

MAS Thesis Guide (2022/23)

Chair of Entrepreneurship

POTENTIAL TOPICS

The chair of entrepreneurship supervises MAS theses in the broad domain of (technology) entrepreneurship in independent ventures or corporate contexts. We are, in particular, interested in the following empirical contexts:

- **New Technology Paradigms** (e.g., *blockchain, AI, ML*):
with emphasis on implications for organizing economic activity, i.e. how to coordinate new economic activity, the emergence of novel organizational forms, or design of organization
- **Science-based Ventures**
with an emphasis on strategy formation, resource mobilization, and the impact of different professional logics on typical growth and development trajectories of deep tech ventures
- **Corporate Entrepreneurship**
with an emphasis on the design of successful acceleration programs in corporate context and their impact on corporate renewal.
- **Grand Challenges & Sustainability**
with an emphasis on food challenges and related innovative activity with respect to novel business opportunities and the design of business ecosystems to build more sustainable social structures.

Usually, your thesis will be written in collaboration with and for a company, addressing a concrete managerial problem in that company. Occasionally, we also supervise thesis research in conjunction with your own business activities. However, simply writing a business plan will not suffice as a thesis – you should base your business research in a generalizable set of problems that need to be tackled by a manager and/or entrepreneur and use scientific insight to address those problems within your thesis write-up.

APPLICATION & FINDING A THESIS MENTOR

Due to capacity restrictions, we can only supervise and mentor a limited number of theses per year. Please apply early and with complete information to increase your chances to find a thesis mentor at our chair.

While Prof. Clarysse is always the official thesis supervisor, you will typically be guided by an assigned thesis mentor, a research from our chair. You may propose a specific thesis mentor when applying for a thesis with us. The easiest way to identify a potential thesis mentor from our chair is to look at our website entgroup.ethz.ch. However, due to capacity limitations, we cannot guarantee a mentor of your choice.

For applying for a thesis supervision with our chair, please send an email to **Constanze Coelsch-Foisner** (coelschc@ethz.ch), containing the following:

- A brief outline of the proposed topic or problem you want to research (2-3 paragraphs), clearly developing the research question and a proposed method
- A short statement how your project fits into the [research areas of our chair](#) and how it uses scientific insights to help solve a practical problem for a company
- A recent CV and your current standing in the MAS program (best, include a current transcript); also mention any additional skills or motivations that drive your interest in the project
- The current status of the project vis-à-vis the partner company and their interests
- Your expectations in terms of timing
- Optionally, a suggestion for a specific thesis mentor

