

Thesis Manual of the MA History

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Introduction

This Master's Thesis Manual is aligned with the [Master's Thesis Regulations of the School of Humanities](#). Those general regulations set out the guidelines regarding the nature and format of the thesis, its assessment, and its completion within the framework of VU-wide quality assurance in education and the regulations of the Faculty Examination Board. This programme-specific manual concerns the Master's thesis trajectory within the one-year Master's Programme in History. Like the Master's Thesis Regulations of the School of Humanities, this manual is intended for both students and academic staff, ensuring that all parties are informed about the shared objectives and opportunities associated with the thesis process.

Master's Thesis Trajectory

The Master's thesis trajectory comprises both the Master's thesis and the Master's Thesis Colloquium and carries a total of 18 ECTS credits, equivalent to 504 study hours. Together, these components constitute the Master's thesis trajectory, the admission requirements for which are specified in the programme's **Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER)**. The TER also stipulates that Master's students must have obtained at least 24 ECTS credits before commencing their Master's thesis. Students may apply to the Examination Board for exemption from this requirement.

Master's Thesis Colloquium

While working on the Master's thesis, students are required to participate in the accompanying Master's Thesis Colloquium. The purpose of the colloquium is to promote interaction among students during the Master's thesis trajectory, encourage satisfactory progress and timely completion, facilitate discussion of the theoretical, historiographical and methodological aspects shared by individual thesis projects, and provide students with opportunities to practise presenting their research findings clearly and effectively.

The Master's Thesis Colloquium is a module offered in the second semester. The lecturer coordinating this module also serves as **Thesis Coordinator**. The Thesis Coordinator is responsible for organising the colloquium but is not responsible for the academic supervision of individual theses. Responsibility for the supervision of the Master's thesis rests with the student and the Supervisor.

One Master's thesis trajectory commences each academic year, in January. If there are sufficient candidates, the Thesis Coordinator may decide to initiate an additional Master's thesis trajectory in September. If there are insufficient candidates to form a group, the Programme may agree upon an individual trajectory with students for both the Master's thesis and the associated colloquium activities.

Topic and Supervisor

The History Programme at VU places great value on students' freedom to choose the topic of their Master's thesis. In principle, all topics of the student's personal interests are eligible, provided that a supervisor is available with sufficient expertise in that subject. If a student has chosen a profile, the thesis topic must be related to that profile. Furthermore, the topic of the Master's thesis must differ from that of the

Bachelor's thesis, including a Bachelor's thesis completed within another programme or at another institution.

The relevance of the topic, the feasibility of the research, and its position within current scholarly debates are discussed with a supervisor from the programme's academic staff. The research question, selection of sources and literature, and broader scholarly context are defined in close consultation with the supervisor.

Students may take the initiative in approaching a member of academic staff to discuss possible thesis topics. In doing so, students are encouraged to explore the expertise available among lecturers, chair groups, research centres, and the various projects within the Faculty. Academic staff publish their research profiles, projects, and publications through institutional websites, particularly through the **VU Research Portal (PURE)**. Students may always contact the Thesis Coordinator for information and advice.

In addition, each year the Thesis Coordinator will invite academic staff to propose thesis topics related to their ongoing research. A list of these topics will be made available through the Canvas page of the Master's Thesis Colloquium.

If a student encounters difficulties in finding an appropriate Supervisor, the student should first contact the Thesis Coordinator. If the Thesis Coordinator and the student are unable to resolve the issue, the matter will be referred to the Examination Board. Within ten working days, and in consultation with the Programme Director of the Programme, the Examination Board will appoint a Supervisor.

As indicated in the Faculty Master's Thesis Regulations, it is possible in certain cases to involve a **Second Supervisor** in the process. Within the History Programme, approval from the Programme Director is required for this arrangement.

Second Assessor

In addition to the Supervisor(s), the appointment of a **Second Assessor** is mandatory, as stipulated in the Faculty Master's Thesis Regulations. Within the History Programme, the Second Assessor is appointed by the Thesis Coordinator. Consequently, students are not required to find a Second Assessor themselves.

