



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Master's in Political Science

Academic year 2025-2026

Master's Thesis Guide

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1 What is the Master's Thesis?

The Master's Thesis (MT) is a substantial piece of academic work that proves the student's competence to carry out research autonomously at a Masters level. In the MT students should present:

- a research question related to any of the topics dealt with in the substantive modules of the master,
- a well-structured theoretical framework that proves good knowledge of the literature and the debates involved in the research question,
- a suitable qualitative or quantitative research strategy involving methods learned in the methodological modules of the master.

The MT must show that the student is capable to carrying out sound and rigorous academic research and has the ability to evaluate research conducted by others. Students are encouraged to include their own empirical analysis in their MT.

The MT must be between 8,000 and 12,000 words long, including appendices and bibliography. It can be written in English, Spanish or Catalan.

The thesis involves 250-300 hours of student work (i.e., about 37 days of full time dedication, 8 hours per day, to the thesis).

2 Personalized supervision

Each student will be assigned a tutor from the UAB faculty who would guide him or her in a personalized way during the development of the MT. Students are advised to explore potential tutors early in the academic year and to discuss potential tutors with the Module coordinator.

The following schedule for tutorial meetings is advised:

- February: Initial meeting with supervisor
- March-April-May: Meeting to discuss progress on thesis
- May: discussion of MT final draft.

Note that tutors are not available for supervision during the month of August

Tutors

In this list you will find professors available for MT supervision and their respective lines of research. Their contact details can be found on the department's web page. It is also possible that external professors supervise a MT, but this has to be authorized in advance by the MT module coordinator.

Tutor	Research Topics
Eva Anduiza	Political behavior. Political psychology. Political communication. Feminism.
Ismael Blanco	Urban regeneration. Public Participation. Local governance and community development
Agusti Bosch	Elections. Electoral behavior. Public opinion. Policy mood
John Etherington	Nationalism, national identity and territory. State formation
Ana Mar Fernández	EU's institutional system. European decision-making. EU's external representation
Nuria Font	Environmental governance. Europeanization of policies. EU institutions
Carol Galais	Public opinion. Political psychology. Political socialization. Participation. Emotions. Conspiracy theories.
Raquel Gallego	Public policy. Public management
Ricard Gomà	Public policies. Local government
Enrique Hernández	Public opinion. Political attitudes. Political behavior. Democracy
Dani Marinova	Political psychology. Political economy. Political parties and party systems.
Marga León	Social policy. Gender studies
Eva Østergaard-Nielsen	Migration. Democratization
Ixchel Pérez	EU politics. Public administration.
Guillem Rico	Political attitudes. Political behavior. Political leadership. Populism
Xavier Ballart	Public policies. Public administration. Public service motivation.
Jordi Argelaget	Party politics. Decentralization.
Stefano Camatarri	Voting behavior. Migration. Representation
Sergi Ferrer	Polarization. Party systems. Public opinion.
Marta Gallina	Political behaviour, political sophistication, and populism
Laurence Go	Political economy, development and labor economics
Lara Maestripiéri	Public policies, social change, social vulnerability.
Roberto Pannico	Attitudes toward the EU, economic voting, information processing, party cues
Paula Zuluaga	Taxation. Gender. Feminism

Leire Rincón	Universal Basic Income, Redistribution preferences, gender politics
Merce Cortina	Urban Policies, Local Governance systems, Social Movements and Public Policy Analysis
Luisa Faustini	Migration governance, EU migration policies, neighbourhood policies, migration diplomacy, international relations, democratization and Mediterranean politics.
Marc Guinjoan	Political behavior, electoral systems, climate change attitudes, populism, conspiracy theories.

Collective tutorials

In addition to regular meetings with the tutor, all students will attend weekly discussion sessions during the second term, which will provide additional methodological supervision. In these sessions students will present and discuss their ongoing MT. Students should send a MT draft a week before their scheduled presentation, and actively discuss each-others work. Attendance at these tutorials is **compulsory** for all students enrolled in the MT module, and it will be taken into consideration in the MT module assessment.

An introductory session to the module and the collective tutorials will take place in February.

3 Writing an academic paper

The MT is an academic paper. It involves the following tasks:

- Define a research question
- Read what has been written on the subject
- Organize ideas and develop an original theoretical framework
- Define a research design
- (Gather and) analyze your data
- Write a draft
- Prepare the final version

Define a question

Normally you start considering several possibilities, often too broad and ambitious. You must be precise and realistic when identifying a question that is relevant and about which we need to know more. The research question must be related to the existing academic debates in the discipline. The definition of a research question therefore requires a great deal of prior work, reading the relevant literature on the subject that interests us.

Exploratory and descriptive research questions are also suitable for the MT. We encourage students to define their own research questions. However, we can also direct them into specific directions connected with ongoing research projects.

