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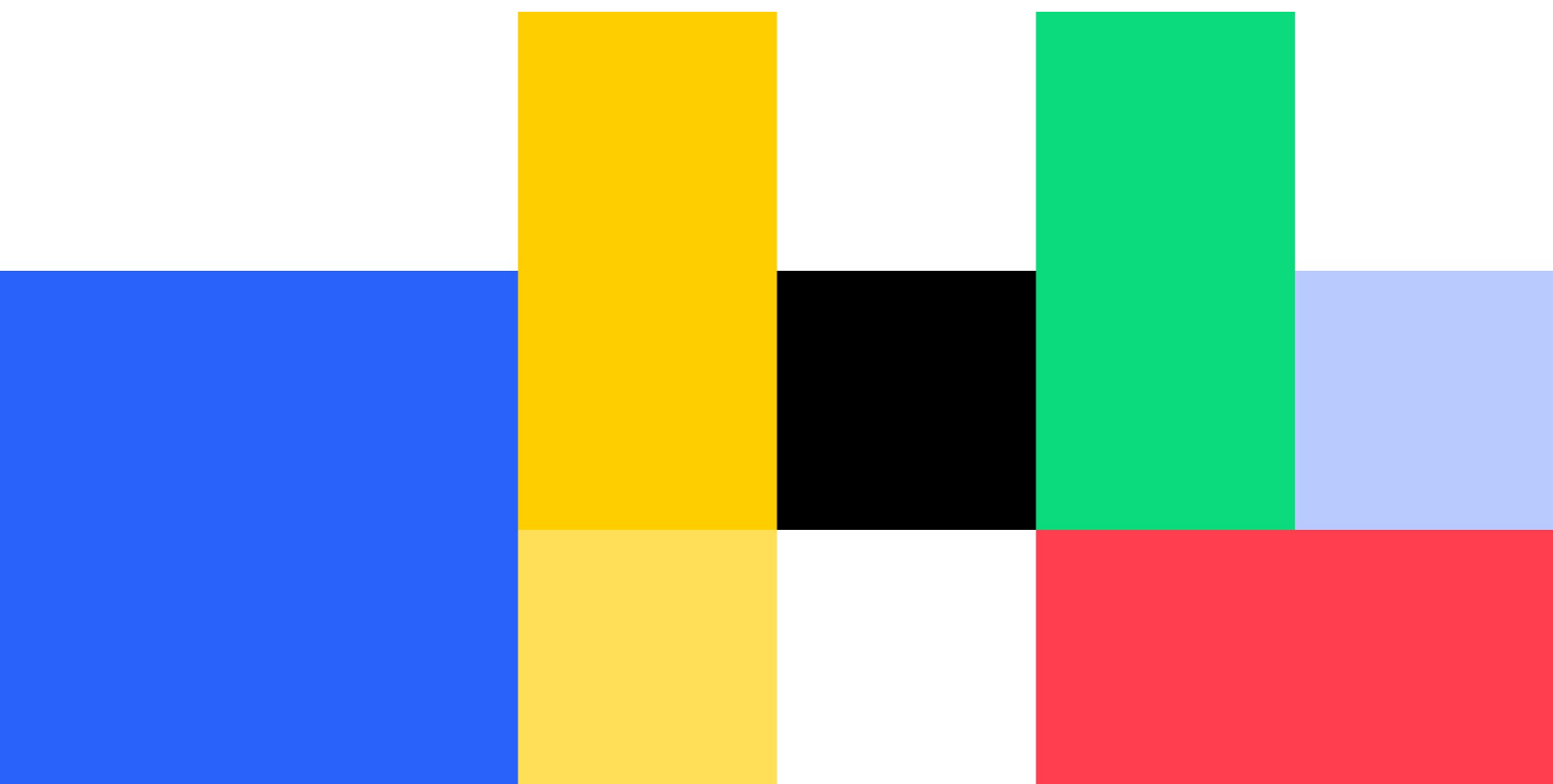
Thesis Manual

Bachelor and Master Theses with Company Partners

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Version: winter semester 2026/27



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Foreword

Dear students,

your thesis marks the final and perhaps most important stage of your studies. For the first time, you will spend several months working on a question of your own – on a problem that genuinely matters to a company. You will bring together everything you have learned: theory, methods, analysis and the ability to convince others with well-founded recommendations.

For the university, the thesis is proof that you can solve a complex problem independently and on a sound academic basis – and that you are a worthy graduate. For you, it is often even more: a piece of work you can be proud of, and not infrequently the start of your professional career.

It is normal to feel some respect for such a task. The drive for your thesis, however, must come from you: you set the pace, ask the questions and make the decisions. I will support you with critical feedback and responsible supervision – as intensively as your preparation allows.

