



Advice about the final thesis

By Inger H. Dalsgaard, lecturer, Ph.D., Section for English, Aarhus University

ABOUT THE FINAL THESIS

Before starting students almost always think they can never reach the minimum 60 pages but most finish feeling they could all too easily have written more than 80 pages.

Approaching thesis writing one chapter at a time will make each smaller goal seem more manageable, and comparable in length and scope to essays you have done before.

- Try not to go beyond 70 pages, the ideal length, but prove your ability to select, control and present material and arguments according to requirements. These are competences future employers may well appreciate too
- You can hand in 15-odd pages to your supervisor for detailed critique and comments: the so-called "Trial Chapter". You decide what section you think you'd benefit most from having closely examined. If your supervisor agrees, you might hand in several smaller sections, as and when you need feedback most, rather than one long finished chapter (too?) late in the process.

STANDARDS AND STYLE

Don't underestimate the importance of first appearances: This means that the visual, and to you perhaps superficial, appearance must also be considered before handing in. Make sure you pay attention to typography, spelling etc. and to the guidelines set out for referencing formalia in the Department Style Guide.

Often the summary is the last thing you do, but the first thing examiners read, so proof-read it as carefully as you do the rest of your thesis.

- Ideally your thesis is clearly argued and progresses logically. This clarity should be reflected in your contents list. Whether you use chapter titles or/and consecutive numbering try to present a tidy-looking list, which makes it easy to navigate in your text and get a preview of where it will be going, leaving readers with a positive initial impression of your thesis.
- Where the set-up of the main text of the thesis itself is concerned, may I point out that big blocks of text with no line breaks or endless chapters with no subsections (with or without titles) leave examiners breathless – and dying for a natural tea or pee break! Few

arguments should be that convoluted, so be kind and divide your arguments into manageable, meaningful subsections of fewer sentences if you realize pages are totally unbroken.

- Don't try to disguise an overlong thesis by fiddling with the margins: it shows. But note that the page set-up in the Style Guide does not add up to the ca. 400 words per page the "Studieordning" stipulates, so don't be surprised when an 32000-word thesis turns out to be less than 80 pages. Ultimately, it's the word-count that counts!
- One practical aspects it is important to get right is reference: whether in the form of footnotes, endnotes or bracketed in the text they should be accurate and consistent as should the details in your bibliography. Careless mistakes will be noted. Also try to be user-friendly (it is always a good idea e.g. to include the original publication date of publications, not just the date of the edition you got hold of). Look to secondary texts for inspiration and ideas for academic writing styles as well as reference styles and ways to organize arguments as well as bibliographies.