

Project & Thesis Guidelines MA

Game Development and Research (March 2025)

1 The Master's Project (General Info)

The module "Master's Project" consists of the following parts:

- Master Thesis + Practical Project (20 ECTS)
- Thesis Presentation and Defense (4 ECTS)
- Master's Project Mentoring

The Master's Project provides evidence that the examinee is capable of independently completing an assignment on a subject pertaining to their field of study within a given time frame (4 months) by elaborating on subject-related specifics as well as on interdisciplinary contexts and by making use of academic and subject-related methods.

The project may be realized in the form of a joint team project, provided a student's individual contribution is **clearly distinguishable** (through written documentation) and can be assessed accordingly. If the student wishes to work as part of a team for the Master's Project, they must discuss the matter with their first supervisor before registering the thesis.

The **Master's Project** consists of **two parts**: a **practical media project work (= Practical Project)** and a **media theoretical part (= Thesis)**.

- The **practical media project** includes a game prototype (or similar practical work such as a game design document, concept art, etc.) Other media forms are permitted with the consent of the supervisor. Accompanying the practical media project must be documented explaining the process and choices made during the process of the practical work.
- The **media theoretical part** functions as the academic foundation and reflection of the practical work. The thesis and practical documentation must be clearly distinguished from each other.

For the grading process, the **weight** of both parts (= Theory & Practice) is suggested by the student and confirmed by the supervisor and examination board. The smaller part must be at least 20% of the overall workload.

The module Master's Project is passed if it is graded "sufficient" (4.0).

The rules of this guide are unique to Master Game Development and Research. Students from another program need to consult their respective program managers about submission requirements.

2 Scheduling the Master Phase

Timewise, the Master Phase can be planned using these key building blocks:

- The **grading period** (for each examination, incl. those of the 3rd semester) is **8 weeks**.
- The **registration form** is submitted to the program manager **after the acquisition of all necessary ECTS** (= 96).
- Students have **four months from the start date of their thesis registration** to execute and write the Master's Project.
- Students may **withdraw** from their Master's Project only once and **only within the first two weeks** of the assigned time frame.
- **Extension of deadline:** In exceptional cases, when it was beyond the control of a student to make the deadline, the chairperson of the examination board may extend the deadline of submission by up to six weeks if a student submits **a request prior to the deadline**. The request in which the student states the reasons for the deadline extension must be **sent via e-mail to the chairperson of the examination board**. The project supervisor will be consulted on the request.
- **After submission**, the student must arrange a **date for the Thesis presentation and Defense** with their supervisors and program manager. As a rule of thumb, the Thesis presentation and Defense should take place about 8 weeks after handing in the Master Thesis.

3 Admission to the Master's Project

- Students can only be admitted to the module "Master's Project" if they meet the following admission requirements:
 - **Ongoing enrolment** at TH Köln
 - **96 credits (ECTS)** from semesters 1 to 3
- The admission to the Master's Project is to be decided by the chairperson of the examination board and, in case of doubt, the entire examination board.

3.1 Finding a Supervisor

- The Master's Project is assessed by two examiners, who also serve as supervisors. The **first supervisor** must be a professor at CGL and, ideally, should have previously taught the student at CGL. The student is responsible for selecting and reaching out to a proposed first supervisor for the project.
- The examination board appoints **the second supervisor**, and the student has no influence on their selection. However, in special cases, such as collaborations with a company, the student may submit a written request for a specific second supervisor who either works for the company or has relevant expertise in the thesis subject. The examination board will consider this request where possible.
- The examination board decides on both supervisors for the Master Thesis, Final Presentation, and Oral Examination and takes the student's suggestions into consideration. The examination board ensures that the examination obligations are distributed as evenly as possible among the supervisors.

