

Master of Arts in African Studies

Master’s Dissertation

Vademecum / Thesis Manual

Academic Year 2023-2024

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Titles, terms and references

Doctor	Person who obtained a PhD, recognizable by the abbreviation 'dr.' in front of their name.
Supervisor	The supervisor is the (main) coach of your MA dissertation. With him/her you will agree on the topic, the approach, the checking of the various chapters, etc. This may be someone from the program in African Studies, or any other lecturer whose course you took during your curriculum.
Co-supervisor	At times an MA dissertation is coached by two people. The second person is the co-supervisor. At least one of the coaches is a doctor (dr.).
Second reader	Each MA dissertation of the program in African Studies is read by at least two people: the supervisor(s) and a second reader (also called "reading commissioner" or in short "commissioner"). They also meet together with the other members of the exam committee, in order to attend and evaluate your oral presentation (cf. infra).
Evaluation form	The readers of your MA dissertation use a standard evaluation form. This form may be found online, here https://www.africanstudies.ugent.be/en/information-for/info-for-students/#anchor2 .
Exam committee	The exam committee of the program in African Studies deliberates over the final mark of the MA dissertation, based on the reading reports of the supervisor(s) and the second reader, as well as your oral presentation and defence.
Secretary	The secretary of the exam committee in charge for African Studies is prof. dr. G-M de Schryver .
Ombudsperson	The names of the relevant ombudspersons may be found at https://www.ugent.be/lw/nl/student/studiestudentenbegeleiding/ombudspersonen.htm .
A005119	Code of the Ufora course 'Master's dissertation' in African Studies. Here the program-specific information with regard to your MA dissertation may be found.
MA app	Here all faculty-general information with regard to your MA dissertation may be found: https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/ .

Relevant websites

https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/	MA application of the faculty: This is where you will register the (preliminary/final) title and supervisor(s) of your MA dissertation, and upload your MA dissertation
https://www.africanstudies.ugent.be/en/	Website of the programme in African Studies
https://www.ugent.be/lw/en	Website of the faculty of Arts & Philosophy
https://www.ugent.be/student/en/study-facilities/academic-writing/center.htm	Supporting site for all writing assignments in English at UGent
https://lib.ugent.be/	Following the successful oral defence of your MA dissertation, this is where your MA will become part of the UGent university library collection

What is a master's dissertation?

Contents and concept

As a capstone to the MA studies each student is supposed to write an MA dissertation. In the MA dissertation proof needs to be given that the candidate is able to undertake independent academic research, can reflect critically, and can also contextualize the research topic by framing it in a broader theoretical and methodological context.

The choice of a topic and the (co-)supervisor

Choosing a topic

You may choose your own topic. Some supervisors have a list of suggestions, which you may find at <https://www.africanstudies.ugent.be/en/information-for/info-for-students/#anchor2>: these are lists of research topics for which the student may approach the respective supervisor for guidance. Students may also come up with their own suggestions, and based on that, develop a research topic together with their supervisor(s).

Choosing the (co-)supervisor

The student is supposed to find their supervisor(s) on their own. This may be someone from the program in African Studies, or any other lecturer whose course was taken. The student chooses the supervisor in function of the topic. As the occasion arises, if you choose a supervisor from another program, and especially if you choose a supervisor from outside the faculty of Arts and Philosophy, the secretary of the exam committee of African Studies may force you to look for a co-supervisor from within the program in African Studies, this to ensure the Africa contents of the work. You yourself have the responsibility to find a co-supervisor. At least one of the supervisors has to have a PhD.

Role of the (co-)supervisor

This information is part of the 'Brochure' of the faculty's MA app:
<https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>.

Agreements with the (co-)supervisor

This information is part of the 'Brochure' of the faculty's MA app:
<https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>.

Administration

Registering your (preliminary/final) MA title as well as the name(s) of your supervisor(s) is done via the faculty's MA app: <https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>.