STYLIZED THESIS PROCESS

Typical starting time

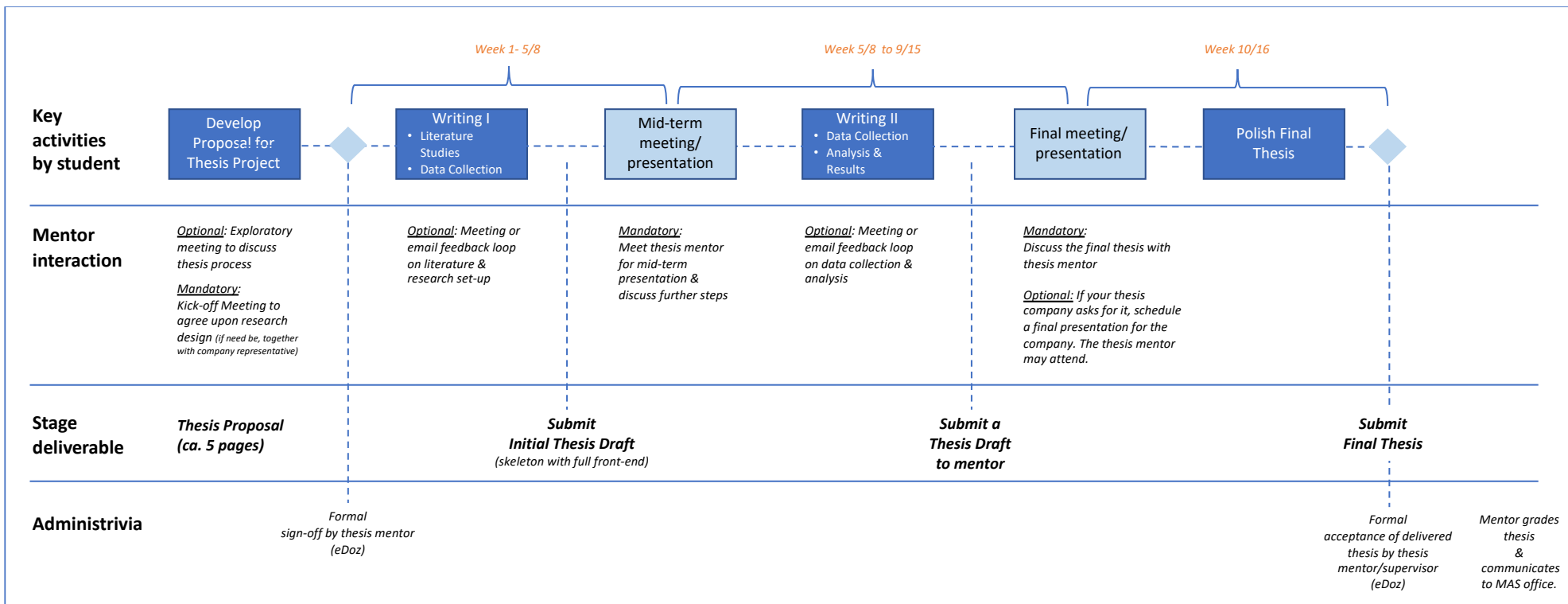
The typical cycle for assigning supervision projects starts in December up until the beginning of the spring term. So, early contact is advised. Occasionally we may be able to also add you and your topic during other times of the academic year, but please do not rely on that. Typically, the thesis work starts at the beginning of the Spring term.

Thesis process

Note: Apart from an early exploratory discussion, there will be commonly three official meetings with your thesis supervisor, of which the last one is typically the final presentation. Beyond that you may request feedback on written material via email or in-person meetings as deemed necessary.

- **Kick-off stage (mandatory meeting):** After you have expressed interest in conducting your thesis work with our chair and have redacted the research proposal, you will have a kick-off meeting with your supervisor. In this meeting, you will discuss and fix the overarching research question and the research design.
Should you need to sign an NDA with your thesis company, please ask your thesis mentor for a template. Do not sign anything the company offers. We typically use an ETH template.
- **Literature review and method stage (optional around week 4):** Your thesis work should start with an in-depth study of the literature, which you should conduct independently. In parallel, you should also start collecting data in accordance to the research design you have discussed in the kick-off meeting. You may request a meeting and/or engage with your supervisor via e-mail to refine your written work and method approach.
- **Mid-term stage (mandatory meeting around week 8):** Once you have concluded the literature review and have almost completed data collection there will be a mandatory meeting with your supervisor to discuss your progress so far. This meeting will serve as an opportunity for you to gain feedback on your draft and establish next steps forward.
- **Preliminary results stage (optional meeting around week 12):** Taking stock of the feedback collected in the mid-term meeting, you are expected to start analyzing the data and extracting preliminary results. At this stage, you may request a meeting with your supervisor and/or engage in an email exchange to gain feedback on how to refine the results.
- **Final results/presentation stage (mandatory meeting around week 14-16):** At this stage, your thesis should be almost fully completed. There should be a full and high-quality draft with clear results. You will present your thesis work at a final presentation in the presence of your supervisor and ideally (if available) other researchers from our chair. In the best case, one or more company representatives attend this final presentation and provide feedback on the impact of your project. Beyond this point, only very limited changes should be applied to the thesis, which you should then formally submit.

The chart on the next page illustrates the prototypical process. On pages 4-5, we describe the process in more detail.



THE THESIS PROPOSAL

The first step in writing a successful MAS thesis at our chair is to agree with your mentor on the thesis proposal. **The writing and sign-off of the thesis proposal is a crucial part of the supervision process as it builds a quasi-contract between you and your mentor about content and process of your thesis project.**

Typically, the thesis proposal is written prior to the official kick-off of the thesis. The proposal should also be agreed upon with your company supervisor.