This manual gives you orientation: what matters, how I assess and how you can arrive at a good thesis step by step. Its rules are not an end in themselves. They ensure that your results are traceable and taken seriously – by me, but above all by the company that wants to work with your recommendations.

I look forward to accompanying you on this journey.

Prof. Dr. Stefan Wengler

Your thesis at a glance

Goal	You solve a real problem of a company – on a sound academic basis and with recommendations that can be implemented.
Setting	The thesis is written in cooperation with a company, usually during an internship. You set the pace.
Length	Bachelor 40–60 pages, master 60–80 pages (text including figures, excluding front matter, references and appendix).
Empirical work	Bachelor 5–8, master 12–15 expert interviews, each no longer than 45 minutes.
Process	Topic → exposé (3–4 pages) → registration once the exposé has been reviewed and approved → situation analysis and framework → interview guide (sent to me in advance) → interviews and analysis → writing → submission.
Supervision	Every two weeks until the exposé is approved, then every four weeks. Documents at least three working days in advance, with clear questions.
Assessment	Seven criteria, 100 points. Practical relevance: bachelor 45 %, master 40 %. Up to five bonus points for a financial or cost plan.
Essentials	Clear research question · documented interviews · referenced and verified sources · documented AI use · recommendations that follow from your findings.

1 Your thesis: what it is about

You work on a real problem of a company, analyse its situation, interview experts and develop recommendations the company can work with. In doing so, you combine academic work with real impact.

Why with a company?

All theses I supervise are written in cooperation with a company, usually as part of an internship. This has four advantages for you:

- **Practical experience:** You learn how decisions are actually made in companies.
- **Better results:** Real data, real interview partners and a concrete problem make your thesis more relevant than any purely literature-based work could be.
- **Visibility:** Over several months, you show what you can do – to people who make hiring decisions.
- **Orientation:** You find out whether the industry, the company and the role suit you.

You write your thesis for yourself and for the benefit of your company partner – not for me. I am therefore very open regarding the choice of topic, as long as it is a marketing or sales topic. What matters to me is a win-win situation for you and your company partner.

From thesis to job

In my experience, 70–80 % of my graduates receive a job offer after their thesis. The reason: they work on future topics that are often still looking for their place in the company – and that someone has to take care of afterwards. With their recommendations, many of them essentially write their own work plan for the next 18 to 24 months.

What your thesis should achieve

The three questions behind every thesis

- What is the company's problem, and what exactly do you want to find out?
- What do the company data, the literature and the experts say?
- What should the company do – in which order, by whom and by when?

Despite its practical focus, your thesis remains an academic piece of work: every statement must be traceable to sources, data or interviews. That is precisely what makes your recommendations reliable for the company.

Bachelor and master compared

	Bachelor thesis	Master thesis
Core achievement	You apply proven concepts and methods soundly to a real problem.	You select concepts and methods in a justified way, examine results critically and think beyond the single case.

	Bachelor thesis	Master thesis
Expert interviews	5–8	12–15
Literature	Key textbooks and relevant journal articles	Current state of research, predominantly journal articles
Recommendations	Concrete, derived from findings, rough roadmap	Prioritised, with implementation plan (milestones, responsibilities), effects and risks
Independence	Partly with guidance	Largely independent
Length*	40–60 pages	60–80 pages

* Text including figures and tables, excluding front matter, references and appendix.

2 Process and supervision

The drive for your thesis comes from you. Supervision can only be as good as the preparation you bring to our meetings.

How I understand supervision

I see myself as a critical sparring partner on your way into professional practice. I ask questions, require justifications and tell you openly where your thesis does not yet hold up. I do this not to slow you down, but because in the end a company will work with your results – and because your thesis bears your name.

What you can expect from me	What I expect from you
Until the exposé is approved: a meeting every two weeks. After that: an update meeting every four weeks. Open, critical feedback on the exposé, the outline, the interview guide and your specific questions. On request, a joint meeting with your supervisor in the company. A fair and transparent assessment based on the criteria in chapter 3.	You drive the thesis forward and keep to agreements. You send documents at least three working days before the meeting, with a short agenda: status, next steps, open questions. You come with clear questions and your own proposals for solutions. You report problems early. You make the decisions – it is your thesis.

I do not read complete drafts in advance: the thesis should be entirely your own, and the assessment must remain fair for everyone. I therefore give feedback where quality is decided – on the exposé, the outline, the interview guide and your specific questions.

The steps at a glance

I do not set a rigid timetable: you determine the pace of your thesis. There is one fixed rule, however – you register the thesis only once your exposé has been reviewed and approved. A solid exposé is the best insurance for a good thesis.

