

Introduction to Research and Master Thesis Methodology

Master 1 IBE

G. de Lanauze

IAE - Université Montpellier

Structure of the course

Six 3-hour sessions

Sept-Dec 2025 - G. de Lanauze

Jan-Feb 2026 - M. Somsing

GdL

Sept. 24

Oct. 21

Dec. 02



Aim: Teaching and coaching for master thesis

1- Brief recap of research as part of the professional world, because you can:

- plan to do a PhD / thesis
- help / be involved in a research process as a manager

2- How to write a master thesis

3- Start thinking early about possible topic for your thesis

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Course objectives

Intended learning outcomes:

- Understand science and the academic research process
- Develop skills to address complex issues by leveraging existing knowledge and conducting relevant studies
- Learn how to begin writing a master thesis
- Understand the objectives, expectations and guidelines for the thesis in the IBE program / Identify a pertinent research issue

Managerial skills outcomes:

Acquire the fundamental knowledge required to write a Master Thesis
Conduct an in depth analysis of a topic of general interest, with relevance to future professional goals

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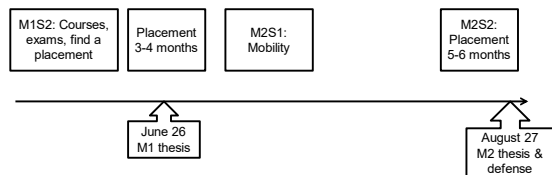
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Contextualization

- Write a master thesis of international standards at the end of master 2

- A tight schedule:



- A long and challenging process



Objective: use master 1 dissertation as preparatory work for a good master 2 thesis

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What is a master thesis?

- **Proof that you reached the graduate standard (master level)**
 - Responds to a debate in the management science literature
- **Demonstration of an understanding of the state of the art**
 - Critical appreciation of existing work
- **A novel contribution that brings new evidence or arguments to bear upon the topic.**
 - Identification and addressing of the research issue: the topic
- **Length for final M2 thesis is usually between 60 and 80 p. min.**
Basically, for the Master 1 : a 50-55 page structured dissertation
 - . A proposition maintained by argument
 - . A dissertation advancing original research

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First step: the master 1 dissertation

- Students who write a master's thesis generally do so over two semesters: Necessity to start early (M1)
- Master 1 dissertation is more like a bibliographic essay focusing on previous literature and a good understanding of the existing body of knowledge
- Based on references : implying that you read extensively about your topic, in order to introduce and structure your research issue
- Aiming at introducing and theoretically grounding the research issue that will be addressed in the master 2 thesis

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The academic context for research

What is science?

« Scientia » = knowledge, scire = verb, to know.

- What we know, what we consider as true.
- Doing science, it's about building models (theories, models, concepts).
- Highly respected,
- Drives credibility



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What is science?

Science is that activity, the underlying aim of which is to further our understanding of why things happen as they do in the natural world.

It accomplishes this goal by applications of scientific method—the process of observing nature, isolating a facet that is not well understood, and then proposing and testing possible explanations.

S. Carey, 2004

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What is science?

- ➡ • Way of knowing
- Study of natural world (process)
- Involves observing, proposing explanations, testing explanations
- Evidence-based

Know, use and interpret scientific explanations of the natural world

- scientific knowledge (content)

Generate and evaluate evidence and explanations

- scientific reasoning, using evidence

Understand the nature and development of scientific knowledge

- how science works (nature of science)

Participate productively in scientific practices and discourse

- how to talk/think about science, how to use scientific knowledge, engage in scientific practice

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Research is...

- **Searching for explanation of events, phenomena, relationships and causes**
 - What, how and why things occur? Are there interactions?
- **A process**
 - Planned and managed – to make the information generated credible
 - The process is creative / circular – always leads to more questions
- **All well designed and conducted research has potential application.**
 - Researchers are responsible to help users understand research implications
 - Public research is a public good
 - May be more rigorous and objective because it is subject to more scrutiny
 - Private research may also be rigorous
 - But research on a company's product may be questioned as biased.

