



# The thesis (excerpts proposed for student handbook 2025-2026)

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## 1 The thesis (excerpts proposed for student handbook 2025-2026)

You are expected to conduct research in an independent and scientific manner and to write a Master Thesis in the English language on a subject relating to European governance. The word limit is 15,000 words, which *excludes abstract, footnotes, endnotes, annexes and bibliography*. It may deviate by only 500 words. If you deviate significantly from this limit you must seek permission from both your Promoter and the Programme Director, otherwise marks will be deducted.

### 1.1 What structure should a thesis have?

As a general guideline, an MSc thesis must contain the following elements:

- Cover page
- Abstract (500 words maximum)

- Table of Contents
- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2, Chapter 3, etc.
- Final Chapter: Conclusions
- Bibliography
- Annexes (if necessary)

The **Cover page, Abstract, Table of Contents, and Bibliography** are mandatory elements of the submission.

The purpose of **Chapter 1: Introduction** is to give the reader a clear idea about what the point of the thesis is, how you intend to argue that point, and why it is relevant to learn more about this. Apart from answering the classic questions What, How, and Why, the introduction includes a brief road map and describes the scope (and limits) of the thesis.

**Chapters** In tandem with your promoter, you jointly decide both the number of parts and chapters of your thesis. Chapters are the building blocks of the thesis. Each chapter deals with an aspect of the overarching question of the thesis. They must be coherent and logically solid in order to fit in the thesis as a whole. There must be a logical link and sense of progression between the different chapters in order to build a well-structured thesis. Chapters should be approximately the same length, and have the same conceptual 'weight' in order to ensure the flow and coherence of the thesis.

The purpose of the **Conclusions** is to revisit and contrast the research question with the findings discussed in the analysis. The conclusion confronts the question with an answer **and its theoretical and practical implications**. The conclusion can also include speculations about the likely course of a development, suggestions for future research and/or policy recommendations.

**Annexes** should be included in a thesis if both the student and the supervisor deem it necessary. These should be included in the final version of the thesis, or a link should be provided at the end of the thesis to a secure space on a VUB-managed server (e.g. the VUB's onedrive).

## 1.2 Thesis supervision: Promoter and Co-promoters

### 1.2.1 Choosing a Promoter and/or Co-promoter

The choice of the topic is part of your task. It is facilitated through your learning journey early in the first semester, and discussions with professors on the programme, as well as your own personal and professional interests. You will identify potential supervisors of your thesis very early in the academic year. This process will be facilitated by a Thesis Information Session, organised towards the end of the first block of courses, as well as your own research of our staff members (please view <https://researchportal.vub.be/> for hints about our team's research profiles. You will request a supervisor through the VUB's Master Thesis Information System (MaThIS): you are of course welcome to reach out to EuroMaster professors via email or during our Thesis Information Session before making a final request. Supervision by your first preferred promoter is not always possible, due to resource restraints.

### 1.2.2 What is a Promoter?

EuroMaster Promoters possess PhDs and are entitled to supervise at the Master level. They comprise:

- All EuroMaster professors teaching a course
- Post-Doctoral researchers at the BSoG
- in exceptional circumstances, students can, with the approval of the Programme Director, seek supervision from professors or researchers in other departments of the VUB.

A promoter generally has expertise in your research topic, and has the capacity to competently supervise you.

### 1.2.3 Co-promoters

It is not mandatory to have a co-promotor. However, if you think that the quality of your thesis can benefit from additional expertise, you may request one. EuroMaster students operate with both a Promoter and a Co-Promoter when the nature of the research topic falls beyond the specific expertise of the Promoter and requires the academic expertise of a Co-Promoter or if the Promoter feels that she/he alone cannot competently supervise you, given their own supervising schedule.

#### ! Practical recommendations for thesis supervision

1. The student has the right to meaningful, timely, and constructive feedback from the promoter. Generally, you can expect to have four meetings with your (co-)promoter during the entire process.
2. While the promoter is to signal issues and problems in certain aspects of your thesis, s/he is not allowed to provide ready solutions nor final corrections to these issues or problems. The promoter's task in other words is to give advice and guidance that allows you to find and implement the solutions and corrections independently. The (Co-)Promoter will generally:
  - Suggest conceptual and practical frameworks and structures suitable for the Research Question
  - Suggest primary and secondary documents as necessary
  - Ensure clarity, logic, and high-level analyses throughout
  - Keep an eye on any unprofessional practices, from plagiarism to persistent tardiness or lack of writing
  - Review the complete draft of the thesis at least once before the final submission
3. The student and the promoter have the responsibility to respect deadlines that are agreed between the two. A definitive understanding on deadlines should be determined by the promoter and the student after the first few meetings.
4. The promoter has the right to ask the student to resubmit documents that s/he thinks are not suitable or of poor quality, and/or respond with only minimal feedback
5. It is preferable to postpone a meeting/deadline rather than send a document that is known to be of insufficient quality
6. The promoter has the responsibility to comment each of the submissions above within a reasonable period of time that is mutually agreed with the student
7. The promoter will comment each of the above noted submissions once, but not more; each draft Chapter will thus receive feedback once, and the complete manuscript consisting of the commented Chapters will be commented on at general, structural level (i.e. how the chapters link together)
8. After having provided feedback, the Promoter is not required to comment on the details of the undertaken changes, nor to take a position on their correctness, because they are a part of the final assessment.
9. Unless otherwise agreed, no supervision of the thesis can be provided after the end of the exam period (generally from the end of June) until the submission date.