#	Step	What you do
1	Topic and company	Agree on a practical marketing or sales problem with the company and with me. The topic must allow access to internal information and interview partners.
2	Exposé	Prepare an exposé of 3–4 pages (see below). During this phase we meet every two weeks until the exposé is approved.
3	Registration	Register the thesis with the examination office – only once your exposé has been reviewed and approved.
4	Situation analysis and framework	Analyse the company situation and build a concise conceptual framework. It provides the categories for your interview guide.
5	Interview guide	Send me your interview guide and list of planned interviewees before the first interview .

#	Step	What you do
6	Interviews and analysis	Conduct, document and analyse the interviews. From now on we meet every four weeks for an update.
7	Writing and revision	Plan at least two weeks for revision, formatting and checking your references.
8	Submission	Submit according to the examination office's requirements.

The exposé

The exposé is the blueprint of your thesis. It is no longer than 3–4 pages and consists of three parts.

Part 1: Problem statement and context

Lead from the general to the specific in at least three paragraphs:

Level	Guiding question	Example
Big picture	Which development is changing the environment?	Digitalisation is changing how business customers buy.
Industry	What does this mean for the industry?	In mechanical engineering, buyers increasingly research online before contacting sales.
Company	Which concrete problem arises for the company?	Company X is losing key customers because its sales team is involved too late in the buying process.

Part 2: Objective and research question

Specify exactly what you want to answer. Behind the research question lie several sub-questions that you need to answer on the way. Proceed as follows:

1. **From problem to decision:** Which decision does the company have to make, and what knowledge does it lack for it?
2. **Formulate the question:** Start with "How ..." or "Which ..."; avoid yes/no questions.
3. **Narrow it down:** Define for which customers, markets, products or processes the question applies.
4. **Check it:** Can the question be answered with company data and interviews in the time available? Does the answer help the company?
5. **Derive sub-questions:** Break the research question down into steps that are reflected in the chapters of your thesis.

Example: research question and sub-questions

Too broad: "How can company X improve its sales?"

Better: "Which requirements must a key account management programme at company X meet to retain its 20 largest customers in Europe?"

- How are key customers managed today, and where are the weaknesses? (situation analysis)
- Which success factors of key account programmes does the literature describe? (framework)
- What do customers and employees expect from such a programme? (interviews)
- How should company X design and introduce the programme? (recommendations)

Part 3: Approach

Outline the planned chapters and briefly explain what you will do in each: which concepts you will draw on, whom you intend to interview (number, functions, internal/external) and how you will arrive at your recommendations. Conclude with a first proposed outline.

When things get stuck

Expect your exposé to need several rounds of revision. This makes the start take a little longer – time you will recover several times over later on.

Interviewees cancel, data arrives later than planned, writing stalls – this is part of almost every thesis. What matters is reacting early: get in touch as soon as a problem becomes apparent, and bring a proposal for how to proceed. Together we will find a solution.

3 How your thesis is assessed

Your thesis is assessed against seven criteria with a total of 100 points. Practical relevance carries the most weight – but only if it is built on solid analysis.

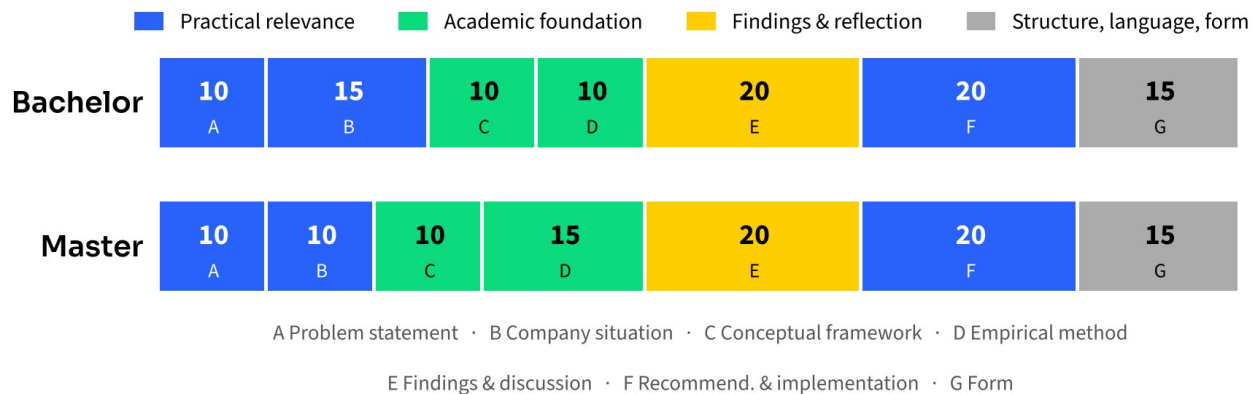


Figure 1: Weighting of the assessment criteria (points out of 100)

The master thesis shifts five points from the company analysis (B) to the empirical method (D): at master level, the justified selection of experts and a systematic analysis are part of the core achievement.

