

Guidelines for the writing of bachelor's and master's theses

As of February 2026

0. Preliminary remarks

Theses are independent and, above all, individual assessments. Each student therefore designs their thesis independently and responsibly, according to the topic and their own preferences. There is no set length for the thesis. Past theses have shown no correlation between page count and quality (grade).

Regarding the formatting of theses, this section provides guidelines to ensure consistent presentation. This benefits both authors and readers.

Theses with significant spelling and grammar deficiencies will be returned immediately by examiners and supervisors and will only be read once these deficiencies have been corrected.

1. Layout

The document is to be written in DIN A4 format. The margins are 3 cm on the left, 2 cm on the right, 2.5 cm at the top, and 2 cm at the bottom. The line spacing is 1.5, and the font size of the body text should be at least 11 pt. For clarity, outline points may appear in bold. The same font is used throughout. Spaces are inserted between paragraphs and outline points.

The examination regulations require a declaration of originality, which must be included in the work. The form is available for download on the examination office's website. In addition to the declaration of originality, an overview of the AI systems used and their application must be attached as an appendix to the thesis (see point 6).

The simple past tense is generally used in academic writing. Exceptions are generally accepted textbook knowledge, which can be formulated in the present tense.

2. Outline

The title page is followed by the table of contents with the outline points according to the decimal classification system:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Text
- 2.1 Text
- 2.1.1 Text
- etc.

More than three levels of subdivision should be avoided to maintain clarity.

The table of contents is followed, before the introduction, by lists of tables, figures, and abbreviations, if applicable.

Theses based on experimental investigations typically have the following main sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion (possibly combined with Results), Summary, and Bibliography. Further subdivision depends on the subject of the work and is therefore not subject to strict regulations. The introduction is an exception (see 2.1). The structure of purely literature-based theses (without experimental investigations or the use of existing data) differs and must be determined individually with the supervisor. A logically structured outline facilitates both writing and reading the thesis.

2.1 Introduction

The introduction places the work in a broader context and presents the problem statement and objectives of the work (1-2 pages). It does not include a subdivision.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review, which also serves as an introduction to the own work, summarizes the current state of key international publications on the topic. It should be structured systematically and clearly. Trivial or textbook knowledge need not be explained. The literature review concludes with a transition to the author's own work, including the derivation of hypotheses and the formulation of objectives.

2.3 Materials and methods

This section of the thesis provides a clear and comprehensive explanation of all aspects of the experimental design, setup, and execution, including data acquisition and sample collection, sample preparation and analysis, and statistical evaluation. If citable methods were used, a brief description with references is sufficient. Any unusual circumstances encountered during data collection that may have influenced the results should be mentioned.

2.4 Results

The results are presented clearly with mean or median values and a measure of dispersion (e.g., standard deviation), including the statistical analysis. Evaluations, interpretations, and comparisons with other studies are not yet undertaken in this section.

Image material used for qualitative or quantitative evaluation must not be altered through post-processing in such a way that the message of the original image changes.

When reporting values, the number of digits should not exceed what is necessary for the accuracy of the data collection. Generally, 2 to 3 digits are sufficient, e.g., 'The heritability was 0.32'.

In addition, the underlying individual data are documented in a table appendix, which follows the reference list of the work, to ensure traceability.

Tables and figures must be self-explanatory and understandable even without accompanying text (see below). However, all tabular and graphical representations are addressed in the main text with their essential information (via cross-references). Tables and figures are numbered in the order of their first mention in the text.

2.5 Discussion

The discussion involves a critical evaluation of the own data and findings in two respects. First, in a separate error discussion (for experimental work), potential factors influencing data collection accuracy should be addressed. Second, the data should be contextualized within the relevant international literature. Simply repeating the results should be avoided. Instead, the own data should be interpreted and discussed in relation to existing data or findings from the literature. The significance of the new results should then be derived from this analysis. Mere assertions should not be made.

The discussion ends with conclusions or hypotheses, which may be derived independently. A conclusion is not a summary.

Recommendations for further research are encouraged.

2.6 Summary

The summary presents the content of the work (objectives, main methods and results, conclusions) in a condensed form on a maximum of two pages.

3. Tables and figures

Tables and figures are numbered consecutively in the title. For tables, the title appears above the body; for figures, it appears below (= figure caption). Titles and captions must be written in such a way that the content and any abbreviations used are understandable to the reader without the need for accompanying text. Footnotes inserted directly below the table can be helpful in this regard. It is essential to ensure that all units used are specified correctly and that the axis labels on the graphs are complete.

If data is presented exclusively as images, care must be taken to ensure a meaningful presentation so that the numerical values are understandable.

