



My B.Sc. / M.Sc. thesis at the Department of Agricultural Markets

Supervision Guidelines

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Potential Supervisors:

Prof. Dr. Sebastian Hess is head of the department, and therefore, for formal reasons, your first supervisor. However, Dr. Beate Gebhardt may predominantly supervise your thesis. Please coordinate with your first supervisor who you should ask to be your second supervisor. It is generally possible to choose external second supervisors (also from companies and government associations). Due to different rules of the respective study programs at Hohenheim, it may vary which academic degrees are entitled to serve as second supervisors. Should you have any doubts, please check the examination rules of your study program. The department's scientific staff are available as co-supervisors and contact persons for methodological or content-related questions.

In case of doubt, your respective examination regulations apply for all questions about the general underlying framework of your thesis!

1. Time Frame of writing your thesis

1.1. Choosing a topic

- ⇒ You find a list of topics on our website: <https://marktlehre.uni-hohenheim.de/themenvorschlaege>
- ⇒ As a general rule, we will supervise theses which fall into the scope of our expertise, subject to our time resources. There is no guarantee that your thesis will be supervised by our department. We do not offer any other topics apart from those listed on our website. However, please feel invited to bring up your own suggestions.
- ⇒ You may send your own topic suggestions by e-mail to one of the above mentioned supervisors

1.2. Setting an appointment for a first meeting with your supervisor in order to narrow down your topic

During the lecture period, please contact Prof. Hess within his office hour on Thursdays from 2:00-4:00pm (see website <https://marktlehre.uni-hohenheim.de/>)

During lecture-free periods, please contact Prof. Hess by e-mail for an appointment. Dr. Gebhardt can be reached by e-mail in order to set an appointment.

- ⇒ In case you decide after the meeting to write your thesis with our department, please send an e-mail with your working title and contact information to our secretariat (Katharina Mayer) within two weeks after the meeting, so we can include you to our list of theses supervised by the department. Please always cc your supervisor when sending this e-mail!
- ⇒ Without this confirmation from your side, we consider the topic as still available and may assign it to other students who are interested.

1.3. Exposé

Depending on the topic, your supervisor may recommend to write an exposé. This is an approximately ten page document in which your thesis will be thoroughly planned. It mainly applies to M.Sc. theses. The exposé should be structured as follows:

i) research topic, ii) research objective and research question, iii) methodological approach, iv) material used (e.g. data base), v) time frame, vi) initial literature selection.

Of course you are very welcome to write an exposé without being requested to do so, for example in order to propose your own thesis topic, or to present your topic in case you are cooperating with an external company.

Optional, but desirable: presentation and discussion of the exposé or the thesis in our research seminar (for M.Sc. students):

During lecture period every Wednesday, 3-5pm (only in English). Registration through our secretariat (Ms. Katharina Mayer). Advantage: test run and additional suggestions for the completion of your thesis. No disadvantages; will occur in agreement with your supervisor.

1.4. Thesis registration

As soon as the topic has been determined and can be expected to be realized as envisaged (e.g. regarding data availability, survey feasibility, etc.), the thesis has to be registered with the examination office. This is the responsibility of the student. It is not desirable that you submit your thesis considerably before your deadline. Hence, your thesis should be registered in coordination with your supervisor as soon as possible.

1.5. Consulting your second supervisor

Please discuss with your supervisor at an early stage of your thesis how to possibly involve your second supervisor.

1.6. Send a draft outline to your first supervisor:

Preferably as a word document: The draft outline will be commented on in written form and orally. The outline should follow our thesis guidelines <https://marktlehre.uni-hohenheim.de/leitfaden>. After that, not less than the **following stages** are common practice; deviations may occur in consultation with the supervisor. **In any case, the student is responsible for initiating and preparing for appointments with the supervisor (1.7 -1.12):**

1.7. Discussing the proposed methodology

You are welcome to propose a methodical approach. In any case, you should discuss your choice with your supervisor.

1.8. If applicable, send a draft version of your questionnaire ...

... or codeplan to your first supervisor; preferably as a word document: The draft will be commented on in written form. Codeplan and questionnaire should always be discussed with your supervisor (possibly even for a second time). Please do not contact any third party (e.g. do not send questionnaires, do not conduct expert interviews nor ask for data, etc.) without previously consulting with your supervisor!

