



Guidelines for elaborating a Master's
dissertation or project

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1. General Framework

Elaborating a master's project/dissertation is often associated with some degree of uncertainty on the part of students as to what to do, both in administrative terms and on how to carry out their work. This document aims at clarifying questions that may arise on this matter by:

- Specifying and clarifying some aspects regarding the elaboration and defence processes of the master's dissertation/project at the Business School (BS);
- Revealing some key points and dates of this process;
- Clarifying the presentation and graphic standardization rules of the final document.

2. Types of Master's final projects at Iscte Business School

Iscte Business School accepts Dissertations or Projects as the master's final year assignment. Within the Project modality, it can assume the following formats: Pedagogic Case Study, In-Company Project, or Business Plan for Innovative Project.

2.1 Projects

A Project can assume different formats:

- Pedagogic Case Study: This type of work should characterize a business situation, identifying the company and its environment and presenting a specific business problem as well as the associated pedagogic note;
- Business Plan for Innovative Project: Presentation of an innovative project with the identification of the key strategic, marketing, technological, organizational and financial aspects, which allow its evaluation and hypothetical funding and implementation. This modality should be approached in a broad sense, allowing, for example, the development of internationalization, expansion, innovation and relocation studies, among others.

• In-Company Project: Students can develop a specific project in a company in accordance with its objectives, being able to do so as company interns or on an autonomous basis. Some examples of in-company projects include:

- elaborating an internal business plan for a new product or market;
- creating, adapting or improving a performance evaluation model;
- creating a new product's communication plan;
- implementing a management control system.

Index types of the different Project formats can be found on this document's annexes (See Annex 1).

2.2. Dissertations

This master's final assignment format is destined to students with a drive towards research or that want to explore themes and topics that do not fit within the project framework. A dissertation, although allowing different models from those of the Bologna project (point 2.1), should nonetheless follow what is proposed to a project in regards of the dimension, focus and rationale aspects.

The standard index type of a dissertation can be found on this document's annexes (see Annex 1).

3. Presentation of the list of topics and supervisors by the Business School

3.1. Selecting a topic and a supervisor

Each master's director is responsible for elaborating a list of potential topics/supervisors to be sent to students. The list should be disclosed to students throughout each master's Research Seminar classes. Students should consider this list as one of the sources for supervisors but are also allowed to suggest external supervisors.

3.2. Proposals of external supervisors by students

It is up to the student to contact the potential supervisors, preferably with a written document about the project where the topic and the methodology are laid out in a clear manner.

Should the student seek and intend to have an external supervisor, he/she must attach to the proposal form (Fénix) a Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the said supervisor.

3.3. Approval of external supervisors by the Business School

External supervisors must be approved by the master's director by decision of the Business School's Scientific Committee.

Students will be informed if the supervisor was not approved up to 10 business days after the deadline for the submission of the proposal form (Fénix), being required to reformulate the process in accordance with the justifications for the non-approval.

4. Development of the Master's Project/ Dissertation

4.1. Supervisor guidance

Each student is responsible for developing his/her Project/Dissertation. Supervisors should guarantee the monitoring of the Project/Dissertation in accordance with a plan of activities. Such a plan should be laid out by the student and presented to the supervisor in the early stages of the Dissertation/Project, being recommended that both parties create a written agreement over the activities to be carried out and their dates.

Student monitoring could be achieved through in-person meetings or alternative ways, such as online tools, upon agreement by both parties.

4.2. Decision to submit the Master's Project/Dissertation

The decision to submit the Project/Dissertation falls upon the student who must always obtain a favourable opinion from the supervisor(s).

5. Rules for carrying out the Master's Project / Dissertation

Iscte's Scientific Council has developed a set of presentation and graphic harmonization norms for master's projects or dissertations which should be followed by all students developing this type of assignment. The details of these norms can be found in Annex 2.

6. Document page length

The document page length for a master's project or dissertation at Iscte Business School is 50 pages. This number pertains to the maximum number of pages, excluding bibliographic references, sources and annexes. Please check Appendix 1 to see in more detail the recommended number of pages per chapter.

7. Master’s Project/Dissertation submission dates

Submission dates	
30 th of November	Submission of the Project/ Dissertation proposal form (Fénix system)
30 th of September	Due date for the Project/ Dissertation submission (Fénix system)

8. Documents to be submitted

All declarations have been dematerialized and are completed on Fénix by the student, supervisor, master’s director, jury members and other relevant parties.

