



MA in International Development Studies
Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University

Thesis Guide

2011

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CHAPTER I

THE THESIS AND THE MAIDS PROGRAMME

1.1 The objective of this Thesis Guide:

- outline the requirements of the Master's thesis
- suggestions on how to prepare yourself for the thesis
- detail common problems and ways to help avoid or minimize them

In short, the aim of this guide is to prepare students who are about to embark on their thesis project.

This Thesis Guide is an introduction for students of M.A. in International Development Studies at Chulalongkorn University who are about to write their thesis. The guide intends to take the student through the process of designing and undertaking this important academic research project, from the very first thoughts about a topic, to the research and final submission of the thesis. The guide will help the student decide on the topic, develop a research plan, formulate the research, and then propose and defend the thesis.

Completing a Master's thesis is a demanding task. This is not to say that writing a thesis is impossible, but the commitment and amount of work needed to complete the project are significant. Not only are the educational and intellectual challenges of graduate work demanding, the student must often deal with personal, financial, career and cultural difficulties. With good preparation, dedication, and commitment, a student should be able to complete the thesis and the programme without too many difficulties.

If the student is well prepared and understands the type of work, and what is demanded of them, they can better prepare for the likely problems before they occur. One of the main aims of this guide is to describe what graduate research entails so the student is not surprised by what he or she must accomplish. Preparation means the student is more likely to succeed, and graduate with a degree that is useful, interesting and valuable to society.

Writing a thesis involves three dimensions: academic, administrative, and “formatting”. The academic and administrative aspects of the thesis are dealt with in this guidebook. The “formatting” dimension, that is, all the “formatting requirements” of a final thesis, are included in the Thesis Format Requirements booklet.

1.2 The thesis: a major component of the master’s programme

The thesis is a major component of your degree and needs substantial organization.

The thesis is worth 12 credit points out of a total of 36. It is equivalent to 4 semester long courses. In terms of credit points it should be worth nearly a semester’s work. However, the thesis is the most important component of a Master’s programme and will require more work than a regular semester. Normally the thesis is done after the student has completed coursework, during the third semester of the programme.

Writing a thesis is a year-long process that should begin early in the FIRST semester.

The minimum length of the thesis is 50 pages or between 10,000 and 20,000 words count (not including bibliography and appendices). The average length of pages for past theses ranges from 50-120 pages.

1.3 Academic requirements for graduation

The requirements to complete the MAIDS programme are basically:

- Maintain an average of B (GPA of 3.00) throughout the coursework
- Pass the thesis examination and fulfill all conditions to the satisfaction of the Thesis Examination Committee.

1.4 Grading

Letter grade	Mention	Grade Point Average	Letter grade	Mention	Grade Point Average
A	Excellent	4.0	C	Fair	2.0
B+	Very Good	3.5	D+	Poor	1.5
B	Good	3.0	D	Very Poor	1.0
C+	Fairly Good	2.5	F	Fail	0.0
I	Incomplete				

Students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 throughout their studies at the MAIDS programme. If after the first semester your cumulative GPA is under 2.5, you will be asked to leave the programme. If your GPA is between 2.5 and 3.0, you will be given three semesters to raise it to or above 3.0.

Thesis evaluation

The master's thesis - worth 12 credits - is evaluated on a pass/fail basis. In addition, the mentions "Good" or "Very Good" can be awarded to works of outstanding quality.

See Chapter 10: The Thesis Evaluation for more detailed information on thesis evaluation and grading.

1.5 Some basic definitions

There are many terms used in the Master's programme - and many countries use these words differently. Knowing each of these definitions helps. Here is a list of the most common terms, and some of their different meanings.

1.5.1 Auditing a course

Graduate students may 'audit' a course. This means they can attend lectures and seminars but do not have to undertake assessment. This can be done for the candidate to learn some background information, to acquire language or some other technical skills, or to meet other students.

1.5.2 Dissertation or Thesis (plural: Theses)

Basically these two words mean the same thing, and either can be used. The thesis is a written report of an independent research project undertaken by the student. These vary in length according to the degree and subject, ranging from 50 pages for course work theses to 500 pages for doctorate dissertations. We will talk about the criteria for the M.A. in International Development Studies later. The terms have changed over time: a thesis was once smaller than a dissertation (so one does Honours Thesis and a Doctoral Dissertation). There is now a tendency for Americans to use dissertation and British/Australians to use thesis.

1.5.3 Drop out and Failure

There is quite a difference between these two terms. To drop out means to voluntarily leave the programme. To fail is to either be asked to leave, or to have your final piece of work fail to meet the requirements. While the drop out rate for Master's is high in comparison to undergraduate degrees, the failure rate is extremely low - this only occurs in extreme circumstances.

1.5.4 Research

To research means, literally, to go back (re-) and look for something again (search). Research is a very common word, but the practice of research itself is often unfamiliar to some students. Research means the student works independently on a topic they have selected. Research can be done in a laboratory, in a library, or in a public place. It involves

investigating, problem solving, and analyzing. It differs from course work where the structure of the course and the lecturer, guides the student.

1.5.7 Supervisor and Advisor

These words are the same, but Chulalongkorn uses supervisor (which tends to be the British term) while the British use supervisors. Supervisors are the academics who assist the candidate with the research thesis. The number of supervisors for a candidate can vary from 2 to 4. They are like a guide who suggests what to do and helps when the candidate has a problem.

1.5.5 Thesis Examination Committee

This is the Committee that will examine both the student's thesis proposal and final thesis draft. This committee is composed of a chairperson, your thesis supervisor, and a committee member. Generally these are all faculty members at Chulalongkorn University.

1.5.7 Oral Defense

The thesis is examined at Chulalongkorn by an oral defense. This means that the written text is discussed in a public forum by the Thesis Examination Committee. Students will be questioned about their thesis and must defend its findings, methods, theory, and so on.

CHAPTER II

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

2.1 To plagiarize

“verb take (the work or idea of someone else) and pass it off as one’s own.

— DERIVATIVES plagiarism noun plagiarist noun plagiarizer noun.

— ORIGIN from Latin *plagiarius* ‘kidnapper’, from Greek *plagion* ‘a kidnapping’.”¹

2.2 What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is to copy someone else’s work and imply that it is your own. Plagiarism is the most severe academic offense and a breach of intellectual honesty. Plagiarism in the context of the master’s thesis will result in a failure and impossibility to graduate. It is important to see there are two vital components of plagiarism, and two things you cannot do:

1. Claim other work is your own. This means you are lying about the work you have done. You are expected to read and discuss other people’s work, by distinguishing their work and ideas from your own. If you copy what someone says without adequately stating that it is someone else’s idea, then the lecturer and thesis examination committee will assume you did this work. Hence it is important that your reader knows what you have written and researched, and what other people have done.

2. Not acknowledge other people’s work. This often happens when students are not familiar with quoting and referencing systems. Other people’s work must be cited in your

¹ The Oxford Compact Dictionary. Oxford University Press. Retrieved October 5, 2005 from www.askoxford.com

work using the approved bibliographic system – in this case the Harvard Style. The Concise Rules of Harvard Style (which every student is given a copy) contains detailed guidelines for quoting and referencing sources. Knowing and respecting these rules will ensure that you do not inadvertently plagiarize someone else's work.

American political scientist Charles Lipson has written extensively on the topic of plagiarism and academic integrity. For more information consult <http://www.charleslipson.com/>.

2.3 Guidelines for avoiding plagiarism:²

- **USE YOUR OWN WORDS AND IDEAS.**

Practice is essential to learning. Each time you choose your words, order your thoughts, and convey your ideas, you can improve your writing.

- **GIVE CREDIT FOR COPIED, ADAPTED, or PARAPHRASED MATERIAL.**

If you repeat another's exact words, you **MUST** use quotation marks and cite the source. If you adapt a chart or paraphrase a sentence, you must still cite. **Paraphrase means that you restate** the author's ideas, meaning, and information **in your own words** (see examples).

- **AVOID USING OTHERS' WORK WITH MINOR "COSMETIC" CHANGES.**

Examples: using "less" for "fewer," reversing the order of a sentence, changing terms in a computer code, or altering a spread sheet layout. If the work is essentially the same, give credit.

- **THERE ARE NO "FREEBIES."**

ALWAYS cite words, information, and ideas you use if they are new to you (learned in your research). **No matter where** you find it -- even in an encyclopedia or on the Internet -- you cite it!

- **BEWARE OF "COMMON KNOWLEDGE."**

You don't have to cite "common knowledge," **BUT** the fact must really **be** commonly known. That Abraham Lincoln was the U.S. President during the Civil War **is** common knowledge; that over 51,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Battle of Gettysburg³ **is not**.

² Student Judicial Affairs, October 1999, University of California, Davis.

³ "The Battle of Gettysburg: Aftermath," Gettysburg Convention & Visitor's Bureau, September 22, 1999, <http://www.gettysburg.com/visitor/booklet/bat/aftermth.htm>

- **WHEN IN DOUBT, CITE.**

Better to be safe than not give credit when you should!

Example of ETHICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Citing a source for factual information:

In describing the role of the Los Angeles Times in the conflicts and events surrounding the diversion of water from the Owens Valley, I have relied upon the factual account given in Thinking Big The Story of the Los Angeles Times (Gottlieb and Wolt, 1997).⁴

Identifying the source "up front" means the student doesn't need a page cite until the end of this paragraph, but additional page citations would be required to reference facts used later in the paper.

MORE EXAMPLES - How to Cite Correctly

The Original Source:

" In research writing, sources are cited for two reasons: to alert readers to the sources of your information and to give credit to the writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas. "⁵

Plagiarism (same words, no quotation marks):

In research writing, sources are cited to alert readers to the sources of your information and to give credit to the writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas.

The student has used the author's exact words, leaving out only a phrase, without quotation marks or a citation.

Also Plagiarism (incorrect paraphrase):

In research writing, we cite sources for a couple reasons: to notify readers of our information sources and give credit to those from whom we have borrowed. (Hacker).

The student has made only slight changes, substituting words such as "a couple" for "two", "notify" for "alert", and "our"/"we" for "your"/"you," leaving out a few words, and giving an incomplete citation.

A Solution (appropriate paraphrase):

A researcher cites her sources to ensure her audience knows where she got her information, and to recognize and credit the original work. (Hacker, 1995, p. 260).

⁴ Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big The Story of the Los Angeles Times* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977).

⁵ Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference* (St. Martin's Press, 1995).

This student has paraphrased in her own words, while accurately reflecting and citing the author's ideas.

A Different Solution (quotation with cite):

*In her book *A Writer's Reference*, Diana Hacker notes, "In research writing, sources are cited for two reasons: to alert readers to the sources of your information and to give credit to the writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas." (1995, p. 260).*

CHAPTER III

THESIS STAGES & TIMELINE

Completing a Master's thesis at Chulalongkorn involves a number of academic and administrative stages. Each stage is important and many must be followed exactly. Please note that the timeline given here is approximate while precise dates are available in the programme's calendar.