Criterion	BA	MA	Guiding questions
A Problem statement & objective	10	10	Is the company's problem turned into a precise objective or research question? Is the subject clearly delimited?
B Analysis of the company situation	15	10	Is the starting situation analysed in a company-specific way (business model, products, key figures, market and competition, internal processes)? Are causes of the problem identified – not just a company portrait?
C Conceptual framework	10	10	Concise, relevant and correct? Does it provide the categories for the interview guide and the analysis?
D Empirical method	10	15	Is the research instrument (usually the interview guide) derived from the framework and pilot-tested? Is the selection of respondents justified and does it cover different perspectives? Are raw data and analysis documented traceably?
E Findings, discussion & reflection	20	20	Are the findings structured, discussed against the company situation and the literature, and critically reflected – including the company's own view? Are implications and limitations stated?
F Recommendations & implementation	20	20	Do the recommendations follow from the findings? Are they concrete and prioritised? Is there an implementation plan with milestones and responsibilities? Are effects, effort and risks assessed?

Criterion	BA	MA	Guiding questions
G Structure, language & form	15	15	Red thread, balanced chapters, precise language and spelling, correct and consistent APA citation, figures and layout; length within the intended range. Proofreading before submission is strongly recommended.
+ Bonus: financial/cost plan	+5	+5	Optional. Only with transparent assumptions. The total remains capped at 100 points.

Minimum requirements

These five points secure the foundation of every good thesis. If one of them is not met, the thesis is graded 4.0 at best; suspected plagiarism is reported to the examination board.

- The research question or objective is clearly stated.
- The empirical work is documented: interview guide, list of interviewees, consent, transcripts or approved protocols and the evaluation matrix in the appendix; for complementary surveys also the questionnaire and raw data.
- All ideas of others are referenced; references exist and are correct (I check a sample).
- The use of AI tools is documented according to university rules (chapter 6).
- The recommendations are based on your own findings.

Performance levels and grades

Level	Share of points	Description
4 – outstanding	90–100 %	Complete, consistently justified, own contribution; no relevant weaknesses.
3 – good	75–89 %	Solid and traceable; individual gaps that do not call the result into question.
2 – with deficiencies	60–74 %	Basic requirements met; several gaps or one that noticeably reduces the validity.
1 – insufficient	below 60 %	Essential requirements not met.

Points	95–100	90–94	85–89	80–84	75–79	70–74	65–69	60–64	55–59	50–54	< 50
Grade	1.0	1.3	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.7	4.0	5.0

Bachelor vs. master: what "good" means

Criterion	Bachelor – level "good"	Master – level "good"
A Problem	Practical problem clearly translated into an objective	Research questions developed from the practical problem and delimited
B Company situation	Complete and correct description with key figures and products	Analytically penetrated (competitive position, strengths/weaknesses); causes identified
C Framework	Key concepts correct, relevant sources	Current literature; concepts compared and tailored to the case
D Empirical method	5–8 interviews; guide traceable; results analysed in an orderly way	12–15 interviews; guide derived from the framework; selection justified; systematic evaluation
E Findings	Structured, related to the starting situation; limitations stated	Critically interpreted, confronted with situation and literature; implications derived
F Recommendations	Concrete, derived from findings; rough roadmap	Prioritised; implementation plan with milestones and responsibilities; effects and risks weighed
G Form	Clean, consistent, understandable	Precise, dense, ready for management decisions

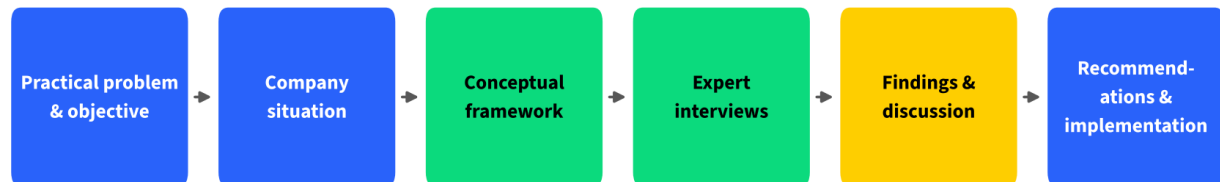
Rule of thumb: A bachelor thesis reaches 1.3 with a sound company analysis, 5–8 carefully analysed interviews and concrete recommendations with a roadmap. A master thesis reaches 1.3 only if the situation analysis reveals causes, the interviewees are selected in a justified way and analysed systematically, and an implementation plan with milestones is in place.

How to convince your readers

- **The evidence chain:** Can each key recommendation be traced back to a finding and its source (interview, company data)?
- **The appendix:** interview guide, transcripts or protocols and evaluation matrix – this is where it shows whether the empirical work is genuine.
- **Critical distance:** Do you question the company's view or merely confirm it?
- **The references:** I check a sample of sources.

