

Guidelines on writing a Master's thesis in practical philosophy

The thesis should be between 30 and 50 pages long (1.5 space), on a topic that is chosen after consultation with your supervisor. It is important that you show a very good acquaintance with the relevant literature in the field, and that you back this up with a correct list of references. The thesis should not be a mere summary of the views expressed in the relevant debate. You need to identify and clearly articulate a problem and then present clear arguments for a clear conclusion, drawing on the relevant literature. It is important that you give an independent presentation, in your own words, of the arguments, even if they are inspired by the relevant literature. Note that an MA thesis requires more independent thinking than a BA thesis.

It is advisable to start thinking about a thesis topic and disposition early on in the MA course, for it may take some time to find a manageable topic, which is not too wide-ranging, and to settle on a well-functioning disposition. A good idea is to consider a few alternative topics and write a synopsis for each, in which you state the problems, which conclusions you would want to argue for, and which ideas and authors you would want to discuss. Your supervisor can then give you feedback on these synopses, which will help you decide which topic to go for.

Once you have a topic and a disposition, start writing on some part of your argument. You can begin anywhere. There is no need to start from the beginning. It is better to start on something you happen to be excited about and have fresh ideas on.

Think of your essay as a conversation between disagreeing parties. Your job in the essay is not, however, to *report* a conversation, but to *engage* in one. So, don't structure your essay by pegging views to people: 'X said ...Y said....'. Instead, you should simply state your view, and make your case, using the arguments that you've found in the literature, as well as any you have come up with yourself, to back up your case.

Make sure that your opponents get a chance to respond to your arguments, and give them the chance to expand and develop their arguments. Your conclusions will be

stronger if they are supported by arguments that take into account the best versions of the opposed points of view.

Your supervisor decides when a thesis is ready for a final seminar. A thesis is ready for a final seminar if it is likely to pass and is not likely to be improved by further work within reasonable time frames. The grading is done after the final seminar.