3.1 Timeline (Dates flexible)

<u>Timeframe/Deadline</u>	<u>Stage</u>
First semester	<p>Thesis topic selection. In the first semester you must determine a thesis topic. Selection of a thesis topic is an active process, which involves reading and discussion with professors, who can become your potential supervisors.</p>
End of first semester; end of January.	<p>Submission of thesis topic; selection of Thesis Examination Committee members. By the end of the first semester you should have a clear idea of your thesis topic. A thesis topic is not a full thesis proposal; it is simply a topic, a field of interest, that will allow the student and the MAIDS programme committee to select an appropriate supervisor and Thesis Examination Committee members.</p> <p>The selection of a supervisor and Thesis Examination Committee members is a mutual process. You may propose a professor with whom you feel comfortable. If this is not the case the MAIDS programme committee can make recommendations and assign you a supervisor. At the very least a supervisor must be familiar with your suggested topic (See chapter VIII for more information on thesis supervisors).</p>
End of first semester	<p>First possible notice of failure You will be asked to leave the MAIDS programme if your GPA is below 2.5/4.0.</p>
Beginning of second semester; Feb-May.	<p>Preparation of Thesis Proposal In the second semester you should also start developing your research proposal, with the help of your supervisors. This stage should take around 3 months. The contents of a proposal are discussed in Chapter 4.</p>
May – beginning of June	<p>Thesis Proposal Examination This is a formal academic stage where you must publicly discuss and defend your thesis proposal. The purpose of the defense is to publicly announce what you wish to study, and how you are going to study it. This means that anyone who is interested, or who can assist the research can give you advice. The purpose is also to ensure that the research you will be undertaking is feasible, ethical and of a suitable standard for a Master's programme.</p>

	<p>Getting ready for the proposal defense. When you and your supervisor believe you are ready for a proposal defense you must notify the MAIDS Office. At this stage you will have to present a full proposal and know who are your supervisors.</p> <p>IMPORTANT NOTICE: You must submit your thesis proposal document to your Thesis Examination Committee 7 days prior to the examination day, to allow them time to read and reflect upon it. The student normally prepares a brief 15 minute talk about their topic, which covers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the key issues of the topic • research questions • objectives or hypothesis • research methods <p>The outcomes of the defense are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass without condition: the student goes ahead with the research. • Pass with conditions: the student has to do some further work, and modify the thesis proposal, before starting the research. A student who obtains a pass with conditions does not have to go through another defense. • Fail. Student must re-write a proposal. <p>Note that a failing grade is very rare. Supervisors will not let their students defend their proposal if there is a chance of failure. This can result from a student who insists on defending their thesis against the advice of their supervisor(s).</p>
Beginning of June	Second Thesis Proposal Examination for those who failed the first examination.
Beginning of June	<p>Deadline for students to submit the approved and revised thesis proposals to the programme committee.</p> <p>In cases where a student gets a pass with conditions they must resubmit the proposal within a stipulated time before they proceed with their research.</p>
Third week of June	<p>The programme committee must submit approved thesis proposals to the faculty's board.</p> <p>This stage and the subsequent one do not directly involve the student. However, it is important for you to know that the programme and faculty have also administrative deadlines to meet with regards to your work. Deadlines involving the higher instances of the university cannot be informally negotiated between you, your supervisor, and the programme.</p>
End of June	The Faculty must submit approved thesis proposals to the graduate office.
End of the second semester; third week of April.	<p>Registration.</p> <p>You must be registered in the course and as a student until you complete the thesis. The MAIDS programme strongly encourages all its students to complete the thesis in one semester. Failure to do so entails the payment of full academic fees for any necessary additional semester(s).</p> <p>Under special circumstances you can take a study leave of absence,</p>

	where you don't have to enroll for a year – this is in instances of illness or other serious personal problems.
Third semester; Mid Jun - Aug	<p>Research and/or fieldwork. This is where the real work begins. During this stage you do your field work and/or archival research, meet regularly with your supervisors, and write up your findings. The practice of this stage is discussed further in chapter 5 and chapter 8. In order to complete your thesis within the third semester, the research stage should normally take no more than 3 months.</p>
Third semester; Mid Jun - Aug	<p>The write-up. The final write up is also known as completion. The write up does not mean that the student has written nothing by this stage. Rather, it is where the student concentrates exclusively on writing. As the guide details below, it is best to have done a considerable amount of writing at this point. At this stage the student should be drafting material already written into the final thesis. Once the research has been undertaken the student needs to hide in his/her room and write the thesis.</p> <p>The timeframe for the research, fieldwork and write-up is the same simply because there is no fixed rule as to when you should stop “researching” and start “writing-up”. During this period your supervisor will certainly want to have a look at a first draft of your thesis, so you will want to begin early converting your research findings into a presentable form.</p>
Two weeks prior to thesis examination	<p>Setting a Final Thesis Examination Date & Submitting Draft Copy to Graduate Office for Format Examination <u>The final thesis examination can take place 60 days after your thesis proposal is approved by the University. You must also submit one copy of your thesis draft to MAIDS office for a format checking by Graduate Office 15 days prior to your defense date.</u></p> <p>Before requesting a thesis examination, your thesis supervisor must approve your final draft. Student makes appointment with thesis committee in advance Because thesis examination committee members are extremely busy people, the student should inform the MAIDS Office at least TWO WEEKS prior to the proposed examination date, so that the office can arrange any necessary documents.</p> <p>The Graduate Office wants to make sure you have followed all the format guidelines pertaining to a Master's thesis, including margins, pagination, and referencing. All these guidelines are included in the Thesis Format Guide booklet.</p> <p>The thesis format examination normally takes 1 week. Once completed, the Graduate Office will hand back the thesis draft, with red ink indicating all the format guidelines you have violated. You will be expected to correct mistakes before submitting your final version of the thesis following your thesis examination.</p> <p>The Graduate Office requests that you submit this draft with format checking form TWO WEEKS before defense date. Once the Graduate Office has reviewed your thesis format, it will issue guideline how to submit online.</p>

<p>Two weeks prior to thesis examination</p>	<p>Submission of thesis draft to Thesis Examination Committee Two weeks prior to the thesis examination, YOU MUST SUBMIT HARD COPIES OF YOUR FINAL THESIS DRAFT DIRECTLY TO YOUR THESIS EXAMINATION COMMITTEE.</p> <p>IMPORTANT NOTICE: This deadline is perhaps the most important of the entire thesis process. It sets the date when you finalize the thesis and will proceed to defend in front of the examination committee. You cannot expect committee members to read and prepare comments for your thesis two or three days prior to the examination date.</p>
<p>Deadline: last week of August</p>	<p>Thesis examination The thesis examination or defense is much like the proposal defense. The student prepares a presentation of around 30-45 minutes, explaining their research and findings. Here they outline their objectives and how they were completed. The examination normally takes one to two hours.</p> <p>Please inform the MAIDS Office in advance if you require a projector and computer for a PowerPoint presentation during your exam.</p> <p>The Thesis Examination Committee will decide on the outcome of the defense. The defense is announced publicly, so anyone can go. This ensures that the research contributes to public interest.</p> <p>Outcomes: Pass without conditions: the thesis is submitted within two weeks of defense sometimes with minor corrections.</p> <p>Pass with conditions: The examiners states what corrections need to be made to the thesis and gives a period of no more than 1 month to correct them.</p> <p>Failure: the thesis must be substantially corrected and the student must redo the defense.</p> <p>Most students get pass with conditions. It is rare to fail, and uncommon to get pass without conditions, for there are often small errors and omissions which must be corrected.</p> <p>For more information, consult Chapter 10: The Thesis Examination.</p>
<p>Two weeks after the thesis examination</p>	<p>Thesis revision Students should plan to stay at Chulalongkorn at least two weeks after the thesis examination, in order to complete the changes and revisions requested by the Thesis Examination Committee.</p> <p><u>IMPORTANT NOTICE:</u> You are NOT free to go home right after your thesis examination. The MAIDS Programme strongly advises all students to make provisions to stay in Bangkok until end-October.</p>
<p>Third week of September</p>	<p>Deadline for submission of approved and revised theses to the Graduate Office.</p> <p>Student have to: 1. submit one HARD copy (BINDED) and a CD containing word file and pdf file of thesis to MAIDS.</p>

	<p>2. submit thesis online at http://thesis.grad.chula.ac.th</p> <p>2.1 Forms to fill in online: (1) Questionnaire on thesis publication, (2) Research Mapping information, (3) Report of thesis publication</p> <p>2.2 File to Upload: (1) Thesis Abstract (Thai & English) File Upload, (2) Thesis FULL TEXT File Upload</p> <p>2.3 Documents to be printed out: (1) Barcode on the front page of the thesis cover, (2) Documents for complete thesis submission. These documents need supervisor and chairperson to sign.</p> <p>3. submit one HARD copy (NOT BINDED) of the complete thesis together with the documents below to the Graduate Office:</p> <p>3.1 A CD containing PDF file and MS Word of thesis + bibliography information + Thai & English Abstract in MS Word + Thesis Dissemination Report</p> <p>3.2 One signed approval page</p> <p>3.3 One signed abstract (both in Thai and English)</p> <p>3.4 A letter requesting for changing title signed by the thesis committee chairperson (If any)</p> <p>3.5 A confirmation letter from International conference organizer or journal publisher</p> <p>3.6 A copy of full presented or published paper</p> <p>3.7 Documents for submission of complete thesis (print form the website you submit thesis online)</p> <p>3.8 Barcode on the front page of the thesis cover (print form the website you submit thesis online)</p> <p><u>IMPORTANT NOTICE:</u> Please ensure that you have made all the format corrections required by the Graduate Office during the thesis format examination. Failure to do so will unnecessarily delay the formal completion of your thesis, and could jeopardize your graduation.</p> <p>Again, this deadline is fixed by the Graduate Office, and is NON_NEGOTIABLE.</p>
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3.2 Demonstrating progress

After completing coursework and enrolling in the thesis course, the student must work on their research project. According to university regulations this means the student should be dedicating around 36 hours a week to the research project. As thesis research is largely self- directed, the MAIDS Office sometimes does not know if this work is being undertaken, or if the student is having problems. The university requires the MAIDS Office to record the progress of all students enrolled in the thesis course. Recording

progress is also a Chulalongkorn University requirement. The progress report enables the office to keep regular contact with students and provide assistance where necessary.

A common problem during research is that students disappear. They finish course work, return to their jobs or home countries, and don't respond to emails from the MAIDS Office or even their supervisors. That is why the Office insists on regular progress reports. Even if you have not progressed, we still want to know about it.

The progress report, completed in collaboration with your supervisor, assesses the state of your research. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Allow you to plan your time schedule
2. Organize with your supervisor when you will complete certain tasks, when you will meet, and allow the student and supervisor to discuss how they are going.
3. Inform the programme of your progress so plans can be made to organize a defense; assist with any troubles you have, or coordinate with supervisors.

The progress report does not have to follow a specific format. It can be as simple as a detailed email.

CHAPTER IV

CHOOSING A THESIS TOPIC

4.1 Deciding on a topic

You should decide on a topic early in your coursework, ideally during the first semester. Choosing a topic is something that is either very easy, or very hard. Some students have a quite clear idea of what they want to research even before starting the programme, others are undecided throughout most of their coursework. Selecting an appropriate topic is the first critical aspect of your research.

Remember that a topic is specific. Subjects like 'Development Studies in Thailand,' 'South East Asian International Relations and Development Studies,' or 'Human Trafficking' are not specific enough. These are large areas and there are too many potential topics in them. You need to think of a specific event, idea, or issue such as "Thai Women's Rights in the 1997 constitution," "Malaysia-Singapore relations on Development Studies, 1990-2000," or "The Trafficking in Children in Cambodia." Notice how each of these topics has a more specific geographical area and time frame. Even these topics themselves are too broad, but the research itself will focus on one aspect within each of them.

You need to be specific because you cannot write a thesis on such a broad area. It will be about everything and nothing.

The more precise your research interests and topic, the easier it will be for the programme to assign you a qualified supervisor. Remember that you can and probably will change and adapt your topic. However, begin thinking and talking about your work in terms of research topics because this will make it both easier to find a good supervisor and plan your research work.

Another good suggestion is to look at previous research topics to see how students have focused their research on a specific issue. The list of past MAIDS students' research topics is available at the office and on the programme's website.

Some considerations and advice:

When looking for a topic, some students are lucky to find a topic that interests them, and that the programme will support right away. Others have to go through two or three different proposals and are still unsure when the coursework finishes. Generally students know what they want to research, but they do not know how to turn this into a research topic. Do not worry, this is expected. Before you commit yourself to a topic, consider the advice given below.

4.2 Advices for choosing a topic

4.2.1 The topic must interest you.

This does appear obvious. However, be careful if you are doing a topic because someone else told you to, your work wants you to or you think it is the right thing. If you are not interested in the topic, imagine how you will feel after concentrating on that one issue for a year. Chances are you will dislike the topic, find it hard to motivate yourself to research it, and also be unwilling to put in extra time to produce a good quality thesis. However, if the topic is interesting, then you will enjoy researching and talking about it. At this level of research, the student is expected to be highly self-motivated and even passionate about the subject. If you are not interested, then you cannot get passionate about it.

