

# How to write a Master Thesis in the European Master Programme in Law and Economics

## 1. Introduction

This paper about writing a master thesis during the EMLE Programme should be a guideline for you and help you write your Master Thesis. Please read it carefully before you start working on your thesis.

## 2. Form and Contents of the Thesis

The thesis must be related to law **and** economics and must follow an interdisciplinary approach. It is not acceptable if only legal or economic aspects are discussed. Moreover the thesis should not discuss broad topics in general terms, but should concentrate on more specific problems and discuss them in a profound way.

### 2.1 Length and form

The length of the thesis should be approximately 15,000 words, including footnotes and any appendices but excluding the bibliography. The EMLE Board may penalise students who write more than 16,000 words. There is no lower bound for the length of the thesis. It needs to be written on a computer as you are required to submit an electronic version. The font size should be 12 points, double-spaced. Make sure that there is enough space for correction notes at the side margin. Suggestion: top margin 2.5 cm; bottom margin 2 cm; left side margin 4 cm, right side margin 2 cm. Please pay attention to correct spelling and appropriate style.

### 2.2 Submission

The thesis must be submitted by Monday, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2010 without exception.

At this date, hard copies of the thesis must be *posted* (they may arrive later) to the supervisor and the external examiner. The addresses will be published in due time.

At the same date an electronic version has to be emailed to:

- the Supervisor
- the External Examiner
- thesis2010@emle.org

The electronic version must consist of one document only. We will not accept a submission that consists of a series of appendices, a separate cover sheet, etc. The file must be in **.doc** or **.pdf** format. Binding is not strictly necessary for the hardcopy but it would be nice not to receive a loose collection of sheets.

The first page of the thesis must contain an **authorship declaration** with a handwritten signature. The declaration should read:

"I hereby declare and confirm that this thesis is entirely the result of my own work except where otherwise indicated. I acknowledge the supervision and guidance I have received from... This thesis is not used as part of any other examination and has not yet been published." Date/Signature

### 2.3 Language

In principle, the thesis should be written in English, but an exception can be made if three conditions are fulfilled:

1. courses in the third term were taken in that language (e.g. in German in Hamburg, in French in Aix-en-Provence),
2. the language is not your mother-tongue,
3. an external examiner can be found to read the text in that language.

### 2.4 Content

The thesis is a scientific text, not a composition or an essay. Therefore, it is necessary to use an objective and abstract style. The text should not contain emotional passages. You have to form a clear structure in order to guide the reader through your questions, your arguments and towards your conclusion.

Therefore, you have to describe your research question(s) at the beginning. It is useful to explain why these questions are important for the development of the legal or economic science and why the study was undertaken. You should state the aims of the paper and give sufficient background information to allow the reader to understand the context and the significance of the question(s) you

are trying to address. Moreover, you have to explain the scope of your work, i.e. what will and will not be included.

Then your explanatory, analytical, and argumentative parts should follow. Explain the methods you use for your analysis. Describe the results and actual statements of observations, including statistics, tables and graphs. Then discuss the question you described at the beginning.

At the end of your thesis you have to figure out your conclusion. This conclusion should be as concise as possible and it should also refer to the questions at the beginning of your work. You have to make clear what is the strongest and most important statement that you can make from your observations.

### 3. Structure

Since the only aim of your thesis is to describe and to solve the problem you have chosen, you should avoid taking up questions that are not important for your scientific problem, even if they are very interesting. Normally, you should not even mention them in a footnote. Any other explanation would be a digression from your topic.

As all scientific texts, your thesis has to be structured. Since the individual parts must not be too short, four levels are usually sufficient. In Germany, two alternative systems are used to structure such theses and other scientific publications. The first one uses upper case letters on the first, roman numerals on the second, Arabic numerals on the third, and lower case letters on the fourth level. The second system uses only Arabic numerals separated by dots:

<u>First system:</u>	A.	<u>Second system:</u>	1.
	I.		1.1.
	1)		1.1.1.
	a)		1.1.1.1.
	b)		1.1.1.2.
	2)		1.1.2.
	II.		1.2.
	B.		2.