## 1.3 Requirements for building the thesis

Throughout your thesis journey, you will have to submit a number of deliverables to your supervisor in order to show your progress. The following list of milestones are required:

Table 1: Assignments checklist

Item	Date due	Length
Choosing promoter, MaThIS submission deadline	25 November	n/a
First research outline: 'Thesis pitch', initial research question	15 December	500 words
Working research question and initial literature review	20 January	3000 words
Policy/context document	15 February	3000 words
Method and conceptual framework	20 March	2000 - 3000 words
(Empirical) Analysis chapters	15 April	5000 - 6000 words
Complete draft (including introduction and conclusions)	10 May	15000 words

These documents will be submitted through the canvas site "MSc Thesis in European Governance". Your supervisor will then review these and provide feedback either in writing or in person.

## 1.4 Submitting the thesis

### 1.4.1 Specifications for the thesis

Please note the following requirements for the thesis:

- PDF format
- A4
- fully justified paragraphs
- page numbers clearly marked (arabic numerals)
- 1.5 spacing; single spacing may be used for block quotations or footnotes
- Minimum 11 point font; one single font must be used throughout the thesis, with the exception of footnotes or endnotes
- Your documents should also be proofread
- All theses are submitted via Canvas: **documents submitted through email will not be accepted**
- Late submissions will be treated as resits
- The thesis must be written in English
- Left margin: 3.5 cm; right margin: 2.5 cm
- All consulted material must be listed in the bibliography at the end of the thesis
- Throughout the thesis and in the bibliography, there are different ways to refer to sources (Harvard, MLA, APA, etc.): choose one and stick to it throughout the thesis
- **Failure to correctly acknowledge the sources used to write the thesis can be seen as plagiarism; if confirmed, you risk being expelled from the university for academic fraud**
- You should check with their supervisor concerning delivery of hard copies of the thesis

### 1.4.2 Cover or title page

When you are ready to submit your thesis, you will need to generate a cover page. This should be done automatically through the [MaThIS](#) system. If using MaThIS does not work out, please download the template from the VUB's [MARCOM](#) page. NB: you must be logged in to access the page. You can find the specific template by going to <https://max.vub.be> and looking under the headings: Logos and Templates ← Papers and Doctoral invitations ← Master thesis header page. Your title page should contain the following information:

- VUB IES Logo

- Name of the university: Vrije Universiteit Brussel / Institute for European Studies
- Faculty name: (Faculty of Social Sciences & Solvay Business School)
- Title of thesis
- Student name
- Student ID number
- Promoter name
- Co-promoter name (if applicable)
- Date of academic year of submission
- Number of words (not including the bibliography).

After the title, the following words should be included: *“Master thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master after Master of Science in European Integration.”*

### 1.4.3 Late thesis submission

Theses are to be submitted by 31 May in your year of study. If you submit after this date, you will be considered to have failed the thesis, and will have one last chance to submit your thesis on 15 August. Please note, that – unless agreed with your supervisor – no supervision of the thesis can be provided after the end of the exam period, until the submission date. So please try to carry out most of the substantive work on your thesis before the first session deadline.

If you fail to submit your thesis in either the first or second sessions, you have one final opportunity to submit your thesis on 15 December. You will then graduate in February of the following academic year (i.e. not with other members of your cohort). If you choose to do this (or to submit your thesis even later), you must pay the annual registration fee AND pay the thesis fee a second time. You are thus **strongly** advised to aim for the May submission date within your study year(s).

## 1.5 Assessment of the thesis

### 1.5.1 Grading procedure for the thesis

For each thesis the Promoter and Readers (the jury) prepare evaluation reports, which are submitted to MaThIS. These evaluations should be available to you after the grade has been announced. No oral defence is foreseen. However, the jury might ask for an oral defence if there are doubts about the authorship of the thesis. As a general rule, the jury consists of the Promoter and a second reader who is designated by the EuroMaster Programme Board. In case a thesis is supervised by both a Promoter and a Co-Promoter, then a third person must be chosen to complete the jury.

