

# What are the alternative options for the master thesis?

## Introduction

We encourage you to discuss creative alternatives for your master thesis and internship with your internship supervisors. In response to questions, we have reorganized and updated our description of alternatives. There may be more possibilities than what we describe below, but they will give some guidelines as to what is possible and acceptable. The options outlined below make it possible for master students to graduate on schedule.

Note that the minimum length for all possible alternatives remains the same as in a standard thesis. Please discuss with your first supervisor which format of the formats below fits best for your research field and project situation. Below, we describe three categories of scenarios.

## Three types of scenarios

- A. You already have an introduction, a method section, and perhaps already some data and **you would want to keep what you have** – of course with some adjustments in the introduction to inform the reader about the content of the remaining chapters. Then you may complete the thesis in one of the following ways:
1. **Center the thesis on detailed predictions:** If you have very clear hypotheses, you may exchange the Results section with a Predicted Results section, in which you provide detailed illustrations of what the pattern of results would look like when your null hypothesis is confirmed, or when the evidence points in the direction of an alternative hypothesis. The discussion could address an evaluation of the probability of different results based on a further literature review. Or you could choose to keep any discussion short, and expand the introduction to maximally support/explain your predicted results.
  2. **Use existing data:** If your supervisor happens to have data that are relevant for your hypotheses, your supervisor might allow you to use the existing data, so you can finish your thesis on schedule (if necessary with some updates of introduction and methods to fit with the data you might use). Together with your supervisor, you might also look for online data (data published in open access journals, or public data bases) that could be used to investigate your question of interest. *As an aside, should you find a super-interesting dataset that you can use to verify a question totally different from the one you planned, this is also possible, but discuss feasibility with your supervisors!*
  3. **Use simulations:** If your supervisor has modeling software that could be used to test predictions you have formulated, you may work together with your supervisor to generate a simulated dataset, which can be used as a basis for your Results and Discussion sections. Some of you may even have the

background to write such computational models yourselves, but always discuss with your supervisor before you begin to evaluate feasibility.

- B. You already have an introduction, a method section, and **you want to collect data**. This may not be totally impossible in some cases.
1. **Go online:** there are various software packages (such as Inquisit6 and the Psychopy Builder) that allow you to do surveys and a range of behavioral experiments online. One of your supervisors may have experience with such software, and might be able to help, or you might delve into this yourself if you have programming experience.
  2. **Target the summer for planned data collection:** This may be reasonable in limited cases, especially if you already collected partial data and there is preliminary data indicating that the planned experiment works. The risks should be fully discussed with your supervisors. To mitigate the risk, when you take this option, we suggest you already greatly expand the literature review in your Introduction, so you can strongly limit the Discussion. In this way, the only work that remains to be done is to collect, analyze and report the data. Should the data collection not be possible in the end, this will likely become clear in time for you to still turn the thesis in a fully theoretical thesis in the form of an extensive literature review (see below).
- C. You already have an introduction, a method section, but **you are happy to turn your empirical thesis into a theoretical thesis**. There are two possibilities we describe below. Note that below we assume you stick to your chosen topic, but you could also use these scenarios after a complete switch in your topic (see also below under additional questions).
1. **A focused review on your already chosen topic.** You could perhaps keep your envisaged (more general) introduction, which could lead to various open questions. You add to the introduction information about the other chapters. If there is a debate in the field that pits two or more views against each other, this could also inspire a few interesting research questions. The second part of your thesis would then become 'focused' in the sense that you may select a few crucial papers that have convincingly shown support for specific (maybe incompatible) hypotheses. The selection of these papers would take place together with your supervisor. Your review would then focus on the pros and cons of the design, data collection, analysis done, and interpretation in the selected studies, to weigh the evidence in favor of one or another hypothesis. You could also provide suggestions for improved design and analysis.
  2. **A classical review on your already chosen topic.** You write a full literature review on your chosen topic according to a conventional format. In this format as well, you should focus enough attention on the most relevant papers so that you can discuss and criticize the practical aspects of the reviewed work (such as design, data collection, analysis).

As a guideline for style and organization, you could use the format of a theoretical BA thesis. Please see the student handbook writing skills at **askpsy** [https://askpsy.nl/bestanden/downloads/curriculum/internships/2019-FPN\\_Handbook\\_Writing\\_Skills\\_v001\\_27-08-2019.pdf](https://askpsy.nl/bestanden/downloads/curriculum/internships/2019-FPN_Handbook_Writing_Skills_v001_27-08-2019.pdf)

As method guideline on how to conduct the literature review, please follow the steps provided by Cochrane <https://training.cochrane.org/handbook/current/part-2>.

## **Additional questions**

### ***A. Does my research proposal remain valid?***

Whatever the changes are in the focus of your thesis, your current research proposal approval remains valid, and no new proposal needs to be written under any circumstances.

### ***B. Does the ethical approval of my project remain valid?***

If you will collect data in a changed project, no individual study needs to be submitted to the ERCPN as long as what you do falls under an approved research line of your supervisor. This question is only relevant if you find a way to still collect data and your participant category, methods and/or topic change in an ethically relevant manner. Please discuss this with your first supervisor. The supervisor needs to inform the ERCPN then.

### ***C. Does the fact I am missing out on the practical work have any consequences?***

There are no negative consequences with regard to the requirements for the Master Thesis in case you meet the set standards as agreed between you and your supervisors.

Even if not hands-on, your thesis work will expose you to not only theoretical background, but also to practical aspects of science, as you will explicitly evaluate various practical aspects of studies that you treat in your introduction and/or discussion. It should also be considered that there is by default a great variety among internships, with some focusing almost entirely on analyzing existing data, and others involving mostly the setup of new experiments, and yet others focusing heavily on data collection and less on other aspects of research. However, in your training as a whole there is sufficient (above-threshold) exposure to a full range of practical skills to qualify you for your diploma, even if some aspects of research are less present in your internship experience.

***D. Should I compensate for missing some of the practical internship experience?***

You can request some help from your supervisors and other staff members to help you compensate in a variety of skills. They include various types of data-analysis, programming, computational modeling. As indicated above, you may also try to do some data collection online.

**E. I have other questions about my internship that my supervisors cannot help me with. Whom should I contact?**

Please contact your FPN internship coordinator by email.