3.2 Registering for the MA Thesis

- The Master phase is agreed on – both in terms of content and timing – between the student and the first supervisor.
- The topic of the Master's Project is set by the student after consultation with the first supervisor. **The student and the first supervisor must agree on the title of the Master Thesis before handing in the registration form** (no working title).
- The thesis title must refer to both the practical media project and the media theoretical part. The weighting of the grades (i.e., 40% Theory, 60% Practice) must be included in the registration form (behind the thesis title).
- The **registration form** can be found here: https://www.th-koeln.de/mam/downloads/deutsch/studium/studiengaenge/f02/antraege_formulare/f02_ma_gdr_antrag_auf_zulassung_zur_abschlussarbeit_und_kolloqium_en.pdf
The registration form must first be signed by the first examiner and the student. The student then sends the registration form to the program manager, who officially registers the thesis and sets the deadline. **After the official registration**, the student has **4 months to complete the thesis**.
- If the deadline (four months from the registration date) falls on a Sunday or holiday, the thesis is due on the following workday.

4 Thesis Submission and Evaluation

- **Please note:** A printed copy of the thesis is no longer required for MA Thesis Projects registered after March 1, 2025. All MA Thesis Projects must be submitted digitally.

• Step 1: Online Submission

- The completed Master's Thesis, along with all associated practical components of the thesis project—such as accompanying artworks, game development documentation, prototypes, and any additional relevant materials—**must be submitted via the following link:** <https://th-koeln.sciebo.de/s/glg1NhvjXeuK7uC>. The date of upload will be considered the official submission date, and it is essential that the deadline be strictly adhered to. Late submissions will not be accepted.
- The MA Thesis Project files must be **named after the following pattern:**

For thesis files:

Lastname_Firstname_"Thesis"_Semester of submission

Example: Doe_Jane_Thesis_WT25

For project files:

Lastname_Firstname_"Practical" (if applicable, a more specific description) _Semester

Example: Doe_Jane _Practical _WT25

Example: Doe_Jane _Practical_Prototype_WT25

Example: Doe_Jane _Practical_Concept Art_WT25

Example: Doe_Jane _Practical_Code_WT25

- If the practical project consists of particularly large files, students must provide a download link that remains accessible at least until the day of the oral exam. This download link should be included in a separate (Word) document.

• Step 2: Notification

- Immediately after uploading the thesis, students must send an (informal) **email to the Office of Student and Examination Services** (studium-suedstadt@th-koeln.de) to notify them of the submission. The email should include the student's full name, thesis title, and student ID. **The email must be sent from the student's official university email account (s-mail).**
- The Office of Student and Examination Services will verify whether the MA Thesis Project has been submitted correctly and by the deadline. They will then inform the supervisors who will begin the review process of the MA Thesis Project. The student is **not** required to notify the supervisors about the submission of their thesis.

5 Thesis Presentation and Defense

- **After submission**, the student must arrange a **date for the Thesis presentation and Defense** with their supervisors and program manager via email. As a rule of thumb, the Thesis presentation and Defense should take place about 8 weeks after handing in the Master Thesis.
- The final **presentation** and **defense** (= Oral Exam) conclude the Master's Project. The student's final presentation and the subsequent oral exam are to be evaluated independently and should take place within eight weeks of submission of the Master Thesis + Practical Project.
- Students may only be admitted to the Final Presentation and Oral Examination if
 - they are enrolled at TH Köln.
 - they have **passed all other module examinations** of the MA GDR.
 - their Master Thesis + Practical Project **have been graded at least "sufficient" (4.0)**.
- The student's **presentation** of the Master Thesis + Practical Project should last **at least 15 minutes and may not exceed 30 minutes**. The subsequent **oral examination** will be held for **30 minutes**.
- The **examination commissions** consist of up to 3 members of the following group. However, only the **two examiners (= supervisors)** will evaluate the presentation and oral examination.
 - 1st examiner of the Master's Project
 - 2nd examiner of the Master's Project
 - Protocol: Program Manager
- Students do **not** have to register for the Final Presentation and Oral Examination separately. This is included in the application for admission to the Master Project & Thesis.
- However, students must consult the entire examination commission (see above) to make an appointment for the final presentation.
- The final presentation and defense can be held online (via Zoom) or on-site at CGL. Here, too, prior consultation with the supervisors and the program manager is required.
- If a student does **not** pass the Final Presentation and Oral Examination, they may retake this examination once.
- Students must know that from the date of their passed final examination (not the end of the semester!), they will no longer be considered a student by official offices (visa, health insurance, etc). However, students can still use their student train ticket until the end of the semester. For non-EU students, the 18-month job search period begins from the date of the final examination.
- We encourage graduates who have produced outstanding theses to share their work with other students as exemplary samples. Upon obtaining consent from the author, the MA GDR

