



General Guidelines for a Finals Thesis in the Field of International and European Politics

Students who are enrolled in a bachelor or master program in Political Science may write their final thesis in the field of International and European Politics. Students of other courses will only be accepted in exceptional cases. Currently, Prof. Dr. Thomas Gehring and Prof. Dr. Monika Heupel supervise final theses.

1. General Information and Requirements

A bachelor thesis should comprise approximately 40 to 45 pages of written text. A master thesis should comprise about 80 to 90 pages of text. The list of contents and literature, as well as the appendix are not included in these specifications. Regarding language, the thesis can be written either in English or in German.

The preparation time determined in the examination regulations (*Prüfungsordnung*) begins with the explicit confirmation of your supervisor. Beforehand a formal registration at the examination office (*Prüfungsamt*) is required.

The official confirmation of your topic will be granted only after the project has been well designed. To confirm your research design, a proposal (about 1 to 2 pages) needs to be handed in. The proposal must include the following aspects:

- A title of the thesis in English. When writing your thesis in German, a German and an English title are required. Please note that the title will appear on your final certificate. Hence, it is your *carte de visite* when applying for a job.
- Research Question: What will be analyzed?
- Theoretical linkage: Which theory or theoretical approaches will you use to answer your research question?
- Empirical field of investigation: Which case or cases are supposed to be analyzed?
- Material: Which material will you use to answer your research question?
- Broad structure: In which steps will you develop your argument?

Since the preparation of a final thesis project requires a certain amount of time, it is recommended that you attend the office hour of your supervisor at an early stage – if possible, prepare a first draft of your research proposal.

The preparation of a final thesis in the field of International and European Politics requires regular participation in the colloquium. As soon as you have completed one third of your thesis, you have to give a presentation of approximately 20 minutes about your project to the participants of the colloquium. You will then receive detailed feedback in order to be able to solve potential problems in your research project. The colloquium takes place regularly but does not have fixed dates. Please contact Mrs. Genslein who can put you on the mailing list of the colloquium in order for you to be informed about upcoming sessions.

2. Your Research Topic

You are free to choose your topic, as long as the subject of your research project is linked to the field of International and European Politics. This applies to all subjects concerning the foreign policy of individual states and to all subjects that have a distinct transnational focus.

A list of potential research subjects does not exist. It is recommended to choose a topic out of the range of studies of the Chair of International Relations. This range covers the following research areas:

- Formation, function, institutional design, and effects of international institutions in all policy fields, also comparing different institutions and/or regarding the role of non-state actors (e.g. NGOs...);
- Subjects concerning European integration, e.g. treaties, policies, decision-making processes, state and non-state actors, including the EU organs. Current issues like the enlargement of the EU, the Euro crisis, the foreign policy of the EU or the Brexit are also suitable for a final thesis;
- Research questions in the area of foreign, security and crisis policy, e.g. foreign policy decisions of single states, also comparing different countries or cases.

Subjects that are widely or entirely located within a state will not be accepted. For instance the topic “The political system of Pakistan” cannot be chosen. However, it would be possible to write about “The impact of Pakistan’s political system onto the Pakistani foreign policy”.

3. The Research Question

The research question is the centerpiece of any good academic paper. Due to the complexity of reality, e.g. the complexity of international institutions or foreign-policy decisions, it is impossible to simply describe or capture the research subject. You always have to focus on specific aspects while disregarding others that are also worth examining. The research question defines the aspects of a subject that will be examined.

The research question should be as specific as possible in order to fulfill its selected function. A negative example would be “International Institutions now and then.” An example for a good research question would be: “How did the end of the East-West conflict change the role of the UN Security Council in maintaining international peace and security?” Just like any book and academic article you should work on exactly one research question. Although it is possible to demonstrate a general research question, multiple (different) questions must be avoided.

Good research questions are always analytically motivated and refer to a causal link. For example: Why is something happening? Which consequences result from it? Define the dependent and independent variable(s) and avoid purely descriptive research questions like: “What is the organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe?”

Identify a scientifically and/ or empirically relevant research question. Empirical relevance can, for instance, arise from an empirical observation with (potentially) important implications (within the framework of the WTO a juridical dispute settlement mechanism arises – Why? Which consequences result from it?). Scientific relevance arises if your subject is connected to an academic discussion, e.g. due to empirical observations that contradict theoretical assumptions. One example would be Intergovernmentalism and the European Commission or the European Court. Intergovernmentalism expects the member states to control the integration process. But how is this basic premise compatible with the existence of supranational bodies? Which functions could have been delegated to these bodies by the states? Which role do they actually play?

Moreover, a research question should be interesting. Please note that you will intensively work on your research question for three to six months. Research questions with obvious results from the outset can easily get boring during the preparation as well as during the reading. Thus, interesting research questions are the ones that are worth looking at because of their non-obvious outcomes.

Finding a useful and productive research question requires a minimum knowledge of the topic area that will be processed. Therefore, please check if there is any research question you could develop on the basis of one of your attended courses. Maybe you can use an already existing paper as a starting point for further research.