It is optimal to use one subsection for each individual thought or idea you have. You should devote a new subsection with a new heading to every new argument in your chain of argumentation. Only the less important arguments can be summarized under the same heading. By the way, good headings describe the subsequent problem or argument with only one noun, and not with a long question or sentence.

Since you want to guide the readers and to convince them of your opinion, you have to ensure that every statement, argument, opinion and conclusion follows from the parts you have written before. Your train of thought has to be complete and comprehensible. It should not contain any gaps. On the other hand, each thought or argument can only be used for one step of progress on the way to the conclusion. Thus no part of your work should be repeated elsewhere in your paper.

#### 4. Literature work, citing, and bibliography

When you have found a relevant opinion in the literature, your job is to examine it and to find out whether it is right or wrong. Normally, you will find many different utterances to your topic, so that you can decide which one of them is most suitable. Or you may think that all of them are wrong. Then you have to reject them (arguing why) and to develop your own solution. In any event, you have to mark all thoughts and arguments that are not your own.

Incorrect use of other people's ideas and words will be taken extremely seriously and penalties will be imposed. To avoid that, you have to be very careful to follow a simple three-step procedure.

Firstly, you have to build a bibliography that lists *all* sources you used in alphabetical order at the end of the thesis. There are various methods of citing books, articles, websites, etc, but be sure to state at least the surname and initial of the author(s), title of the publication, title of the journal or book (if applicable), publisher (optional), and the time and place of publication, wherever possible.

Secondly, whenever you use somebody else's arguments, you have to indicate this within the main text. The usual way to do that is to make a footnote which states the author and year of publication so that the reader can identify the source in your bibliography. Specify page numbers if possible and make clear exactly which thoughts are taken from that source.

Thirdly, when you **quote** from a source, in addition to stating the source in the way outlined above, you have to indicate exactly which words are not yours, even if you quote only part of a sentence. You can do that either by using quotation marks or italics, or by setting the quote apart from the main text, or any combination of these means. **To use only a footnote at the end of a quote is not sufficient and will be considered as plagiarism.**

The theses will be checked for plagiarism with a computer programme that detects incorrect citation. Penalties may range from a reduction of the thesis grade to non-acceptance of the thesis.

Students are warned that Wikipedia is not always a reliable source. Dates of last visit should be supplied for all internet sources.

## **5. Thesis Seminar**

The following applies only to students who spend their third term in Hamburg, but similar arrangements will be made at other third term universities.

In Hamburg there will be a thesis seminar in May or June. During this seminar every student is expected to present an outline of his/her thesis and to discuss the subject with their fellow students. This will help you to identify mistakes and to see if all arguments of your train of thought are conclusive. To prepare yourself and your colleagues for this discussion, you have to write an outline of your thesis. This outline shall consist of four to five pages and shall present the questions you are trying to solve and the main arguments and thoughts on your subject. The outline should also include a table of contents and an overview of the most important literature. The outline has to be submitted to the lecturer and your colleagues at least one week before the discussion. More information on the thesis seminar will be published in due course.

## **6. Supervisors and External Examiners**

Each student is assigned, and each thesis is evaluated by, a supervisor, who is a faculty member of the third term university, and an external examiner, who is not. Students should aim to consult with the supervisor on a regular basis during all stages of writing the thesis. They are also encouraged to ask other experts for advice. Generally speaking, the more opinions you collect on your thoughts and your work, the better.

The external examiner, by contrast, is relevant to the students only when it comes to submitting the thesis. Students should not approach the external examiner for advice as his or her role is limited strictly to evaluating the thesis.

## **7. Materials and Libraries**

A scientific thesis such as the one conducted during the EMLE Programme requires extensive literature work. Even if the most important part of your thesis is to find your own conclusion to your research question and to give good reasons for it, it is also necessary to study the literature on your subject and to evaluate it critically. Please refer to information provided by your third term university on sources of the relevant literature, e.g. libraries.