Have a look at the different research lines outlined in page 4.

Read what has been written on the subject

The first step to obtain information on a subject is to perform a bibliographic search, usually based on keywords or authors who have worked on the subject. The study of this literature serves different purposes in the MT. First, it helps to define precisely our research question. Second, it provides information on how this issue has been studied before: concepts involved, explanations provided, theoretical approaches, and methods of analysis applied. Third, it may also provide secondary data that can be used to test our hypotheses. Fundamental and revolutionary theoretical contributions are not expected in a MT. But a thorough understanding of the academic debates regarding the research question is expected. Reading is thus fundamental and this will take a long time, so you should start early.

Organize a theoretical framework

Contrary to what is sometimes believed, a review of the literature is not a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework involves the answers that, from previous knowledge and our own contribution, can be proposed to the research question that guides our master thesis. These answers are the working hypotheses. Within these hypotheses all concepts should be clearly defined, particularly if they are controversial.

Define research design

The MT should propose a **qualitative or quantitative** research design for hypothesis testing, specifying what part of reality will be observed and how. The crucial question in this section is to argue how the proposed analysis is adequate to answer our research question and test our hypotheses. In other words, one should choose the best available and feasible design (qualitative or quantitative) in order to answer the research question.

Gather and analyze your data

Students are encouraged to gather and/or analyze their own data, with a realistic approach that takes into account the limited time and resources available for a MT. Extensive data gathering is not possible in the context of a master thesis due to resource constraints (time and money). Hence, secondary data analysis (based on existing qualitative and quantitative sources) is completely acceptable. See for example:

- Kern, Florian G, and Katariina Mustasilta. 2023. "Beyond Replication: Secondary Qualitative Data Analysis in Political Science." *Comparative Political Studies*: 00104140221139388.
- <https://datasetsearch.research.google.com/>

Once your research question is defined your MA thesis advisor will be able to guide in the choice of a research design and the best empirical evidence available. However, one must take into account the availability and accessibility of evidence when choosing a topic and research design.

Write a draft

The work should be structured into several sections. The following scheme applies to any MT:

- Research Question: What do I want to know and why is it important?
- Theoretical Framework: What do I already know about this question? What are my expectations?
- Research Design: How will I analyze this question? Which cases and data will be considered?
- Data analysis: Which empirical evidence provides answers for my question and tests my hypotheses?
- Conclusions: What are the main findings and contribution of my MT?

Having defined the structure within each section, develop one idea per paragraph.

When presenting theoretical arguments, it is essential to relate them with existing previous research through citations (see section below).

When analyzing data, make sure to cite the sources where these came from. Any tables or figures must be discussed in the text.

Prepare the final version

The final version should take special care of the language and formal matters (see section below). The final version does not include everything that you have written or analyzed, but only the most important aspects. It is advisable to use a neutral, and clear style of writing, avoiding poetic or literary styles.

4 Academic integrity, plagiarism

Academic integrity

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is one of the most frequent and problematic forms of academic dishonesty. You are committing plagiarism when

- You present the work of others as our own;
- You take words or ideas from other authors without due recognition (e.g. no mention);

- You do not use quotation marks around a direct quotation;
- You give incorrect information about the true source of a quotation;
- You paraphrase a source without mentioning it (e.g., without quoting)
- You abuse of paraphrasing, even if the source is mentioned (e.g., "rehashed")

For more see <http://www.plagiarism.org/>

Artificial intelligence and academic work

The increasing availability of artificial intelligence (AI) tools—such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Bard, or other text- and code-generators—requires clear guidance. The inappropriate use of AI is considered academic dishonesty, just like plagiarism.

You are **misusing AI** when you:

- Present AI-generated text as if it were your own original writing;
- Use AI to generate entire sections of your thesis (literature review, analysis, discussion, etc.) and submit them without critical revision or citation;
- Copy and paste AI-generated references, bibliographies, or data without checking their accuracy (these may be fabricated or incorrect);
- Allow AI to replace your own analysis or interpretation of results;
- Use AI to translate or paraphrase sources without acknowledging either the original source or the tool.

You may **appropriately use AI** when you:

- Employ it as a support tool (e.g., to brainstorm ideas, improve the clarity of sentences, check grammar, or reformat text);
- Use it to generate code or syntax (e.g., in R or Stata), provided you understand the code, verify that it works, and cite the assistance (e.g., *"Code adapted with the help of ChatGPT"* in a footnote or methods appendix);
- Ask it to explain statistical concepts or suggest resources, and then engage critically with the output;
- Use translation tools (including AI-based ones) to improve your English or Catalan/Spanish expression, while still taking responsibility for accuracy and clarity.