4.2.2 The topic must be a manageable size.

The most common problem at the beginning of Master's research is that students pick a topic which is beyond the realm of possibility. Often research projects start out as potentially three or four PhDs, and gradually the student cuts out the unnecessary work and research before finding the thesis topic. Refining your topic is a normal research process. From the start, be aware that you cannot do everything, and some ideas or investigations must be ignored. When you have to drop part of your research, be pleased rather than disappointed. Similarly, be careful that you have picked a topic which can, if necessary, be expanded if you are short of material. While this is a very uncommon outcome, and one

which the supervisor nearly always picks up early in the project, it is good to start on a topic that can move either way (that is, grow into a bigger project, or be cut down into a smaller one).

4.2.3 The topic must be within range of competence.

Remember that if you are completing a Master's thesis, this is the very start of your research career, and that you are a novice in the field of research. You will be learning the skills of research as you go. However, it is expected that you have completed an undergraduate degree so you know the basics. Students should not commit to undertake field research in which they have no knowledge or where research skills are beyond their capabilities (for instance language or travel). If you want to do a thesis on corporate law but have a degree in Biology, and have never studied law, then you will be working in a field which you have no background. This does not mean that you only research what you know. Rather, design your topic in awareness of your competencies. Similarly, if your reading or analysis skills are limited do not take on a detailed theoretical or philosophical topic. You must find the right balance between working with what you already know and challenging yourself in new areas of inquiries.

4.2.4 The topic must demonstrate a student's mastery in an area.

Related to the above point, it is best to have a research project in the areas where you are competent. The project should show off your skills, so look at ways to highlight them. If you are good at field work, then base your research project on field work. If you are good at archival research, then do a project that involves archival research. If you have access to certain groups or areas, such as minority groups or INGOs, use this. Skills such as textual analysis, legal analysis, statistics, philosophy, or field research can be highlighted if the student is good in these. Additionally, if you are doing something you are good at, and in turn, you produce good work, then this should have a positive effect on you.

4.2.5 The topic must contribute to knowledge.

A good thesis should positively impact people's lives. You should think about who and to what your thesis will contribute, because the more it contributes, the more important your thesis will be.

By definition a thesis must be a contribution to knowledge. This means the research to some extent must be new, and could be used by different people. It is difficult at this early stage to know if your topic is a worthy contribution, but your supervisor can help you there. This is not as difficult as you think - for you will be making your own opinions and own experimental or research findings. However, there must be some element of critical analysis and application of your own judgment. This can be a difficult concept for some students as it is a more Western style of research and study, and it will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6: Research.

CHAPTER V

THE THESIS PROPOSAL

5.1 What is a research proposal?

The research proposal is a document that outlines the research you intend to undertake.

The proposal ensures the research you intend on doing is of a suitable standard and size for a Master's thesis. It also ensures that you are capable of doing research and are suitably prepared.

The proposal must essentially do the following:

- Prove the research is of an appropriate standard. That is, the topic is at an appropriate level for an international degree, and the topic fits the definition of a thesis: it is a contribution to knowledge.
- Prove the research is feasible.
- Prove the student is capable of undertaking the research.
- Outline your research methods: Chulalongkorn University must approve all research before it is undertaken. This ensures that research ethics are respected, and that there is no risk in undertaking the research.

5.2 Proposal structure

- The proposal should be Times New Roman 12 point, spaced at 1.5 lines.
- No special binding is needed.
- You need a cover page.
- The size of a proposal varies greatly, from around 8 to 15 pages.

The structure of the proposal contains the following sections.

5.2.1 Introduction or Statement of Research Problem (2-3 pages)

This is an overview of the topic you will study. The introduction gives the context of the issues and a general overview of the main points. Here you state the question or issue you intend to answer. This section gives the reason why the research needs to be undertaken. The research must answer a problem (or a question). The Statement of Research Problem gives you the opportunity to outline why you need to study the area you are studying.

Be careful not to confuse a problem in the 'real world,' for instance violence or any other violation, with a research problem. A research problem is a theoretical or conceptual problem which your thesis should provide an answer for. A problem in the real world is something that is going wrong and that your thesis will address indirectly. A research problem does not mean something is going wrong, it means there is some issue which nobody knows the answer to, and you plan to find this answer or the issue which has not been answered satisfactorily. This section, together with literature review, will lead to thesis question. In other word, it provides a basis for justifying your research question.

This section should answer this question:

- What is the issue I'm looking at?
- What further do we need to know about the issue?
- Why the issue is significant in term of the exiting socio-political and/or economic context?

5.2.2 Literature Review (3-5 pages)

Here you must detail what has been written in the field to demonstrate that you know the field, and have done some thinking about what you want to study. The objective of literature review is to identify the knowledge gap in the field. This will lead the student to identify his/her research problem and questions. The literature review should demonstrate that you have read and researched what literature is already available, and what research has already been done. You must provide descriptions of relevant texts, analyses of important research, and criticisms of work related to your research. The

literature review will be probably the largest section of the proposal, and will need about 3-5 pages. It is too difficult to determine how many texts you should refer to, but 10 would be an absolute minimum. Literature review must be related to the issues you want to address.

This section should answer the questions:

- What have other people written and said about the topic?
- How does the literature relate to my research?
- What is the knowledge gap related to the area of your research interest?

5.2.3 Research questions

The questions summarize the direction of your research. When you undertake research, your thesis will answer these questions. The easiest way to write questions is to restate your objectives in question form. Generally, you will have 2-3 questions which focus on the central concerns of your research. The questions are basically a summary of the research objectives, but stated in question form.

This section should answer the following question:

- What questions does the research answer?

5.2.4 Objectives of research

The objectives section is very similar to the statement of problems. However, in the objectives section you discuss exactly what the research will do and what the potential outcomes will be. The objectives are a crucial aspect of the thesis as it summarizes the whole direction you will be taking, and the key issues you will address. The objectives will state what the outcomes of the thesis will be if the research is undertaken.

The objectives are generally stated in terms such as:

To identify ...

To analyze ...

To compare ...

To define ...

To evaluate...

To assess ...

To criticize ...

To determine ...

You cannot use broad terms like ‘to explore,’ to understand’, or ‘to think about’ because these are your personal objectives, and not the research project’s objectives. Also, be careful with using terms like ‘to suggest’ or ‘to propose’ because these may be recommendations coming out of the research, and not research findings. Objectives are normally done in point form. Generally a proposal has between 3-4 objectives.

This section should answer the following questions:

- What will the thesis achieve?

Please note that **Research question section comes before Objectives of research.**

5.2.5 Hypothesis (Expected Outcomes)

You are expected to give a brief assessment of what you expect to find. This enables you to guess what your research will show, and to provide a theory about why the results will be as you anticipate. It is not necessary for your final thesis to agree with the outcomes, they can be the exact opposite (and, in fact, many good theses disagree with their original hypothesis). The purpose of this section is for you to think ahead to how you will analyze your findings. This may only need to be 1-2 paragraphs.

This section should answer the following questions:

- What do I think the research results will be?
- Why will the results demonstrate this?

5.2.6 Research Methods

You must detail your research methods because the Thesis Examination Committee must decide if your methods are appropriate for the research you will undertake, if they are ethical, and if you are capable of doing the research. Here you describe how you will find your answers. This can be through documentary research, questionnaires, surveys, site visits, and so on. The committee checks that the methods will allow you to find what you

are looking for; also that the objectives match the methods, so you will be collecting data on the issue that you are exploring.

The size, obviously, depends on the type of methodology as most research in the programme involves fieldwork, interviews, and questionnaires. This section is normally about 2-4 pages. However, purely legal or textual analysis need only be one page.

This section should answer the following questions:

- What research tools will I use?
- How will these tools allow me to find what I am looking for?

5.2.7 Research Scope

Many students include a section on the scope of the research. The scope describes the area that you will research. It may be the conceptual, physical, subject or temporal (time) area. The scope will detail the exact limit of the issue under research.

This section should answer the following question:

- What is the size of the subject area I am researching?

5.2.8 Significance of research

In this section you detail what contributions the thesis will make. Reasons include practical applications (for example advances in NGO monitoring), contribution to knowledge (for theoretical or social topics), or social benefits (for example in education, politics, or health). Here you need to think of potential outcomes of the research topic, or where the thesis will be practical. The contributions occur in three areas: contributions to knowledge, to the research subjects, and to the community in general. While Master's research tends most to contribute to the academic community, the student should consider any other ways the thesis may contribute to groups, communities, or organization. This may only need one page.

This section should answer the following questions:

- To whom my research will impact?
- What will this research contribute to the academic world?

5.2.9 Ethical Issues (Optional)

You need to announce if you may have any ethical research concerns. This may be researching vulnerable subjects, or if there is any risk involved in the fieldwork. This section may be 1 paragraph, and generally less than a page. Further details are given in Chapter 7: Research ethics.

This section should answer the following question:

- What are the ethical issues of my research?

5.3 Developing a thesis proposal

5.3.1 Analysing your topic

5.3.1.1 Identify your research goals / purposes

Distinguish them from your research topic / questions. How well does your research topic or question serve your research goals? How could you modify your research topic or question to better achieve your goals in carrying out this project? What other topics / questions could also achieve the same research goals? Note: identifying your research goals are an attempt to justify your research question, which you should do in your thesis proposal. The other part of justifying your research question is by showing how it will make a contribution to existing academic or policy literature, something we will cover later.

5.3.1.2 Graph the issues related to your topic

Brainstorm (“think freely about”) the various issues that are related to your topic by drawing a “spider-web” graph. Then, decide whether any of the issues are actually specific aspects or sub-topics of others. Group these together. Ask yourself: have I already picked the most interesting issue, or could I focus my research project more easily on a different, related issue? Could I focus my research project on one of the sub-topics of my issue, in order to narrow the focus and make the thesis project more manageable?

5.3.1.3 Re-phrase and sharpen your research question

Change the question from a ‘how’ question to a ‘why / under what conditions’ question. Ask yourself these two questions: a) what is the most interesting or troubling problem involved in this issue or topic?; b) what would be the most interesting outcome or result or resolution (good or bad) to that problem? Now, re-frame your thesis question in this format: “Why does [your issue / problem] have [result or outcome]?” Note: it could be either a good or bad outcome; a high level or low level outcome; or a resolution or failure of resolution. Or try to re-phrase your question by using “Under what conditions” instead of “Why”.

You can also have secondary research questions. These can ask about other outcomes that are related to your main problem and outcome. Or, your secondary questions can ask about different ways your main cause affects your main outcome. HOWEVER, even if you have several research questions, it’s usually good to have one clear, focused, main question.

5.3.2 Building a model of your thesis research project

5.3.2.1 Goal

We want to graph what you think you will find in your thesis research. We want to choose possible causes or influences on the outcome of your research question. We want to guess which cause is the most important one, and focus special attention on that cause. Perhaps in doing the research, you will find that a different cause has a bigger influence on the outcome or result of the problem you are studying. That would be fine. For now, we just want to make an educated guess or hypothesis about the primary cause or causes, in order to guide the project. We also want to graph the ways in which you think your main cause will influence your outcome.

5.3.2.2 Definitions and usefulness

Model: An abstract arrangement of relationships between different phenomena (or “issues”). Most social scientists and academics are interested in creating and testing models for their own sake – that is their job! But for practitioners and students who aim to understand or influence some specific part the “real world”, creating a model is also very useful.

First, having a model will make your thesis more organized and easy to research and write. Focus your research and your writing on evaluating (or “measuring”) and describing the variables in your model. If you organize your thesis according to a simple model (maybe each chapter will describe what you found or what you know about one specific issue or variable), then the thesis can practically “write itself”!

Second, a model will help you get deeper understanding of some aspects of your research subject (that is why academics believe in models), even if it ignores many aspects or details. Remember, your thesis cannot, and should not, try to capture all aspects of the full reality of the issue or community that you are

studying. Some people do not like being forced to make a simple model. Because they care so much about a community or issue, and know so much about its complex aspects, they find it strange or even “false” to “force” their research and thesis to fit an unrealistic, overly simplistic model. You know that the issue is more complicated, and you cannot really say that there is one major cause! For example, if the goal of your project is to research the welfare of the Karen community, or the advancement of human rights in southern Thailand, you may feel it is inadequate or misleading to pick some small aspect of those topics and then focus all your effort on explaining only that specific issue. It can feel very “artificial” to ignore many things seem relevant or important to discuss.