program management will upload the thesis to a cloud-based platform (ScieBo) and furnish download links to fellow MA GDR students.

6 Formal MA Thesis Guidelines

6.1 Documentation of Project

- For the duration of the master's phase, the student must keep records that **reflect the creation process** of the practical media project work. This production diary encourages students to adopt a unique perspective based on their individual specializations. Students are encouraged to incorporate artifacts such as sketches, renderings, screenshots, code, etc., that represent their distinct workflows. The production diary's visual design may reflect the individual aesthetic nature of the project. Students can ask their supervisors about more detailed expectations when it comes to the scope, format and/or structure of the production diary.

6.2 Thesis Formatting

- The Master's Thesis must be written in English.
- Regarding the maximum number of characters/words, students must consult their supervisors.
- MA GDR students have the flexibility to select any of the widely recognized academic referencing styles but must maintain consistency in their choice throughout the thesis text. However, it is strongly **recommended to adhere to CGL's official referencing style** for the MA Thesis. Additional details on CGL's referencing style can be found in the following paragraphs.
- CGL does not prescribe formatting details for the thesis. However, we advise students to follow academic standards, e.g.,

Font: Times

Font Size: 12 pt. (main body of the text), 10 pt. (footnotes, block/indented quotations)

Line Spacing: 1.5 (main body of the text), single spaced (footnotes, block quotations)

Paragraph Alignment: Justification

Margins:

Top: 2.5 cm

Bottom: 2.5 cm

Left: 4.5 cm

Right: 3 cm

- Pagination starts with the title page, though the title page should not display a page number.
- MA GDR Students should follow the guidelines outlined in the six sections of this chapter: (1) Structure, (2) Statement of Originality, (3) Statement on Collaboration, (4) Title Page, (5) Referencing and Bibliography.

6.3 Structure

The thesis should follow the general structure of an academic paper. Thus, it should include the following elements:

- Table of Contents
- Abstract (500 words max.)
- Introduction
- Main Part
- Conclusion
- References
- Statement of Originality
- Statement on Collaboration

6.4 Statement of Originality

IMPORTANT:

- **The MA thesis will automatically fail if it does not include the statement of originality.**

- The MA thesis and documentation require a declaration affirming that the work is solely the student's own. In the case of a team project, the declaration must specify the student's individual contributions (clearly indicated) and assert that no additional resources or supporting literature beyond those indicated have been utilized.

- The statement of originality should be included on the last page of the thesis and documentation text, along with the student's signature. Students who did not work a group for their MA project should use TH Köln's official form (download here: https://www.th-koeln.de/mam/downloads/deutsch/studium/rundumsstudium/organisation/eigenstandigkeit_serklarung_zur_prufung.pdf) for their statement of originality.

- Students who create their MA thesis in a team must create their own statement of originality and alter the following text accordingly:

"This is to certify that the content of this project, documentation and thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual

content of my submission is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing it, as well as all sources used have been properly acknowledged.”

- The statement of originality should clearly identify each team member’s individual contribution, both in the table of contents and at the outset of their respective sections within the thesis and documentation text.

6.5 Statement on Collaboration

- For group projects, students have the option to choose between an individual or a collaborative thesis. This decision must be discussed with and approved by the supervisor(s) before the official registration of the thesis. Regardless of the chosen format, the written submission must conclude with an additional declaration outlining the student’s collaboration with team members in all aspects of the submission.

