



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

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## I. Introduction

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

## II. Formal requirements

The thesis needs to be written on a computer as you are required to submit an electronic version.

### 1. Length

The length of the thesis should be approximately 11,500 words, including footnotes and any appendices but excluding the bibliography, abstract, tables (in the body of the text or the appendix) and their captions, the authorship declaration, acknowledgements, front page and table of contents.

**If you use a different word processor than Microsoft word, the word count returned by MS Word will be authoritative.** So be sure to check the final text by copying it into MS Word before submission.

The EMLE Board may penalise students who write more than 13,000 words (see §5 (8) of the EMLE Exam and Thesis Regulations).

### 2. Font size and margins

The font size should be 12 points, double-spaced. Footnotes can be in smaller font. Make sure that there is enough space for correction notes in the side margins. Our suggestion is a top margin of 2.5 cm, a bottom margin of 2 cm, a left side margin of 4 cm and a right side margin of 2 cm.

### 3. Document format

Every thesis must be submitted in electronic version (see section II.6 for details).

- The electronic version: The electronic version must consist of a single unified document. We will not accept a submission that consists of a series of appendices, a separate cover sheet, etc. The file must be in the **.doc** or **.docx** format, with the following naming convention: **"EMLE Thesis YourLastName YourFirstName"**.

An additional .pdf version may be sent if you worry about the correct layout, but word count will be judged from the MS Word version.

#### 4. **Language**

Please pay attention to correct spelling and appropriate style.

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

- The language is the official language of your third term University (e.g. German for Hamburg students, French for students from Aix-en-Provence),
- The language is not your mother-tongue,
- Both a supervisor and an external examiner and can be found to read the text in that language.

#### 5. **Authorship declaration**

The first page of the thesis **must contain an authorship declaration** with a handwritten signature pasted as a picture. This declaration should thus be in the same file. 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/Name/Signature]

#### 6. **Keywords and two-digit JEL-code**

The title page of the thesis **must contain 3-5 keywords + 1-3 two-digit JEL-codes**

#### 7. **Topic/title change**

After 1 June, no thesis topic change is possible anymore. Please follow the procedure to change the thesis title or topic as indicated in the Exam and Thesis Regulations.

#### 8. **Thesis submission procedure**

The thesis must be submitted via e-mail by

- **Wednesday 12 August 2020 23.59 CEST**

(See [http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/24-hour\\_clock](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/24-hour_clock) for details about the 24-hour clock system) without exception. Late submissions will be forwarded to the EMLE thesis committee which will either penalize the thesis by applying a significant grade reduction or – in severe cases – reject the thesis entirely.

To submit a thesis the student will have to

- Send an electronic copy of the thesis to [thesis@emle.org](mailto:thesis@emle.org). The mail should have a subject in the form of “**EMLE Thesis YourLastName YourFirstName**”. This e-mail address is only meant for thesis submission. You will receive an automatic reply to your mail, which you can use to check whether your mail arrived. Please note however that it is your own responsibility to make sure that the attached file opens correctly. You can consider to open your sent mail and attachment on a different computer to check that. Should there be problems with the mail submission or attachment after the deadline, the EMLE will take no responsibility for this and will consider your submission late! If you are in doubt, we advise you to submit your thesis during office hours in advance of the deadline, with the specific request to the EMLE management team to confirm that the attachment opens correctly.

### **III. Contentual requirements**

#### **1. Basic requirements**

The thesis must be related to law **and** economics and must follow an interdisciplinary approach. It is not acceptable if only legal or only 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.

It is important to note that the thesis structure and the framing of the central thesis are essential to writing a good thesis. Students are therefore advised to contact their supervisor to discuss these matters at the beginning of the thesis writing process, not at the end.

## **2. Style**

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.

## **3. Structure**

You have to form a clear structure in order to guide the reader through your questions, your arguments and towards your conclusion. 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.

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 sections 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 the strongest and most important statement that you can make from your observations is.

## **4. Use of literature**

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 opinions on 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 (See II.5).

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

## 5. Plagiarism

All theses will be checked for plagiarism with a computer programme that detects incorrect citation. Incorrect use of other people's ideas and/or words will be taken extremely seriously and penalties will be imposed. Penalties may range from a reduction of the thesis grade to rejection of the thesis.

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. Please note that "footnote" in this context refers to both "classical" legal footnotes **and** economics-style APA notations. Both methods of notation are considered valid as long as they satisfy the requirements for proper attribution laid down in this section. Specify page numbers if possible and make clear exactly which thoughts are taken from that source by placing the footnote next to the relevant statement. If necessary repeat the footnote for each statement. "Generalized" footnotes referring to more than one paragraph or sentence (e.g. by placing them in the headline or at the end of a section) are not permitted and **will count as plagiarism**.
- 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 and indenting it,

or any combination of these means **in addition to** the footnote. In these cases, to use only a footnote at the end of a quote is not sufficient, since you have made use of someone else's language without giving due credit (a footnote only gives contentual credit, not text credit). **Using only a footnote but none of the extra notations above will therefore be considered plagiarism.**

Do note that this applies even when quoting only parts of a sentence. In that case use brackets [...] to indicate omissions. The same goes if you want to add words to restructure the sentence: [added text].

Example:

**Original text:** "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is anywhere directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labour."

**Shortened text:** "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, [...] seem to have been the effects of the division of labour."

**Modified text:** "The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour [...] and [the] judgment with which it is [...] directed, or applied [to any venture], seem to have been the effects of the division of labour."

The use of colons (as in: Adam Smith said: The greatest improvement ...) is not sufficient since it does not make clear whether the cited author just expressed the idea following the colon (second case – footnote suffices) or whether he used these exact words (third case – footnote and additional notation required).

Please ascertain that you understand the difference between the second and third cases. This is one of the main sources of wrong citations year after year. To recap:

- If you use someone else's ideas, but describe them **fully in your own words**, a footnote is sufficient as described under "secondly".

- If you use not only the idea but **any** part of the original wording (for example by including parts of an abstract to describe a paper) you will have to make clear which parts of your text were, in fact, written by someone else. Use the methods described under “thirdly” to do so **in addition to** using a footnote. Limit the number of quotations, because the large majority of your thesis should be written in your own words.

Please do also refer to the plagiarism presentation slides sent to each student after the Midterm Meeting. **If you have any questions about plagiarism and correct citations/quotations, please feel free to contact us at [management@emle.org](mailto:management@emle.org).**

## 6. Table of content and headlines

As all scientific texts, your thesis has to be structured and should contain a table of contents.

Since the individual parts must not be too short, four levels are usually sufficient.

We suggest you to use one of two alternative systems to structure your thesis. 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.

#### **IV. Helpful resources**

##### **1. Supervisor and external examiner**

Each student is assigned, and each thesis is evaluated by, a supervisor, who must be a professor, lecturer, assistant professor, or visiting scholar. The supervisor is normally a member of the faculty at which the student is studying during the third term (see also the EMLE Exam and Thesis Regulations, § 5(4)). 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.

Students should not approach the external examiner for advice as his or her role is limited strictly to evaluating the thesis.

##### **2. Thesis supervision**

At every third term university, thesis discussion meetings in the presence of supervisors are organized in the first part of the third term. In these meeting the topics, core ideas and methodology are discussed. Supervision styles differ per third term university and are described on [www.emle.org](http://www.emle.org). Please read how supervision is handled at your third term university. Students are expected to actively seek for supervision, plan their timing and leave ample time for last corrections and spell-checks.

##### **3. 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. All students also have access to the library of the Erasmus University Rotterdam and its resources throughout the EMLE academic year, regardless of the Universities they will attend during their studies.