1.9. Feedback about your progress on the empirical part of your thesis:

Unsolicited short and informal notice (approx. 1-2 times) to the supervisor about your progress on the empirical part of the thesis; either via e-mail, by phone, or during the office hour: How is the return flow of a survey, are there any difficulties, which steps are you planning to take regarding the analysis of your data...?

1.10. Send a presentation on central results:

Please unsolicitedly send a preliminary presentation of max. 10 slides to your supervisor. You should already have identified preliminary results, but it should be early enough to still allow changes to be made. The development of this presentation is also an important pre-step for your defense.

- ⇒ The presentation is merely supposed to show the central results, in order to keep the thesis on track. Please **do not** send any written drafts of your thesis to the supervisor („Is this ok?“, “Could you please have a look at my draft?“)! **The written thesis is generally not going to be corrected in advance** for the following reason: Supervisors are supposed to grade the thesis and thus cannot be co-authors. Generic feedback about written drafts is therefore difficult to differentiate from co-authoring. Either, comments would be very detailed, which would affect the supervisor’s objectivity, or the comments would only be superficial and therefore incomplete, which eventually would be arbitrary or unfair. **Thus, please do not send drafts of your thesis with requests for general feedback. Instead: Always feel free to ask specific, definite questions!**

1.11. Hand in your thesis

Your completed thesis is handed in to the examination office. Moreover, please send a .pdf file to your supervisor and the secretariat (Ms. Katharina Mayer). You are not obliged to do so, however, it facilitates the administrative procedure considerably. Thank you!

1.12. Setting an appointment for your oral defense:

- ⇒ Please set a defense date with the secretariat (Ms. Katharina Mayer), if the respective examination regulation requires an oral defense. Some study programs at Hohenheim do not require a defense, and then of course we do not request you to do so either! For defenses, we usually offer one fixed day per month (usually Fridays).
- ⇒ You may register for the defense date one week in advance at latest.
- ⇒ Students have no right to claim a certain defense date; it is up to our mutual agreement.
- ⇒ Therefore, please preferably plan your defense date at an early stage, e.g. 1-2 months before handing your thesis in.
- ⇒ At the day of the defense, the candidate is to appear in sufficient time before the defense presentation, and **independently and unsolicitedly ensures a smooth technical procedure**: A laptop can be borrowed in the secretariat if necessary, however, this has to be announced at least two weeks in advance. Provided that you bring your own laptop, make sure to bring the respective adapters and test them in advance. Sending your presentation slides to the supervisor, or discussing them with your supervisor in advance is not intended.
- ⇒ The duration of a B.Sc. defense is max. 30 minutes including presentation and discussion. The presentation therefore shouldn’t be longer than 15 minutes.
- ⇒ The duration of an M.Sc. defense is max. 45 minutes, therefore, the presentation shouldn’t last longer than 20 minutes. Presentations should be practiced by the student in advance at least three times, in order to ensure a smooth process.

2. Frequently asked questions:

2.1. How often should I contact my supervisor?

The above-mentioned stations offer a good compromise between independent scientific work and supervised work. Waiving of the above-mentioned meetings does not offer any advantages, since from the supervisor’s point of view, a consensus about the approach should exist. Approaching the supervisor too often with excessively detailed questions however may signal a lack of independence, which may ultimately have to be factored into the overall grade for the written thesis.

2.2. How is the grade for the written thesis composed?

Note: Not all aspects apply to every thesis. B.Sc. theses can possibly be literature reviews.

- ⇒ How well did you motivate and connect your research question, hypotheses, method, results and conclusion?
- ⇒ How demanding and advanced is the method you used and/or the underlying theory?
- ⇒ How concise and correct is the empirical analysis, e.g. on the basis of the quality of the illustrations or tables developed?
- ⇒ How suitable is the cited literature?
- ⇒ How diverse and valuable are the literature sources?
- ⇒ How innovative was the approach in general?
- ⇒ How valuable is the formal quality regarding spelling and grammar? Note: Please arrange proofreading of your thesis at least 1-2 weeks before your deadline. We have to evaluate formal mistakes, even if they are minor.