6.6 Title Page

- The title page of the thesis and documentation text must be structured as follows:

›**Title that encompasses your Project & Thesis (i.e., thesis topic as registered on the official form)**‹

by

›**Name**‹

› **Student ID (Matrikelnummer)**‹

›**Email Address**‹

written in the Winter Term 20xx/20xx

for MA Game Development and Research

at Cologne Game Lab / TH Köln

supervised by ›**academic title and full name of your supervisor**‹ (e.g., Prof. Björn Bartholdy or Prof. Dr. Gundolf S. Freyermuth)

submitted on ›**day month year**‹

6.7 Referencing and Bibliography

6.7.1 Direct and Indirect Referencing

Indirect Quotes:

- Whenever an academic writer incorporates the work of another individual or institution, it is essential to acknowledge the source by clearly indicating the borrowed content and its origin. This includes facts, opinions, and quotations—whether directly quoted, paraphrased, or expressed as an idea derived from another text but articulated entirely in the writer's own words.

Direct Quotes:

- For **shorter quotes** (under three lines of text): In-text quotations must begin and end with **quotation marks**; the footnote number follows the end quotation mark, which follows the period/comma/question mark/punctuation that signifies the end of the sentence/clause.

Example:

In his work "How to Cite Correctly in a MA Thesis", media scholar John Doe states that "Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua."¹

- For **longer quotes** (three lines of text or more): Longer quotes (three lines of text or more) must be formatted as a separate paragraph, referred to as a **block quotation**. This block should be indented, single-spaced, and presented in smaller font size (e.g., 10-pt. if the main text uses a 12-pt. font). Block quotations do **not** require the use of quotation marks.

Example:

(Main Text Body) ... Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua:

At vero eos et accusam et justo duo dolores et ea rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo dolores et ea rebum.²

¹ Doe, John: *How to Cite Correctly in a MA Thesis*, Boston, MA: Dordrecht 1980, p. 34.

² Doe, John: *How to Cite Correctly in a MA Thesis*, Boston, MA: Dordrecht 1980, p. 35.

(Continuation of Main Text Body) Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua ...

6.7.2 Referencing via Footnotes

- CGL's referencing style mandates that the **referencing of all sources is done via footnote**.

Text Body:

- In-text footnotes are represented by numbers.
- Note numbers should be superscript and without brackets.
- Place note numbers after the second quotation mark, which comes at the end of a sentence or clause, and after most punctuation marks (comma, semicolon, etc.), except for the dash where note numbers precede it.
- The source is named at the bottom of the page.

Footnotes:

- Footnotes and comments are always followed by a period.
- Footnotes and comments should always begin with a capital letter.
- References to reference literature are indicated with "cf." This is not used for verbatim quotes.
- "et al." for editors should only be used when a publication has more than 3 editors.
- For more than 3 places of publication, "i.a." (inter alia) is used.
- When the bibliography includes multiple works by the same author, the author's name is abbreviated with "id." or "idem," or use an em dash (—).
- When a source is first cited, the footnote should contain the complete bibliographical data (see subsection 6.7.3 *Complete Citation in Footnotes and in the Bibliography*)
- For additional citations, short citations are used. (See subsection 6.7.4 *Short Titles in Footnotes*)

6.7.3 Complete Citation in Footnotes and the Bibliography

- The **bibliography is sorted alphabetically**. Several titles by one author are also sorted alphabetically. Essays by an author are listed after his/her monographs.

• **Monographs**

Last Name1, First Name(s)1[/Last Name2, First Name 2/Last Name3, First Name3]: *Title*, Place: Publisher Year.

Examples:

Maturana, Humberto/Varela, Francisco: *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Boston, MA: Dordrecht 1980.

Meyer, John W.: *Weltkultur. Wie die westlichen Prinzipien die Welt durchdringen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2005.

• Essays in Anthologies (= Essay collection with editors)

Last Name, First Name(s): "Essay title," in: First Name Last Name (Ed.), *Anthology Title*, Place: Publisher Year, Pages.