However, consider this: while you want to gain a true, deep understanding of your topic, you cannot and need not explain everything about it. Rather, your model only tries to find the most important reason(s) for the most important specific outcome about which your research question asks. That specific outcome is often only one aspect of the overall issue, but it can and should represent the larger issues that you care about. Again, you do not need to cover the whole broad topic in your research, but rather your goal can be to clearly explain one aspect that stands for the broad topic. Also remember that if you care and know a lot about a topic your knowledge, concern and experience will show in your writing, even if you limit your discussion only to a simple model.

Hypothesis: A hypothesis is a suggested relationship between two or more phenomena (or variables, for example, “X causes Y”). In your model, you want to guess or propose which causes / factors are most important in explaining the specific outcome in your issue or case study, and then investigate whether those really are the most important causes. That is your hypothesis. “A is the most important cause of Z”. Or, “A and B are the most important influences that determine whether X [issue] occurs at a high level or low level.”

Theories: Theories are hypotheses that have been tested successfully (they have not yet been shown to be false). Theories also say how one thing (or set of

things) causes an outcome. By researching your hypothesis, you are actually building a theory.

5.3.3 Types of variables (“factors”, “conditions”, and “issues”) to put in your model

We will use the social-science terminology of “variables”. But you do not have to use those words. You can call them “issues” or “explanations” or “causes” and “outcomes” in your proposal or thesis.

5.3.3.1 Variable: situation, factor, condition, or “issue” that can be different under different circumstances.

5.3.3.2 Dependent variable: the outcome of the key issue that your research question focuses on

“Why / under what conditions does Z [the resolution / outcome to the key problem / issue in your topic] occur?” The resolution / outcome is your dependent variable. Sometimes we see a resolution, sometimes we don’t. Sometimes we see a high level of outcome, sometimes a low level. That is the “variation” of the “variable”. Remember – even if the case/issue/community that you are studying actually does not change at all, it is still a “variable”. If you can imagine a different outcome than the actual one, or if you can think of the same issue having a different outcome in a different country or a different period of history, then your “outcome” is a variable, even if it doesn’t change in the case you are studying.

5.3.3.3 Independent variables: also called “explanatory” variables.

These are all the issues or factors or things that can influence the outcome of your key issue / problem. There are three main kinds of independent variables, but let’s just focus on two of them:

i) Key or study variables - these are the issues or things that you think will most affect the outcome that you are studying. So, your hypothesis is in this form: Research question – “Under what conditions does Z [the most interesting outcome / resolution of your topic] occur? My hypothesis X [the key variable] is the most important cause of Z.” Or else, “My hypothesis is that X and Y [two key variables] are the most important influences on whether Z is achieved.”

ii) Control variables – these are alternate explanations, or other issues or things that might affect the outcome you are studying. You mention and examine (one or two or three) control variables in your project in order to compare their influence against the influence of your key variable. You might find that some of these control variables are things that do affect the outcome of your question, but they are secondary causes - you think they are less important than the key variable(s). Other control variables can be issues that do not really affect the outcome, but people often mistakenly believe they are important influences on your question. You want to include both kinds of control variables.

ADVICE: You can pick control variables by asking this question: What are the different key variables emphasized in the articles and books that I read for my literature review?

Example of dependent/independent variables

Let's say that international terrorism is the issue / problem you are trying to explain, and the level of terrorism is the outcome or result that is most important about that issue. The level of international terrorism is your dependent variable. So, what things influence the level of international terrorism, or cause the level to be higher or lower? Anything you think might influence that level is an independent variable. Does poverty help fuel international terrorism? Maybe, maybe not. But if your hypothesis is that lack of democracy in the Middle East is the key variable that provokes terrorism, you still want

to include poverty in your study as a control variable. Also, some people think that resentment of U.S. foreign policies generally, or the level of violence in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories specifically, are major influences on the level of international terrorism. In your study, you will focus on showing that the lack of democracy [key independent variable] influences the level of terrorism [dependent variable]. But you also want to examine whether poverty, resentment of U.S. foreign policies, and level of violence in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories [three control variables, or two with one having a specific sub-variable] are closely associated with the level of international terrorism. You examine them because you want to show that these three control variables have less influence or are less closely linked to the level of international terrorism than lack of democracy, your key / explanatory variable.

5.3.3.4 Intervening variables: the specific ways or mechanisms by which your key variable influences your outcome [dependent variable]

This is where your special knowledge of the topic really becomes useful. Most of you started your proposals with research questions that began with the word "How?", as in, "How does this affect that?" In the step 1 above "Analyzing your topic", you then changed your question to the format: "Why / under what conditions does that [outcome] occur?" Now, however, after you have picked your dependent variable and your key independent variable(s), you can go back to ask the question "how?" The various answers to the "how" question can be called intervening variables. Think about how your topic works in the real world. What are the ways that things actually happen in your topic? What is the sequence of events that occurs in your organization or community? List all the specific ways that your main cause affects the outcome of your topic issue.

IMPORTANT TIP / LESSON: identify the possible implications of the key independent variable(s) in your model. Pick the most important (and also the most obvious) implications. Look for them in your research, and discuss them in your thesis. Try it this way: Forget about your outcome / dependent variable for a moment. Focus only on your main cause [your key independent variable]. If that variable or cause is strongly present, what are the various things we should expect

to see? How will that cause affect other issues, groups, and situations, besides the one you're interested in?

Hint: one usual implication of a key variable is that “actors” (the people or groups that you are studying) talk about that variable, or that cause, in their own writing or discussions. Thus, their writings or their speeches can be an important intervening variable.

Example of key variables found in actors' discourse

If our hypothesis is that resentment of the U.S. is the key cause of terrorism, then we would expect to find a lot of discussion of U.S. foreign policy in terrorist groups' speeches and web-sites. If neo-liberal ideology is a key cause of the World Bank's policies in Thailand, we would expect to see lots of citations of major neo-liberal theories in the World Bank's training manuals. If a rights-based development approach is key to youth welfare, then, in communities with high youth welfare, we would also expect that leading NGOs' planning documents would mention the key principles of a rights-based approach, such as beneficiaries being involved in project design, etc.

NOTE: some of the implications of your main cause / independent variable are not intervening variables, because they don't influence the specific outcome you are studying. Still, you can list them, look for them in your research, and mention them in your thesis, because they help to show that your key cause / independent variable is strong.

Example of intervening versus non-intervening implications of independent variable

In Greg B. Felker's PhD Dissertation, entitled “Upwardly Global? The State, Business, and MNCs in Malaysia and Thailand's Technological Transformation.” (1998, Princeton University), he argues that the level of dominance of government over private business is the key independent variable explaining the pattern of technology development [dependent variable] in Malaysia and Thailand. He argues that Malaysia's government has

a higher level of dominance whereas Thailand's government had a lower level.

To prove this (in other words, to check / measure the key independent variable), he checks and report several implications of a high level of government dominance over private business. One implication: if government is dominant over private business, the share of corporate income tax in total government tax revenue is likely to be high. By contrast, if private business is politically strong, the government will have to find tax revenue elsewhere, because the share of corporate income tax in the tax total will be lower. He shows that Malaysia has a much higher share of corporate income tax in its overall tax revenues, and Thailand's is much lower. The share of corporate income tax was not an intervening variable, because it did not directly influence the pattern of technology development [the dependent variable] in those countries. But, it did help prove that the assessment of the key independent variable was correct.

Meanwhile, he identified other implications of the key independent variable that were intervening variables. Example: if government dominance over private business is high, then government agencies that promote technology development will be able to "pick and choose" which individual businesses get subsidies or tax breaks. If government dominance is low, such agencies will have to give subsidies automatically to all qualified (or even unqualified) businesses that demand them. Thus, the degree of government discretion in industrial & technological agencies became one of the key intervening variables, because it was a crucial mechanism to determine how the level of government dominance affected the pattern of technological development.

5.3.4 Making a model of your thesis project in the form of flow-charts

5.3.4.1 Make two graphs

One graph shows your independent (key and control) variables and your dependent variable (your outcome). Another graph shows your key independent variable, intervening variables (causal mechanisms or ways of influence), and the dependent variable.

- Identify and state clearly your dependent variable (the most important specific outcome of the most interesting or important problem in your topic). I
- Identify and state clearly some main independent variables – think about and list the main causes or things that influence or might be thought to influence the outcome of your problem. Refer to the literature review that you have already done, and think of the main things that those books & articles emphasize in explaining or studying your topic.

5.3.4.1 First graph showing your outcome / dependent variable, as well as the major possible causes / influences / independent variables. Highlight the cause or causes that you think are the most important influence on the outcome, and which you will probably argue should be emphasized.

- LESSON: YOU CAN GO BACK LATER AND CHANGE YOUR MODEL AS YOU DO RESEARCH AND THINK MORE. IN FACT, YOU ARE VERY LIKELY TO CHANGE YOUR MODEL – IT'S QUITE O.K. – BUT IT'S STILL USEFUL TO START WITH A CLEAR ONE IN MIND.

5.3.4.2 Second graph showing some intervening variables or mechanisms. Think of all the ways that your key explanatory / independent variable can influence your outcome. This is where you can think about and answer the “how” questions that you first had when you started thinking about your project. Next, forget your outcome for a moment, and just think of all the possible effects of your

main explanation / key independent variable. How does that factor affect other groups or issues? Are any of these effects easy to see and report?

5.3.5 Why / how is this practical or useful for your thesis?

5.3.5.1 Organizing your research

You can focus your research on examining, measuring (qualitatively or maybe with some interview or statistical data), and reporting (describing clearly) those specific variables / issues. As long as you know and can say why you have chosen those variables, you can focus solely on them. You do not need to gather information and write about all aspects, background, complexities, counter-examples, of your topic. **DECIDING WHAT TO INCLUDE AND WHAT TO LEAVE OUT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN RESEARCHING AND WRITING YOUR THESIS.** In this way, the model helps you to limit and focus your research – to decide what to include and what to leave out. As you do your research, look for any evidence of the variables in your model. Also, do the reverse – take whatever data or observations you gather in your research, and group them under each of your model’s variables. You can use note cards to physically organize the data under each variable, or do it electronically in different files.

5.3.5.2 Organizing your writing – The model can help you the same way with your writing.

Part of your thesis can be just a report of how & why you made your model. Why is your question important? Why / how did you select it? Why / how did you form your hypothesis? Describing these questions to your reader can make up your introduction, literature review, and / or theory/argument chapters. (Below are some specific comments about the literature review).

The main part of your thesis can be organized in chapters or sections according to your model. There are different ways of doing this. For example, each intervening variable can be discussed in a single chapter. Or else, you can

make one chapter for each specific aspect of your dependent variable (mentioning various relevant influences / mechanisms / intervening variables within each chapter).

Thus, the writing begins to “organize itself”. You can simply discuss each intervening variable / mechanism, how it works, what evidence you found about it in your case, and what is your assessment of each variable in the real-world situation you researched. You can write as though you are a “news reporter” discussing what you found about each variable in the model. Otherwise you can write as if you are telling your friend what you found about each variable. You can also look at different examples or sub-aspects of your outcome, and then just describe evidence of those aspects, or your assessment of each aspect or case-example.

5.3.6 Revising your literature review

Your literature review should give the reader an understanding of the different major arguments or approaches to your topic, and especially your major research question / dependent variable. It is not just a list of books and articles on your topic.

IMPORTANT POINT – You can organize your literature review according to the major independent variables in your model. Think especially about your control variables – the causes that you do not think are the most important influences on your outcome. Some other people probably do think that these things are the most important causes that affect your outcome. Therefore, after reading relevant authors and sources (books, articles, etc.) group together or classify them according to which cause / key independent variable they emphasize. Use these various categories as “sub-headings” in your literature review.