4 Structure of the thesis

The recommended outline follows the logic of the assessment. Deviations are possible if they are justified.



Red thread: every recommendation must be traceable to a finding and its source.

Figure 2: The red thread of the thesis

Chapter	Share (guide)	Content
1 Introduction	5–10 %	Practical problem and relevance, objective and research question(s), approach and structure.
2 Company and situation analysis	10–15 %	Business model, products, key figures, market and competition, relevant processes; causes of the problem. Use internal data and documents – a company portrait copied from the website is not an analysis.
3 Conceptual framework	10–15 %	2–4 key concepts from the literature, condensed into a framework that structures the interview guide and the analysis.
4 Method	8–10 %	Research design, selection of experts (table), development of the guide, conduct, transcription, analysis procedure, ethics and data protection.
5 Findings	20 %	Presentation along the categories, with quotations and an overview table.
6 Discussion	10 %	Findings vs. literature and company situation; implications; limitations of the study.
7 Recommendations and implementation	15–20 %	Prioritised measures, implementation plan with milestones, responsibilities, effects and risks; optional financial/cost plan.
8 Conclusion	3–5 %	Answer to the research question, outlook. No new content.

5 Method: expert interviews

Expert interviews are the empirical core of your thesis. This chapter explains how to plan, conduct and analyse them so that your findings are traceable and convincing. Wherever possible, complement the interviews with company data and documents – this allows you to cross-check statements.

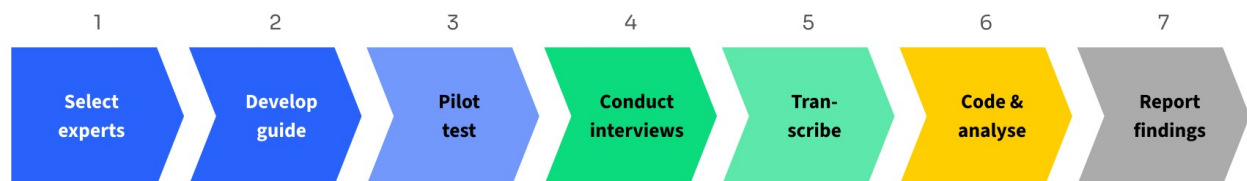


Figure 3: The seven steps of an expert interview study

5.1 What is an expert interview?

In an expert interview, the person is not of interest as an individual but as a holder of specific knowledge that results from their role – for example responsibility for a process or privileged access to information (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). Bogner and Menz (2009) distinguish three forms of expert knowledge:

Form of knowledge	Meaning	Example question
Technical knowledge	Facts, rules, procedures	"How is a new key account currently selected?"
Process knowledge	Experience of procedures, interactions and routines	"Can you describe the last time a key account was lost?"
Interpretative knowledge	Assessments, explanations, priorities	"Why do you think the current approach does not work?"

Expert interviews are **semi-structured**: a guide ensures that all topics are covered and that interviews are comparable, while leaving room for follow-up questions and new aspects (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Gläser & Laudel, 2009).

5.2 Selecting experts

Experts are selected **deliberately** (purposive sampling), not at random. What matters is that they cover the relevant **perspectives**: different functions and hierarchy levels, internal and external views (e.g. customers, partners, sales and service).

- Define selection criteria from your research question (role, experience, perspective).
- Combine internal and external perspectives. Eight interviews across roles and customers are more informative than fifteen with colleagues from one department.
- Document the sample in a table: code (I1, I2 ...), function, organisation type, years of experience, date, duration, mode (in person/online).

Why 5–8 (BA) and 12–15 (MA) interviews?

Empirical studies show that with relatively homogeneous groups and a focused question, most themes emerge within the first twelve interviews (Guest et al., 2006). A systematic review found saturation after 9–17 interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The required number decreases the more focused the objective, the more suitable the experts, the stronger the theoretical framework and the better the quality of the conversation (Malterud et al., 2016). The numbers set in this manual are within this range.

5.3 Developing the interview guide

The guide translates your research question and framework into questions. Kallio et al. (2016) describe five phases: (1) check whether semi-structured interviews suit the question, (2) use existing knowledge from the literature and the company analysis, (3) formulate a preliminary guide, (4) pilot-test it, (5) present the complete guide in the thesis.

From research question to question: operationalisation

Research question	Category (from framework)	Guide question and probes
Which requirements must a key account management programme at company X meet?	Selection of key accounts	"How are key customers selected today?" – Probes: Who decides? Which criteria? Example of a recent decision?
	Value creation for the customer	"What do your most important customers expect beyond the product?" – Probe: Can you give an example?

