

Master's Thesis Survival Guide

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THE BEGINNING

Choose a topic that matters to you

You'll be totally immersed in this topic for a long time, so make sure you pick something that you're genuinely interested in and passionate about. Picking a topic that matters to you will help sustain your motivation, and make you actually want to investigate whatever it is that you're researching.

Think ahead

Thesis. An ominous term, a word whose sole mention evokes in the minds of students a rumbling horizon disrupted by mythological flying creatures. But let's forget about our fears of fire-spitting lizards. The keyword here is *horizon*. It's not unusual to think of our thesis projects as an uncomfortable *problem* belonging to a distant future which, eventually, we'll find the time and means to deal with. Framing it as a problem (an obstacle, a hurdle) is a mistake. Turn this approach on its head and start thinking of it as an opportunity to undertake an entertaining and stimulating project that will you give the (perhaps once in a lifetime) opportunity to dedicate half a year to explore a topic you're passionate or curious about. Don't stress too much about it, though, just give yourself a moment from time to time to think about potential topics and methods, write down ideas whenever they pop in your head, even if the outline deadline is months away.

THE MIDDLE

Befriend a thesis buddy

No one suggested that thesis writing should be a solitary process. To become a thesis writer you need two things: a text to be read and a reader to read it. As you see, this is a social process through and through. With this in mind as soon as you stop reading this... wait, not now... get away from the brain-sucking screen, go out into the world and start looking for a thesis writing buddy. See this person as a less scary version of a peer-reviewer.

It can be a friend or someone whose judgement you trust. This will be a relationship between colleagues who will offer mutual critical and constructive advice, a fresh pairs of eyes, and someone to bounce off ideas with. Who better than a classmate who's aware of this process and will give relevant advice and support. Next time you're in class turn to your right (it's a right-handed world). Yep. That charming person sitting there can be your next best thesis-buddy.

Embrace organisation

Making a schedule seems like an obvious but necessary point. Breaking down what you've got to do into manageable chunks will save you time. If you portion out your work into smaller tasks, the whole thing won't seem as overwhelming. Use whatever method suits you best – if you're into time management apps, go for it, if you want to make a giant wall chart, do it! The Academic Support Centre has a lot of really great information on time management, so definitely make use of them.

Don't measure yourself against others

If and when you ask friends how much work they've done, it will likely make you feel paranoid (or make them paranoid!). Either way, remember that everyone works at their own pace, every topic requires different processes and you will spend more or less time on different sections than your friends.

See yourself as a katana swordsmith

Much like during the process of tempering a samurai sword or making fancy pottery, writing needs to be seen as a craft. It demands discipline, one or two or three sleepless nights, following a code of honour. You'll hear so many times throughout the programme that writing is a craft that, despite your romantic soul, you'll end up believing it. Embrace this mindset, it will help you get ready for the long but highly-gratifying journey that is writing a thesis.

Get hands on

Get used to printing your work, photocopying and cut-and-pasting. Sometimes printing hardcopies is the best way of really seeing your work, especially picking up on typos and missed words. It particularly helps to print when you get closer to the word count, since endlessly scrolling through a Word document can be rough on the eyes and brain. Also, physically cutting out things like interview quotes can really help during the analysis process.

Kill your darlings

Edit, edit and then...edit! A lot of the work you do won't make it into your final thesis. Even though everything might feel like gold to begin with, remember that a concise, polished end product is what you're after. Being brutal with your editing means letting go of some of your favourite parts, and constantly revising everything. You will tire of going over everything so many times, but that's a good sign that you're doing a solid editing job.

Find an extra pair of eyes

Make sure to get advice and help with language checking and proofreading. The Academic Support are great for this – you can make individual appointments and they will read drafts of your work and give you feedback. Ask a friend (or several) to re-read your work and check for things like spelling mistakes, grammar and missed words – sometimes when you've been staring at something for so long it can be really hard to spot those things. This is so important for your overall thesis, and will really help when it comes to the end product.

Accept the freakout(s)

There will be times during the process when you'll freak out, doubt your whole topic and your decisions. You'll also hit mini walls, experience self-doubt and general anxiety about anything from research scope to methods. At some point you might even consider throwing out your entire topic and starting again – don't do it! Trust the advice of your supervisor and your past self. It's just panic, it'll pass. Learn from your earlier freakouts what helps you get through them/helps them pass faster – from snacks, to calling a friend to changing your scenery for a bit.

THE FINISH LINE

Get ready to showcase your stuff

Once you've handed in your thesis (hooray!) it will soon be time for your examination seminar. Don't worry, the hard part is over! All those hours of work you put into your thesis

are behind you, and now you get to share your efforts with your friends and see what everyone else has been up to. Some of the best ways to prepare for your own examination session are re-reading your thesis and making notes as you go, thinking of possible questions the examiners might ask you, and perhaps doing some mock sessions with a friend. Having a friend ask you questions about your work is a really great way of making yourself feel comfortable and confident before your examination, since you get a chance to articulate your points out loud. It's also a nice idea to attend your classmates' seminars too – as well as being there to morally support your friends, it will help you get a good idea of what to expect in terms of format, and what kind of questions the examiners might ask you.

The academic fika

See the examination as having an academic fika. After all, you *are* in Sweden, you thought the academic world would be impervious to the fika culture? In a nutshell, the examination consists of having an animated chat about your work with people who have read it with keen interest. Instead of seeing them as academic inquisitors, think of the examiners as peers who are sympathetic towards you and want to see your success. There is no one who knows your work as well as you, anyway. Who else will remember how much it took you to cook that especially important argument that allowed your thesis to advance further, or securing that elusive interview with the Important Person.

By the end you'll feel like Super(wo)man

Let's not pretend, it's a demanding process, even arduous at times, but by the end your thesis will be a source of immense satisfaction and pride. After a postgraduate thesis, you'll feel capable of handling any future, real-life tasks. Making an annual accounting report or navigating the bureaucratic seas of adult-life will feel like a breeze. Everyone knows that having a master's degree makes you automatically the favourite among your siblings (or cousins if you're an only child), but also it'll help you develop invaluable skills and competencies that will give you an edge over others in the work market. And it grants you flying powers, let's not forget that.

Kick back!

The most important thing to remember after you finish is to relax. Make sure you take time to enjoy your freedom - you did it! It's easy to feel a bit flat after you hand in your thesis, or feel pressured to quickly rush into the next phase of job-hunting/project-seeking/life-sorting... But don't forget to allow yourself time to unwind - go see your non-Lund friends again (who you've been putting off for weeks), catch up on those TV shows you didn't have time for: relax and enjoy - you deserve it!

GOOD LUCK, LYCKA TILL!

Ally McCrow-Young wrote her thesis on political engagement through alternative consumption, addressing the multiple online and offline spaces of commodity activism using a case study of Oatly's consumers. She graduated with a Master of Science in Media and Communication from Lund University in 2016 and is a co-founder of the Lund University Critical Animal Studies Network. She gained her Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is a doctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen.

Alfonso Méndez Forssell wrote his thesis on media literacy education in Mexico as a potential contribution to civic affairs and the democratization of media through citizen participation in media policymaking. He has a bachelor in Communication Sciences from La Salle University, Mexico and a Master of Science in Media and Communication from Lund University. He is currently working in the policy arena in Mexico. He wants to pursue his thesis project further by going into the field and doing a PhD. He's still trying to figure out the meaning of media.