For example, you can say, “Some observers stress that targeting policies to reach particular populations in need is the most important factor in achieving higher social welfare. Such targeting-based arguments are one specific type of a needs-based approach to development programming, because they assume that the main way to achieve social welfare is to match programmes more closely to needs. Examples of targeting arguments

include A, B, and C authors. Author A did a study of....” After the literature review, when you get to your own hypothesis, you draw a contrast between that literature and your own study by emphasizing the different independent variables that you think are key. “In contrast to targeting and other needs-based approaches to social development programmes, I hypothesize that a rights-based approach is more effective. The key factor in achieving higher welfare among vulnerable groups is adopting rights-based programming in its various aspects: involving beneficiary populations in programme planning; working to change laws or government policies to make those rights clear”, etc.

As you go back over the books and articles that you read for your literature review, ONLY summarize the relevant parts of the sources, meaning, those parts of the sources that discuss the independent variable and its effects (the sources’ key variable, which is usually a control variable in your model, except for those sources that you agree “got the argument right” by picking the most important cause). KEY POINT: You do not need to give a full summary of the various sources that discuss your topic.

As you finish each section (each section defined by the key independent / explanatory variable the authors’ emphasize), mention why you think that these sources are wrong. Why are they wrong to emphasize these causes more than the key cause that you will study? What have they left out or given insufficient emphasis? What is it about their explanation that is not fully satisfying or convincing?

Another section of your literature review can discuss some sources that emphasize the same key independent variable as your hypothesis but explore that variable’s effect on a different outcome. In other words, they make a similar argument to the one you want to make, but they ask a different research question. Perhaps it is a related question. In any case, summarize how the variable works in causing that outcome, and explain how it is similar / different to the way you think that this same variable will cause the outcome in your own study.

5.4 A good research proposal

What makes a good research proposal?

While there are many different research proposals, there are some basic elements that make a proposal good. Great proposals clearly answer these questions:

- Is the research problem of a Master's degree size and standard?
- Are the objectives and questions clearly stated?
- Does the literature review demonstrate the student's knowledge of the area?
- Will the methodology provide the tools to answer the research questions?

At the proposal examination, the committee will basically be looking at the following points:

5.4.1 The topic is suitable for a thesis

The topic must be of a suitable size; that is, neither too big nor too small. The topic must be a thesis: it must contain an argument. You cannot describe an event, as this is not a contribution. The topic must contribute to knowledge. You will offer some new analysis of a research problem. The topic is a social contribution: stakeholders in the topic will benefit from your research

5.4.2 You will find what you are looking for

Here the committee will determine if the research methods you suggest will allow you to locate what you are looking for. Without accurate research methods you may not be able to find your data, or to analyze your material.

5.4.3 You know enough about the field to enter it

This is determined by the literature review. Here you must demonstrate that you have done enough research to show that you will not get lost, and that you can find your

way about the issues, concepts, and people; also, that you will be able to navigate yourself out of trouble.

5.4.4 Project is well coordinated

The objectives of the research, the questions, the literature review and the methods are all focusing on the same aspect of research. You must make sure that the methods answer your research questions, not other questions, and the literature review provides information on your objectives, and so on. A good proposal is closely focused on your thesis topic.

There are some other basic ingredients of a research proposal that can help make it successful.

5.4.5 Clearly written

The expression and presentation should be professional, clear, and concise. The supervisory panel wants to know if you are serious about your topic, and you are organized enough to undertake a significant research project. A poorly presented, unclear proposal will not convince them.

5.4.6 A proposal that shows enthusiasm

This may be hard to convey in a proposal, but the best proposals convey this enthusiasm. Here the student demonstrates their interest in the project, and their enthusiasm will tell the committee that the student will complete the project. Most important, the committee will know why the student is doing the project.

5.4.7 Demonstrated knowledge of the research subject

You only have a couple of pages to convince the committee that you know what you plan to study. A well-organized literature review, and a thorough bibliography should convince the committee of your research and knowledge on the issue.

For more information

Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

CHAPTER VI

RESEARCH

6.1 What is research?

Researching is a demanding task of study at the graduate level. Research is also a solitary activity: the student must design, organize, initiate, and undertake all aspects of their research on their own, but with advice from the supervisors. Good student researchers must be very independent and self-sufficient. This chapter outlines what skills makes a good student researcher, and also what are the important activities a researcher must be aware of.

There are three main features which distinguish a good researcher:

- Independent
- Investigative
- Analytical

6.1.1 Independent

Research is mostly an individual activity. While it is possible to research in groups, and it is important to discuss research findings with colleagues and friends, the actual work of research for the master's thesis must be done alone. A good student will be able to organize their own time, decide which direction to take, and locate good resources, books, or experiments themselves. There is much more emphasis on the student taking the initiative in this master's project. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you need it, but remember you cannot always rely on the supervisor. A good researcher is a problem solver who - with the initiative and creativity - can teach themselves how to analyze new material. The reason for having a research project, such as a thesis, is to enable the student to learn skills so that they can undertake research on their own after graduation.

6.1.2 Investigative

Good research answers a question that no one has answered before. You will be covering new ground, and looking at original problems. The student must be curious about the subject, and pay attention to details. Often the research does not come easily and the student will need to work hard to find data on the project. Hence, the skills of investigation are critical. These skills are asking questions (why does something behave as it does?, why did she write that?); inventing approaches or solutions (is this the best way to do find the answer?); and finding alternatives (is there a better place to look for this data?). Much like a detective or investigative reporter, the student must be a quick and original thinker.

6.1.3 Analytical

To analyze is to examine something by discovering how it works. This is not merely describing it, or stating what it does, but outlining how and why it does what it does. The student must have a desire to know how something works. They cannot accept anything without question, and they should have a good enough knowledge to propose why something works as it does. Analysis is also a skill of observing (seeing how things work) and paying close attention to detail (either in a text or in the field). Also, a good observer quickly understands what they are seeing, and is able to detail and explain the observation. Skills of analysis are a combination of investigation and problem solving, with the student putting forward their own ideas and proposals.

There are more necessary skills in conducting research, but these are the most important. They are skills which are difficult to teach, but they can be learned by experience.

6.2 Good research practices

A good researcher does these things:

- Writes often and writes early
- Keeps extensive and detailed notes
- Thinks critically about the subject: always questions why things are as they are

- Knows the computer programmes
- Talks to the supervisor about progress

While there are no real secrets to completing a Master's thesis other than hard work and dedication, the following suggestions will assist the student:

6.2.1 Write often and write early

A thesis is a written project, and the student is assessed on their written work. The writing is the most difficult part, and is also the skill the student must learn the most about. Therefore it is best to start writing early. Do not spend a year reading before putting the pen to the paper. It is much easier to re-draft a document that is already 12,000 words long, than to write 12,000 in the final month. The earlier the student starts writing, the less they will have to write further on, the more practice they will get, and finally they will have more written material to show and discuss with their supervisor.

Students should start writing during the second semester. Time should be set aside every week for writing (perhaps only 4 hours, but this should be enough).

6.2.2 Always take careful notes and keep a bibliography

The bibliography for the average Master's thesis consists of around 50-100 entries. Managing such a large number of references is a serious task; misplaced information can take days, perhaps weeks, to relocate. The student needs to have a well-developed system of note taking, bibliography, and referencing.

Whenever you read an article, read it with a pen and paper and take notes, as you cannot expect to remember everything. Make sure to detail where all your quotes come from as well as the page numbers. From the first day the student should begin organizing their bibliography, starting by learning the official referencing system (the APA Style), and by recording the full reference of everything they read. A good system will save weeks of work at the end of the thesis. Nowadays programmes like Endnote make compiling a bibliography very easy. These programmes, as detailed below, are crucial to know.

6.2.3 Know your computer programmes

The Master's candidate should expect to spend a great part of their lives during the thesis in front of their computer (perhaps 8 hours a day for three months). The revolution in computing, with word processing, bibliographic programmes, statistics packages, and spreadsheets, means the production of a thesis now is far more easier than it was ten or twenty years ago. But in order to take full advantage of these advances the student must know the various programmes. It is essential that the student knows basic programmes like Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Endnotes, Internet Explorer, and email software. The quicker you are with these programmes, the less time you need to spend typing and formatting, and the more time you can spend reading and thinking. Make sure if you are not familiar with these programmes that you learn them in the first months of research.

6.2.4 Talk to your supervisor about your progress, and be honest with your progress

Supervisors are your guide for the project. It is crucial that s/he know exactly what is going on. The supervisor can do nothing if you do not admit you do not understand, that you need more help, or that you are confused, because the supervisor does not know you are having trouble. You need to make sure you are honest with your progress. If you cannot understand what your supervisor wants you to do, s/he must know. If you do not pass on this information it may be too late to fix the problem. If you are having difficulties the supervisor will need to reassess the project and find ways to assist you. Similarly, if you find the tasks too simple, or the supervisor is too strict about what you must do, you must let him/her know.

6.3 Key features of research

6.3.1 Arguments

A thesis cannot simply be a description of a topic because a description does not show your engagement in the topic. Rather a thesis must argue a particular point. For instance, you must state why you think something happens as it does, or argue what you consider is the best way to fix - or to understand - a problem. An argument is not necessarily emotional or forceful, but it is a thoughtful evaluation or assessment about your topic. The argument will help you read and critically analyze material related to the research because you consider the material based on your argument.

An argument is the organizing principle of a thesis, and this is where you offer an explanation or an evaluation of your topic. Students can have great difficulty deciding what their argument is going to be. A thesis must say something about what you (as the researcher) think about your topic. That is, an argument is always a personal engagement with the topic. By personal, we are not talking about opinions or emotions, we are talking about your well-informed evaluation. This concept is critical: you must reach your argument and your explanation of the research problem by a well-researched and evaluated analysis.

Wayne Booth, in *The Craft of Research*, gives a clear and detailed outline of an argument. A central point he makes is that an argument is made up of three parts:

6.3.1.1 A Claim

The claim is what you consider to be the most appropriate explanation.

- Claims are substantive: they must make a contribution because this is the basis of a thesis.
- Claims must be contestable: you cannot argue that if you stand in the rain you will get wet. We all know this already and you cannot contribute anything by arguing for something that we already know.

6.3.1.2 Evidence for the claim

Evidence is the facts, theories, and previous research you use to justify your claim. This is all the background information you use to inform your claim.

6.3.1.3 Qualifications

- Qualifications limit and specify the argument.
- Qualifications give opposing points of view and create a dialogue for discussion.

When planning a research topic it is important to think about these three parts of the argument. It can be useful to think about what the three parts are in your own topic. If you have a clear idea this will greatly help you develop both your research proposal, but also, plan the research itself. It also means that from an early stage you are well-prepared to search, and research, on the specific issue.

6.3.2 Theory

Much has already been mentioned about this in Chapter 5, under the section “Building a model of your thesis research project”. A theory is the explanation of why something occurs. Arguments and theories are almost the same things. In fact, it could be said they are two different aspects of the same thing: an argument is why you believe a certain thing occurs, and the theory is the explanation of why this particular event occurs. The main difference is that your argument is more personal, and the theory is based on more formal explanations. Most often the theory you use is derived from other theories which you adapt for your own project.

A theory is made up of concepts which describe and classify the events or objects studied, and the relationships between concepts. For example, a thesis on foreign aid and MAIDS involves the two central concepts of MAIDS and foreign aid, and the relationship between them can be the positive (or negative) impact aid has on MAIDS. An argument may be that the more aid there is, the greater chance for the respect of MAIDS, because of

the theory that more aid leads to higher levels of education and more government accountability.

Theories always occur in a context. Students must examine other theories from previous research and adapt these to their own research. Most theory is determined by schools of thought, such as Marxist or Feminist theories. Sometimes theories are quite explicitly stated, for example, Marxist theories mostly work on the theory that the main divisions in society are social class. Other times theories are more subtly implied and the student needs to read the article closely to understand what the actual theory is. The main point, however, is that a student needs to put their theory in a context of other people's work, and justify why their particular theory is the best one for the situation.

At the early stages it is not crucial for the student to locate their arguments and theories. However, the sooner it occurs, and the clearer these two aspects are, the easier the research and writing will be.

CHAPTER VII

RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethics can be defined as the “principles or standards set by a community which regulates what is considered legitimate or acceptable behavior.” Many universities have very formal ethical guidelines. At this stage, Chulalongkorn’s guidelines are more general. However, at MAIDS we are very serious about research ethics, and insist all students closely address ethical considerations of research. Because human rights form an important part of the MAIDS curriculum, it is logical that they themselves should place emphasis on their respect of other people’s rights, in particular the rights of their research subjects.