Elements to be completed/submitted by the student:

- i) Upload the document’s complete version in PDF format;
- ii) Insert abstracts in word format (both in English and Portuguese) in specific fields;
- iii) Upload a CV (European Format);
- iv) Complete the declaration of honour on Fénix;
- v) On Fénix, complete the application form requesting the authorization to carry out a master’s project/dissertation defence session, directed to Iscte’s Rector.
- vi) Complete the Library application form on Fénix;
- vii) In the event of an embargo request, upload the [application form](#) directed to the Scientific Committee along with the entity’s declaration/embargo justification, embargo period and identification of the confidential material.

9. Preliminary assessment of the delivered projects/dissertations' originality

After the submission of the Project/Dissertation, the document will be submitted to an overlap content verification process. During this process, the index of overlapping content with existing scientific publications will be assessed with the help of a specific software tool.

When irregularities are found, Projects/Dissertations cannot be submitted to public defence sessions and are thus subject to deliberation on the course of action regarding the irregularities that have been found, namely the possibility to effectively exclude them from the said sessions.

10. Defence of the Master's Project/Dissertation at the Business School

10.1 Defence period

Most Project/Dissertation defence sessions will take place between the 1st of November and the 31st of December of each academic year.

10.2. Structure of the jury panel

The jury panel will be composed of three members:

- President (the master's coordinator or someone to whom he/she has delegated this role, as long as it is a tenure track faculty with a doctoral degree);
- Two members (one of the members must be the supervisor and at least one must be a tenure track faculty).

10.3. Defence session format

The session's maximum length is 60 minutes, being each member of the jury allowed to intervene.

The project/dissertation defence session is open to the public as required by Portuguese Law and starts with an oral presentation by the student, which should not exceed the 15-minute mark.

The time the student has to answer will be equal to the time used by the jury panel.

10.4. Grade

Jury members will decide if the dissertation/project is approved or failed, attributing a final grade from 0 to 20 points.

10.5. Repeating of the Master's Project/Dissertation defence session at the Business School

Should the student fail the project/dissertation curricular unit, he/she is allowed to enrol again and pay the corresponding tuition fees, provided this is done within the time limits that have been set for the course. If the student wishes to, he/she may choose a new supervisor, topic or applied project.

11. Criteria used in the final evaluation of the Master's Projects/Dissertations

Master's dissertations and projects will be evaluated according to 8 criteria elements disclosed on the table below:

Criteria (*)

Defines goal and suitable methodology
Shows ability to interpret and reflect
Contribution to theory and/or practice (of organizations or pedagogy)
Collects and analyses data
Interprets results, discusses and provides recommendations
Write a persuasive, well-structured master thesis
Behaviour during the development of the research
Master thesis presentation and oral defence of candidate

(*) Adapted from Fisher, C. (2004). *Researching and writing a dissertation for business students*. FT Prentice Hall.

Annex 1 – Detailed structure of the documents

Dissertation

Items	No. Pages (suggestion)
Sub Cover	
Dedication and acknowledgements (optional)	
Abstract, key words and JEL classification (in Portuguese and English)	
Index	
Introduction: contextualization and definition of the research question and clarification of its importance and relevance; statement of the research questions and objectives as well as the dissertation structure.	5
Literature Review (suggested: reference to at least 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles (80%), books and, in smaller number, to other sources (20%)).	10
Conceptual Model and Research Hypothesis (*)	3
Contextualization (**)	4
Methodology	5
Obtained results, findings and discussion (research findings, contributions to existing theory, implications for practice).	15
Conclusions and Recommendations (includes limitation disclosures and suggestions for future research)	4
Bibliographical references	
Annexes	
Total (maximum)	50

* optional - the content may be integrated on the previous chapter (Literature Review)

** optional – the student may conclude that it makes sense to present the applicability context of his/her work. This may be integrated on the introduction chapter, contextualization of the research problem or at the beginning of the disclosure of the obtained results.

Case Study with Pedagogical note

Items		No. Pages (suggestion)
Sub Cover		
Dedication and acknowledgements (optional)		
Abstract, key words and JEL classification (in Portuguese and English) – Describes the starting point of the project, the type of data to be analysed, the proposed approach to solve the case study and the type of findings and learning opportunities it will allow.		
Index		
Introduction		3
Case Study		
1.1	Presentation of the case study problem	1
1.2	Data organized by themes (depends on the case study problem at the starting point and of the project's scientific area)	12
1.3	Restatement of the case study problem, specifying the question(s) to be approached and answered by the students.	1
1.4	Case Study Annexes	5*
Methodology		3
Pedagogic Note		
3.1	Case Study target audience	1/2
3.2	Pedagogic objectives	1/2
3.3	Literature Review applied to the Case Study's theme (suggested: reference to at least 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles (80%), books and, in smaller number, to other sources (20%)).	8