Include such an operationalisation table in the method chapter. It shows that the guide is derived from the framework – a key point for criterion D.

Structure of a guide

1. **Opening (approx. 5 min):** purpose of the study, duration, consent to recording, confidentiality.
2. **Warm-up (approx. 3 min):** role and experience of the interviewee.
3. **Main part (approx. 30 min):** 3–4 topic blocks derived from the framework, each with an open key question and prepared probes.
4. **Closing (approx. 5 min):** "Is there anything important we have not talked about?" – thanks, next steps.

Good questions

- Open ("How ...", "Describe ...") instead of yes/no questions.
- One question at a time; no leading questions ("Don't you think that ...?").
- Ask for concrete situations and examples – they yield process knowledge.
- Check the guide with a pilot interview and reduce it: an interview lasts no longer than 45 minutes and holds 6–8 key questions. Focus on what is essential.

Helfferrich (2011) recommends a four-step procedure for developing the guide: **collect** all possible questions, **check** them for openness and relevance, **sort** them into topic blocks, and **subsume** them under a few open key questions.

5.4 Conducting the interviews

- Send interviewees the topic and the consent form in advance – not the full guide.
- Thank your interviewees afterwards and offer to share the results: they have given you their time.
- Record the interview (with consent; if recording is not permitted, see 5.6) and take brief notes. After each interview, write a short postscript: atmosphere, interruptions, first insights.
- Managers often expect a conversation at eye level rather than a question-and-answer session; be well prepared and able to discuss the subject (Trinczek, 2009).
- Listen more than you talk. Use pauses and neutral follow-ups ("Could you say more about that?").
- Online interviews are acceptable; ensure good audio quality and use a tool approved by the university for recording.

5.5 Ethics and data protection

Interviews generate personal data. You are responsible for handling them correctly:

- Obtain written **informed consent** (purpose, recording, storage, anonymisation, right to withdraw). The signed forms go into the appendix or are submitted separately to me if confidential.
- **Anonymise** transcripts: replace names of persons and, where necessary, customers by codes.
- Store recordings securely and delete them after the grading process according to the agreed period.
- Do **not** upload recordings, transcripts or confidential company data to AI tools that are not approved by the university or the company.
- Check with the company whether a confidentiality clause is required (chapter 7).

5.6 Documenting interviews: transcript or protocol

Expert interviews are about content – facts, processes and assessments – not about linguistic detail. The documentation therefore has to make the content traceable; it does not need to reproduce every hesitation. Choose the strongest option that is permitted in your company and justify your choice in the method chapter:

Option	When	What goes into the appendix
1 Full transcript	Recording permitted	Complete transcript with simple transcription rules and numbered paragraphs (Dresing & Pehl, 2018)
2 Protocol + key passages	Recording permitted, limited time	Protocol of the whole interview plus verbatim transcription of all passages you quote or that carry key findings
3 Approved protocol	Recording not permitted	Protocol on the template (appendix), written within 24 hours; verbatim notes in quotation marks; confirmed by the interviewee

Option 3 is not a disadvantage if it is carried out properly. Take notes during the interview along the guide, write them up immediately afterwards and send the protocol to the interviewee for confirmation. This confirmation corrects misunderstandings and makes the protocol a reliable data basis. Ideally, conduct the interview in pairs (one person asks, one takes notes) if a fellow student or colleague can attend.

Transcription with AI – without the cloud

Local transcription software runs entirely on your own laptop; recordings are not uploaded. One example is noScribe, free open-source software based on a speech recognition model that runs offline (Dröge, 2025). Use such tools only with the consent of the interviewee and the company, and check every transcript against the recording. Cloud services (e.g. transcription functions of online meeting tools) may only be used if the company explicitly approves.

Bachelor theses may use any of the three options. Master theses use option 1 or 2; option 3 only if recording is not permitted.

5.7 Analysis: the evaluation matrix

You do not need special software. The analysis follows the logic of qualitative content analysis – categories derived from theory, supplemented by categories from the material (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024; Mayring, 2022) – in a practical form: an evaluation matrix in Excel or Word.

1. **Set up the matrix:** one row per category from your framework and interview guide, one column per interview (I1, I2 ...), plus a final column "Summary".
2. **Fill in the matrix:** go through each transcript or protocol and enter the relevant statements in short form with their source, e.g. (I3, para. 12).
3. **Add categories:** if important statements do not fit any category, create a new one.
4. **Summarise:** for each category, note the core statement, agreements, contradictions and differences between groups (e.g. internal vs. external).
5. **Derive findings:** the summary column is the basis for the findings chapter.

Category	I1 (Sales)	I2 (Customer)	I3 (Management)	Summary
Selection of key accounts	Revenue only (para. 8)	Not visible to customers (para. 5)	Revenue and potential, but no defined process (para. 4)	No uniform criteria; revenue dominates; customers do not notice any special status

Example of an evaluation matrix (excerpt).