Ethics are principles or guidelines, not rules. So sometimes there is no clear answer to an ethical decision and students and supervisors must address the problem by finding a balance between the importance and impact of the research. However, there are some clearly explained rules which are detailed below and cannot be broken: minimal risk, no deception, and you must take care of your research subjects. Most importantly, as a researcher, you have power and authority and at no time can this be abused.

These are the main ethical concerns for you to consider

7.1 Risk

Risk is any potential threat or danger that the research may cause (directly or inadvertently) to the subjects of the research. Risk can take many forms; a physical risk is when the subjects are part of a medical experiment, or if the subjects are exposed to dangerous conditions (for instance traveling in dangerous areas); risk can also be psychological: if the subjects are exposed to harmful ideas (of a political or sexual nature, for instance); or must talk about traumatic experiences (such as domestic violence or other violations).

Much of this information on risk closely follows guidelines set for Australian universities, which has been slightly adapted to the MAIDS context. Risk can be classified into the following categories.

7.1.1 No Risk

Non-invasive projects where there is no risk to subjects above the everyday norm and where subjects are not identified.

- research involving the use of standard tests and questionnaires administered appropriately to normal subject populations, and where data are recorded in such a manner so that the subjects are not and cannot be identified
- research or evaluative procedures involving observation of public behavior on unidentified subjects, where data are recorded in such a manner so that the subjects are not and cannot be identified
- research or evaluative procedures involving collection of existing publicly available data, documents, records or specimens
- research carried out in an educational setting using groups of subjects (rather than individual subjects), where data are recorded in such a manner so that the subjects are not and cannot be identified.

Projects classified as no risk do not need to be monitored by the thesis committee.

7.1.2 Minimal Risk

Research risk classified as minimal when subjects are considered not to be exposed to physical, psychological and social risk above the everyday norm, but which may contain an element of slight risk to the subjects. It would include, for example non-invasive research involving minors. It may also refer to people who are in a vulnerable situation, such as in custody or prison, school children, people engaging in illegal activities, people who have suffered violations which have caused them distress. In these instances, the committee will recommend the student to take the utmost care when dealing with these subjects, and the committee will request to see all surveys and interview plans before they are undertaken.

In these instances it is expected that the Thesis Examination Committee will monitor the student's activities. This will include:

- Checking all questionnaires and interview outlines before they are administered.
- Get feedback promptly on the result of fieldwork and discuss any issues arising.
- Documenting all necessary approvals for interviews and questionnaires.
- Assisting the student in data security, such as making sure subjects are anonymous if they wish to be.

7.1.3 At risk

Research which involves risk to subjects above the everyday norm. This risk is of particular concern and any research which involves risk must get approval from the Thesis Examination Committee, and be closely monitored by the main supervisor. Research at risk includes:

- may cause discomfort (either physical, psychological or social) beyond normal levels of inconvenience. For example talking about serious violations either witnessed by the subject, or occurred to the subject.
- examines potentially sensitive or contentious areas (such as sexual violence, domestic violence, political subversion, illegal activities)
- seeks disclosure of information which may be prejudicial to participants (e.g. information which is potentially incriminating and may put the subjects in jail, or political beliefs, or sexual orientation)
- involves circumstances where the purpose of the study is not fully disclosed. This may be where the researcher must lie to get access to information.
- uses a highly vulnerable subject population (such as children, handicapped populations, or people subject to serious violations).

In these instances the Thesis Examination Committee will monitor the student's activities. This will include all the activities from minimal risk, and in addition:

- Determine if candidate is capable of working in this risky environment.
- Ensure the student has thoroughly researched the issue and will not put subjects or themselves at risk.

- Closely monitor fieldwork while it is being undertaken. This may include asking for weekly updates on activities.

Some very important rules for the research:

- You cannot harm the subject or yourself in the course of research
- You cannot put yourself at risk. Even if you wish to be brave and undertake dangerous research, say in conflict situations or illegally border crossings, this kind of research is not supported by the university for many reasons, such as insurance, university reputation, and so on.

7.2 Consent

Consent is important because to respect your subjects' rights, they must know they are part of a research project. It is disingenuous to lie to subjects. However, you often need to be aware of what information you can give to ensure you get the information you need. Subjects of research who are identified in the research by name will need to know more details of your project. They don't need to know precisely the claim of the research, but must know what the subject of the research is. If you are criticizing a particular organization or idea, you may not want to give this information because the subjects may refuse to talk. However, they may also wish to have the right to reply. Those subjects who are not identified do not necessarily need to know or understand the nature of the research, but they do need to know they are the subject in a research project.

You must gain consent for interviewing vulnerable people.

This includes:

1. Children under 18: parental consent needed.
2. Children at school – the school must give written permission.
3. People under guardianship or care: Patients, prisoners, mentally handicapped, or any other detained person. You should get written permission from the relevant authorities to speak to these people.

7.3 Deception

Deception is where you gain information, without consent, through disguise (as an example, using disguise to gain entry into a group or location). There is much debate about using deception. As of yet, no research undertaken at MAIDS has used deception, and it is unlikely approval would be given for this. This must be discussed with the committee.

7.4 Privacy

All research subjects have the right to privacy. You can offer confidentiality, but this is not legally binding. The researcher and subject do not have the same legal status as doctor and patient. However, there has never been a case of a court requesting a researcher to disclose the identity of a subject. You have to note in your thesis if the subject asked for confidentiality by noting in a footnote “the subject requested not to be named or identified in the research.” Privacy also includes the safe keeping of your information. You should not let unauthorised people read your notes or access interview tapes if they contain sensitive information. It is assumed that the only person allowed to examine this data is the researcher.

7.5 Illegal activities

A student cannot deliberately undertake any illegal activities during the research. This includes crossing borders illegally, participating in drug taking, visiting restricted areas (such as illegal gambling houses, entertainment areas if under the required age, entering private property without permission), illegal protests, and so on. Under special circumstances research whose legality is unclear, but it is considered of low risk – for instance interviewing protestors or visiting groups in borderland areas – may be conducted. However, permission from the committee must be granted.

7.6 Vulnerability

As a researcher you are given a certain power and demand, a trust which cannot be misused. You must consider if the participants are vulnerable (for instance if they are

minors, prisoners, patients or the intellectually handicapped). This also includes psychological vulnerabilities, for instance battered women, people with low self-esteem (for instance people with eating disorders), or recovering addicts. If the group is vulnerable first think if it is essential that the investigation uses the particular group. Care is needed to ensure that consent is informed and freely given. The subject's well-being is YOUR responsibility. Post-research counseling may be necessary.

7.7 Collectives

If you intend to deal with a social group, you need to consult the leaders first. These can be indigenous groups, or even schools and offices. This also makes research sense because you will need to understand how the group operates from a variety of viewpoints.

7.8 Research misconduct

All research findings must be reported accurately and honestly. No cheating, fraud, plagiarism, inventing findings, adjusting results, and so on. This will result in immediate failure and expulsion from the programme.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP

The relationship with the supervisor is perhaps the most important aspect of the research. This section:

- describes different types of relationships
- suggests ways to formalize the relationship
- describes common problems faced by the student and supervisor

The most important part of your research project will be the relationship with your supervisor. Basically, the quality and difficulty of your Master's thesis will be determined by the relationship with your supervisor. The supervisor plays many roles to the student. They offer academic advice, they give project management advice, they may be of moral support; also they will help the student with networking and career choices. Sometimes the supervisor is at a distance and there will be little contact for months, and, at other times, there will be daily contact. The supervisor's knowledge of the field and managerial skills will determine the quality and the success of the thesis. The success is not really about how good the supervisor is, but how good the relationship is. All relationships are different, for some students want a lot of leadership, discipline, and close contact. Other students want the supervisor to take a distant role and to be able to step in if troubles arise.

The University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association has written an excellent article on what to expect from your supervisor. They detail how important an supervisor is to your research project:

A good supervisor is as important as an interesting research project, and choosing the right supervisor can be a complex task. Your supervisor can smooth the path of your research, spare you months of frustration and time lost through poor project planning, keep you on track to meet shorter than expected completion times, and keep you motivated. ("Postgraduate Life", University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association, 1995)

The nature of the relationship is personal, and for this reason it is something the student and supervisor need to negotiate early. The two extremes of supervision are close supervision, and distant supervision. Lets list some of these differences

8.1 Types of Supervisor and Student Relationships

Close supervision:	Supervision at a distance:
Regular meetings and regular submission of work in progress. Structured timetable	Student decides when to meet, and what work to hand in.
Supervisor has input on most student decisions: the project outline and plan is determined by the supervisor, who will also decide on experimental or research models.	Students works independently from supervisor: supervisor will allow the student make all the decisions on how to structure and manage the research project.
Structured programme: A timetable is made early in the supervision, and the student must stay within this plan	Unstructured programme: There is no overall plan and the student decides what action to take as events arise
Professional: supervisor and student keep to formal agreements about the supervision.	Sociable: The meetings are informal, and the student and supervisor are friendly, perhaps meeting off-campus.
Attention to details: supervisor closely monitors all the details of the project and reads all the drafts	Relaxed: supervisor leaves the minor details up to the students

Often supervisor relations are a mixture of both extremes. Neither style is better than the other; however, it is important that both sides agree on what style suits them best.

8.2 Design your supervision: organize a contract

Because of the potential differences it is wise for the supervisor and student to set out a plan early in the supervision. Most universities now suggest the student and supervisor draw up a plan of how to conduct the project. They will informally agree on the

supervisor's role and determine things such as when to meet, what each person is expected to put into the project, and the timetable of events. Some suggested items to organize are:

- frequency of meetings
- timetable of expected workload.
- specific accomplishments (either books to read, field trips to undertake, or writing to accomplish)
- Reading the student expects the supervisor to do
- Other activities the student should undertake, such as courses, training, or conference papers.

Some students may need more contact time early in the supervision to assist with the reading, learn new concepts and getting familiar with the university system. They should organize this with their supervisor and also discuss potential problems they may encounter. The supervisor may have some special requests for the student, as well.

8.3 How many supervisors are best?

Most MAIDS students work with only one supervisor. However the programme can also support supervisor panels of two or three people. Any more is not recommended. A student can have two supervisors: a major supervisor and a co-supervisor. Sometimes there will be a third, but not often. The best number will be a decision reached by the student and the major supervisor. If the supervisor travels a lot or plans a study leave mid-candidature, it would be wise to have perhaps two alternative supervisors. The advantage of multiple (2 or 3) supervisors is that you gain extra input on your thesis. The problem is trying to synthesize three different points of view and incorporate them in your thesis.

The Programme also insists students should have one supervisor from within the programme itself. This is to ensure the supervisor committee undertakes all the proper administrative and academic requirements, and that the standard of theses from the Programme is maintained. The second or third supervisor can be someone from outside the Faculty of Political Science or Chulalongkorn University, e.g. a staff member from an NGO or international organization with expertise in your research topic. All supervisors must be approved by the MAIDS programme.

8.4 The responsibilities of student and supervisor

In some ways the thesis is a shared project. However, the responsibilities are quite distinct, and the student must be aware of what their obligations are. The primary responsibility for oversight of a student's work rests with the supervisor, and the final responsibility for the thesis rests with the student.” So while the supervisor is expected to know the subject matter of the research, offer opinions and criticisms, direct the student, and ensure there is continuing progress made, the student must make sure they submit something of a required standard. However, each person has specific responsibilities.

In the case where there is more than one supervisor, it is also important to distinguish each supervisor’s role. The basic differences can be summarised as:

The **Major supervisor** has a primary responsibility for the thesis.

S/he determines the main objectives of the thesis

S/he is the main source for the student

S/he will decide when the proposal and thesis are ready to defend

S/he will manage the administrative tasks associated with the thesis.

S/he will read all the drafts of the thesis

The **Co-supervisor(s)** will provide feedback on drafts.