Examples :

Table x: Influence of the dosage of X on body weight (BW) and feed conversion (mean and standard deviation, 10 animals per treatment)

	Dosage of X (mg/kg feed)			
	10	20	30	40
Final BW, ¹ kg	15.0 ^b	15.5 ^{ab}	16.0 ^a	15.9 ^{ab}
SD	1.10	0.61	1.23	0.81
BW gain, g/day	180 ^b	185 ^{ab}	190 ^a	188 ^{ab}
SD	15.1	10.0	16.2	12.0
Feed/gain, kg/kg	3.02 ^b	2.91 ^{ab}	2.82 ^b	2.85 ^b
SD	0.082	0.090	0.051	0.070

^{a, b} Different superscript letters within a line indicate significant differences ($P \leq 0.05$)

¹ Average live weight at the start of the experiment: 5 kg

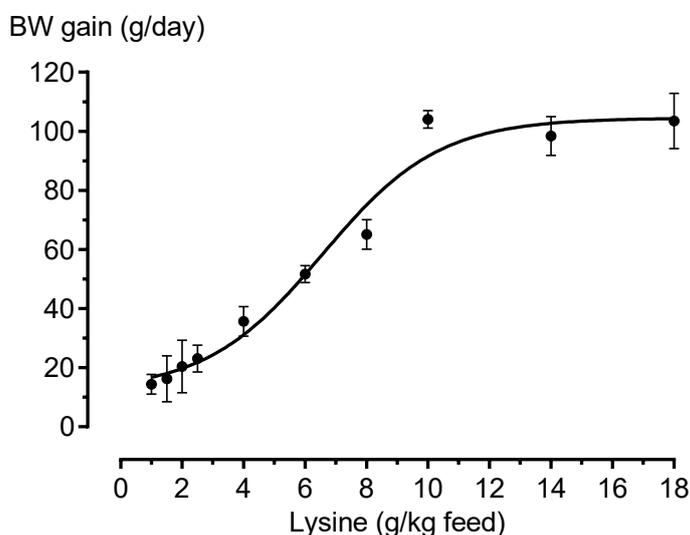


Fig. y: Influence of the lysine concentration in the feed on the increase in body weight (BW) at 10 to 20 weeks of age (mean and standard deviation, n=4 animals per treatment)

Literature results can also be presented in the form of figures or tables. However, simply copying tables or figures from the respective sources must not infringe copyright. In case of doubt, it is advisable to consult with the supervisors.

4. Use of literature references

When citing literature, it must be clear whether verifiable results or opinions are being presented. Quoting means paraphrasing passages in your own words. Descriptions from the internet must also not be used verbatim and must be cited without attribution. It is recommended to limit quoting to works relevant to your topic. If, in exceptional cases, quotations are used verbatim, they must be copied exactly, including all punctuation. The quotation must then be enclosed in quotation marks ("text").

Textbook knowledge that is considered general knowledge within the subject does not need to be supported by citations (e.g., 'The microbial colonization of the rumen plays a crucial role in the digestion of feed by ruminants'). An exception is the use of specific illustrations from a textbook, in which case a citation is always required.

In the text, a reference is cited by mentioning the author's name and the year. If the name appears within a sentence, the year is placed in parentheses, e.g., 'Greiner (2007) found that...'. Alternatively, the full source can appear in parentheses at the end of a citation, e.g., (Greiner 2007). If the cited work is by two authors, both last names are given, e.g., '...Kitsche and Schaarschmidt (2015) found that...'. For more than two authors, only the last name of the first author is given in the text; all subsequent names are replaced by 'et al.¹', e.g., Kim et al. (2005). If multiple sources are cited at the same point in the text, they are listed in alphabetical order and separated by commas, e.g., (Greiner 2007, Kim et al. 2005).

All sources used are listed in the bibliography in alphabetical order by the last names of the first authors. Following the last name, separated by commas, are the initials of the first names. All authors are listed here. If there are multiple works by the same first author, the order of the second and any subsequent authors determines the bibliographic order. After the last name, the year of publication is given in parentheses; this must match the year cited in the text. A colon is followed by the full title of the work, then the name of the journal, including the volume number and the first and last page numbers of the article, and finally the *digital object identifier* (DOI), e.g.:

Kitsche, A. and Schaarschmidt, F. (2015): Analysis of statistical interactions in factorial experiments. *Journal of Agronomy and Crop Science* **201**, 69-79.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jac.12076>

Kim, J. C., Mullan, B. P. and Pluske, J. R. (2005): A comparison of waxy versus non-waxy wheats in diets for weaner pigs: effects of particle size, enzyme supplementation, and collection day on total tract apparent digestibility and pig performance. *Animal Feed Science and Technology* **120**, 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anifeedsci.2005.01.004>

Some journals have stopped using page numbers. In such cases, the journal's article number is used in citations instead of the page numbers.