Golden rule: AI can be a tool to support your research, but it cannot *replace* your

intellectual work. You remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of everything you submit.

PLEASE NOTE: Professors in the Masters are concerned with and actively seek for potential cases of plagiarism. Plagiarism in the MT will entail a fail in the MT module.

5 Citations and bibliography

Each time you use an idea or information from another author, source or institution, you must include a citation. This practice is essential for two reasons:

- It is a basic principle of honest academic work to acknowledge other people's work. Otherwise you would be committing plagiarism.
- You must offer your readers the chance to go to the original source to verify the information or to complete it.

PLEASE NOTE: MT without an adequate system of quoting and referencing will not be assessed.

You must use a bibliographic manager such as Endnote, Refworks, Zotero or Mendeley to ensure a systematic production of bibliographies. The UAB library provides Mendeley training sessions.

There are several ways to cite. You can follow the recommendations of any academic journal. The point is to have a homogeneous system of quoting and referencing. [APA recommendations](http://www.apastyle.org/learn/quick-guide-on-references.aspx) are particularly thorough and useful. See <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/quick-guide-on-references.aspx>.

At the end of the MT include the complete **reference of all works cited in alphabetical order by author's last name**. Only references in the text must be included in the reference section. The character, style and punctuation are important and should also be uniform. It is recommended not to use bold or underlined fonts.

6 Formal criteria

MT must:

- Include page numbers.
- Include a cover page with author's name, title, date, tutor's name and the text "Master's Thesis presented with a view to obtaining the degree of Master's in Political Science, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona".
- Include a table of contents.

- Include titles and numbers for each table or figure.
- Have passed several spelling and grammar revisions.
- Include an adequate and homogenous system of referencing and a final list of the complete references used.
- Have a homogeneous style (font, titles, etc.). 12p font and 1.5 spacing are advised.

MT that do not comply with these requirements will not be considered for assessment.

7 Assessment

The module MT will involve three assessment components:

- the MT itself (80%)
- the presentation and defence (10%) and
- the participation in collective tutorials (10%).

The MT must prove that the student has:

- Ability to guide research towards the fruitful analysis of a particular relevant question. This will be assessed considering the definition and justification of the research question.
- Knowledge and a critical understanding of the academic debates around this specific question. This will be assessed considering the theoretical framework of the MT.
- Ability to relate theory and empirical analysis. This will be assessed considering the definition of an appropriate research strategy and the data gathered and analyzed.
- Ability to assess other researchers' work. This will be assessed considering how the MT takes into account previous research on the matter, the quality of the citations, and in the students' contribution to collective tutorials.
- Ability to communicate both in writing and orally. This will be assessed considering how the MT is written and defended.

The MT will be evaluated by two professors of the department and will be defended publicly in July or September.

A MT can obtain the following marks:

- Excellent (10-9 out of 10): A very well written MT, compelling and original, based on thorough reflection and rigorous analysis, including detailed knowledge of the literature, a solid research design and data analysis appropriate to answer the research question.
- Good (8-7 out of 10): Interesting argument and good knowledge of the literature. Includes a research design and data analysis reasonably appropriate to the question posed.
- Pass (6-5 out of 10): The knowledge of the literature is sufficient but could be improved. Some limitations are found in the proposed methodology and/or in the data analysis.
- Fail (4 or less out of 10): Severe problems with the research question, theoretical framework, research design or data analysis.

8 Submission and defense

The MT shall be submitted through the Campus Virtual to the module coordinator, to the professors participating in their assessment, and to the tutor either before the 1st of July (for July defense) or before the 1st September (for September defense).

In the public defense, students will have 15 minutes to present the most important aspects of their MT and then professors taking part in the evaluation committee will discuss them with the student. This defense will be taken into account in the assessment of the MT module (see above).

Deadlines

Master's Thesis to be defended in July: deadline for submission is 1st July.

Master's Thesis to be defended in September: deadline for submission is 1st September.

Note that tutors are not available for supervision during the month of August. Students are thus encouraged to present their MT in the July call, if possible.

Defenses take place in the second week of July for those that submit in July and second week of September for those that submit in September. Specific dates will be published in due course.

8 Useful Resources

General advice

http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch/Teaching_and_Learning.htm

Tips to be a good discussant

<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~malex/DiscussantTips.htm>

<http://sites.utexas.edu/ecoadvising/files/2012/05/ESP-Tips-on-being-a-good-discussant1.pdf>

The five commandments

http://faculty.georgetown.edu/kingch/How_to_Write_a_Research_Paper.htm

How to write a dissertation and other tips

<http://www.cs.purdue.edu/homes/dec/essay.dissertation.html>

Writing for Research (on many aspects of an academic carrer)

<https://medium.com/@write4research/>