3.4	Case Study Lecture Plan – Including objectives per animation phase; tasks and tools to be used by the faculty, preparation of the student and timings.	1
3.5	Case Study Lecture from the faculty to the students	1/2
3.6	Solving the case study – data analysis (which may require additional research beyond the information provided in the case study formulation if that need is explicitly mentioned on the statement of the case study question)	12
3.7	Spreadsheet or slides with answers (depends on the case study problem at the starting point and of the project’s scientific area)	*
Conclusion		2
Bibliographical references		
Annexes to the Pedagogic Note		
Total (maximum)		50

* Not included on the 50-page limit for the document’s pages

In-Company Project

Items	No. Pages (suggestion)
Sub Cover	
Dedication and acknowledgements (optional)	
Abstract, key words and JEL classification (in Portuguese and English)	
Index	
Introduction	5
Literature Review applied to the sector's object of research, business or proposed innovation (suggested: reference to at least 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles (80%), books and, in smaller number, to other sources (20%)).	10
Methodology	5
Information presentation and analysis – studied data (can refer to auxiliary calculus on the annexes)	15
Implementation	8
Conclusion	3
Bibliographical references	
Annexes	
Total (maximum)	50

* When applicable, the student will include the results of the market research he/she has carried out on the appropriate sections according to his/her judgement, as a complement to the project diagnosis or as a decision support tool.

Business Plan for Innovative Project

Items	No. Pages (suggestion)
Sub Cover	
Dedication and acknowledgements (optional)	
Abstract, key words and JEL classification (in Portuguese and English)	
Index	
Identification of the promotor (if the intention is to present the project to a funding entity) and of the innovative proposal.	1
Literature Review applied to the sector's object of research, business or proposed innovation (suggested: reference to at least 20 peer-reviewed scientific articles (80%), books and, in smaller number, to other sources (20%)).	8
Methodology (include methodologies for testing the value proposition)	5
Market Analysis – current context and future trends – identification of the data collecting and processing methodologies, opportunities and threats, namely from other innovative products (raw data should be kept on the annex).	6
Internal Analysis – identification of the business' strengths and weaknesses	2
Competitive Analysis – confronting opportunities and threats with strengths and weaknesses (e.g. SWOT analysis)	1
Business Plan's Objectives	1
Development Strategy	1

Definition of implementation policies (marketing, technology, organizational and financial resources) with the corresponding details of the costs.	10
Requirements for implementation	2
Financial Evaluation (includes provisional financial documents/forecasts and evaluation tools)	4
Conclusion	2
Bibliographical references	
Annexes	
Total (maximum)	50

* The student will include the results of the market research he/she has carried out on the appropriate sections according to his/her judgement, as a complement to the project diagnosis or as a decision support tool.

Annex 2 – Presentation and graphic harmonization rules for Master’s Dissertation/Project

1. Master dissertation/project General Structure

According to the norms established by Iscte’s Scientific Council for to the Business School, the master’s dissertation or project document should have the following structure, in this order:

- i) **Cover:** It features the Iscte logo and, if the work is done in co-tutelle with another institution, the logo of that institution. If a printed paper version is required, the cover must be in white cardboard and the binding made with glue. For the latter situation.
- ii) **Sub Cover:** it has the same content as the cover, differing only in the logo, now displaying the logo of the School. In case of co-tutelle, the logos of the schools or institutions involved should appear on the sub cover, side by side.
- iii) **Dedication, acknowledgements, and references to funding**, if any.
- iv) **Abstract in Portuguese with a maximum of 250 words**, with 3 to 6 keywords and 2 JEL Classification codes
(<https://www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php>).
- v) **Abstract in English with a maximum of 250 words**, with 3 to 6 keywords and 2 JEL Classification codes
(<https://www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php>).
- vi) **Indices:**
 - General Index
 - Table of contents and figures (if applicable or justified)
- vii) **Glossary (if applicable):**
 - Glossary of acronyms
 - Glossary of symbols
- viii) **Body of text:**
 - Introduction
 - Chapters 1, 2, 3, ..., n
 - Conclusion

For details on each of the dissertation/project modalities, please see Annex 1.

