

Student Guidelines for Writing BA and MA Theses

Leiden University Centre for the Study of Religion
October 2024

I. Eligibility to write a BA or MA Thesis

- A. Students enrolled in the BA in Religious Studies programme must have successfully completed all courses belonging to their first and second years, totalling 120 ECs, and the BA Thesis Seminar before they are eligible to submit their BA thesis (OER, BA Religiewetenschappen, art. 4.2.1).
- B. Students enrolled in the MA in Religious Studies programme must have successfully completed at least one of two required courses – Tools and Theories in the Study of Religion; Religion on the Move – before completing the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar. The MA thesis can only be submitted upon the successful completion of the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar (OER, MA Religious Studies, art. 4.2.1.).
- C. Students enrolled in the MA in Social Sciences and Humanities Education: Religious Studies programme participate in the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar of the MA Religious Studies during their second years.
- D. To write either a BA or MA thesis in the spring semester, students must be simultaneously enrolled in the BA Thesis Seminar or the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar during the spring semester. To write either a BA or MA thesis in the fall semester, students must have successfully completed the respective seminar in the spring semester before writing their thesis.

II. Credit Points

- A. The BA Thesis and BA Thesis Seminar together constitute a single component (*onderwijseenheid*) with a combined study load of 15 ECs.
- B. The MA Thesis and the MA Thesis Seminar and Job Market Orientation are two separate components (*onderwijseenheden*). The MA Thesis is 15 ECs; the MA Thesis Seminar and Job Market Orientation is 5 ECs.
- C. Students enrolled in the MA in Social Sciences and Humanities Education: Religious Studies programme obtain 2 ECs for successfully completing the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar. Their seminar programme is (slightly) different from that of the students mentioned under II.B.

III. Length of Theses

The BA thesis can be max. 10.000 words; the MA thesis max. 15.000 words. This total *excludes* all apparatus, such as footnotes, bibliography, and front page.

IV. General BA Thesis Assessment Criteria (quoted from the 2024 Faculty Regulations)

The BA thesis is a written report of research that the student carries out under the supervision of a lecturer. The thesis must give insight into the student's ability to:

- A. formulate, with help of their supervisor(s), a research question that shows insight into elementary scholarly questions and key concepts and ideas within their field of research;

- B. summarising and reflecting on secondary scholarly literature in a synthetic and clear way;
- C. applying key concepts and methods within their field of research to a limited amount of primary sources, whether collected by means of fieldwork or not;
- D. formulate ideas clearly and correctly.

In addition, the thesis should be assessed on at least the following aspects:

- A. the adequate/sufficient formulation and operationalization of the research question;
- B. the adequate/sufficient analysis of secondary literature;
- C. the adequate/sufficient analysis of source materials;
- D. language use, structure, and style.

V. General MA Thesis Assessment Criteria (quoted from the 2024 Faculty Regulations)

The MA thesis is a written report of research that the student carries out under the supervision of a lecturer, but with a high degree of independence. The thesis must also give insight into the student's ability to:

- A. independently formulate a research question that displays insight into the methodological principles, central issues and state of the art of their field of research;
- B. independently formulate a realistic research plan which fulfils the criteria set in the relevant field of research;
- C. critically and analytically report on existing academic debates and propose creative solutions based on secondary literature;
- D. apply the more complex concepts/methods of their field to a corpus of primary source material (whether existing or collected during the student's own research);
- E. formulate ideas clearly and correctly.

In addition, the thesis should be assessed on at least the following aspects:

- A. the originality of the research question and the manner in which it has been put into practice;
- B. the critical analysis of secondary literature;
- C. the critical analysis of source materials;
- D. language use, structure, and style;
- E. the degree of independence displayed during the research and supervision process.