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Science, research, and the University: Overview of the research in France

Core mission of the University worldwide

The Bologna process: setting up the European Higher Education Area:

based on three cycles: Degree/Bachelor – Master – Doctorate
Every master now oriented both professional and research

Actors and structures:

Searchers
Universities / Labs
Ministry of Research / Doctoral schools (Écoles doctorales)
Companies, managers
Agencies, consulting comp. / Data analysts

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Doing Research

Research is all about addressing an issue or asking and answering a question or solving a problem, so...

Identify an issue, question, or problem.

- Talk with people who want or need your study.

Find out what's already known about it.

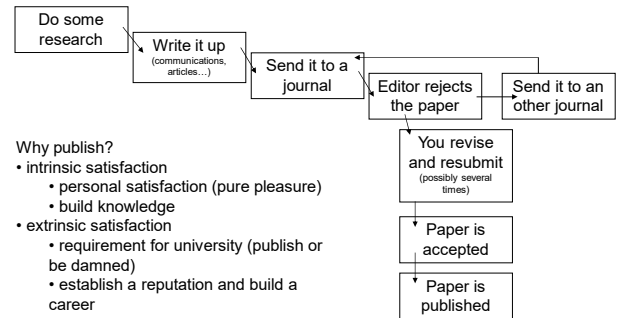
- Talk with experts and/or read their reviews and the original research on the topic.

Plan, cost, and do your study accordingly.

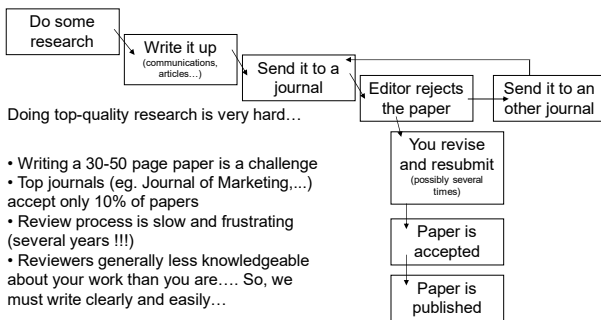
Write it up and submit it for assessment.

- Submit it for publication.
 - Undergraduate projects are sometimes good enough to publish.
 - Your work will **benefit more people** if you publish it.
 - Rule No. 1 in academia is **publish or perish**.

The publishing process: How does it work?



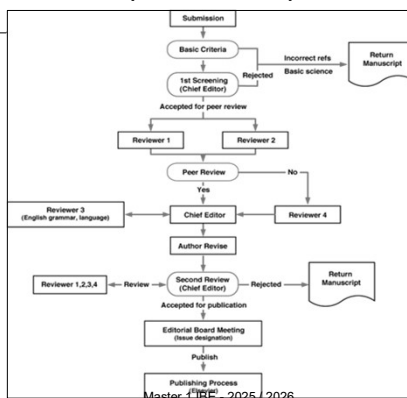
The publishing process: How does it work?



Peer reviewing

- **Peer reviewing is the process by which academic or scientific work is evaluated by independent experts (peers) in the same field before it is published.**
- **These reviewers assess the quality, validity, originality, and relevance of the work to ensure it meets the standards of the discipline.**
- **Peer review helps maintain scientific integrity and improves the quality of published research.**

The peer review process



Research criteria

Research must be :

Reproducible : in the same conditions, we must obtain the same results

Generalizable (external validity)

Cumulative (concordant with previous knowledge)

The Scientific Method

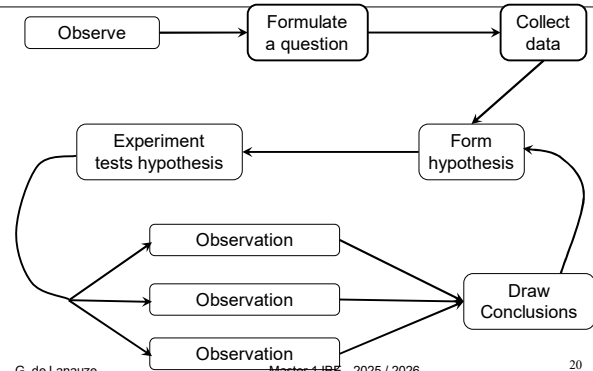
- Starts with observation - can be anything
- Question - what do you want to know?
 - Gather data - what is already known
- Form hypothesis - a possible explanation
- Design experiment to test hypothesis
 - This is the hard part
- Experiments generate more observations
 - Support the hypothesis or not
 - If not modify hypothesis
- Allow us to draw conclusions about hypothesis