4. Theory

Your research project must establish a link to a theory or theoretical approach. Scientific knowledge is gained through the connection of theory with empirics. Theories are constructions that apply across cases (e.g. models, causal relationships). They help us to structure, systematize and explain empirical observations. The choice of your theoretical approach determines how you intend to process your research question and therefore which variables and causal relationships you have to analyze.

For a final thesis in the field of International and European Politics an explicit and viable theoretical link is indispensable. This link has to be elaborated within a separate theory section.

Bear in mind how theory and empirics should be linked:

- The theory usually serves to guide the empirical analysis (e.g. what can be learnt about the NATO from the perspective of cooperation theory?). The theoretical link helps to explain theoretical assumptions and to deduce research criteria (e.g., on which factors do you have to concentrate and which can be ignored from a cooperation theoretical perspective?). In this case the subject of interest is empirical (you want to find out something about the NATO). The theory is the necessary instrument.
- A thesis can also be designed to test an existing theory. In this case the research project focuses on deriving testable hypotheses from a given theory (e.g., “What would neorealism expect regarding the German foreign policy after the reunification?”) that are tested on the basis of suitable cases. In this case the scientific subject of interest is of a theoretical nature (you want to find out something about the explanatory power of a certain theory) and the empirical part merely has an instrumental function.
- In rare cases, the aim of a final thesis is to create your own theory (e.g., assumptions and/or hypotheses that apply across several cases). An example would be “Under which circumstances can international conflicts over the distribution of river water be cooperatively solved?” In this case the aim is to develop a theory while empirical observations have an instrumental function. Overall, it is very important to choose cases that are suitable for theory development. A single case is not sufficient here.

Think about which theoretical literature is most suitable for your research project and your research question. The core can consist of a single suitable theoretical contribution (article or book) or as well of a series of publications from the same area. Within the theoretical chapter you are not supposed to write a complete literature review (“which literature exists?”) but instead to develop a theoretical basis tailored to your thesis. Keep in mind that theoretical articles oftentimes include different assumptions and use different terms and therefore are not always compatible.

The precise formulation of the assumptions derived from your theory (e.g. in the form of hypotheses) and their operationalization for the empirical analysis (e.g. in the form of indicators) are of key importance for the success of your thesis. Formulate both of them as precisely as possible at the end of your theoretical chapter in a separate paragraph. Without the explicit tailoring of your (by definition always general) theory onto your empirical object of investigation your empirical analysis will inevitably be unfocused and disoriented.

In the case that there is no suitable theoretical concept available, even the most interesting research questions are unsuitable for a final thesis.

5. Design of the Empirical Analysis and Material

On the basis of your (preliminary determined) research question you then have to decide which research design you want to use to test your theoretical assumptions. There are several possibilities:

- A theory-guided case study is a particularly simple design. You either investigate the causes of an event (e.g. the German decision to send the Federal Armed Forces to Afghanistan) or the effects of an event (e.g. the installation of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism) while the empirical analysis is guided by your theory.
- Another option is a comparative design in which you will identify the differences and/or similarities of two or more cases (e.g. “Why did Germany get involved militarily in Afghanistan but not in Iraq?”). Your thesis can either try to explain variances (Why is there different behavior?) or identify similarities despite different results (Which basic constants shape the German foreign policy in the military sector?)
- One variant of the comparative design is to use a method that compares different phases within one case. The aim of this variant is not to describe a running process over time but instead to compare, for instance, an international institution at two or more points in time. You might for example compare the functions, accomplishments or problems of the UN Security Council before (e.g. 1985) and after (e.g. 1995) the end of the East-West conflict.
- Variance on the theoretical level can also promote research findings. With this approach you separately analyze one result from two different theoretical perspectives. You might for instance examine whether the EU’s decision for the accession of countries of eastern Europe can be better explained out of a rationalist (interest-orientated) or out of a constructivist (based on legitimation and promises) theoretical perspective.

No matter which design you finally decide to use, you always have to check in advance if the necessary empirical material exists and is available for you. Consider for which as-

pects you need information (e.g. the preferences of the actors) and where you can find them (e.g. in documents, statistics, newspaper reports or already existing research papers...). In the case there is no empirical material available even the most interesting research question are unsuitable for a final thesis.

6. Rules and Formalities for Scientific Work

For the preparation of a final thesis in the field of International and European Politics the same requirements as for seminar papers apply. You can find more information about the preparation of seminar papers on our homepage:

<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/polib/study/academic-writing/term-paper/>

7. Further Literature on Scientific Writing

We recommend the consultation of further literature on scientific work. We suggest that everyone who writes their final thesis get a closer understanding of the following three books:

GEORGE, ALEXANDER L. AND ANDREW BENNETT (2005): Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences. Cambridge: MIT Press.

KING, GARY; ROBERT O. KEOHANE AND SIDNEY VERBA (1994): Designing Social Inquiry. Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Esp.: Chapter 1.

VAN EVERA, STEPHEN (1997): Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science. New York: Cornell University Press.