Submission dates

The dates to submit your MA dissertation for the academic year 2023-2024 are:

- Tuesday 28 May 2024 (= first Tuesday of the second-semester examination period), before 16:00
and/or
- Tuesday 13 August 2024 (= first Tuesday before the start of the retake examination period), before 16:00

Notes on the so-called 'third session'

In case you did not pass for your MA dissertation, it is possible to retake it in a subsequent academic year. On the condition that you passed all other first- and second-semester courses as well as all year courses, there is a possibility to hand in your dissertation in January, and thus to graduate in February.

HOWEVER: Although this is colloquially referred to as a 'third session', it is important to keep in mind all of the following points:

- You have to re-enrol for the new academic year, and to add the MA dissertation to your curriculum (+ submit it for approval). Following this, you will need to re-register your supervisor(s) as well as your MA title.
- You will again have to pay the MA tuition fee.
- You will again put in study credit in order to take the MA dissertation.
- You may submit in January, but you are not obliged to do so. A submission in May is still possible. In both cases: in case of failure, your next opportunity to submit is August.

The three relevant dates for the academic year 2023-2024 are in this case:

- Tuesday 9 January 2024 (= first Tuesday of the first-semester examination period), before 16:00
or
- Tuesday 28 May 2024 (= first Tuesday of the second-semester examination period), before 16:00
and/or
- Tuesday 13 August 2024 (= first Tuesday before the start of the retake examination period), before 16:00

Timeline for the writing process

Within the program in African Studies the following timeline is used, this with the aim to submit your MA dissertation during the first exam session.

- (1) Monday 16 OCT 2023: Choice of **supervisor** and **research domain**. Inform the secretary of the exam committee in charge for African Studies: prof. dr. [G-M de Schryver](#).
- (2) Monday 20 NOV 2023: Delimitation of the **topic** and **working title** in consultation with your supervisor. Inform the secretary of the exam committee in charge for African Studies: prof. dr. [G-M de Schryver](#). Discussion of potential fieldwork, including timing and financing.

Note that this day is also the deadline to put the same information (i.e., working title + supervisor(s)) into the faculty's MA app: <https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>.
- (3) Monday 18 DEC 2023: Compilation of a **bibliography** (whereby the student indicates which works he/she already read). The supervisor offers suggestions for further (compulsory) reading.
- (4) Monday 15 JAN 2024: Submission of a paper with the **status quaestionis** and **methodology**. The supervisor provides feedback.

- (5) Monday 19 FEB 2024: Submission of a detailed **table of contents**. At each section the student indicates the core by means of well-chosen keywords. He/she also prepares a timeline: how much time is needed for each section? To be sure: this table of contents is obviously indicative and may (and will) change as the research and write-up progress. The supervisor provides feedback.
- (6) Monday 18 MAR 2024: Submission of a **chapter** of one's choice (but not the introduction or the conclusion), in consultation with the supervisor. In parallel the student will also continue work on the other chapters. Those other chapters do not need to be read by the supervisor before final submission, unless the supervisor insists on this.
- (7) Monday 6 MAY 2024: Delivery of the **introduction** and **conclusion**. The supervisor provides feedback.

Each deadline is the very last day on which the student may hand in the respective item. If the student misses a deadline, the supervisor may decline to give feedback on that item.

If needed, the supervisor may change or add deadlines. Students may also ask for changes to the schedule, on the condition that good reasons are brought in for that (for example because fieldwork is planned).

Contents of a master's dissertation

Contents and structure

The piece of work that the student will produce will have the form of an extensive **scientific text**. This means that the following parts must at the very least be present:

- introduction
- problem statement, research question, or goal
- theoretical framework & literature review
- method & data collection
- analysis
- synthesis
- conclusion
- discussion
- reference list
- addenda: 'the raw data' (e.g., audio, video, pictures, transcribed texts, scanned logbooks, etc.), 'ethical aspects' (i.e., consent forms), ...

The exact order of these parts may vary. Depending on the topic, some aspects may receive more or less attention. Discuss this with your supervisor.