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The Scientific Method

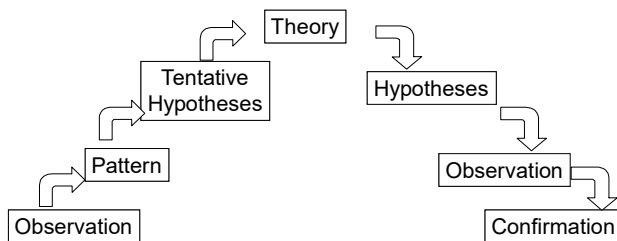


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Philosophical assumptions What's happening in the « real world » ?

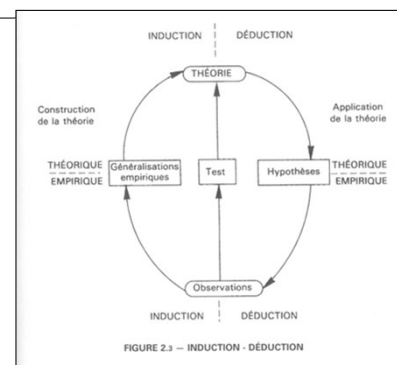


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Induction/deduction



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Induction

In inductive reasoning, it is supposed to be that :

The premises support (without logically entailing) the conclusion
The truth of the premises makes likely the truth of the conclusion
It is improbable for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false.

- Example 1:
- The sun has risen every day in the past.
- Therefore, the sun will rise tomorrow.

The premises of an inductive argument never provide any reason to think that the conclusion is true.

The future will resemble the past !!!

Compare theory

Develop theory

Look for patterns

Form Categories

Ask Questions

Gather information

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Deduction

RECALL: All arguments have two basic elements: statements and inferences.

Statements are true or false.
Inferences have to do with what "follows from" a given set of statements

In deductive reasoning, it is supposed to be that :

The premises logically entail the conclusion
The truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion
It is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false.

- Example 1:
- All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. So, Socrates is mortal.

Theory

Hypothesis

Data collection

Findings

Hypotheses confirmed or rejected

Revision of theory

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Better with examples:

- **Inductive argument:**
 - an argument whose premises make its conclusion likely
 - January has always been cold here in Siberia. Today is January 14, so it is going to be another cold day in Siberia.
- **Deductive argument:**
 - an argument whose premises make its conclusion certain
 - Smith owns only blue pants and brown pants. Smith is wearing a pair of his pants today. So Smith is wearing either blue or brown pants today.

Ways of Knowing

- **Inductive reasoning**
 - Reasoning from the specific to the general
 - Limitations:
 - In order to be certain of a conclusion one must observe all examples
 - All examples can be observed only in very limited situations where there are few members of the group
- **Deductive reasoning**
 - Reasoning from the general to the specific
 - Limitations:
 - You must begin with true premises in order to arrive at true conclusions
 - Deductive reasoning only organizes what is already known

The Manager-Researcher Relationship

Manager's obligations

- Specify problems
- Provide adequate background information
- Access to company information gatekeepers

Researcher's obligations

- Develop a creative research design
- Provide answers to important business questions



What's a good research?

Main characteristics. . .

- Clearly defined purpose
- Detailed research process
- Thoroughly planned design
- High ethical standards
- Limitations addressed
- Adequate analysis
- Unambiguous presentation
- Conclusions justified

Going into a PhD Some overview

Going into a PhD

After the master: the doctorate

The PhD thesis is the union card for academia:

- You belong to a community
- You get to add "Dr" to your name

Why write a thesis?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| It will make you famous | Unlikely |
| It will radically change science | Unlikely |
| It will advance our knowledge | Just a little |
| It will be read by others | Your thesis committee |

Main benefit is : You will learn how to research and how to write

The Good/Bad News



Good news:

- **You only have to write ONE thesis**
 - Except you French and Germans who have to do a habilitation

Bad news:

- **Writing a thesis is hard, painful work**
- **It's unlike any other document**
 - Thesis writing is not a marketable skill

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What is a PhD? Definition

A thesis is an original contribution to knowledge...

A reader will expect that:

- you have identified a worthwhile problem or question which has not been previously answered
- you have solved the problem or answered the question.

