Tips for your master thesis (mémoire) proposal

If you are reading this little note, it means that you want to work your dissertation with me. Thank you! It will be my pleasure. In order to make better use of our time and to know if your topic proposal and my interests are compatible, I would be grateful if you would read the following instructions and Q&A.

You are enrolled in a business school whose objective is to train you for your professional life, whether in a private company, in a public or international organization. In practically all your professional opportunities you will be confronted with *writing*; emails, reports, briefs, notes, articles, working papers... *Bref !* written communication is important right from the start and it should ideally be efficient. Of course, through this *hard-skill* your employability is likely to increase considerably, even if it is about research and you are inclined to do something more concrete. So thank you for taking the time to read this little document.

One of the first "fireproofs" of written communication before your professional life is your Master dissertation. Communicating written ideas goes through several stages, one of the very first of which is (almost naturally): *what do I want to communicate?* In other words, you need to have a **topic** in mind (which indicates a framework), raise an **issue** (*problématique*) and ask a **research question**. The latter can be the subject of your dissertation. Of course, your paper must answer this question clearly, in one sentence in the abstract, as well as in more detail in the rest of the paper.

Once the previous question has been answered (the *what?*), the next question is: *how?* The structure of your work (displayed in the table of contents) should be as follows, by section:

> Cover page
> Abstract (1/2 page)
> 1. Introduction (de 2 à 3 pages)
> 2. Stylized facts (10 to 20 pages)
> 3. Litrature review (10 to 20 pages)
> 4. Empiricl analysis and/or mode (10 to 20 pages)
> 5. Conclusion (1 to 2 pages)
> Bibliographical sources (Harvard style)

To keep your project understandable and coherent, the number of **subsections per section should not exceed 3** (only applicable for sections 2-4).

If your word processor is (well) word, please take a look at the tutorial at this link. If you are used to working with another text processor (LaTeX for example), normally you do not need a tutorial (but if you do, we can always discuss).

As mentioned above, a key aspect of any research job is to ask a research question and answer it. Your arguments should be clear, thoughtful and original. The last adjective implies that you must respect the 15th commandment: thou shall not plagiarize! This does not mean that you cannot draw inspiration from other documents (on the contrary!), but if you use them, you must quote them.

At any time, I can share with you dissertations that have been (successfully) defended, which shall serve as inspiration for you to know the quality of work I expect.

Finally, here are some questions / answers that may be useful to you:

How often do you need to contact me?

Very short answer; **more is better than less.**

More elaborated answer; an important aspect of teamwork is effective (interpersonal) communication. If you plan to contact me once at the beginning, twice in the middle and one last time at the end of your work, you are familiar with the notion of the bare minimum. If you plan to contact me every day or several times a week, this is not ideal because I have other things to do during the week. Ideally, you should aim for an intermediate point between these two extremes (every two or three weeks for example).

How much time will/can your teacher dedicate to your project?

Very short answer**; maybe as much as you**, even if it is a subject I am familiar with.

More elaborated answer; it depends… on

- The compatibility of your subject with my expertise (more compatibility = less investment = more clarity)
- My schedule (usually at the end of the semester I'm quite busy... unless I'm mistaken, so are you)
- Your effectiveness in communicating (this point can be quite important)

What is the ideal length of your dissertation?

Very short answer; **the strict minimum is 40 pages, appendix inclusive.**

More elaborated answer; taking into account that a peer-reviewed article should not exceed 35 pages (or 15,000 words), and that any document considered as a dissertation should be around 100 pages, between 35 and 100 pages remains a correct amount of pages. However, this limit shall not necessarily be more important than the quality limit, which can sometimes be much more important.

Must I do empirical work?

Very short answer; **not always.**

More elaborated answer; mastering statistical/econometric or other tools often requires mastering specialized softwares (therefore, often excel is not enough). If you wish to do empirical work, you must be aware that this implies (1) looking for / finding the right data (ideally for several regions / individuals / countries / periods), (2) knowing how to process this data in order to synthesize the information collected, (3) being aware that this processing is *done to support your arguments*. In the end, these (the arguments) are the most important parts of your work.

Do I have to write my dissertation in English?

Ideally yes, but you can also work with me in French or Spanish.

Should I focus on substance or form?

Very short answer; **both!**

More elaborated answer; of course substance is what matter most, but if it is not easy to digest, then you may have failed in your effort to communicate. Therefore, several characteristics are also taken into account in grading your work.

To be introduced; page numbering, headings, bibliographic references, uniform text aligned ("justified") or not, same font everywhere, referencing of titles/subtitles, graphs, equations and tables.

To avoid: copy-paste, spelling mistakes, plagiarism, long paragraphs followed by short ones, other aspects that can make your work superficial or show a lack of professionalism.

I did not finish what I had to do on time...

It does not matter, as long as you report it to me honestly and with enough time to react (e.g. to contact the people involved, i.e. the administration, and to organize my activities accordingly). Above all, **do not stress**. Sometimes effective communication (including timing) is more important than the deadlines set in advance when they are not met. Having said that, I strongly advise you not to implement the "ostrich technique" or "playing dead".

Once I return my work...

It is up to you to decide your level of post-thesis involvement. If you finish your work and the topic you (and your professor ☺) have treated is potentially publishable, we can continue working together, either to publish it in a peer-reviewed journal, or on a platform such as The Conversation, or as a case study, or to submit it to a dissertation competition, or other. If you decide to stop working on your project in question, please be aware that your database / model can still be used by me (unless you disagree, in which case please let me know at the outset).