VI. Language

- A. Although some BA courses are taught in English, the official language of instruction of the BA Religiewetenschappen is Dutch (OER, BA Religiewetenschappen, art. 2.9.1). Students are, therefore, expected to write their BA thesis in Dutch. However, the Board of Examiners is entitled to permit students to write their BA thesis in another language, yet only in individual cases and in accordance with the University's Guideline on Language Policy (OER, BA Religiewetenschappen, art. 2.9.2).
- B. The BA Thesis Seminar is taught in Dutch.
- C. Because the language of instruction of the MA Religious Studies is English, the MA thesis has to be written in English (OER, MA Religious Studies, art. 2.8.1). However, the Board of Examiners is entitled to permit students to write their MA thesis in another language, yet only in individual cases and in accordance with the University's Guideline on Language Policy (OER, MA Religious Studies, art. 2.8.2).

- D. The MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar is taught in English.
- E. If students want to write their thesis in another language than Dutch (BA) or English (MA), they have to, first, reach agreement on doing so with their (intended) supervisors and, subsequently, ask the Board of Examiners permission to do so by justifying their reasons for wanting to deviate from the language rule on the “Preliminary Thesis Form” referred to in section XIV below.

VII. Appointment of Supervisors and Second Readers

- A. In consultation with their seminar instructor (who has information about the availability of staff to supervise), students will identify a preferred supervisor, meet with their supervisor and return the “Preliminary Thesis Form” which is available on the seminar Brightspace page to their seminar instructor.
- B. The seminar instructor will submit a list of students, preferred supervisors and thesis topics to the Board of Examiners.
- C. The Board of Examiners will in most cases approve the choice of supervisor and, in consultation with the seminar instructors, appoint a second reader for each thesis. In the rare cases that the Board of Examiners cannot appoint a preferred supervisor, the Board will, in consultation with student and seminar instructor, identify and appoint another supervisor.
- D. The number of theses that staff members can supervise varies greatly and is assessed every year. Please note, the default is 3 BA theses and 2 MA theses across all programmes for 1.0 FTE. In its calculation of supervision workload, the BoE includes, besides theses, the supervision of internal research internships, external internships, and supervised self-study projects.
- E. Please see the “Schedule of Meetings” section VIII below for more information on this process.

VIII. Schedule of Meetings Related to Supervising BA and MA Theses

The dates below are intended as suggestions and can deviate depending on the student/supervisor/situation. In general, we suggest the following standard for the BA and MA Theses advising process (intake + 3 progress interviews + final interview) and the following chronological timeline. We integrate milestones from the BA Thesis Seminar and the MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar in this timeline alongside meetings between students and their supervisors. First, see the process in chart-form and then below are more details to clarify the process from the supervisor and seminar leader perspective.

<i>Overview of thesis process</i>		
	Thesis seminar	Supervision
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * First seminar meeting: Review of thesis evaluation form; seminar instructors help students identify a good topic and discuss available and relevant supervisors * Second seminar meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Students contact potential supervisors and have a first informal talk (either by e-mail or in person) on the topic, research questions, method, and primary material for the project
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * By 4 December, thesis seminar instructors collect the “Preliminary Thesis Forms” and send them to the BoE * Board of Examiners formally assigns supervisors and appoints second readers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Formal intake meeting with supervisor, ideally before the start of the Winter Recess; students should send a research design, draft TOC and work plan

January		
February	* Regular meetings in thesis seminar	
March	* Regular meetings in thesis seminar	* Meeting on introductory chapters with supervisor. Students email their work at least a week in advance
April	* Regular meetings in thesis seminar	* Meeting on subsequent chapters with supervisor. Students email their work at least a week in advance
May		* 16 May submit first full draft by e-mail * Meeting on full draft
June		* 13 June submit final version by e-mail * 27 June submit graduation application
July		
August		* 15 August mark submitted in uSis

A. November

The students will meet with the BA Thesis Seminar and MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar instructors to brainstorm and identify potential supervisors. (The instructors will have knowledge from the *Onderwijsdirecteur* (Director of Studies) and the Board of Examiners regarding the availability of staff for thesis supervision.) Students will contact their potential supervisors directly by mail. Instructors will distribute their seminar syllabus to all potential supervisors so they have a breakdown of the upcoming dates.