A very good thesis is outstanding in most of the above-mentioned criteria, and formally impeccable. A good thesis is outstanding in some of the above-mentioned criteria.

A satisfactory thesis is overall average regarding the above-mentioned criteria.

A sufficient thesis is below average in some aspects.

Common reasons for failing the thesis:

- ⇒ Plagiarism; too superficial approach to the topic, severe implementation mistakes.

2.3. Is there going to be a plagiarism assessment?

Supervised students agree to their theses being assessed for plagiarism by a plagiarism software. In the case of plagiarism, the student has failed the thesis, and there will not be a defense.

2.4. How is the grade for the presentation composed?

A successful defense has the following characteristics:

- ⇒ Fluent and appealing presentation, which points out the scientific and social significance of the research question.
- ⇒ The objective of the thesis should become clear.
- ⇒ Research / important results are presented as the outcome of a scientific/analytical approach.
- ⇒ Graphic illustrations and tables are in high quality, correct notations for equations, etc.
- ⇒ Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the objective and the actual results, rather than disconnected from the main work of the thesis.
- ⇒ Outlook on future research on the basis of the current research status.
- ⇒ References to relevant literature, if applicable, during the presentation (e.g. „Application of method by XX (Xy, 2018)).
- ⇒ Lively and intelligible presentation.
- ⇒ Precise answers on questions during the discussion.

2.5. „How extensive is the thesis supposed to be?“

- ⇒ There are no specifications about maximum or minimum length. The structure is relevant: Write down everything which is necessary in order to answer the research question and to give insight into your approach, but nothing beyond that.
- ⇒ Keep record of questionnaires, programming code, transcripts or additional results in the appendix.

- ⇒ Experience shows a benchmark of approx. 30-50 pages for B.Sc. theses and 65-95 pages for M.Sc. theses. This is, however, just a reference point!
- ⇒ Some students dedicate a lot of time and writing to the first chapters of their thesis by collecting a particularly large number of facts on the research question, and occasionally risk losing the thread. Please consider that you should particularly focus on working on your research question. Considering that, it is especially important to give insights into your methodology and to present your results in an informative but concise manner. You should plan sufficient time for those chapters, and comprehensively familiarize with your methodology, e.g. by consulting books.

2.6. Writer's Blocks

„I haven't made any progress with my thesis for quite some time now, or haven't been able to work on my thesis. Do I have to contact my supervisor?“

- ⇒ Your time schedule is fully your own responsibility. You do not need to give us a detailed account. As long as we do not hear from you, we assume that you are satisfied with your progress. In case you are experiencing difficulties, and need advice or feedback, we will be glad to help you.

„Somehow, I do not manage to work on my thesis, although I do have ideas.“

- ⇒ You are not alone. There can be various reasons. Often, but not always, it may help to deal with the phenomenon of procrastination:

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/procrastination/>

<https://www.thephdproofreaders.com/increase-your-productivity/phd-thesis-procrastination/>

Challenges when organizing and writing your thesis are as much part of the thesis as its actual content. You may include your supervisors in these areas if required, and get some advice, or agree on regular feedback in short intervals for a certain period of time (e.g. send a new paragraph every day by email to the supervisor in order to get started). Sometimes, it is helpful to simply bring your research objective to mind: What would you like to find out?

Work with mind-maps while planning and carrying out your research. Break down the overall project „B.Sc./M.Sc. thesis“ into small work steps. Try to rather work every day for a limited time than allowing for large gaps between your work periods.

2.7. Literature Research

„There seems to be no literature for my thesis topic.“

If anyone had written exactly your research work before, we would not assign the topic in the first place. Your literature research should initially be carried out in a broad and general manner. Example: Your topic is „Agriculture on the moon“. Your search about „agriculture AND moon“ in the library catalogue may have resulted in zero results, which is hardly surprising. Instead, you should be looking for „life on the moon“, „human settlement in hostile environment“, „agricultural cultivation under glass“, etc.

Keep track of interesting literature and potentially work with a program of literature administration/citation manager (Zotero, Citavi, Endnote, etc.) You'll find information in our guidelines and on our website at „Effektive Literaturrecherche“:

<https://marktlehre.uni-hohenheim.de/leitfaden>