

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
Department of Economics

NOTES ON THE PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION OF MASTER'S ESSAYS

General Information

The Master's Essay, of usually between 7,500 and 12,500 words, is written *under the direction of a supervisor*. The number of words given is only a suggestion; there are no lower or upper limits.

The project should involve some degree of *original research*. This could take many forms. For example, an application of existing empirical methods to new or different data sets, an extension (normally small) of existing theory, or a critical analysis (with original insights) of a theoretical or economic policy problem are all suitable topics for an MA essay.

After the supervisor has approved the essay for submission, students must submit a PDF of the essay to the Graduate Studies Assistant (gradassist@econ.queensu.ca) for grading. Please format your pdf.file label as the following: lastname, firstname-MAEssayadmyear. The student should also inform the Graduate Studies Assistant who their supervisor is and please provide the title of your essay upon submission. The essay must be in proper form (see below), and free of typographical errors. Please also make sure that there are no electronic font or other issues that may make the essay unreadable. If initial perusal of the essay by the Graduate Studies Assistant and/or the Coordinator of Graduate Studies indicates that the essay is not properly formatted, it will be returned to the student for corrections prior to being graded. Please do make sure that you e-mail the correct version of the essay, as we will not consider multiple submissions.

The Department examines essays as quickly as possible, but it may take several weeks for the essay to be marked, especially if it is handed in during the peak period of August. Students are strongly advised to submit by **August 1st**. In that case, we guarantee that the essay will be graded in time for Fall convocation and to avoid paying additional fees. If the essay is submitted by **August 15th**, we will request the graders to see if it may be possible for them to hand in the grades in time for convocating in the Fall, but we offer no guarantees. Beyond that, it is highly probabilistic as to whether or not the deadline for the Fall convocation can be met.

The essay will be examined and assigned a percentage grade by a committee composed of the supervisor and one other faculty member of the Department. The average grade of the two committee members will be assigned unless the individual grades differ by more than 10 percentage points. In such a case, the Coordinator of Graduate Studies or his/her delegate will examine the essay and assign a final grade based in part on consultation with the committee members. In the event of a failing grade, revision of the essay or submission of a new essay may be made on the approval of the Graduate Council. After the essay has been approved and any required revisions have been made, the PDF will be posted on the QED website with password protection.

Past essays are available on the QED website. They are password protected. The password can be obtained from the Graduate Secretary.

Following is the grading scale that is sent to the examiners:

- <70 : Fail
- 70 - 75 : Marginal Pass
- 75+ : Clear Pass
- 80+ : A solid and complete piece of work, well organized, and well written
- 90+ : An excellent essay with original insights, well organized, and well written.

Furthermore, any essay that receives a mark of 85% or greater will automatically be considered for the Scarthingmoor Prize. This prize is to be given yearly for an outstanding MA essay, chosen by a committee of faculty members selected by the Head of the Department of Economics in consultation with the Coordinator of Graduate Studies. According to the terms of the prize, preference will be given to essays which “contribute to our understanding of political economy, economic growth and development, macroeconomic policy, or financial markets.” The value of the prize is currently approximately \$8,000.

Format:

The essay must be in satisfactory literary form and should normally be between 7,500 and 12,500 words in length. It should comprise of the following in order:

1. Title page (include the international copyright symbol; sample attached)
2. Acknowledgments
3. Table of Contents
4. The main body of the essay
5. Footnotes (these may also appear at the foot of each page or at the end of each chapter)
6. Bibliography
7. Figures (unless inserted in body of the essay)
8. Tables (unless inserted in body of the essay)

Generally speaking, an essay should be drafted in a form acceptable to the major journals of economics. The text must be double-spaced except for footnotes, figures and quotations, of five lines or more, which should be single-spaced. The inside margin (left) should be 3.8 cm or 1 ½ inches; other margins 2.5 cm or 1 inch. This applies to figures and tabulations as well. Ornate type styles are not acceptable. Italics may be used only for emphasis or where otherwise appropriate (e.g. scientific, journal titles).

If footnotes are on each page, space should be left on the page after the footnotes. There should be a line separating the text from the footnotes.

There should be only two sets of page numbers - small Roman numerals for the preliminary pages, and Arabic numerals for the text, bibliography and appendices.

Tables, figures and maps must conform to the previous regulations and be incorporated in relation to the text and pagination. Figures must have scales and symbols defined on them, not in the text.

Copyright

The international copyright symbol (©) must appear, typed at the foot of the title page of every MA essay (see example).

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF
THE WEALTH OF NATIONS**

by

Adam Smith

**An essay submitted to the Department of Economics
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

July 1776

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MA Essay Tips

1. When should I start thinking about my MA essay?

The December break is a good time to start thinking about your MA essay. If that doesn't work, the Winter semester reading week break or soon thereafter can also serve as a good self-imposed deadline. You should aim to have identified the topic and your supervisor by the middle of April. Each faculty member will generally only supervise 2 or 3 MA essays, so if you want someone in particular to be your supervisor you should contact them early.

2. How do I decide the topic of my MA essay?

You should try to work on something that you are interested in. The best thing to do is start with a fairly narrow question (e.g. how does X affect Y? or what are the likely determinants of Z in a context where agents are constrained by W, etc.). Remember that while big questions are important, feasible research often necessitates it being broken down into narrow, focused questions. Perhaps this is something that occurred to you during your coursework, or something that you have studied but were not convinced by the answer. Depending on the question, your attempt to answer it may involve empirical or theoretical work or may require a thorough critical review of the literature.

The next step is to try to ascertain whether addressing the question is feasible. Is the data available to test the hypothesis? Can I access it at low enough cost? Is it possible to deal with identification problems? Are there some existing models I can make use of? Am I able to understand the mathematical tools needed (perhaps with a bit of work)? Do I have the skills and the time to do this?

You should think about these questions before you dive headlong into a project; you will have to look at the existing literature on the subject to assess this. Your supervisor can help you formulate your MA essay, but you should think about these issues seriously for yourself first.

3. How do I identify and approach a potential supervisor?

You may already have an idea of who you want to act as your supervisor based on your courses. You should approach a supervisor with an idea of what you want to work on (i.e. the question you want to address). Don't just show up and ask for suggestions. That said, you should be willing to be flexible if the faculty member suggests alternative, perhaps more fruitful, lines of the research. The best MA essays are written when the supervisor is also interested in the question(s) being asked.

If you have a topic in mind, but are not sure who would be the appropriate faculty member to supervise, you could look at faculty research interests (available on-line) or you could ask the Graduate Coordinator to suggest someone based on your potential research question.

4. Writing the essay: 3 tips

Think small – do not necessarily expect to change the world or the way economics is done. Start with a narrow focus. You can always expand the analysis and put in other elements later if needed.

Maintain a working plan/proposal – a one or two page written proposal that you can refer back to and which can be updated if necessary is a good idea.

Try to arrange frequent meetings with your supervisor – take into account that he/she may be away for part of the summer. Set up a plan of interaction --- weekly, fortnightly, in person or via e-mail.