



Designing an MA Thesis Concept

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The final part of your MA is writing your thesis. In this document, we offer some advice to help you prepare for this last phase. Start by looking for a possible supervisor. If you do not already have someone in mind (who you may know from your classes, for example), search the different profiles and publications of the department's staff. This will help you identify anyone who is an expert in your field of interest (or in a related field), and thus could be a good person to discuss your ideas and plans with.

To organise your ideas and plans, we ask you to write a short concept of your planned MA thesis, project or research. This contains a preliminary research question and information on what your project will consist of (answering the questions where, who, how, when, why, how much and how many?). It is important here to present a solid argument explaining the relevance of your research project: what wider lessons can be drawn from your research or case study and why do these matter? You will have to explain, in a concise way, how your research builds upon the existing theoretical literature (describe which particular body of literature and why) and what gaps in this state of knowledge you hope your research to fill. One likely option is that you locate your work firmly within specific debates in the discipline of anthropology. Another option is that you explain what your anthropological research or perspective may contribute to an interdisciplinary field that, for example, addresses a particular theme or region, rather than being a purely anthropological debate.

When you develop your ideas, try to make sure they can be achieved within the frame of an MA thesis, which is a total of 30 ECTS, 10 for the research and 20 for the writing, and is between 80 and a maximum of 120 pages in length. Hence, you should ask: can this research question be meaningfully answered within the framework of an MA, and with the methods and theoretical approach I have chosen?

We invite you to submit, in three to five pages:

- an introduction, which includes a brief overview of the project, an explanation of the relevance of the project, and potentially, your motivation for conducting the study;
- your research question;
- the theoretical framework, describing how your project relates to existing (anthropological) knowledge that has been developed by scholars with similar interests; what new insights you intend to provide and why your academic community needs those insights (i.e. the expected or potential outcomes and significance of the study);
- a description of the kind of methods you will use and why, including your thoughts about accessing possible research participants;
- a reference list;
- depending on the extent to which you have already developed your plans, additional aspects such as a preliminary thesis outline with sub-questions per chapter, and a plan and ethics section.

Please read the IKSA Anthropology Writing Guidelines for the format and style and for additional considerations for writing academic texts in your concept proposal as well as the final MA thesis.

Finally, note that your thesis concept is an anchor, not a straitjacket. Once you have completed your thesis you will probably find that it looks different from your initial concept. This is normal in anthropological research, as along the way you will discover things you had not thought about before, ask new questions and read additional works and theories. Nonetheless, you need to start with a concept and present it in a structured way. This will help you to organise your thoughts, stay focused and keep track of your progress, and to reflect constructively upon your ideas as they develop. It will also help your supervisor to understand your aims so that they can support you in achieving your goals or warn you when you need to adjust them.