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What is a PhD thesis?

Demonstration of an understanding of the state of the art

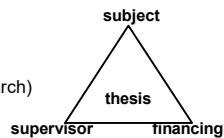
Critical appreciation of existing work

An original contribution

Evaluated systematically

Conditions:

- Duration: Officially 3 years (at least...)
- You need a thesis supervisor (Professor, Doctor HDR (Habilitation to conduct research))
- You need a Financing
- Publicly submitted (thesis committee)
- ... and you need a research project...

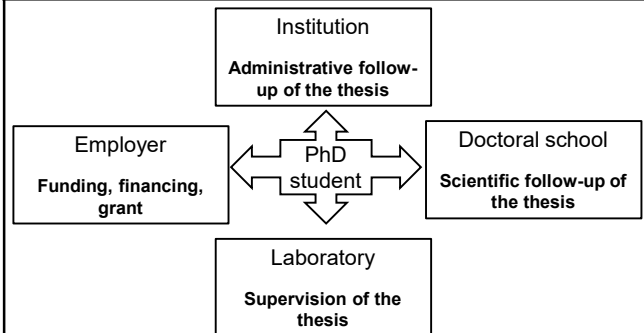


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Organizational context of the thesis



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Sources of financing

Research allowances (allocations de recherche)

Grants and contracts

- Doctoral contracts (funding from the ministry)
- Research contracts (contrats de recherches, laboratories)
- Region grants (bourses de région)
- Other grants (CNRS, Associations,...)

Company fundings (contrats CIFRE (conventions industrielles de formations par la recherche),...)

Institutional contracts (ATER,...)

International grants (mobility, ex: bourses Marie Curie)

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Choosing a thesis subject

You cannot register as a PhD student without a topic

2 solutions:

- Work on a given subject proposed by others
- Define your own subject

Choosing a topic

- Am I truly interested in the subject?
- Does it meet the requirements of the assignment?
- Do I have access to enough information?
- Is the subject limited enough?

It helps to have a good supervisor, good colleagues, knowledge or practical experience, and affinity for the topic.

You must read journal articles to find out what's already known.

Authors also often point out topics for future research.

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Constraints in the choice of a topic

Research directions are not always at the full discretion of the researcher.

Practicalities include:

- Appropriateness of the topic
- Your ability to get supervisory support
- Funding opportunities and commitments

You need a supervisor

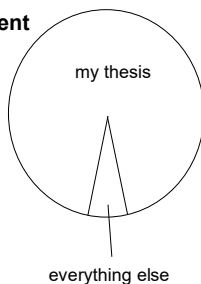
What are the responsibilities of a supervisor?

- Giving guidance on research – usually strong guidance in selecting topic
- Maintaining contact with student, being accessible to student when advice needed
- Giving advice on scheduling of successive stages of the work
- Requesting written work as appropriate, and providing feedback
- Ensuring that the student is made aware of inadequacy of progress or of standards of work below that generally expected
- Actively introducing the student to researchers and events in the academic community
- Informing the student of the institutional regulations concerning the oral examination e.g. nomination procedures for the examiners, and appeals procedures.

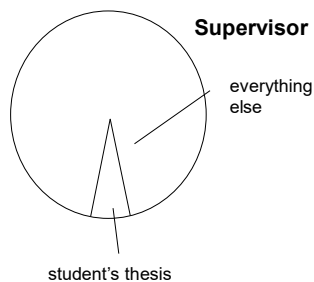
• (modified from The University of Reading 2004)

Contrasting perspectives...

Student



Supervisor



More informations if ever...

- A new opportunity: the elective master 2 « Research and management studies » at the IAE (REM)

– 100 hours dedicated to research training in complement of your M2 IAI

– <http://www.iae.univ-montp2.fr/formations/m2-recherche-et-etudes-en-management>

- More information about PhD at University of Montpellier:

– <http://collegedoctoral.pres-suddefrance.fr>
<http://www.edeg.univ-montp1.fr>
<http://www.contact.asso.fr>

The Master Thesis

General philosophy

A thesis is an original contribution to knowledge:

An advisor/reader will expect that:

- you have identified a worthwhile problem or question which has not been previously answered
- you have solved the problem or answered the question.