S/he will provide an alternative point of view to the major supervisor

S/he will assist the student with certain aspects of the project

S/he will read material requested by the student

S/he will examine the proposal and final thesis of the student

Sometimes the supervisors work closely together and they do not clearly separate their tasks. However, it is fair not to rely on the co-supervisor to do the work the major supervisor is also doing.

8.5 What a student should expect from the supervisors

A good supervisor fulfills many responsibilities: determining a topic and approach, advising on problems, teaching, providing feedback on work, finding resources (contacts or documents), monitoring progress, supporting progress, and moral support.

8.5.1 Supervise research

Most obviously, students must expect their supervisor to provide academic guidance and monitor their academic work. Supervisors need to look over students shoulders and observe their progress, stepping in when it is going nowhere; being supportive when the work is difficult, keeping out of the way when progress is good; and finally to ensure that the research is of the necessary standard.

8.5.2 Managing the topic

The supervisor should assist with the outline of the topic. This starts with formulating the topic at the very beginning, and continues when constructing the necessary actions to complete the research project. These skills are many: time management; recognizing expected outcomes, designing work plans, designing the research agenda, recognizing strengths and weakness of the student, the argument, and the research work.

8.5.3 Provide adequate time for the student

The contact time needed by a master's student will vary according to the state of the project, and also on the personalities of supervisor and student. Meetings could be weekly at some stages, and monthly at others. However, early in the supervision both the supervisor and student should agree on set meetings, and both are expected to keep to these commitments.

8.5.4 Provide constructive criticism on the project

The supervisor must be available to regularly read, comment, discuss, and criticize the student's work. They must do this in a reasonable amount of time and not take a long time to respond to student's written work.

8.5.5 Moral support

This is a difficult skill, but supervisors should provide the necessary enthusiasm, encouragement, and emotional support to the student. Sometimes the student encounters difficulties, cannot see the end and perhaps loses confidence. It is crucial the supervisor can step in and provide support for the student during this time. Like a coach, they must be able to inspire and motivate. Also, they must be able to communicate with the student on some personal or emotional issues related to the project.

8.5.6 Manage administrative procedures

The supervisors must be fully aware of all the administrative procedures for the Master's thesis, including enrolling, regular progress reports, and submitting the thesis. They must inform the student of all the necessary obligations at the university regarding enrolling, intellectual property, and so on. They should know the standard Codes of Conduct for Research, research ethics, and thesis guidelines.

8.5.7 Network support

The supervisors should include their students in academic life. This can be involvement in Programme seminars, speaking at conferences, or meeting academics studying in similar areas. Participating in the academic community is a central factor of academic life, and the supervisor should introduce the student to this group.

8.5.8 Disseminating research

Academic careers are mainly judged on publications. The supervisors should encourage the students to publish, and assist them in presenting work of a publishable standard.

8.6 What supervisors should expect of their students

Of course the supervisor is not the only one providing input. Here are some of the other things students are expected to demonstrate:

8.6.1 Discuss progress openly on the work

The supervisor can only determine how the project is going by what the student reports. If the project is not progressing, they need to know, and as early as possible. It is a big mistake for the student to mislead the supervisor about progress. The best means of monitoring progress is regularly submitting work to the supervisor for comment. The project plan can include deadlines where the student will submit draft copies of chapters or other material for the supervisor to look over.

8.6.2 Mutually agreed meeting times

The supervisor is generally a busy person, so well-structured and well-organized meetings are important. The supervisor does not want the student knocking on her/his door everyday and taking up time. Neither do they want the student to disappear for a couple of months with no contact. Regular meetings should be organized as early as possible, and this can be reassessed every semester, according to the needs of the student/supervisor.

8.6.3 Student responsibility for the thesis

The student must take ultimate responsibility for managing the project and obtaining their degree. While the supervisor has an investment in the completion of the project, it is the student who must be the one accountable for successes and failures. If the project is in trouble, it must be the student who addresses the issues and asks for help. The student should not wait for the supervisor to step in and sort out a problem, but should seek help. The supervisor cannot be blamed for any major problems. While the supervisor is responsible for the final thesis being of a graduate standard, the student must accept total responsibility for the content, presentation, and defend the ideas of the thesis. Remember, it is your argument, not the supervisor's.

8.6.4 Student must balance conformity and independence

There are certain times the student must follow directions and advice, and others, they should break some rules or go against popular opinion - after all they are attempting to contribute original ideas. The supervisor will expect the student to have the initiative to discover work and ideas on their own, to generate their own research. However, in some cases they must also follow the advice of their supervisor(s). Knowing when to follow/break the rules is a skill of a great Master's student.

8.6.5 Regularly produce legible written work

The thesis is written work, and is assessed as such. The only measure the supervisor has of progress is what the student has written. Therefore, the supervisor expects regular written work, and of a reasonable standard so that it can be commented on. There is no point in submitting notes to the supervisor; however, it is not necessary to always give fully detailed, final versions for review. But the student must produce written material that is properly set out, neat, and coherent.

8.6.6 The student will ask others for advice

The supervisor should not be the single but rather the main source of advice. The student should get comments from their peers and other academics on their work. This will both provide new ideas and criticisms, and also relieve the workload of the supervisor. The sources of alternative advice can be fellow students, or more importantly, academic conferences and seminars.

8.6.7 The student shows initiative, enthusiasm, and originality

While these are not necessarily difficult, these skills are very useful. The supervisor will expect the student to give most, if not all, direction and ideas to the project. The supervisor cannot contribute original ideas to the project, because it is the student's job. The supervisor expects the student to work with a genuine interest in the research, and to be self-motivated.

8.7 Common student problems with supervisors

A common question for students at the start of their thesis is "What happens if I start having problems with the Supervisor?" While major problems are not that common, they do happen. The actions depend on the nature of the problem. With academic differences of opinion, these are expected during a candidature, and should be resolved with the supervisor. If this fails then a third party may be necessary - the third party may be someone from the programme or a neutral academic. With personal problems, such as personality differences, the programme chair should sort these out.

The best rule is to sort out the problem sooner rather than later, and always keep your supervisor fully informed of your ideas. Try to deal with difficulties as they emerge rather than letting them overwhelm you. Here are some other common problems:

8.7.1 Supervisor is never there

Academics are busy people. Also, they can travel extensively, and may work overseas for a period of time. It can be difficult for a student to see their supervisor regularly. In this case, contact your second supervisor, and try to organize meetings in advance.

8.7.2 Supervisor takes a long time to read work

After handing the supervisor 30 pages of work, the student will want back comments in a reasonable period (about 2 weeks). If the supervisor is busy, s/he may take over a month. A supervisor should be prompt in reading and returning a student's work. If the supervisor is regularly late with work, something should be done - a note to the supervisor is the first action. If it does not make a difference please speak to the MAIDS Director.

8.7.3 Insufficient feedback from the supervisor

Some supervisors give little response if the work is progressing satisfactorily, or give few comments on written work. This can be upsetting for the student who may have put in weeks or months of work, only to get a mild 'good' in response. It is best for the student to ask for more feedback, or else take their work to someone else for a second opinion.

8.7.4 Difficulty communicating with supervisor

A handbook by the Australian National University gives some good advice for personal differences between student and supervisor:

Try to determine the specific areas you feel you are unable to communicate about. Is it just a personality difference or do you feel you are getting inadequate feedback on your ideas or research? Be creative. Have an informal lunch. Remember that communication can take many different forms. Try to encourage intellectual interaction by

structuring meetings differently. For example, provide written agendas or minutes of the meeting for comment. Make sure that you are being understood! Ongoing inadequate feedback suggests a change of panel might be in order.

8.8 Common supervisor problems with students

Remember that just as many supervisors have trouble with their students. Here is a list of common problems for supervisors.

8.8.1 The student is constantly asking questions and asking for help

Remember your supervisor will expect you to initiate and plan most of your work yourself. Only go to the supervisor for advice on what you think, and not for answers to all your problems.

8.8.2 The student is totally unrealistic about their research plan and the resources that are likely to be available

Many students have a research plan that is more appropriate for 2-3 PhD dissertations. They also are overly optimistic about how much work they can do, and how long it will take them. Even if you do not believe the supervisor that it could take a year to read and research a topic, s/he is more likely to be correct because of their experience.

8.8.3 The student does not incorporate ideas and suggestions from the supervisory panel

This is the problem of the student who is too independent or is trying to hide the fact that the research is not going well. Also, the student does not incorporate comments made by the supervisor and either forgets, or refuses to make changes to their work. This can be frustrating for supervisors who give much advice, only to see it ignored. Remember, you need to balance your own ideas and initiatives with advice from the supervisor. It can be foolish to ignore the advice of your supervisor; at the very least you must consider it.

8.8.4 The student seems overly dependent on advice and direction

Here the student lacks initiative and is dependent on the supervisor for ideas. The student must show initiative and generate new ideas or criticisms. The supervisor should mention to the student that they need to do this work themselves and become more independent.

8.8.5 The student lacks confidence in themselves and their project

A Master's thesis is hard, and some students find the amount and quality of work too much. However, remember you have demonstrated academic excellence to be admitted into the course, and that the supervisor believes you will complete the project, or else they would not have taken you on. All students find writing a thesis to be difficult and a lot of work, but you will complete one.

8.8.6 The student disappears

Often when students leave campus and go into the field they quickly forget about the programme and supervisor. Remember it is the student's responsibility to keep the supervisors informed. Even if you have not done anything, you should still keep in contact with your supervisors at least every month. It is not the supervisor's job to initiate communication with the student, so if you do not contact your supervisor, you will never speak to them.

CHAPTER IX

COMMON STUDY PROBLEMS

9.1 Intellectual and learning demands

9.1.1 The culture of learning

While every student faces unique problems with research and study, there are some common and recurring problems. By knowing these problems it may help the student find solutions to some difficulties they are having. One of the most significant problems for Master's candidates is academic differences. In one of the best books written for Asian students coming to Australia, Brigid Ballard and John Clanchy state, and this point needs emphasis:

“Intellectual Demands are greater than Language demands”⁶

This is not to say that language problems are not important, but that intellectual demands are often ignored or down played and this has a significant impact on the effectiveness of the student's research and study

This section will look at some of the intellectual demands in which a Master's student must be competent.

9.1.2 Learning

9.1.2.1 Discussion based learning

Learning in the MAIDS Programme is based more on seminars where students are made to discuss ideas. The supervisor will expect the student to discuss ideas, and have much to say on the topic. Meetings with the supervisor are not small lectures but a conversation; they are not about learning specific facts but

⁶ Ballard, B and Clanchy, J. (1984). Study Abroad: A Manual for Asian Students. Melbourne: Longman.

about debating ideas, detailing progress, or working through problems. Discussion based learning can be difficult at first for some students due to language difficulties. But, students also find difficulty in putting their ideas in front of the supervisor because of *kreng jai* (shyness) or a lack of understanding of the topic in question.

9.1.2.2 Wide list of reading

Supervisors will expect their students to spend much time reading. This can mean around 15 hours a week minimum of reading, and this could entail one book and perhaps 5 articles. Further, the supervisor does not want the student to only read the texts, but also to understand them enough to comment on and criticize them. Students must have a thorough understanding of the texts, and thus, be able to form opinions on them. Much of graduate learning is based on reading and analyzing books and articles. You will find the amount of reading and analyzing daunting, but again, with practice it is not that difficult.

9.1.2.3 Vague outlines of studies

There is sometimes little or quite vague direction from the supervisor. It is up to the student to initiate the work. At first this can be confusing, because you are unsure if you are doing the research correctly. But this is all part of the learning process, for you need to discover individually how to research on your own time. The self-learning process, again, gets easier through time. Students should see the vague outlines as freedoms rather than limitations for they can research and explore whatever topic they want, and fully manage their own project.

9.1.3 Cultural Variations in Styles Of Thinking

9.1.3.1 Reproductive versus original

Many educational systems train students to reproduce valued sources of knowledge. A good student will find the most accurate information for their research and reproduce this information. Often it is better if they do not criticize

this work, as that can be considered insulting to the academic who wrote it. However, for your thesis you are expected to develop your own ideas about the subject, and to express them. Students are expected to criticize all ideas, regardless of who wrote them, and if they only agree with what they read it, is seen as poor research. Students are expected to comment, evaluate, and analyze other thinkers when they give their opinion. They are judged by their unique, individual, and original approach to the topic.