The names of the journals can be abbreviated, but they must be used consistently. There are standards for these abbreviations:

https://wos-help.webofscience.com/WOKRS535R111/help/WOS/A_abrvjt.html
(accessed on 2 February 2026).

When citing books and dissertations, the authors, titles, year of publication, publisher and place of publication are given, as well as, if applicable, the page numbers of the passages used, e.g.

Gesellschaft für Ernährungsphysiologie (2026): Recommendations for the energy and nutrient supply of dairy cows. DLG-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.

Elwert, C. (2004): Studies on the use of alkanes to estimate diet composition, intake, and digestibility in sheep. Dissertation agr., University of Halle-Wittenberg, Shaker Verlag, Aachen.

When an individual contribution from a book is cited, the editors are mentioned alongside the authors, and the title of the book is mentioned alongside the title of the contribution, e.g.

Greiner, R. (2007): Phytate-degrading enzymes: Regulation of synthesis in microorganisms and plants. In: Turner BL, Richardson AE, Mullaney EJ (eds) *Inositol phosphates – Linking agriculture and the environment*. CAB International, Wallingford, 78-96.

Other formatting options besides those shown here may be used when creating the bibliography, provided all the necessary information is included. However, the bibliography must be formatted consistently.

¹Abbreviation for et alii (Latin): and others

If two or more works by the same group of authors from the same year are cited, they are indicated in the text and in the bibliography with lowercase letters after the year, e.g. Müller et al. (2009a).

Internet sources may be used only in exceptional cases and after careful verification of their reliability. Due to the diverse forms and constant updates of websites, standardizing their citation is virtually impossible. Therefore, in addition to the full web address, the date accessed must also be provided, e.g.

FAO (2015): Global Livestock and Health Atlas.

http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/home/en/news_archive/AGA_in_action/glipha.html, accessed on 2 February 2026.

Experience in the evaluation process shows that, unfortunately, many thesis submissions lack time or care, and the citations are incomplete or partially incorrect. Please avoid this. It is a quality impairment that will also affect the grade.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of good scientific practice. Proof of plagiarism leads to the immediate rejection of the work and may have further consequences.

5. Use of abbreviations

Defined abbreviations from the International System of Units (SI) can be used without explicit mention in the list of abbreviations, e.g., 'g' for gram, 'kg' for kilogram, or 'L' for liter. The same applies to the abbreviations of established genetic parameters, e.g., 'h²' for heritability or 'QTL' for quantitative trait loci.

All other abbreviations, including those chosen by the author, must be defined the first time they appear in the text and then used consistently. An abbreviation list containing all chosen abbreviations will also be created. This list will appear at the beginning of the text, along with the table of contents.

As a general rule, it is advisable to use self-chosen abbreviations sparingly. Only use abbreviations if the corresponding term is used frequently in the text.

6. Use of generative AI systems

Generative AI systems are generally permitted as aids. However, submitting AI-generated content as one's own work without proper attribution constitutes cheating and will result in at least a failing grade. The core work of a written assignment (analysis, argumentation, critical evaluation, and original conclusions) must be completed by the students themselves. The use of generative AI systems must always be approached with due diligence and caution, as generated content is not always accurate and often involves transmitting data, including personal data. Students bear the explicit responsibility for the accuracy of AI-generated content.

The following uses of AI are permitted, provided they are labelled transparently and comprehensibly in accordance with the requirements of this recommendation:

- Help with the translation of texts or linguistic revision and improvement of own texts (beyond mere spelling/grammar correction, e.g. style, suggestions for wording).
- Brainstorming possible arguments, counterarguments or perspectives based on own analysis.

The following uses of AI are expressly not permitted in theses:

- Submitting AI-generated content as own work without proper attribution. This will be considered an attempt to deceive.

- Use of AI to circumvent individual efforts that explicitly require independent critical thinking, creative problem-solving, analytical skills, or specific methodological competencies.

Should any unauthorized or uncritical use of AI become apparent during the development of the work, it will result in immediate termination of supervision and withdrawal of the assigned topic. The consistency of the student's line of argument is also a key aspect of the oral defense evaluation.

In addition to a declaration of originality, an overview of the AI systems used and their application must be included as an appendix to the written work (<https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en/use-of-generative-ai-in-exams>; accessed 2 February 2026).

This text is translated from the original German version. The first draft of the translation has been created using Google Translate.