

HOW (NOT) TO WRITE A THESIS

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS

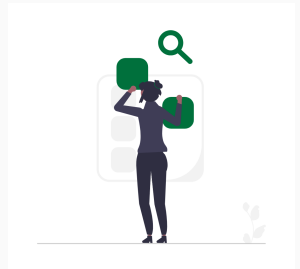
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HSG Bachelor Master Thesis Info Event
theCO, 13. April, 2026



1. Finding a topic/supervisor
2. Formulating a research question
3. Making progress and obtaining feedback
4. Using AI
5. Submission

FINDING A TOPIC/SUPERVISOR



Recommendation 1: Topic

Find a **topic** that you **like**: You will spend a lot of time with it (full-time work for several weeks)!

Note

- **Start reflecting** on possible topics **early on**.
- Narrow down your topic to an issue that is **tractable** within a thesis (e.g., a specific aspect of dynamic pricing for skiing in Switzerland).
- For an **empirical** thesis, make sure that you (will) get access to the relevant **data** before you start.
- For a **theoretical** thesis, agree with your supervisor on a **fallback option** that works even if you fail to achieve what you have in mind.
- It makes sense to be less **ambitious** for a BA than an MA thesis.

Recommendation 2: Supervisor

Find a **supervisor** that you **know** and **trust**: This may be your most important piece of academic work!

Note

- The supervisor should be **knowledgeable** in the relevant field (there are usually several candidates).
- Potential supervisors who **do not respond** to emails within a reasonable time (i.e., a few days) may be a **risky choice**.
- If requested, provide **supporting material** (e.g., a short proposal, info about relevant previous coursework, etc.).
- **Do not show unprepared to preliminary meetings**: Time is precious!
- **Avoid contacting many potential supervisors in parallel** using impersonal emails. Do not waste academic resources!

FORMULATING A RESEARCH QUESTION



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Recommendation 3: Research question

Work on your research question until it is **simple** and **clearly formulated**.

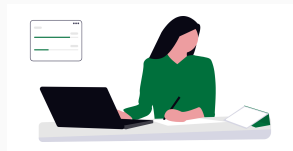
Note

- Ideally, your question addresses a **new** and **relevant** problem.
- Answering **old** questions is **not very interesting** unless a relevant aspect has changed (e.g., new data, new country, new regulation, new method, something was wrong, etc.).
- Asking and answering **new** questions is **more interesting** but also **more challenging**.
- Try to make a **contribution**, either through **novelty** or **smart use of methods**, and make sure to **tell the reader** what it is.

Examples

- Why does X lead to Y?
- What is the impact of X on Y?
- What are the costs and benefits of policy P?

MAKING PROGRESS AND OBTAINING FEEDBACK



Recommendation 4: Progress

Do not hide! You are responsible for making progress on your thesis. Yet, the supervisor and your peers may help you make progress.

Note

- Progress starts with reading the **relevant literature** and clarifying how you add to it. **Do it!**
- The **first attempt** at something is rarely the best: **Iterate** your thinking and writing.
- **Plan ahead:** Give yourself sufficient time to think and work things over — equations may be wrong, estimates may be biased, statements may not hold generally, etc.
- **AI** can help you make progress. Yet, play according to the rules, and disclose its use!

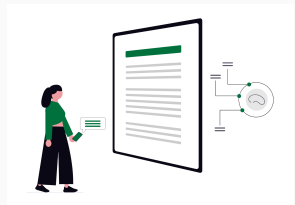
Recommendation 5: Feedback

Invest into **obtaining meaningful feedback**. Do not despair over critical feedback but take it seriously.

Note

- To obtain **meaningful feedback**, you must provide **sophisticated input**. This requires work!
- With your **supervisor**, you should discuss the (i) **structure**, (ii) **contribution** relative to the literature, (iii) **analytical approach**, and more.
- With your **peers** (including AI), discuss **anything** that comes to mind. Be extra careful regarding the quality of feedback from AI.



USING AI



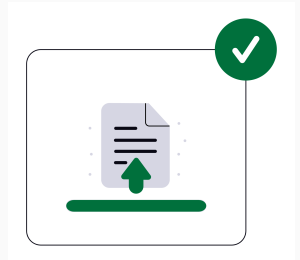
Recommendation 6: AI

Use AI with care: It hallucinates, invents references, and produces generic language. You do not want your thesis to suffer from these shortcomings.

Note

- Use AI as a **support tool**, not a source of truth.
- AI can help with **brainstorming**, dealing with **coding issues**, and improving **grammar** and **style**.
- You remain **responsible** for your thesis and must be ready to defend it in an **oral exam**. If you take inappropriate shortcuts, your supervisor will (probably) reduce the grade.
- Check **HSG rules** and properly **disclose** your use of AI.
- **Disclosure: I used Claude Code  to correct typos, improve grammar and style, and help add figures to these slides written on Overleaf .**


SUBMISSION



Recommendation 7: Submission

Have another human being proofread your thesis before you submit.

Note

- **Formalities matter:** Make sure that your thesis is properly formatted, has clear notation, correct references, etc.
- **Typesetting:** Smart students use **Overleaf**  or other **LaTeX-based software**. If you have not used it so far, it's time to switch!
[Learn LaTeX in 30 Minutes](#)
- Check with your supervisor how **additional materials** (e.g., Python code, etc.) should be submitted.

Thank you!

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