A thesis proposal is ca. 5 pages long concise description of what you aim to research and how you are planning to achieve that. It helps you and your supervisor to agree on the nature and focus of your study and is the basis on what your supervisor will sign off on your thesis start. **Please also refer to the thesis template your mentor can share with you.**

Key elements of a thesis proposal:

Research context & problem: General description of the larger context in which the managerial problem you aim to research occurs. Develop what leads to the problem and delineate a specific and concrete research question that will guide your thesis.

Background & Gap: Summarize relevant existing academic research that informs your research problem – usually 3-5 key papers should be sufficient at this step. A complete review will follow in the thesis. Practitioner research should only come as complement, not as a primary source. You will find relevant academic papers on Google Scholar and notably in the **top management journals**. Summarize how the insights from the literature will help you address the research problem or what the literature does not answer (gap) and thus requires your research.

Proposed Research Design: What is the specific empirical context in which you would like to conduct the research, i.e. a specific company, an industry, etc., and which methodology fits your purpose? What data do you aim to collect and how do you envision to analyze it?

Proposed Timeline: Rough course of actions over 10/16 weeks (depending on your time commitment), incl. meetings with the supervisor (see stylized process) and tentative dates for final defense and hand-in.

Bibliography: List papers and publications you have cited in your proposal. Use established scientific citation practice (e.g., APA).

OFFICIAL START OF THE THESIS

After you agreed with your supervisor(s) about the thesis proposal, you can sign up for the thesis via mystudies.ethz.ch.

As you sign up:

- Define a short and significant title that clearly summarizes the content of your proposal. Try to find a good balance between a catchy and easily graspable title. In doubt, check back with your supervisor.
- Indicate as main tutor Prof. Bart Clarysse and as co-supervisor the main mentor from our chair who will guide you through the process.
- Define beginning and end date of your thesis, as agreed with the supervisor.
- Upload the proposal as task description
- Inform your thesis mentor, so she or he can officially confirm and sign you up in the system.

MANAGING THE PROCESS

We expect you to drive the thesis process. While your mentor will be your guide through the scientific process, notably providing feedback on structuring your work, literature review and methodological approach, it is your responsibility to do the work. Note, that in particular the implementation of your data strategy and the analysis and development of insights is a key element of your contribution.

As long as you steer proactively your thesis project, our commitment is to provide constructive and timely feedback to help you keep going and create your best possible work.

HANDING IN YOUR THESIS

Please ask your thesis mentor about formatting requirements of the thesis document. We do offer a thesis template your mentor can share with you.

Other Submission requirements

- Electronic copy of final thesis to mentor. Discuss also any data submission requirements.
- One or two bound hard copies – please confer with your thesis mentor about precise number. One copy goes into the official MTEC archive.
- Along with the thesis, please hand submit a filled and personally signed “**Declaration of Originality**.” You may include a scanned copy in the electronic thesis file.

THESIS ASSESSMENT

We expect MAS students to know about the basics of academic writing and proper code of conduct, most notably vis-à-vis plagiarism.

We typically check each submitted thesis for plagiarism. In accordance with the ETH rules, we have to report incidences of plagiarism to the Dekanat where the decision about further consequences will be taken. It goes without saying that you do not want to end up in that process.

When assessing the quality of your thesis and determining the final grade, we typically look at the following elements:

- Content (clear problem, comprehensive treatment, critical synthesis and structuring of relevant background literature, appropriate method to produce valid insight, well structured presentation of key results in accordance with academic standards, an evaluative discussion of the results with your own conclusions, practical relevance)
- Form & Writing (academic writing style, proper referencing, professional design)
- Work process (professional attitude, independent workstyle, coachability)

While an MAS thesis addresses practical managerial problems, the thesis should also provide sufficient academic depth to allow us assessing your ability to use scientific methods to provide useful insight and recommendations.

Also note, while our aim in supervising is to provide constructive feedback that will help you to improve your work to levels that allow you to pass and hopefully even pass with excellent results, none of this can be guaranteed. You are the driver of your thesis, and as such responsible for your level of achievement.

For further info about the general MAS Thesis process and timing for the academic year, please check the [MTEC MAS Thesis guidelines](#).

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