B. Early December

Each student writing a BA or MA thesis should fill out a “Preliminary Thesis Form” and return this form to their seminar instructors via Brightspace before December 4. The “Preliminary Thesis Form” includes a working title, a short topic description, the student’s preferred supervisor and, if applicable, a reasoned request to deviate from the language rule. Seminar instructors will collect this information and send it to the Board of Examiners in advance of the BoE’s December meeting.

The Board of Examiners officially appoints supervisors and second readers. The BoE’s administrative secretary will communicate these appointments to the students in the thesis seminar. By mid-December, all students should know their assigned supervisors.

C. Early / Mid-December

Immediately after the allocation of supervisors, students should begin preliminary work on their theses and plan an “intake meeting” with their assigned supervisors.

D. Mid- / Late December

Students have the “intake meeting” with their supervisors ideally before the start of the Winter Recess (i.e. before calendar weeks 52 and 1). During this intake meeting, students discuss with their supervisors the topic, problem, method, and primary material for the thesis. It is recommended that all the supervision meetings for the spring semester are scheduled at this time. Below, we suggest how these meetings could be planned.

E. February-April

Students will continue regular meetings with the BA Thesis and MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar instructors according to the respective course calendars. In general, BA Thesis students meet every week in the semester and MA Thesis students meet roughly every other week.

F. March-April

Students submit draft chapter(s) to their supervisor and schedule a meeting to discuss their work (there is a faculty obligation for “one or more” progress interviews).

G. May 16

Students e-mail a full version of their thesis to their supervisor and schedule a meeting for late May / early June to discuss their work (this meeting is mandatory at the faculty-level).

H. June 13

Students e-mail the final version of their thesis *directly* to both their supervisor and the second reader and to BAthesis@hum.leidenuniv.nl or MAthesis@hum.leidenuniv.nl *in cc*. If the supervisor and/or second reader ask for a hard copy of the thesis, the student is required to provide them with that.

The supervisor will then upload the thesis in the Faculty’s Thesis Grading System.

I. After June 13

After a plagiarism scan, the supervisor and the second reader will evaluate/assess and grade the thesis within four weeks after the thesis has been e-mailed to them. The evaluation/assessment will be uploaded in the Thesis Grading System.

The second reader will give an assessment of the thesis, based on the assessment criteria mentioned in sections IV or V above.

If the supervisor and second reader cannot agree on a mark, the Board of Examiners can apply a third reader. The third reader receives the assessments of the supervisor and second reader and has to take these into account in their own assessment (OER, BA Religiewetenschappen, appendix B, art. 7.7 and OER, MA Religious Studies, appendix A, art. 6.7). The OER does not specify this any further. The Board of Examiners strongly encourages third readers to assess a thesis *blindly* and only use the assessments of the supervisor and second reader *afterwards*, when the final grade has to be determined. This final grade is binding.

A copy of the final evaluation and assessment (including the final grade) will be e-mailed to the student from the Thesis Grading System.

J. End of June / Beginning of July

Students and their supervisors can have an optional, concluding conversation (this meeting is not mandatory).

K. June 27

Students submit their graduation application by filling in this [form](#) (BA students) or this [form](#) (MA students). Students can submit their graduation application before all grades have been registered, including the grade for the thesis. The final grade of the thesis will not be registered unless the student has uploaded a copy of the thesis into the Student Repository.

If the thesis has been assessed with an insufficient final grade, it should not be uploaded in the Student Repository. In this case, the insufficient grade still has to be registered in the thesis assessment system/uSis, so it is clear that the thesis must be retaken.

Regulations on “resits” are mentioned in section XI below.

L. August 15

Grades must be submitted two weeks before the end of the rating period, so two weeks before the end of August or two weeks before the end of January.

The rating of the thesis is posted in uSis by the Herta Mohr Education Administration Office.