A thesis is an attempt to persuade:

A reader/reviewer will ask:

- what is the research question?
- is it a good question? (has it been answered before? is it a useful question to work on?)
- did the author convince me that the question was adequately answered?
- has the author made an adequate contribution to knowledge?

The key to persuasion is organization.

Definition of the master thesis

Study a conceptual issue in the business field, using existing literature and analyzing relevant data from the field.

Write and defend what you identified and found

The final step of your master degree

A work showing your ability to use your knowledge and competencies to analyze and better understand a specified issue

Anchored in the specific field and discipline of your master International Business (can be in Marketing, HR, Logistics, Management, etc..., but international)

Potentially, a first step towards a PhD process

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What the master thesis is not:

The master thesis is not an internship report

The master thesis is not a market study

The master thesis is not a mere description of facts or situations

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What the master thesis is not:

The master thesis is not an internship report:

- Strategies to optimize procurement processes at VALE Nouvelle-Calédonie

The master thesis is not a market study:

- Air Export Consolidation Service: Amsterdam Gateway from Expeditors Toulouse

The master thesis is not a mere description of facts or situations

- The Energy's Power Towards a Third Industrial Era led by Solar Energy

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Rationale for the master thesis

• **Propose the research issue**

- Introduce with the contextual and theoretical interest

• **Expose the theoretical framework**

- What is already known – Literature review
- Introduce the reasons for the research
- Main task for master 1 thesis, and first part of the M2 thesis

• **Develop your study**

- Empirical part: the study is based on primary data from the field
- Your contribution: the results are supposed to enhance knowledge
- Main task for master 2 thesis

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Define your master thesis proposal

Identify a research question and project design

The proposal delineates a research idea that the research will pursue.

The research issue should relate to the subject and field of the master IBE programme

Can be connected with to your internship context (field, company or missions), but it is not compulsory, just a way to have easier access to data for the empirical part

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Hierarchy of importance

Content

the message given

Style

the way that message is presented (structure, language, and illustration)

Form

the appearance of the message (grammar, punctuation, usage, spelling, and format).

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Turn your topic into a research issue

Guidelines:

- A question of general interest (may be worded as a question)
- The thesis will aim at solving the problem
- Outcomes will help practitioners of the field (not only one single company)
- You will not be able to solve all the problems: delineate the perimeter you will address

Turn your topic into a research issue

Examples:

- How Ebola is affecting the economy of Sierra Leone? → why developing countries are so vulnerable to major sanitary crises? : the case of Ebola in Sierra Leone
- The inequality of senior management roles for women within global business environments → Effects of gender diversity on global companies' performances: a culture-based comparison among European countries

Outlines of master thesis (M2)

Title page

Acknowledgements

Summary

Foreword

Presentation of the context, company and mission objectives

Introduction

Introducing the reasons and interest of the research question (contextualization) and the structure of the thesis

First part: Conceptual framework

Theoretical framework of the problem, conceptualization (*literature review*), *identification of the research question*

Second part: addressing the research question

Methodology, data collection and analysis, results and discussion

Conclusion, limits and research avenues

Appendix and references

Limit your Topic

Don't attempt topics that are too broad

Casting the net wide is a common reaction, but, you can easily get lost in a mass of data.

Example: FDI in China

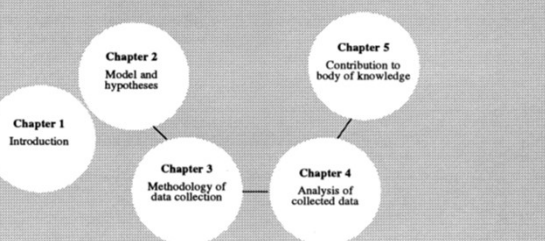
Unclear: Field of research (Marketing; Macroeconomic frame; Investment Conditions; Industry) ?

A statement of a study's limitations in the introduction is useful

Your research situated in a body of knowledge

Body of knowledge

Candidates's research



Australian Marketing Journal, vol.6, Issue1

Literature review

- Provides context for and details about the motivation for the project
- States why the problem is important
- Sets the scene for the work described in the thesis
- Describes what others have done and hence sets a benchmark for the current project
- Justifies the use of specific techniques or problem solving procedures

How to read research?

