EUROPEAN MASTER IN LAW & ECONOMICS

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

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I. Introduction

This paper should serve as a guideline for EMLE students and help you write your Master's thesis as last requirement of the EMLE programme. Please read it carefully before start working on your thesis.

II. Formal requirements

EMLE theses should be submitted in electronic form (Word file). Printouts sent by regular post are not accepted.

1. Length

The length of the thesis shall be approximately 11,500 words with an upper limit of **13,000** words, including footnotes, citations (both in-text citations and footnote citations), and appendices, but excluding the bibliography, abstract, authorship declaration, acknowledgements, front page, table of contents and tables (in the body of the text or in the appendices) and other captions (overextending captions will result in grade reductions).

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 §4 (7) 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 **.doc** or **.docx** format, with the following naming convention: "**EMLE Thesis YourLastName YourFirstName**" (e.g. "EMLE Thesis Miller Jessica")**.**

  An additional (identical!) .pdf version may be sent if you worry about the correct layout, but word count will be taken from the MS Word version.

4. Language

Please pay attention to correct spelling and appropriate style. A supervisor may reject a thesis that is written in poor language or 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 be within 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]

Furthermore, students **must** also declare in the authorship declaration whether or not they used any AI tools and, if so, specify the purposes and extent of any AI use (e.g., language improvement or literature reviews).

6. Keywords and two-digit JEL-code

The title page of the thesis **must contain 3-5 keywords + 1-3 two-digit JEL-codes (https://www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php?view=jel)**

7. Topic/title change

The deadline for changing thesis topics and/or thesis titles is **1 May** for students spending their third term in Arizona and **15 May** for all other third-term EMLE students. 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 to the EMLE Management (**via email** to thesis@emle.org and management@emle.org) by

- **Thursday, 15 July 2027, 23:59:59 CEST (Hamburg time)**

(See 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. The deadline will be strictly handled. Therefore, students are urged to submit well in time to avoid any last-minute technical problems with submission. Students may resubmit their thesis only once **before** the deadline. Any thesis resubmission **after** the deadline is strictly prohibited and will be rejected.

III. Contentual requirements

1. Basic requirements

The thesis must be related to law **and** economics ('economic analysis of the laws') and must follow an interdisciplinary approach. It is not acceptable if only legal or only economic aspects are discussed. If this requirement is not met, it may, in serious cases, result in a failing grade. 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 required to contact their supervisor to discuss these matters at the beginning of and throughout the thesis writing process. Students who do not meet their supervisors at all and at previously agreed timepoints might be rejected from submitting their thesis.

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.

2. Structure

You must form a clear structure in 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 should 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 must state 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 focus on the strongest and most important statement that you derive from your observations.

3. 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. Most likely, 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 should reject them (arguing why) and to develop your own solution. In any event, you must 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.

4. 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 must be very careful to follow a simple three-step procedure.

- Firstly, you should 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 **must** indicate this within the main text. The usual way to do that is to provide a **citation** stating the author and year of publication, so that the reader can identify the source in your bibliography. Please note that the term "citation" in this context refers to both "classical" legal footnotes (**footnote citations**) and economics-style APA citations (**in-text citations**). Both methods of citation are considered valid if they satisfy the requirements for proper attribution laid down in this section. Students should use only one citation style (i.e., either footnote citations or in-text citations) and apply it consistently throughout their thesis. Specify page numbers if possible and make clear exactly which thoughts are taken from that source by placing the citation next to the

relevant statement. If necessary, repeat the citation for each statement. "Generalized" citations 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 must 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 **citation and page number**. In these cases, to use only a citation at the end of a quote is not sufficient, since you have made use of someone else's language without giving due credit (a citation only gives contextual credit, not text credit). **Using only a citation but none of the additional 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 – citation suffices) or whether he used these exact words (third case – citation 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 citation 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 **must** 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 providing a citation and page number**. Limit the number of quotations, because most of your thesis should be written in your own words. Unnecessary or excessive use of quotations may lead to a grade reduction or, in severe cases, to rejection of the thesis.

<u>It is also very important to note the following rules:</u>

- All rules mentioned above in this subsection ("4. Plagiarism") also apply to your own academic work outside the context of any examination (e.g., submitted or published journal articles), if any. Such material **must** be treated as if it were written by another author, following all rules mentioned above in this subsection.

- Copying any part of your own written examinations or assignments (including, but not limited to, your bachelor's thesis) in your EMLE thesis—even if you properly quote your own work—is strictly forbidden and will result in rejection of the EMLE thesis.

- Any submission or publication of the EMLE thesis, or any part thereof, **before** the thesis examination has been completed (i.e., **before** students receive their final thesis grades from EMLE Management) is strictly prohibited and will result in rejection of the thesis.

- If the plagiarism-checking software used by the EMLE Management shows that an EMLE thesis—or any part thereof—has already been uploaded by a party other than

the EMLE Management for plagiarism checking or any other purpose, which may result in similarity-rate issues, the thesis will be rejected and failed.

- In addition to plagiarism, the following practices constitute academic misconduct and may result in a substantial reduction in the thesis grade or rejection of the thesis:
  - fabricated or corrupted citations or references;
  - misattribution (citation-content mismatch) or incorrect pinpoints;
  - citations without corresponding entries in the bibliography, or bibliography entries without corresponding citations in the text; and
  - insufficient use of relevant and valid references, or the absence of citations throughout substantial parts of the thesis.
- The EMLE thesis must reflect the students' own intellectual contribution and must be the result of their own work, except where otherwise indicated in the thesis.

If you have any questions about plagiarism and correct citations/quotations, please feel free to contact us at management@emle.org**.**

5. Structure: table of content and headlines

As all scientific texts, your thesis must 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 using 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:

First system:	Second system:
A.	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 must ensure that every statement, argument, opinion and conclusion follows from the parts you have written before. Your train of thought must 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 of the student's third term university (see also the EMLE Exam and Thesis Regulations, § 4(3)). 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. The more opinions students collect on their thoughts and work, the better.

Students should not approach the external examiner for advice as their 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 meetings the topics, core ideas and methodology are discussed. Supervision styles differ per third term university and are described on 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, spell-checks and to fix any technical issues that may arise upon time of submission. Students are obliged to meet with their supervisor several times during the writing process.

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.