The Thesis Coordinator consults with the Programme Director regarding the appointment of Second Assessors. In doing so, the Programme Director takes into account requirements concerning independence, available staffing capacity, and any workload distribution agreements within the Programme, Department, or Faculty. In all cases, the Second Assessor must apply the **Intended Learning Outcomes** of the Programme in which the Supervisor is appointed.

Thesis Contract and Thesis Work Plan

Once the thesis topic has been approved, the student and the Supervisor draw up a **Thesis Contract**. The relevant form can be found on the Canvas page of the Master's Thesis Colloquium. This document stipulates the arrangements agreed between the student and the supervisor. The Thesis Contract is accompanied by a **Thesis Work Plan** and schedule.

The Thesis Contract provides clarity regarding supervision arrangements. Students know what they may expect from the Supervisor and what is expected of them. Likewise, the Supervisor knows what is expected in the supervisory process. The

purpose of the Thesis Contract is to prevent unnecessary study delays and to provide a framework for resolving ambiguities and problems should they arise.

The Thesis Contract must include at least the following elements:

- the start date and planned completion date;
- the name(s) of the Supervisor(s);
- a description of the thesis topic;
- arrangements regarding the frequency of supervisory meetings;
- the period within which the Supervisor and the Second Assessor will review the thesis;
- the number of ECTS credits;
- the language in which the thesis must be written;
- any additional agreements.

The Thesis Work Plan structures the student's thinking about the topic and the activities required for the thesis project. It includes a timetable for the various stages of the research and writing process. Both the Supervisor and the student are expected to adhere to this timetable and share responsibility for monitoring progress throughout the Master's thesis trajectory.

Approval and Filing

The student submits the Thesis Contract and Thesis Work Plan through **OnStage**. The student and the Supervisor are jointly responsible for ensuring that both documents are completed clearly and accurately.

The Thesis Coordinator reviews the documents to ensure that they are complete and conducts a brief substantive review. If the Thesis Coordinator identifies any deficiencies, the Supervisor and the student may be asked to revise the Thesis Contract and/or Thesis Work Plan. Following revision, the documents must be resubmitted through OnStage. The Supervisor subsequently approves the plan in OnStage (go/no-go decision).

Form and Frequency of Supervision

Students are entitled to systematic supervision during the preparation of their Master's thesis. Supervision includes at least the following elements:

- advice on the selection and delimitation of the thesis topic;
- approval of the thesis proposal and research design;
- guidance on revising parts of the thesis that require improvement.

The frequency of supervisory meetings is specified in the Thesis Work Plan. The student and the Supervisor agree on deadlines for submitting parts of the thesis in preparation for supervisory meetings. As a guideline, students are entitled to a minimum of four and a maximum of eight supervisory meetings. According to workload allocation norms, a Supervisor may spend a maximum of 30 hours on the supervision of a Master's thesis, including all feedback and corrections.

The Supervisor provides written feedback on submitted work, either in the margins of the text or in a separate document. During supervisory meetings, the Supervisor explains this feedback orally and advises the student on subsequent steps. Effective feedback should have the following characteristics:

- recognisability, enabling the student to identify areas for improvement;

- applicability, providing clear and concrete guidance for future work;
- safety, ensuring that the student does not feel intimidated or unsafe as a result of the feedback received.

When submitting a revised version of any part of the thesis, the student must also submit previous versions. Corrected versions must be retained until the Master's thesis has been completed.

The Supervisor will provide feedback on draft sections a maximum of two times. If, after two rounds of feedback, the draft sections remain insufficient, the Supervisor must document this and take it into account in the final assessment.

The Thesis Contract specifies the deadline for submission of the final version of the Master's thesis. It also specifies the period available to the Supervisor(s) and the Second Assessor for reviewing the final submission.

Delays

If the Supervisor has not received any material, or if material is not submitted on time, the scheduled supervisory meeting will lapse.

Supervisory meetings may be cancelled by either the student or the Supervisor(s), provided that notice is given at least two days in advance, except in exceptional circumstances.

If a Supervisor is unable to fulfil their responsibilities due to prolonged absence, illness, or other circumstances, this must be communicated to both the student and the Thesis Coordinator. In consultation with the Chair holder responsible for the Supervisor concerned, the Thesis Coordinator will arrange a replacement.