It is also important that the student clearly indicates that the MA dissertation departs from a well-defined **problem statement**, **research question**, or **academic goal**. This is best done at the very beginning of the piece of work (preferably already in the first paragraph of the introduction). An MA dissertation which is goal-oriented is one which aims at a "tangible end product" (e.g., a syllabus revolving around a certain topic, a dictionary, etc.). Note that a goal-oriented end product should also

adhere to the principles of an academic piece of work. As such it is quasi inevitable that the student, in his/her progress towards the end product, will encounter certain partial scientific research questions (e.g., what are the minimum requirements to which a syllabus should conform?, how do I go about the compilation as a lexicographer?).

Language requirements

Given that the MA in African Studies is taught in English, you will also write your MA in English. If you want an exception to this rule, you will need the permission from your supervisor(s), including a motivation.

Applying for exceptions is done via the faculty's MA app (<https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>), and the deadline is Monday 20 November 2023.

Size

Between **25,000** and **75,000** words, including footnotes or endnotes as well as references (but excluding possible addenda).

Form of a master's dissertation

This information is part of the 'Brochure' of the faculty's MA app: <https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>.

References and bibliography

The correct use of reference-management software — such as EndNote, Reference Manager, Zotero, etc. — is strongly recommended. Using such software (some packages of which are made freely available to students at UGent) will save you countless of common inconsistencies, both with regard to the citation apparatus, as well as the list of references and/or bibliography. See for more information https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_reference_management_software.

Students who still prefer to take care of these aspects manually, are advised to adhere to a single style, for instance the MLA style (cf. <https://www.mla.org/MLA-Style>).

(Note that this advice is not only valid for the MA dissertation, but also for all other papers that need to be handed in at UGent.)

Avoiding plagiarism

See the separate document on this topic, within the present Ufora environment.

Evaluation

General

The final mark for the MA dissertation is arrived at by consensus by the exam committee, based on the reader reports of the supervisor(s) and the second reader, as well as the evaluation which the members of the exam committee made of the oral presentation and the defence (cf. infra).

Evaluation form

At the program in African Studies, the supervisor(s) and second reader of your MA dissertation use a standard evaluation form for the assessment. This form may be found on the UGent African Studies website, here: <https://www.africanstudies.ugent.be/en/information-for/info-for-students/#anchor2>.

Oral presentation and defence

Each student is also supposed to expound on their MA dissertation orally, on a day which has been scheduled during the regular examination period. The defence has the following format: 15 minutes of presentation by the student, followed by 10 to 15 minutes of questions posed by the members of the exam committee. Other students are welcome to attend the defence. At the end of the day, and thus not at the end of each individual defence, the exam committee will deliberate, armed with a comparative perspective.

Feedback

On the day the results are made public, you will get to see the reader reports of the supervisor(s) and the second reader via the faculty's MA app (<https://apps.flw.ugent.be/masterproef/>).

If so wished, each student may then request an appointment with their supervisor(s) and/or the second reader of their MA dissertation for further feedback.

Checklist

Use this checklist while you work on your MA dissertation:

CHECKLIST MASTER'S DISSERTATION in AFRICAN STUDIES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Done?</i>
1. Arrangements with your supervisor		
16 October	Choice supervisor and research domain.	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 November	Delimitation topic and working title, planning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 December	Compilation bibliography.	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 January	Delivery status quaestionis and methodology.	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 February	Delivery detailed table of contents.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 March	Delivery chapter of one's choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 May	Delivery introduction and conclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Formal requirements		
	Spelling check	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Grammatical check	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have your MA dissertation read by a third party (fellow student, friend, family member, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Mention the word count of the main text on the cover page (expectation: between 25,000 and 75,000 words)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have the pages been numbered correctly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Is the cover page in order?	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Have the section and page numberings of the Table of Contents been updated/refreshed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Has the introduction been completed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Has the conclusion been completed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Is the citation apparatus in accordance with the norm and consistent?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have all sources been mentioned/listed correctly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If you used an AI (artificial intelligence) tool like ChatGPT , has each use been mentioned? Failure to mention the use of AI amounts to plagiarism, and will be sanctioned!	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have the addenda been added, either in print or in digital form (as a CD, USB stick, link to an online website or archive, ...)?	<input type="checkbox"/>