

Planning and Writing your Thesis at FB02 – A Guideline for the process from topic idea to submission

Purpose of this guideline:

This guideline is intended to provide an insight into the process of writing a thesis at the Department of Historical and Social Sciences (FB02) at TU Darmstadt. To this end, it describes a prototypical collaboration between supervisors and students. The focus is on the first phase: finding a topic, research question and supervisor. These first steps can pose challenges for students, as they are not regulated in a mandatory way and therefore hardly mentioned in the official guidelines. The relationship between supervisor and student is highly individual. It is therefore important to seek this individual agreement at an early stage. The guidelines thus supplement the legally binding rules, which can be found in the [General Examination Regulations of TU Darmstadt](#) (APB) §26 and on the information pages of your student office.

Thesis process:

The typical thesis process, which can vary in detail between institutes, degree programmes and individual supervisors, can be roughly divided into four phases:

1. Finding a topic and contacting a supervisor
2. Preliminary discussion(s), exposé if necessary, registration
3. Independent preparation of the thesis
4. Submission, assessment, defence if applicable

The individual phases are described below, focusing on the expectations of students on the one hand and supervisors on the other.

Phase 1: Finding a topic and establishing contact

Finding a topic and establishing contact with potential supervisors is the most individualised phase of a thesis, differing greatly from case to case.

1. Establishing contact and types of theses: In principle, the initiative comes from the students. They should contact their desired supervisor early on, ideally in the semester before the intended writing phase. Theses may be supervised by members of the institute who hold at least a doctoral degree. When making initial contact, you should first clarify whether the desired supervisor still has capacity to supervise the thesis and, secondly, whether the proposed topic is suitable for supervision by this person. Several situations must be distinguished here: 1. Is it an empirical or a purely literature-based thesis? The approach and expectations of the supervisor will vary depending on this. 2. The topic can be chosen by the student or suggested by the supervisor. At FB02, it is generally expected that students will develop their own topics. However, particularly in the context of empirical and research-related topics, it is also possible for supervisors to suggest topics. In any case, it is advisable to make contact early on and to start thinking about the topic yourself. The first enquiry is usually made by email. However, it can be helpful to attend the general office hours of potential supervisors beforehand, to look at the current research on the institute's or working group's website, or to make use of initial contacts made in previous courses. Finally, you can and should always ask your fellow students for advice.

2. Topic and research question: For the initial contact, a rough idea of the topic is sufficient. When searching for a topic, it is helpful to pick up on topics from past seminars for which you are already

familiar with the literature and where further research questions have often been suggested in the seminar. Of course, you can also search for topics outside of the seminars that are in your area of interest. However, a purely political or topic-driven interest is not sufficient; there must also be a recognisable scientific relevance. In the course of preparing the application, the topic is specified and a concrete question is developed (in consultation with and supported by the supervisor). The topic itself is not yet a question!

Two special cases should be mentioned here. Firstly, it may be that a topic for a thesis comes up in the context of an internship, working student contract or similar employment relationship. In that case, a person from the internship position can also provide the second assessment, but the academic supervision clearly remains with the primary supervisor. Secondly, these guidelines only apply to a limited extent to the preparation of academic papers as part of a teacher training programme (Lehramt), as the process is highly standardised by the Centre for Teacher Training (ZfL).

In principle, students have a right to a supervision place for their thesis, as this is the only way they can complete their studies. However, this supervision place does not have to be with the person of their choice.

Phase 2: Preliminary discussions, exposé (if applicable), registration

The structure of supervision after initial contact also varies from person to person and depends heavily on the study regulations, supervisors and topic. As a rule, registration of the thesis is preceded by a supervision phase during which the content structure of the thesis and, if applicable, the methodological approach are specified with the support of the supervisor. Once the “roadmap” is clear, many degree programmes require an exposé, which is commented on and approved by the supervisor. Even if no formal exposé is required, the student and supervisor should agree at some point that a thematic and methodological “common thread” has been satisfactorily developed. Then it is the right time to register. It is important that both sides are clear about the next steps and expectations. Accordingly, generally applicable and comprehensible expectations of supervisors towards students and of students towards supervisors are described here. Many supervisors also provide information and explanations on their websites about their requirements and expectations for final theses.

Expectations of students:

- Check in advance whether the formal requirements of the examination regulations for registering a thesis have already been met (e.g. CP limits, who is allowed to supervise, etc.).
- Get in touch early on. Finding a topic can take time, especially if it is not an advertised, predetermined topic. Supervisors have various other tasks besides supervising theses.
- Inform yourself about the formal procedures. (APB, examination regulations, website of the Student Office, regular lectures on theses, this document).
- Come to meetings with your (potential) supervisors prepared according to the current status. This does not mean that you need a complete exposé at the first meeting, but that you take the recommendations from the last meeting or the last email to heart. Be reliable and treat everyone's time with respect.

Supervisors are obliged to

- respond to student enquiries in a timely manner and with meaningful content;
- provide assistance, feedback and advice, especially before the thesis is registered. This can be done through detailed email correspondence, office hours or colloquia, which should be offered accordingly.
- provide information about supervisor-specific details/ arrangements of the process (exposé, colloquium, procedure) at an early stage, e.g. on the website or during office hours;

- provide recommendations/ advice regarding the second supervisor. Thematic proximity or personal acquaintance can be good reasons for choosing the second supervisor. However, it is also possible not to specify a name at the time of registration, but to leave the decision to the examination board. As a rule, the second supervisor does not play an active role in supervising the thesis, unless this is desired by both parties.

The registration process itself is clearly standardised. Binding information is provided in the general examination regulations and by the Student Office.

If, despite your own efforts to obtain information, there are still uncertainties, you can always ask your supervisors.

Phase 3: Writing

During the writing phase, students work independently. The supervisor should provide advice to the extent that is necessary and appropriate. The need for supervision varies greatly between students and also depends on the topic. Advice covers, for example, the research question, methodology, literature or data basis. Students should contact their supervisor at an early stage if they have any questions or difficulties. Feedback from supervisors should be taken seriously and implemented. Corrections are always intended to improve the thesis.

If problems arise **and** the supervisor is unable to help or is themselves the problem, the following offices offer assistance:

- Student advisory service: If you fail your thesis
- Student office: Organisational and legal questions
- Dean of studies: Last resort
- In cases of discrimination or similar
 - a) Student council: fachschaft@gugw.tu-darmstadt.de
 - b) AStA: antidiskriminierung@asta.tu-darmstadt.de
 - c) Anti-discrimination office / Equal opportunities office at TU: antidiskriminierung@tu-darmstadt.de

Phase 4: Submission, assessment, defence (if applicable)

The official submission of the thesis always takes place via TUBAMA. The theses are archived there. You will receive more detailed information from the Student Office after registering your thesis. It is worth actually performing the test upload described there so that the PDF is not rejected at 11:59 p.m. on the submission date due to the wrong file type.

The review period for first and second reviewers is six weeks. The reviews should be submitted to the Student Office within this period. If students need an earlier review, e.g. because they are about to start a new job, this should be taken into account within the time constraints of the reviewers.

If an oral defence (disputation) of the thesis is required in a degree programme, the supervisor plans and structures the disputation. Comprehensive information on this should be provided to students at an early stage.