

Thesis Proposal Guidelines

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This document serves as guidance for the preparation of a formal thesis proposal at the Competence Centre of Sustainability Governance (HSG-ACA/IWÖ) at the University of St. Gallen.

Length and Focus

The proposal should not be longer than 5 pages; keep it short and concise. Narrow down the question rather than laying out a broad topic. It should give a good idea of why you think this topic is of relevance and how you propose to address it. You can also list options for your research strategy which can subsequently be discussed.

The proposal should include the following:

1. Your name and contact details
2. Working title
3. Background and introduction to the topic
 - a. Why does this topic matter? Explain its relevance to you, the field, and the world.
 - b. It is helpful if you frame your topic as a problem to solve to which your work contributes – this will allow you to focus your thinking.
4. Short literature review of relevant concepts
 - a. Which academic field do you want to speak to? This will determine which journals you target for the literature review.
 - b. Which theoretical lens do you want to take? This is important in shaping your assumptions as you go into the research.
5. Research question(s)
 - a. Please formulate one to two crisp research questions. The more specific your question, the better. You will find it much easier to draw a boundary around your work.
 - b. Sense-check, if this question really addresses the problems you've outlined and framed in section 3. And 4.
6. Research strategy: methods and approach
 - a. Which data do you want to collect / use and how?
 - b. Describe your sample (which region, sector, type of person / organization do you want to collect this data from?)
7. Preliminary table of contents
8. Timeline in which research will be conducted
 - a. planned date of submission of your thesis
 - b. Milestones: e.g., completion of literature review, completion of data collection, analysis, writing milestones.
9. References
 - a. Please use the [APA citation](#) style.

Questions/Topics that should be addressed in your proposal:

- What research question would you like to investigate? Please state your research question explicitly. Check that the research question can be answered (is feasible).
- Clarify any basic concepts or terms.
- Why is it important to answer this question (relevance)?
- Who will benefit from the answers (audience)?
- How does this your thesis add to scholarly and practical knowledge?
- What relationships are you hypothesizing? What is the logic for the relationships?
- What is the level of analysis (society, markets, industries, firms, leaders, employees)?
- Identify the literature that is relevant to your topic and conduct a brief literature review.
- How will you proceed methodologically (qualitative/quantitative)? How will you collect your data / which data are you planning on using?

Further Guidelines and Resources as you plan your thesis:

1. Help with Writing

Writing is a process that can be learned and continually improved. The HSG therefore has a “Writing Lab” who organise events and workshops on specific writing issues and offer individualised writing guidance. You can find all these offers and events online via:

<https://www.unisg.ch/en/studium/studentguide/beratungsangebote/writing-lab/>

2. Guidelines for use of AI / other Tools

It is a new world out there with Chat GPT and other AI tools being readily available to use for many tasks. I do not discourage you to use these tools – they can be a useful resource for research and help you think through the structure of certain topics. I would however advise you to avoid relying on these tools too much – we know that they have significant problems with separating facts from opinion and that the biases that exist online are readily reproduced. Do the critical thinking yourself! Also, AI written passages or graphs or tables need to be referenced just as you would reference any other source. My advice to you therefore is: If you do choose to use AI tools, then be **as transparent as possible** about when, where and for what you have made use of them. This is the only way to avoid trouble afterwards.

There are also **new HSG guidelines** in relation to the declaration of originality (Eigenständigkeits-erklärung) and list of aids which have been announced. Since February 2023, The HSG has adjusted the [declaration of originality](#) and it applies to all written work submitted after February 2023.

3. Style Guides and Reference Management

There are various guidelines you can follow when preparing an academic research piece. I suggest you look into the guidelines of academic journals, to get an idea (e.g., the guidelines from the [Academy of Management](#)) and that you seek input from the services at the library.

You should also seriously consider using a reference manager to help you keep track of the literature you have been reviewing. You can find information to tools and instructions for citations, for example, under <https://www.unisg.ch/en/university/library/forschen-und-publizieren/academic-research-and-writing>

4. Help with Data & Methods

If you do not know yet what methodologies and data to use for your thesis, be advised that the university's library offers great **data and method consulting**. You can contact them via an online application form for coaching here: <https://www.unisg.ch/en/forschung/forschungsservices/data-and-method-consulting/>. Please make sure that you only contact this service with a clear research design and well-defined questions in mind. More general questions about the appropriateness of a research design or the suitability of a given dataset for a set research question should be discussed with your supervisor first.

For information on the availability of data sources at HSG, please consult the library website: <https://www.unisg.ch/en/university/library/search-and-use/databases/>. The university has a broad offer of access to most important business, economics and accounting databases and you should know whether and where there are potential sources of interest for you available **before** finalizing your proposal.

Together with the proposal, please also provide the following documents and information:

- a. Curriculum Vitae (max 2 pages)
- b. Grade transcript
- c. Planned submission date.
- d. Short letter of motivation