

FAQs: BA/MA-Theses

When should I start thinking about a topic for my thesis?

As soon as possible. At the latest, you should try to find a topic in the lecture period preceding your thesis. Experience has shown that students struggle to come up with a good topic under time pressure – and that this tends to be reflected in the grade. Example: If you are planning to register for your thesis at the end of March, you should start thinking about a topic way before February/March.

What do I need to keep in mind when registering my BA/MA-Thesis?

You will write your BA-thesis at the end of your third year of study (6th semester) according to the thesis module description. The thesis is to be written in the focus area in which you completed two advanced modules. You will write your master's thesis in your fourth semester according to the study guidelines. Please see me during my office hours to discuss possible topics in time before the registration deadline. Usually, the registration deadline is the end of September for the thesis in the winter semester and the end of March for the thesis in the summer semester.

Important: You need to register **in person** at the examination office (Prüfungsamt) in addition to arranging the thesis with me. Among other things, you will need to present the confirmation of examination (Prüfungsübernahmebestätigung) signed by me. Click [here](#) for additional information regarding the BA thesis, deadlines and forms.

In order to discuss possible topics for your thesis, please come to one of my office hours at least 4 weeks before the official registration deadline. Bring along **three different suggestions from at least two different linguistic areas**. You also need to bring a short abstract of each suggested topic (see below). Please arrange an office hour appointment with Ms. Feuerstein (B406, angela.feuerstein@anglistik.uni-giessen.de)

What needs to be included in the topic suggestions for the BA/MA thesis?

The three suggested topics need to cover at least two different linguistic areas (descriptive levels, applied areas such as sociolinguistics or forensic linguistics, etc.). Please note that I **cannot** normally supervise theses on advertising or business/economic language, political speeches, discourse analysis/pragmatics, purely language-sociological research (without a structural linguistic part) as well as theses on Spanglish and hip hop language. Each topic suggestion and accompanying explanation should contain at least:

1. **Variety to be investigated:** e.g. learners' English, Scottish English, American Standard English, Outer Circle varieties, etc.
2. **Linguistic feature to be investigated:** e.g. level(s) of linguistic description such as phonology, semantics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, etc.
3. **Precisely formulated research question including the exact structural linguistic variable(s)/feature(s) you want to investigate:** e.g.
 - Phonology: e.g. "Factors in the regressive assimilation of /n/ in Late Modern British English"
 - Syntax: e.g. "Complementation patterns of ditransitive verbs in Standard American English"

- Lexicology: e.g. “Lexical change in contemporary American English”
- Sociolinguistics: e.g. “A comparative analysis of gender differences in th-stopping in Standard American English and African American English”
- Varieties: e.g. “The realization of the STRUT-vowel in Nigerian English”
- Language history: e.g. “The motivations and effects of French loans in Middle English e.g. “
- etc. etc. of course, you can combine different topics as can be seen in the example for varieties (phonology + varieties). General ideas such as “I’d like to investigate the different communication strategies of women and men” or “I want to study the way children acquire English” are **not** specific enough. They can only serve as starting points in your search for a topic.

4. Data base for empirical part of the thesis: exact information on e.g. the texts, recordings, corpora, questionnaires you plan on using or on the way you plan to collect your data etc.

Where can I find inspiration for my topic?

You will be fairly familiar with the different areas of linguistics and potential research questions from your studies. You can find inspiration e.g. when browsing through the course materials of introductory literature for different linguistic areas. Please come prepared to my office hour to discuss the final topic on which you will be writing. That means: **three different suggestions from at least two different linguistic areas** (see above). You can also find ideas in e.g.

- Wray, Alison and Aileen Bloomer. 2012. *Projects in linguistics and language studies: a practical guide to researching language*. 3rd ed. London: Hodder Education.

How long are BA/MA theses and how are they structured?

A BA thesis consists of 25 pages including tables/illustrations, but excluding the list of works cited and appendices. An MA-thesis consists of 50 pages. Every thesis should contain a theoretical-methodological part as well as a practical-empirical part. The latter should make up from at least half and up to 2/3 of the thesis. “Empirical” means that you need to conduct a small study based on actual language data. It is **not** enough to just reproduce research literature on the topic.

In which language do I need to write the thesis?

We usually expect the thesis to be written in English. Consult the applicable examination regulations ([Prüfungsordnungen](#)).

Are there any formal guidelines?

Formatting, citing etc. need to be done according to the English department’s [style sheet for term papers](#). Please follow the guidelines for linguistics if there are diverging procedures for literature/culture studies and linguistics.

How can I avoid plagiarism (and a consequent fail grade)?

Unfortunately, even students writing their BA- or MA-thesis occasionally get a fail grade due to plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Please learn about the rules of good academic writing

instead of resorting to plagiarism and fraud. Read and follow JLU's guidelines on this matter. Every thesis needs to contain a signed declaration against plagiarism ([Plagiatserklärung](#)).

Where can I find further tips/info?

Read the [Guide for Diplomarbeit, Magisterarbeit, Staatsexamensarbeit, Masterarbeit](#) by Simone Müller. Tips are also valid for BA/MA-Theses.

The tips on finding a topic and structuring a linguistic term paper in [Magnus Huber's tips for term papers](#) (doc) are also relevant for BA/MA-theses.

Can I un-enroll from JLU when writing my thesis?

No. You need to be enrolled when writing your thesis: cf. §19 [Allgemeinen Bestimmungen für modularisierte und gestufte Studiengänge der Justus-Liebig-Universität vom 21. Juli 2004](#)

How and where can I get an extension of the submission deadline for the thesis?

You need to apply in time for an extension of the submission deadline at the [examination office \(Akademisches Prüfungsamt Geisteswissenschaften\)](#). Please consult the examination office's website to learn about requirements regarding form and content of the application.

Where do I submit my thesis? How many copies do I need to submit?

2 softbound print copies (ask for Klebebindung / Leimbindung at the copy shop) plus 3 CDs/DVDs containing the digital version to be submitted to the examination office ([Akademischen Prüfungsamt Geisteswissenschaften](#))