9.1.3.2 Correct versus Creative

Master's research often is not clear or neat. Sometimes the answers to questions cannot be accurate, or methods to find data may be unusual because graduate research is influenced more by individual approaches, and is more interested in original and creative responses. Correctness, while a factor, is not the most important way to assess a response. Thus an approach which may be totally wrong - but uses original ideas - may be rewarded. Your research should be based on asking questions, and only sometimes, on finding answers.

9.1.3.4 Following the supervisor versus self-initiated work

An important study skill for Master's students is to initiate, organize, and carry out their own research. Sometimes the supervisor will have little advice to give, and expect the student to discover research ideas on their own. During research, the student must learn to teach themselves, and organize their own research and work plan. They will come to the supervisor with details of how the research is going, questions, and suggestions how to improve the research. The supervisor will give suggestions and opinions, but will not organize the student's research for them. A student may ask for advice on a topic and the supervisor will not offer assistance, but rather, suggest a book to read. Also, the supervisor will expect the student to come up with alternative ideas and arguments. The supervisor may organize very little for the student and expect to student to be self-motivated and highly organized.

9.1.3.5 Summaries versus analysis

The balance between description and analysis is one of the most difficult tasks for any student. While descriptions, literature reviews, and summaries are necessary components of a thesis, these must be balanced with an analysis of the subject.

To analyze means to break down something into the pieces, and discover how it all works. Analysis does not happen by repeating other people's opinions but by criticizing them. Hence many lecturers prefer student to minimize the amount of summarizing or 'glossing' of other writers and get the students to write their own ideas.

9.1.3.6 Supportive versus critical

Criticisms are expected of the student. The student must look for where ideas or methods don't work, and criticize their failures. The student is expected to offer negative views of well respected thinkers, and give suggestions for improvement. Criticism means to evaluate something. While not all criticism is negative, the student is expected to take a negative stance on a number of occasions. Some students can find this critical approach difficult because they are forced to think and say negative things and thus show a lack of respect to other academics. Supervisors, on the other hand, will be disappointed if poor ideas or poor arguments are not criticized because it means nothing is being improved, and the student is not reading and thinking about the topic carefully enough.

9.2 What is active and passive reading?

One way to approach this problem is to think how to read. One can read passively or actively. A passive reader believes all that is written, and does not consider the implications. An active reader thinks whether the writer's views are correct; they also wonder why the author wrote this, what the implications of the argument are, and how the writing relates to the thesis. Clearly, active reading is far more work than passive, and

takes longer. But the student must be an active reader to understand the material for the thesis.

9.3 Common study problems

All students face study problems. The following section lists a range of problems facing the student, from more general problems to those specific to a master's project. Most reasons why students have trouble are not to do with study, but events in other parts of their lives. However, there are some reasons why students do have trouble finishing their theses. This is looked at in two sections. If you want to make sure you complete your study, it is useful to see the common reasons why students drop out. Avoiding these problems will ensure the student has a much greater chance of success.

9.3.1 Non-academic reasons

By far the most common reasons for study problems are nothing to do with academic work. Rather, one cause is a change of interest from the student who may get bored with study and want to work in a job or take a holiday, or change careers. Also, pressures from life outside campus, in the form of money, employment opportunities, or other personal reasons, are other reasons why students quit. Students find a well-paying job and decide not to stay a poor student. Otherwise they do not have enough money to continue studying and decide to work. Finally, marriage, parenthood, moving away, or a change in career takes the student away from the Master's programme.

9.3.2 Employment

Many students are working full-time and think they can continue to study part-time while working. They plan to work on their thesis at night or on the weekends. In reality, away from campus, the discipline of the supervisor, and the support of fellow students, it is difficult to maintain an interest in the thesis. Refrain from working full-time during your thesis research and writing. Work part-time if necessary. .

9.3.3 Isolation

Because of the lack of class structure, regular contact with other students, and with focussing so much on the research project, the Master's student can become isolated from the programme and other fellow students. This is a problem that should be avoided. The student should keep in touch with other students in similar situations and work through their problems together. Isolation is a common problem faced by all students, but it is also the easiest to avoid.

9.4 Problems specific to the thesis

9.4.1 Losing focus on topic

Early in the project the student can begin to lose the research focus. This occurs because of the vague guidelines of study, or lack of supervisor direction, or the student covering too many topics in their research. The beginning of the thesis is often a very exciting time as there are many possibilities and the student has the freedom to research what they like. Sometimes the student is too general in their research and they wish to research every area, cover all topics, and investigate all possible theories. This enthusiasm is great, but unless the student learns to define the topic and locate the specific issue, the thesis will become too broad and impossible to complete as a thesis project. If the student feels they are not sure what they are doing, it should be discussed with the supervisor. Perhaps the supervisor needs to give more direction, perhaps non-relevant research needs to be dropped, or perhaps the objectives need to be more clearly defined.

9.4.2 Difficulty writing

Many students often find written English difficult, even students whose first language is English. Much practice and learning need to be put into academic writing. Like learning to speak English, the best way to learn how to write is to practice. Never avoid writing, as it is a bad idea to put writing off until later in the project. Approach writing early, for you will find it much easier to complete a thesis that is half done than one where the writing has not even started.

9.4.3 Poor relationship with supervisor

This is a problem which some students face and it is important to acknowledge it here. For further information see Chapter 8: The student and supervisor relationship.

9.4.4 Student is too casual

In these cases, the student is unaware of the required standard of research. They are willing to conduct poor research, not accurately record research and readings, and put little emphasis on the written product. The supervisor will mention the shortcomings of the thesis, and the student must start again and work to a higher standard.

9.4.5 Student is too hard too please

This is the reverse of the above case, especially when the student is unaware of the required standard and quality of research work demanded. Many students consider the thesis as the pinnacle of a research project. They are precise about their topic of research to the point of being fussy, and want to read every book on the topic, interview all the relevant people, and conduct numerous experiments. The student is not willing to submit the thesis until it is nearly perfect. Unfortunately, this does not work. All research is limited by academic, experimental, or physical factors. The student must recognize when a thesis is of an acceptable standard, even if it is not the best possible thesis.

9.4.6 Not balancing research and writing

Reading and taking notes is easy. Writing is more difficult. A golden piece of advice for students already stated is to start writing early, and write a lot early on in the project. It takes some time to get use to writing academic work. But once this skill is mastered writing becomes easier. By writing early - and writing a lot - the student will not be left in the troublesome position of having to convert 6 months of notes (which could be hundreds of pages) into 20,000 words in a month. Also, it is far easier to edit than to write. Some students consider 1000 words a day as an excellent output, and others say they can

write 2-3,000 words a day regularly. The best practice is to not be in a situation where the student must put out a sizeable amount of words, but rather, have the luxury of editing already written work.

9.4.7 Too long in the making

A very interesting study some time ago of research theses showed that the longer one spends on a thesis, the less likely it will be completed. The reasons are that the initial interest is gone, the topic has probably changed, and there will be more new research in the area forcing the student to restart the literature review. This is not to say that the thesis will not be written. However, it is better to seriously plan for a completion date of one year, and keep to this plan or else the student will risk losing interest and focus of the field.

9.4.8 Too independent

While independence is a valuable skill for the Master's student, too much is detrimental. Often students who have not produced as much work as they wanted will hide out and lose contact with the programme. Or, in other cases, students sometimes do not listen to the advice of their supervisors. However, if they do not follow their supervisor's advice or ignore suggestions from other researchers, they risk submitting work which is inappropriate for a Master's thesis. While the student may have great knowledge of the field, they are not familiar with the academic requirements. They may also become too independent from the university and not keep in contact with fellow students, or the academic community. In this case, they lose contact with the research and field, often lose interest and drop out.

From these common stumbling blocks it is easy to see why students have difficulties. Students must balance perfection with casual research, independence and dependence, quality and quantity, initiative with advice. Finding a balance to manage these extremes is crucial for the student.

CHAPTER X

THE THESIS EXAMINATION

At Chulalongkorn University all theses are examined by a Thesis Examination Committee. This means the student must write a thesis, submit this to the examiners, and then publicly defend the findings and arguments in front of the examiners.

10.1 Examiners

The thesis will be examined by the Thesis Examination Committee, who will assess and ultimately pass the thesis. See Chapter 1: The Thesis and the MAIDS Programme, for details on the composition of the committee.

10.2 Preparing for the defense

The student must give a presentation of around 30-45 minutes, detailing the major aspects of the thesis. The core components will be

- Description of the research topic
- Outline of the research methods used
- Discussion of the principal findings

The main task of the defense is for the student to defend the academic quality of the thesis. This means defending its importance, findings, and theoretical or conceptual framework. The student should think about what questions are likely to be asked, and how to defend them. The answers in the defense can persuade the examiners that an issue does not need to be modified.

There will be questions taken from the audience as well as the examiners. The defense will go for about two hours. Afterwards the examiners will meet and decide on the result. This may not come immediately, as it may take some time to decide upon conditions, but expect it to be no more than a week.

10.3 Thesis examination guidelines

10.3.1 Standards

10.3.1.1 Academic Quality

It is difficult to describe the academic standard expected of the students. The thesis should be of an international standard; hence it must have a strong argument, and a relatively developed theoretical context; it must demonstrate original research which has been undertaken using a rigorous and valid research method.

The working definition for a thesis in the programme is a major research project which provides a distinct analysis on an international development issue and contributes to the understanding of the field. The thesis according to this definition must demonstrate analysis, and also actively engages in the topic.

The context for the students is that they are producing a thesis in a coursework major, and the thesis comprises one third of their total workload. It is expected that they have worked full-time on their thesis for four months, and have conducted a considerable amount of original research (and this may be in the library, or in the field). The thesis is not expected to be of an academic publishing quality. However, the better theses will be of this standard, and all theses are expected to be capable of becoming academic publications.

10.3.1.2 Referencing

The thesis should be correctly formatted using Harvard style. The final version must have a complete bibliography, and all quotes must be properly referenced.

10.3.1.3 Expression

As a majority of students are English as a second (or third or fourth) language, the expressions may not be necessarily sophisticated; it should, however, be fully comprehensible.

10.3.1.4 Format

In order to graduate, students must submit a final copy of his/her copy that meets all the format requirements details in the Thesis Format Guide booklet, available at the MAIDS Office and on the programme's website.

10.3.2 Grading

There are three possible results the examination committee will award for the oral thesis defense.

10.3.2.1 Pass Without conditions

This means the version the committee examines is ready to be submitted. The thesis does not need to be in its final form, but must be very close. The thesis may still have minor editing, or other technical faults to correct. There may be some minor theoretical shortcomings or issues of argument to be corrected. The main criteria for no conditions is that any changes must be minor, and must be completed within two weeks.

10.3.2.2 Pass with condition

The student is given a list of the conditions necessary for the thesis to pass. Conditions can vary greatly, from significant re-writes of chapters, to minor conceptual, theoretical, or other modifications. If the conditions are minor, supervisors may consider giving a pass without conditions.

- The conditions must be completed in a set time (between 1-3 months).

- The conditions must be done to the satisfaction of the major supervisor.
- The conditions are determined by consensus of the members of the Thesis Examination Committee. If there is no consensus the decision may go to a vote between the members (which is the official Chulalongkorn policy), and if this fails to reach a conclusion, the final decision rests with the Chair of the thesis supervisory committee. Examples of conditions include redrafting chapters, correcting methodology, or rewriting conceptual or theoretical arguments.

10.3.2.3 Fail

A fail is a very unlikely outcome. The only time this could happen is when a student insists on an examination against the advice of their supervisors. A fail indicates a re-write, and re-defense of the thesis.

10.3.3 Additional grading categories

A thesis that is passed, with or without conditions, is also eligible to the following grades:

10.3.3.1 Good: questions/objectives clearly answered, thorough analysis, hypothesis being discussed and substantiated with sufficient data or theoretical arguments; well-written.

10.3.3.2 Very good: some degree of originality, questions clearly answered and fully substantiated with particularly in-depth analysis, furnished with rare data or information, nicely concluded, well-written, coherent and ready for publishing.