characterise (following these points or in your own terms):

- **The general characteristics of the thesis:** clearly defined research question or hypothesis; the correspondence of the research question to the topic of the thesis; the presentation of the material on the topic and the thesis' logic
- **The methodology and methods:** how appropriate methods are, how the methodology is justified in light of the goal of the thesis and its research question
- **The theoretical and empirical foundation of the thesis:** how thorough is the discussion of relevant theory; how well-grounded the thesis is empirically
- **Conclusions:** if they correlate to the research question and provide an answer to it; and if they are substantiated empirically
- **Formatting:** the thesis's correspondence to academic standards in style
- **Strong points and weak points of the thesis**
- **Whether the thesis should be admitted to defence**
- **Recommended evaluation on a ten-point scale**

Supervisor (degree, position)

Faculty/department

(Place of work)_____/signature/ _____Initials Last name

Date

Marking criteria: Note that a grade will usually be assigned for a combination of reasons and the final grade is based therefore on the overall impression rather than on isolated features. The main categories are represented below.

Deficient (0-3):

The thesis does not have a central research question. It shows poor knowledge of the scholarly context and little evidence of independent thought. The research is superficial, unsystematic, and shows little effort. The argument lacks structure and the writing is vague or incorrect (the expression is poor at best, incoherent at worst.) It makes inadequate use of primary and secondary sources. The presentation does not meet professional standards.

Pass (4-5):

The thesis has a central question and attempts to answer it. It shows knowledge of the academic context. It shows evidence of independent research in the relevant field using appropriate methods. At the same time, its grasp of the issues involved in the question is limited and it demonstrates a limited grasp of the academic context. The selection and understanding of primary evidence and the secondary discussion is haphazard. The argument shows considerable degree of irrelevance and the structure is weak. The writing falls short of correctness and clarity; the presentation of sources is not up to professional standards.

Good (6-7):

The thesis formulates and attempts to answer a central research question in a satisfactory way. It demonstrates a good basic understanding of the topic and of its complexities. It shows a good knowledge of the relevant academic context. It demonstrates solid coverage of the relevant secondary and primary sources, using appropriate methods. The presentation and discussion of sources is generally professional. The language is correct and the main points are made explicitly and in a structured way. However, the analysis may be derivative and lacking in discrimination. It exhibits some problems of relevance and structure. The evidence presented does not fully support conclusions, and it lacks detail and nuance. Expression may exhibit some deficiencies. It shows little evidence of independent thought or of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Excellent (8-10):

The central question is innovative and sharply formulated. It is shown to have considerable relevance for the scholarly discussions in the field. It is very clearly situated in the relevant scholarly discussions and the writer shows an above average level of familiarity with the relevant scholarly context. It addresses all aspects of the topic and demonstrates careful and systematic research in appropriately selected sources. It demonstrates critical reflection on methods and theories. It shows evidence of inde-

pendent thought, knowledge of the field, and high-level insight and powers of analysis. The argument is balanced and well-structured and effectively expressed, with specific, detailed and accurate use of evidence. It is scrupulous in citation of primary and secondary sources and in adherence to bibliographic conventions. It shows evidence of original and independent thought but also of systematic, broad-ranging and thorough research in the field using appropriate methods. It shows exceptional insight and powers of analysis that fully reflects the complexity of the topic. It demonstrates an engagement with and critical approach to the scholarly debate. The argumentation is thorough, the examples always precise and relevant, the selection and synthesis of secondary literature polished. The handling of bibliography and footnoting is up to professional standard and the style is precise, correct, and highly readable. Top work in this field is of a publishable standard.