Define each category in one sentence so that the reader understands what you assigned to it; at master level, add a typical quotation as an anchor example. Software such as MAXQDA or ATLAS.ti is optional and requires training; a well-kept matrix is sufficient for bachelor and master theses.

For master theses with an inductive, theory-building aim, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) are possible alternatives – please discuss this with me beforehand.

Presenting findings

- Structure the findings chapter by categories, not by interviewees.

- Summarise each category, show agreement and contradictions, and support key statements with short quotations, e.g. (I4, para. 37).
- Use an overview table (categories × interviews) to show how often and by whom a theme was mentioned – without overinterpreting frequencies.
- Separate description (chapter 5) from interpretation (chapter 6).

5.8 Quality of qualitative research

Qualitative findings are not judged by statistical representativeness but by their traceability:

- **Transparency:** The reader can follow every step from the guide to the evaluation matrix and the transcripts or protocols.
- **Rule-guided procedure:** The analysis follows a documented procedure.
- **Reflection:** You reflect on your own role – as an intern you are part of the company – and on possible bias of the interviewees.
- **Triangulation:** Where possible, compare interview statements with company data and documents.

5.9 Expectations in the method chapter: BA vs. MA

Aspect	Bachelor	Master
Sample	5–8 experts, selection criteria stated	12–15 experts, selection justified, several perspectives (incl. external)
Guide	Traceably structured, in the appendix	Derived from the framework via an operationalisation table, pilot-tested
Documentation	Transcript, protocol with key passages or approved protocol	Transcript or protocol with key passages; approved protocol only if recording is not permitted
Analysis	Evaluation matrix with summary per category	Evaluation matrix with category definitions and anchor examples; comparison of interview groups
Reflection	Limitations stated	Quality criteria and own role reflected

5.10 Further reading

English

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6 Use of AI tools

AI tools can relieve you of work – what counts is your own thinking. You are fully responsible for every sentence, every figure and every reference in your thesis.

Permitted (with documentation)	Not permitted
Language and style checks of your own text	Generating text passages and presenting them as your own
Brainstorming, structuring ideas, explaining concepts	Inventing or "completing" sources, data, quotations or interviews
Support in literature search – every source checked in the original	Citing sources you have not read
Transcription with local tools that do not upload data (chapter 5.6), checked by you	Uploading confidential company data or personal interview data to non-approved tools

- Document every use of AI in a table in the appendix: tool, purpose, chapter, example prompt.
- AI tools regularly produce references that do not exist. I check a sample of your references; a fabricated reference counts as a violation of good academic practice.

7 Formal guidelines

7.1 Components and order

1. Title page (template in the appendix)
2. Confidentiality clause (if required)
3. Executive summary (approx. 1 page: problem, approach, key findings and recommendations)
4. Table of contents
5. List of figures, list of tables, list of abbreviations (if applicable)
6. Text (chapters 1–8)
7. References
8. Appendix (interview guide, list of interviewees, transcripts or protocols, evaluation matrix, consent form template, AI documentation, further material)
9. Declaration of authorship

7.2 Layout

Element	Specification
Font	Times New Roman 12 pt or Arial 11 pt, consistent throughout
Line spacing	1.5 lines; paragraphs separated by spacing
Margins	Left 3 cm, right 2 cm, top and bottom 2.5 cm
Alignment	Justified with hyphenation
Headings	Numbered (1, 1.1, 1.1.1); max. three levels; at least two sub-sections per level; each level-1 chapter starts on a new page
Page numbers	Front matter Roman (I, II ...), text and references Arabic (1, 2 ...)
Figures and tables	Numbered consecutively with title (tables above, figures below) and source; each figure is explained in the text

7.3 Language

- Write precisely, factually and in short sentences. Avoid exaggerations ("enormous"), filler words and unsupported certainty ("obviously").
- Use neutral or passive constructions as standard; "I" is acceptable for describing your own methodological steps ("I conducted twelve interviews").
- Each chapter begins with a short introduction and ends with a transition to the next chapter.

7.4 Citation (APA 7)

Use the author–date system of the American Psychological Association (2020). Reference managers such as Citavi or Zotero generate this style automatically.

Case	In-text citation
Paraphrase	Digital transformation in sales is an evolving process (Wengler et al., 2021). / Wengler et al. (2021) show that ...
Direct quotation	"..." (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 45). Quotations longer than 40 words are indented without quotation marks.
Two authors	(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) – both names always
Three or more authors	(Gioia et al., 2013) – from the first citation
Own interviews	(I4, para. 37) – refers to the transcript in the appendix; not listed in the references
Internal company documents	(Company X, 2026) – listed in the references with the note [internal document]; archived and submitted

Prefer academic sources (journals, textbooks). Current sources are important for the state of research, but classic works remain citable. Paraphrase in your own words; changing only a few words of the original counts as plagiarism.