An “Outstanding Master Thesis Award” promotes theses of a very high quality (Summa Cum Laude). To be considered for the award, the thesis must be submitted in the *first* examination period.

### 1.5.2 What we evaluate in the thesis

The following shows the criteria used on the evaluation form by the first and second readers to assess your thesis. **Please do read it carefully:** it may help you in understanding where to focus your efforts on your thesis.

- Research design (clearly formulated, original, feasible?)
- Theoretical backdrop and literature study: Methodology, source material and processing of the research findings
- Conclusions of the thesis (Are they clearly formulated? Are they synthetic?)
- Structure and language
- Other remarks
- Overall evaluation (strengths & weaknesses)

### 1.5.3 Thesis Grading sheet

The following identifies the grading scheme used by the first and second readers in the EuroMaster Programme.

Grade	Description
(20)	Thesis has excellent, distinctive ideas, perfectly organised, and is of exceptional quality; a thorough and thoughtful treatment of the topic presented in a logical and convincing manner; the thesis has a clearly articulated thesis; the ideas are original and complex; sources are used carefully and appropriately to support the original argument; careful attention is paid to language and to details of expression and presentation.
(19)	Thesis has excellent ideas and content is organised suitably; the thesis is well-structured, with clear themes supported by evidence; the ideas are original and complex; sources are used carefully and appropriately; careful attention is paid to language and to details of expression and presentation. Occasional lapses in expressions, in the development of ideas, or in the handling of evidences / or sources.
(18)	Thesis is thorough and thoughtful but lacks somewhat in originality, comprehensiveness or insight; effective and appropriate structure; mostly relevant evidence is used to support the main argument; the writing style is slightly less fluid or sophisticated than the '19-20' theses; attention is paid to language and to details of expression and presentation but with only a few lapses.
(17)	Thesis is well-reasoned and well-organised and with some originality; effective and appropriate structure; mostly relevant evidence is used to support the main argument; ideas are well developed and can be easily followed but occasional errors may distract from the content; the writing style is less fluid or sophisticated than the '18-20' theses; attention is paid to language and to details of expression and presentation but with only a few lapses.
(16)	Thesis is well-reasoned and well-organised but with little originality; clear and appropriate structure; mostly relevant evidence is used to support the main argument but difficulties with incorporation of the sources into the line of the argument is evident; ideas are well developed and can be easily followed but occasional errors may distract from the content; attention is paid to language and to details of expression and presentation but with some lapses.
(15)	Thesis is mostly well-reasoned and well-organised, and shows competency on the subject matter; adequate structure, but there are some problems or limitations in logic, argumentation, insights, or organisation; the main argument shows good critical skills and originality of thought, but that struggles with problems of expression and presentation. Overall, ideas need to be developed in proper depth but can be followed.
(14)	Thesis is mostly well-reasoned and well-organised, and shows competency on the subject matter; adequate structure, but there are clear problems or limitations in logic, argumentation, insights, or organisation; errors in expression and presentation distract from the development of content. Overall, ideas can usually be followed but need further exploration and deeper development.
(13)	Thesis is well-developed but lacks coherence: either because of distracting lapses in language that make ideas difficult to understand or lack of connections and transitions between ideas; Support from sources is weak and not developed enough; nevertheless, this thesis meets basic requirements.

Grade	Description
(12)	Thesis shows a serious attempt but with limited success; there is not clear focus or thesis holding the thesis together; evidence is scanty and not clearly linked to the main argument; the handling of evidence raises some concerns; attention to language and presentation is wavering and uncertain; errors in grammar, punctuation; or spelling distract from the content, but these appear in only a minority of the sentences.
(11)	Thesis shows an attempt but with limited success; there is not clear focus or thesis holding the thesis together; evidence is scanty and not clearly linked to the main argument; the handling of evidence raises serious concerns, as the evidence is unsubstantial or not well related to the main idea; attention to language and presentation is erratic and uncertain; errors in grammar, punctuation; or spelling distract from the content, but these appear in only a minority of the sentences. This thesis contains more errors and or less satisfying development of the content than '12' thesis.
(10)	Thesis demonstrates weak understanding of the material and articulates few coherent argument about it; the thesis might wander among several ideas without developing any single one; there is no thesis; the thesis is relied on quotations rather than developing original ideas; attention to language and presentation is erratic and uncertain; errors in grammar, punctuation; or spelling distract from the content.
(9 or less)	Thesis fails to address the assignment in fundamental ways and reveals serious writing problems of the author and/or the thesis is plagiarized from other sources.