- 1. Locate and read a few articles from within a field you are comfortable with.
- 2. Read studies that are of interest to you.
- 3. Read the abstract first.
- 4. Identify the research question and objectives.
- 5. Why did the researcher(s) choose a particular setting or sample?
- 6. What were the methods chosen to collect data?
- 7. What were the most important findings?
- 8. Do not be over-concerned with statistical analysis.
- 9. Be critical but objective.

Consulting Source Material and Preparing a Bibliography

Locate source material for a particular topic
(check reference books, catalogues for books in libraries, reference data bases, specialized search engine on the web,)

Prepare an alphabetic list of source material (books, journal articles, other documents, internet-sources)

Standardized format of the reference list

Continues throughout the duration of the writing.

Definition of Terms and Concepts

Key terms must be defined and stated clearly

Essence of concepts and main theories related to the topic and thesis must be explained

Statement of Hypothesis

A particular argument is pursued

A hypothesis is an idea or concept that is expressed as a statement, a contention for which evidence is gathered and discussed logically my or the book's thesis is that ...)

The thesis statement usually appears in the first chapter where the background of the study is described

Data Collection

Determine methods in data collection

Primary Data:

Generated through direct observation (field research) and interviews.

Interviews are highly or semi-structured (questionnaire).

Secondary Data:

Data already collected for same or other purpose

Identified and collected in books, articles, journals, databases

Two types: internal and external

Main Body

Provide a profile of topic or problem under investigation.

Analyze the literature on the subject.

Apply and compare different concepts and tools in order to support your arguments.

Offer your own view or a critic.

Describe your results and outcomes.

The conclusion

Provide a brief summary of main findings.

Show the relevance of your findings and draw conclusions.

Point out the remaining open questions.

Bibliography

A bibliography is a complete list of the consulted sources you use in writing a report

All references must be included (even when not directly quoted)!!

References can be from Books, Journals/Periodicals, Conference Papers, Unpublished Sources, Internet Sources, Corporate reports or Author's Interviews...

Why do we have to write a bibliography?

We need it because:

- Ideas come from many sources
- References are justifying what you say: Give access to proofs to your reader
- You must give credit to your sources for their ideas
- You are guilty of plagiarism if you claim someone else's ideas as your own

Referencing

The aim of referencing is:
to achieve clarity and consistency in crediting other authors, to point out statements or ideas useful for your own analysis, to analyze or refute another author's claim.

Scholarly standards:

„Footnote system“ :

or

„Harvard system“:
Better solution for the thesis

Rappaport¹ pointed out the idea of ...

¹ Alfred Rappaport, *Creating Shareholder Value*, New York, 2001, p. 46 (or: pp. 60-70)

² Ibid (or: *Ibid* p. 50)

³ [www:usda.pdf](http://www.usda.pdf) retrieved on 03.08.2006

He (Copeland 2002: 62) examined ...

Book Citations

You need:

Author (date) Title of Book (in italics). City of publication, Publisher,

Example:

Day G. S. (1990), *Market driven strategy: processes for creating value*, New York, The Free Press.

Journal/ Review/ Magazine Citations

You need:

Author (date), "Title of article," Magazine Title (in italics). Volume, issue, page(s).

Example:

Morgan, R.M. and Hunt, S.D. (1994), "The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 3, 20-38

World Wide Web Citations

You need:

Author. (if known) **WWW page title** (in italics). [Online]
Available <full http address>, (enclosed in brackets) date
of visit in parentheses.

Example:

Lee, Brian. *About the Middle Ages*. [Online] Available
<<http://geocities.com/Athens/6501/middle.html>>, (June 29, 2010)

Appendices

You can use Appendices to supply additional information (in
graphical, tabular or any other form).

Mechanical Details

Margins: 2,5 cm all sides

Spacing: 1,5

Pages : (minimum of 50 pages)

Font: Times New Roman (New Times Roman)

Font Size: 12

Plagiarism

- **Plagiarism is the act of stealing someone else's work and attempting to "pass it off" as your own.**
- **Types of plagiarism:**
 - Copying
 - Patchwork copying
 - Paraphrasing
- **Avoid plagiarism:**
 - Be honest
 - Quote and/or cite your sources properly

Proper quotations

- **Indirect:** Some researchers note that "motivations to consume local food and beverages at a destination included nine motivational factors: exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience; togetherness, prestige; sensory appeal, and physical environment" (Kim et al., 2009, p.430).
- **Direct:** Kim et al. (2009) note that "motivations to consume local food and beverages at a destination included nine motivational factors: exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience; togetherness, prestige; sensory appeal, and physical environment" (p. 62).
- **Paraphrasing:** Some researchers have observed that health concern was one of the many factors motivating tourists' consumption behaviors of local food (Kim et al., 2009).