IX. In the Case that the BA or MA Thesis is not Completed During the Appointed Semester

- A. Students who do not complete their thesis within one semester must again apply for a supervisor to the Board of Examiners. Students can ask to continue with the same supervisor, but if that supervisor is not available, the Board of Examiners will appoint a different supervisor.
- B. Students who do not complete their thesis within one year must start over with a new track, including a new supervisor and new subject. In addition, they need to retake the BA Thesis or MA Thesis and Job Market Seminar.

X. Exceptions to this Trajectory

BA and MA students are required to use faculty procedures to contact the Board of Examiners if they plan to deviate from the standard trajectory. See [here](#) for conditions such as the following:

- A. Want to write in the fall semester. Students who want to write their thesis in the autumn must contact the BoE no later than 13 June, or else they cannot be assigned a supervisor in time. If staff supervise a student in the autumn semester, please make sure that the project has been approved by the BoE and that you have been formally appointed as supervisor. Also, in order to be eligible to write in the autumn, students need to follow the BA/MA Thesis Seminar in the spring before. If students want to graduate in January, they should submit the final versions of their theses by December 13 at the latest. Students who deviate from the standard programme make a new plan with the Study Advisor.
- B. Want to write their BA thesis in another language than Dutch or their MA thesis in another language than English (see also section VI above).
- C. Want to write a double thesis (= combined with a thesis from another master programme).
- D. Want to continue with the same project and supervisor after a full year.
- E. Extend the length of the thesis beyond 10.000 words for the BA thesis or 15.000 words for the MA thesis (excluding apparatus).

XI. Resits

If a thesis is graded with an unsatisfactory mark (a 5.4 or lower), the student has to take a “resit” in order to still graduate. The Board of Examiners will outline a “resit” trajectory on a case-by-case basis, but if a student wants to graduate in the same academic year, the “resit” has to be completed *before August 29*.

XII. Double Thesis

Students who follow two parallel programmes can choose to write one thesis for both programmes. The faculty-wide [Rules and Regulations of the Board of Examiners](#) (*Regels en Richtlijnen*) regulates the double thesis. The Rules and Regulations state the following:

- 4.11.3 However if the student so wishes, they can write one thesis for both programmes (a ‘double thesis’) under the following conditions:
- A. The student can demonstrate with the intention and problem statement that the double thesis will satisfy the learning objectives and learning outcomes of both programmes;
 - B. The number of words of the double thesis is equal to the number of words required for each of the two programmes added up;
 - C. The student has received written permission in advance to write a double thesis from both of the concerned Boards of Examiners.
- 4.11.4 Each of the two Boards of Examiners can decide not to grant permission to write a double thesis.
- 4.11.5 The double thesis is assessed separately by the designated examiners of each of the two programmes, on the basis of the requirements in terms of form and content that apply to that programme. This can result in different final marks.
- 4.11.6 For each programme, the awarded mark will be recorded by its own Education Administration Office, stating the number of credits that applies to the thesis of that programme.

Furthermore, the BoE of Religious Studies follows the following good practices from the faculty:

- A. We advise supervisors to divide the responsibility of the chapters. Ideally, a double thesis is composed out of two main sections, one section for each of the two involved programmes, with a shared introduction and conclusion.
- B. When the thesis is finished, the Boards of Examiners of the two involved programmes each appoint a second reader. The thesis is assessed twice, once for each programme.

XIII. Further information

To access the Faculty Regulations for the BA and MA thesis, go to this [page](#), and choose the relevant programme (BA Religiewetenschappen or MA Religious Studies). You can then see various faculty regulations, including the Regeling BA-eindwerkstuk and the Regulations Master’s thesis.

XIV. Preliminary Thesis Form

Scriptieformulier
Leiden Centre for the Study of Religion

ten laatste in te leveren bij de docent van het scriptieseminar op xx xx 20xx

Naam en studentnummer:

Studiefase (BA of MA):

Voorlopige scriptietitel of omschrijving van het scriptieonderwerp:

Voorkeur voor een begeleider:

Omschrijving van het scriptieonderwerp van ong. honderd woorden:

Eventuele opmerkingen / verzoeken aan de examencommissie
(gelieve deze in het Engels te schrijven i.v.m. de bemensing van de commissie):