- ix) **Sources:** Legislation, Regulatory Decrees, Ordinances, Orders, Archive Documents, Press, Visual Sources, or other sources of information.
- x) **Bibliographical references.**
- xi) **Annexes (A,B,C...).**

2. Graphic Composition

2.1. Font, spacing and other rules

- i) **Font size and type:** Times New Roman 12, or Arial 11 or Calibri 11.
- ii) **The text should be written in black, and the figures and pictures may be in color.** In the paper version, when available, the text should be printed on white A4 paper of 80 grams or equivalent recycled paper and, mandatorily, on both sides.
- iii) **Margins:** 2,5 cm on all four sides.
- iv) **Spacing (text):** 1.5 lines, with justified text
- v) **The cover, sub cover and spine** shall follow the instructions in the document that you will find in our [website](#) (select your master course → Dissertation or Project).
- vi) **Writing:** the text should be consistently written in UK English or US English.
- vii) **Text Formatting:** the change of paragraph in the text is marked with an entry of 0.7 cm at the beginning of the first line of the second paragraph, i.e. in the second paragraph after the title or subtitle. The first paragraph after the title or subtitle has no entry. There is no additional spacing between paragraphs. The headings or subheadings of the same chapter are separated by a blank line (enter). Additionally, underlining should be avoided; bold should only be used for titles or subtitles. Italics should be used to mark a concept or strong idea.
- viii) **The dedication, acknowledgements, sources of funding, abstracts, index(es) and glossary** should, like the chapters, bibliography, sources and annexes, start on an odd page.

- ix) **Pagination:** excluding the page of the dedication, which should not have a number, the pages should be numbered in lowercase Roman numerals, i, ii, ..., etc and appearing after the page of dedication (if any), until the beginning of the text. From then on, the numbering is done using Arabic numerals (1,2, 3,...), consecutively until the end. In any case, the page number is shown at the bottom outside, i.e. left on even pages and right on odd pages, at 1.25 cm from the end of the page.
- x) **Header:** optionally, a header with the abbreviated title of the dissertation / thesis (running title) can be included.
- xi) **Footnotes should be inserted with automatic numbering.** The font size should be 1 point smaller than that used in the text, with one line spacing and a 0.4 cm entry (hanging paragraph) on the second line of the note (if any), in order to differentiate them spatially. There is no spacing between the notes.
- xii) **Fonts and references are entered at the end of the text (before the appendices)** They are written with the same type and font size as the text, with only one line spacing and with an entry of 0.7 cm ("hanging" paragraph or hanging) on the second line (if there is one), in order to differentiate them spatially. There is no additional spacing between references.

2.2. Tables and figures

Figures are diagrams, maps, drawings or other representations of the same nature and tables contain numerical or qualitative data. The pictures and figures should preferably appear next to the main text where they are invoked. Both representations are numbered in an indexed manner to the chapter (e.g. Table 2.3 for the 3rd table of Chapter 2, or Figure 7.5 for the 5th figure of Chapter 7) and a legend describing their content. The captions of the pictures appear at the top, justified as the text, and that of the figures below and centred being, in any case, self-explanatory.

2.3. Equations and formulas

Equations or other mathematical formulae should be highlighted and numbered in brackets using Arabic numerals. The numbering may or may not be indexed to the chapter. For example:

$$a = \sqrt{b^2 + c^2} \quad (3.5)$$

would be the 5th equation in Chapter 3, or

$$a = \sqrt{b^2 + c^2} \quad (4)$$

the 4th work equation. In any case, the equation must be centered and its reference adjusted to the right, as indicated.

2.4. Annexes

The annexes must be identified by the letters A, B, ... etc. (Annex A, Annex B, ...) and have the same status as chapters.

2.5. Bibliographical References and Sources

Sources and bibliographical references are listed at the end of the text before the Annexes. At the Business School, the rules for its writing and text quoting should follow the APA rule.

Examples of the APA rule being applied:

i) **Throughout the text**

- a. Between brackets: (Simon et al., 2019); (Simon & Jones, 2019); (Simon, 2019)
- b. Within the narrative: Simon et al. (2019); Simon and Jones (2019); Simon (2019)

ii) **Examples of bibliographical references indicated by APA:**

- a. *Scientific Journal article:*

Grady, J. S., Her, M., Moreno, G., Perez, C., & Yelinek, J. (2019). Emotions in storybooks: A comparison of storybooks that represent ethnic and racial groups in the United States. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(3), 207-217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000185>

b. Newspaper article:

Carey, B. (2019, March 22). Can we get better at forgetting? The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/22/health/memory-forgetting-psychology.html>

c. Book:

Jackson, L. M. (2019). *The psychology of prejudice: From attitudes to social action* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000168-000>

Complete information about the APA classification system, with examples, can be accessed at: <https://apastyle.apa.org/>

