



What examiners look for in a thesis: Summary of master's thesis guidelines for examiners

A master's thesis is a substantial piece of independent research or creative scholarship. This guide is designed to help you understand what examiners typically look for when they assess a master's thesis, so you can better judge whether your work is ready for examination.

Your thesis is assessed independently by two examiners. They look at the overall quality of the work, not just whether individual sections are present. In broad terms, they are asking: Is the research purpose clear? Is the work grounded in relevant literature or creative context? Are the methods appropriate and well explained? Are the analysis and conclusions convincing? Is the thesis presented professionally?

Understanding the grade bands

The grade table below shows the formal mark ranges. As a guide, work in the **A range** shows strong independent and critical thinking, and may demonstrate originality in topic, method(s), theoretical development or findings. Work in the **B range** is solid and well supported by evidence, demonstrates a level of critical thinking and competent analysis and appreciation of the significance of its findings or its contributions to creative practice. Work in the **C range** meets master's level but is uneven or limited in depth, or weaker in critical engagement. Work in the **D or E range** has serious deficiencies in one or more core areas.

Mark range (%)	Grade	
90-100	A+	Exceptionally high level of scholarly performance
85-89	A	Very high level of scholarly performance
80-84	A-	High level of scholarly performance
75-79	B+	Very good
70-74	B	Good
65-69	B-	Competent
60-64	C+	Clear pass
55-59	C	Pass
50-54	C-	Marginal pass
40-49	D	Fail
0-39	E	Low fail

90-credit and 120-credit theses

Both types of thesis should demonstrate master's-level scholarship. A 120-credit thesis is normally expected to show greater depth, a broader or more complex scope, and deeper critical engagement than a 90-credit thesis.

What examiners usually look for

Examiners are looking for a thesis that is coherent, well argued, and appropriate for master's level. They do not expect perfection, but they do expect clear evidence of independent thinking, sound judgement, and careful execution. For creative practice, examiners usually consider both the creative work and the exegesis together. They look for a coherent relationship between them, clear articulation of the creative aims, and evidence that the exegesis provides an informed critical context for the work.

1. A clear research purpose

Examiners want to see that your research question, aims, objectives, or creative intent are stated clearly and the purpose and significance explained in relation to previous research. The scope of the study should be clear, including any important boundaries or limitations.

2. Strong understanding of the field

Your thesis should show that you understand the key literature, debates, concepts, or creative influences relevant to your topic. Examiners look for a review that is selective and purposeful rather than simply descriptive, and that draws on the most significant and informative sources.

3. Appropriate and well-justified methods

Examiners expect your methods to fit the research problem and to be explained clearly. They will look for justification of why you chose those methods, how they were applied, and whether the research was carried out ethically and responsibly.

4. Rigorous analysis and convincing discussion

A strong thesis does more than report findings. It interprets them carefully, links them back to the research purpose, and discusses their significance. Examiners look for analysis that is logical, critical, and well supported by evidence or by the creative work itself.

5. Clear conclusions

Your conclusions should follow logically from the work you have presented. Examiners usually look for clear answers to the research question, recognition of strengths and limitations, and a realistic sense of what the project contributes. Ideally the thesis offers ideas for future research.

6. Professional presentation

Presentation matters. Examiners notice whether the thesis is well structured, clearly written, carefully proofread, and consistently referenced. They will expect you to follow any relevant formatting requirements and word limits. Make sure any use of Gen AI tools is acknowledged and that you explain how and where AI was used. Depending on disciplinary expectations, this assistance might be described in a literature review, method or acknowledgements section.

7. A coherent overall thesis

One of the most important things examiners look for is how well the parts of the thesis fit together. The aims, literature, methods, analysis, and conclusions should connect logically. A strong thesis demonstrates significant insight and understanding of what was achieved including any unplanned developments that emerged during the project.