If a student is unable to meet their obligations due to prolonged absence, illness, or other circumstances, this must be communicated to the Supervisor. The Thesis Work Plan and, where necessary, the Thesis Contract will then be revised accordingly.

If, without prior consultation, a student exceeds the agreed submission deadline for the final version of the Master's thesis by more than three months, the thesis must be awarded a failing grade.

Language of the Master's Thesis

The Master's Programme in History is bilingual. Students are therefore free to submit their Master's thesis in either Dutch or English.

Final Assessment

The assessment procedure and the use of assessment forms are described in the Faculty Master's Thesis Regulations.

The final assessment of the Master's thesis is communicated to the student during a meeting with the Supervisor(s), after which the thesis is discussed in detail. During this meeting, the student and Supervisor(s) also evaluate the thesis process. The discussion includes both the supervision provided and the substantive and organisational aspects of the Master's thesis trajectory.

Upon request, students must be given access to the thesis cover sheet and assessment forms.

To obtain a passing final grade, the student must receive a satisfactory assessment on all components of the assessment form. The following grading scale serves as a guideline:

- Satisfactory = 6
- More than satisfactory = 7
- Good = 8
- Very good = 9

If a student receives predominantly "more than satisfactory" or "good" assessments, the final grade will normally be 7 or 8, respectively. A roughly equal distribution between satisfactory and more than satisfactory assessments will normally result in a grade of 6.5; a roughly equal distribution between more than satisfactory and good assessments will normally result in a grade of 7.5, and so forth.

The Supervisor must justify the assessments in the section entitled *Comments*. The procedure for determining the final grade between the Supervisor and the Second Assessor, particularly where initial assessments differ, is described in the Faculty Master's Thesis Regulations.

Timeline

The Faculty Educational Office provides students and academic staff with timely information regarding the deadlines by which grades and documentation must be submitted for a diploma to be awarded on the intended graduation date.

As a guideline for the final phase of the Master's thesis trajectory, and the roles of the student, Supervisor(s), and Second Assessor, the following schedule may be followed within the History Programme. To ensure equal treatment and equal opportunities for all students, it is essential that all academic staff adhere to the deadlines for the submission of both the initial and any revised version of the Master's thesis.

- Around **1 June**, the student submits the first complete version of the Master's thesis to the Supervisor.
- The Supervisor has a maximum of ten working days to read the thesis and provide feedback.
- Around **10 June**, the student receives feedback on the thesis. The student then has approximately two weeks to revise the thesis.
- Around **1 July**, the student submits the revised final version through OnStage.
- The Supervisor ensures that the plagiarism check automatically conducted in OnStage has been completed satisfactorily. In the event of a problematic outcome, the procedure described in the Faculty Master's Thesis Regulations will be followed.
- The Supervisor and the Second Assessor assess the Master's thesis independently within OnStage.
- Around **10 July**, the Supervisor(s) and the Second Assessor must determine the final grade and complete two assessment forms. The Supervisor must provide as detailed a justification as possible; the Second Assessor may limit their evaluation to completion of the assessment rubric.
- Once agreement has been reached regarding the final assessment, the Supervisor completes the final assessment form in OnStage. This form is then

made available to the student. The Supervisor arranges a meeting with the student to discuss the outcome.

- If the student submits the final version of the Master's thesis after the deadline of approximately 1 July, the Supervisor is not obliged to review it, since academic staff are entitled to take annual leave during July and August. In exceptional cases, an alternative arrangement may be agreed between the Supervisor, the Second Assessor, and the student, allowing submission later than 1 July.
- The Education Office automatically receives the thesis dossier, processes graduation, and ensures archiving.
- If the Master's thesis receives a failing grade, a revised version may be resubmitted before **15 August**. Final grades must be registered by the end of August.
- If the assessors decide that the revised version also merits a failing grade, the result must be formally recorded. The student will then be required to write a new Master's thesis on a different topic in the following academic year under the supervision of different academic staff.

For the assessment procedure and the individual steps involved in thesis assessment, please refer to the Faculty [Master's Thesis Assessment Flowchart](#).