Example:

Zimmerman, Eric: "Manifesto for a Ludic Century," in: Steffen P. Walz/Sebastian Deterding (eds.), *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 2014, pp. 19-22.

Complete citation in a footnote: When a source is **initially cited** and includes the specific location of the quote, the citation should conclude with: "..., here p. page number."

Zimmerman, Eric: "Manifesto for a Ludic Century," in: Steffen P. Walz/Sebastian Deterding (eds.), *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 2014, pp. 19-22, here p. 20.

If several essays of an anthology are cited in the bibliography, the anthology is cited separately again with complete citation. The reference to the anthology should be a short citation.

Example:

Zimmerman, Eric: "Manifesto for a Ludic Century," In: Walz/ Deterding (eds.), *The Gameful World* (2014), pp. 19-22.

• Essays in specialist journals

Last Name, First Name(s): "Essay title," in: *journal name* and volume (year), pages.

Example:

Landweer, Hilge: "Herausforderung Foucault," in: *Die Philosophin* 4 (1993), pp. 45-64.

• Periodicals / Series

LastName1, FirstName(s)1[/LastName2, FirstName(s)2/LastName3, FirstName(s)3]: *Title. Subtitle* (= Series, Volume), Place: Publisher Year, pages.

Example:

Schmid, Georg: *Die Zeichen der Historie. Beiträge zu einer semiologischen Geschichtswissenschaft* (= Materialien zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft, Volume 5), Graz/Wien/Köln: Böhlau 1986, pp. 333-345.

• Non-published writings (= PhD Dissertations, etc.)

LastName1, FirstName(s)1[/LastName2, FirstName(s) 2/LastName3, FirstName(s)3]: *Title. Subtitle*. Type, University Location Year [,Page(s)]

Example:

Kucklig, Christoph: *Das unmoralische Geschlecht. Zur Genese der modernen Männlichkeit aus einer negativen Andrologie*. Unpublished Dissertation, Berlin 2006, p. 65.

• Press

LastName1, FirstName(s)1[/LastName2, FirstName(s) 2/LastName3, FirstName(s)3]: "title newspaper article", in: *newspaper*, date, pages or URL.

If the citation ends with a URL, then there is no period at the end. URLs must be followed by the date when the website was last accessed.

Example:

Hafner, Katie: "The 30-Year Path of E-Mail," in: *The New York Times*, December 6, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20011207friday.html [Accessed 25 May 2024]

• Online Documents

<http://www.transcript-verlag.de> from 19.12.2000.

If the online document has no date, then there is no period at the end.

see <http://www.transcript-verlag.de>

When formatting, web links should not be automatically displayed as hyperlinks (in blue with an underscore). Instead, web links should appear as regular text in black font.

• Digital Games

Digital Games – like films – should be cited as follows:

GAME TITLE (Production Country Abbreviation Year, O: Name of Originator – Game Designer or Production Company)

Examples:

ANNO 1404 (Ubisoft 2009, O: Related Designs/Blue Byte Software)
BRAID (Valve 2008, O: Number None, Inc./Microsoft Game Studios)
CRUSH (Sega 2007, O: Zoë Mode)

• Films

Movie titles are treated like literature and need to be cited completely, in alphabetical order and listed in a filmography. Film titles and game titles are formatted in **small caps**.

FILM TITLE (Production Country Abbreviation Year, D: Name of Director)

Example:

PSYCHO (USA 1960, D: Alfred Hitchcock)

6.7.4 Short Titles in Footnotes

First name (s) 1 (shortened) Last name1[/First name (s) 2 (shortened) Last name2/ First name (s) 3 (shortened) Last name3]: Title, pages.

Example:

H. Maturana/F. Varela: Autopoiesis and Cognition, p. 23.

Multiple references of a source in direct series are marked with "ibid." At the beginning of a sentence or a footnote "Ibid." is written with a capital letter.