Proper quotations

- **Indirect:** Some researchers note that "motivations to consume local food and beverages at a destination included nine motivational factors: exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience; togetherness, prestige; sensory appeal, and physical environment" (Kim et al., 2009, p.430).
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- **Paraphrasing:** Some researchers have observed that health concern was one of the many factors motivating tourists' consumption behaviors of local food (Kim et al., 2009).

Focusing on the first step: The master 1 thesis

Aim of master 1 thesis

- Preparatory work for a better master 2 thesis next year
- 50-55 page dissertation
- To be delivered at the end of June for evaluation (*before the education board council, and in order to assert obtention of the M1 before going on mobility*)
- Focus on context, research scope, and existing literature (*Master 2 thesis will ground on this basis and bring related primary source data to enhance knowledge and address the research issue*)

Application

Application: For next time : October, 21st.

- Think of a tentative issue that could be a possible topic for a master thesis
- Explain the reasons of interest – then word carefully the research issue
- Connect to the online library of the UM and find at least five academic articles related to the research issue in the field of international business and management
- Formally present the reference list

Prepare a short powerpoint presentation :

Outlines (4 slides):

Cover page - Title

1. Contextual background and reasons of interest (1-2 Slides)
2. Research issue (1slide)
3. References of 5-8 selected articles (formally correct; quoted from an academic peer reviewed journal), according to standard referencing rules

- To be sent by email to lanauze.g@hotmail.fr by Oct., 19th

In order to get you off to a right start...

1. Contextual background and reasons of interest

You must convince your reader that your topic is interesting

- ⇒ Explain the origin of the question
- ⇒ Bring some statements related to events or situations he probably knows
- ⇒ Show the consequences

1. Contextual background and reasons of interest

Why is the topics of timely interest? > Illustrate

- Use news articles and illustrations or even personal experiences or observations to show and explain why the issue is real, timely and important.
- At the same time, highlight what information is missing for a full understanding of the problem.

2. The most difficult: identify and word the research issue

Must not be a managerial issue, not looking for advice or decision

- Example:
Should we continue to purchase, manufacture and invest in China?

- > wrong wording
- > too wide
- > decision or information?

A better way to word the issue:

The evolving risks, costs and benefits of purchasing in China

2. The most difficult: identify and word the research issue

Must not be only descriptive

- Example:
What are the different kinds of companies existing in China?

- > wrong wording
- > too wide
- > only descriptive

A better way to word the issue:

Organizational factors influencing chinese companies' performance

2. The research issue

- Define a wider view / take a step back
- Handle concepts that need ot be precisely defined
- Make sure that all the concepts are clearly defined and adressed, especially when they are abstract or complex:
 - Eg: Performance, Culture, Impact,...
- Make sure you keep a coherent approach/ angle of attack/ viewpoint/ perspective
 - Eg: Company/ Consumer/ Buyer/ ...

2. The research issue

- Why do you need to limit your subject?
- Because you will not be able to adress it in 60 pages satisfactorily
- Because your case study will not allow you to generalize to a large perimeter
 - Eg: Do customers' opinions have impact on companies' strategies?

2. The research issue

- **Why do you need to limit your subject?**
- **Because you will not be able to address it in 50 pages satisfactorily**
- **Because your case study will not allow you to generalize to a large perimeter**
 - **Eg: Do foreign customers' opinions have impact on companies' strategies? The case of an online restaurant booking platform**

3. Outlines

- **The structure of the thesis should guide the reader clearly through your argumentation**
- **It is the « backbone » of the thesis**
- **You will work on it during the whole writing, and modify it permanently**
- **Use a short sentence (a few words, as a subtitle) to summarize what you are going to address specifically in the forthcoming section**
- **Don't use generic steps (part 1, part 2, ...)**