Reference list (examples)

Journal article: Wengler, S., Hildmann, G., & Vossebein, U. (2021). Digital transformation in sales as an evolving process. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 36(4), 599–614. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2020-0124>

Book: Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.

Book chapter: Trinczek, R. (2009). How to interview managers? Methodical and methodological aspects of expert interviews as a qualitative method in empirical social research. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & W. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing experts* (pp. 203–216). Palgrave Macmillan.

Website (fictitious example): Example AG. (2026, March 3). *Annual report 2025*. <https://www.example.com/annual-report>

Archive all internet sources and internal documents as PDF files and submit them together with the thesis.

7.5 Confidentiality clause

This thesis contains confidential data of [company name]. It may only be made available to the first and second examiners and authorised members of the examination board. Any publication or duplication – even in part – is prohibited without the express permission of the author and [company name].

7.6 Declaration of authorship

Include the following declaration at the end of the thesis and sign it:

I declare that I have written this thesis independently and have not used any sources or aids other than those indicated. All passages taken literally or in substance from other sources are marked as such. I have documented the use of AI-based tools in the appendix; I have checked all content generated with their support and take full responsibility for it. This thesis has not been submitted to any other examination authority.

Hof, [date]

[signature]

8 Frequently asked questions

Question	Answer
What counts towards the page limit?	Text including figures and tables, from the introduction to the conclusion. Front matter, references and appendix do not count. Exceeding the range does not earn points – concise is better.
Who can be an expert?	Anyone with specific knowledge from their role: managers, sales and service staff, customers, partners. Your company supervisor may be one interviewee, but most interviewees should be other people.
How long should an interview take?	No longer than 45 minutes. Plan 6–8 key questions with probes – more cannot be explored in depth in that time.
May I interview in English or another language?	Yes. Quote in the original language and add a translation if it differs from the language of the thesis.
Do I have to name the interviewees?	No. Function and type of organisation are sufficient (e.g. "I4, Head of Sales, machinery manufacturer").
The company does not allow recordings.	Use an approved protocol (chapter 5.6). Properly documented, this is not a disadvantage.
Do I have to use MAXQDA?	No. An evaluation matrix in Excel or Word is sufficient (chapter 5.7).
May I conduct a survey instead of interviews?	Only as a complement and after consultation with me. Online surveys of business customers typically achieve low response rates, which limits their explanatory power. The questionnaire and raw data belong in the appendix.
How many sources do I need?	There is no fixed number. What counts is that the framework rests on the key works and on current journal articles on your topic.
Where do I find literature?	In the university library's catalogue and the databases it licenses, and via Google Scholar. Read the original – not summaries on websites.
May I use internal figures and charts?	Yes, with the company's permission and a source reference, e.g. (Company X, 2026). Confidential content requires a confidentiality clause.
The company expects a particular result.	You are committed to the evidence. Address critical findings constructively and discuss them early with your company supervisor and with me. Critical distance is part of the assessment (criterion E).
Will you read my draft?	I give feedback on the exposé, the outline, the interview guide and specific questions, not on complete drafts.
How detailed must the implementation plan be?	Master: measures, milestones, responsibilities and time frame. Bachelor: a rough roadmap. A financial or cost plan is optional and earns up to five bonus points.

9 Checklist before submission

✓	Check
☐	The research question is answered explicitly in the conclusion.
☐	Each recommendation refers to findings and interviews (evidence chain).
☐	The implementation plan contains milestones and responsibilities.
☐	The method chapter contains the sample table and the operationalisation table.
☐	Appendix: guide, list of interviewees, transcripts or protocols, evaluation matrix, questionnaire and raw data if applicable, consent form template, AI documentation.
☐	The thesis has been proofread by a second person; the length is within the intended range.
☐	Transcripts are anonymised; confidential data are protected.
☐	Every reference has been checked against the original; all in-text citations appear in the reference list and vice versa.
☐	Figures and tables are numbered, have sources and are explained in the text.
☐	Spelling, layout and table of contents checked; page numbers correct.
☐	Confidentiality clause (if required) and signed declaration included.

Finally

With your submission you complete your studies – you can be proud of that. Present your results in the company as well: many recommendations only become projects when someone presents them and stands up for them. Often, that person is you.

General literature on academic writing

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.).
 Bailey, S. (2025). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students* (6th ed.). Routledge.
 Theisen, M. R. (2021). *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten: Erfolgreich bei Bachelor- und Masterarbeit* (18th ed.). Vahlen.

Appendix: Notes for company supervisors

Thank you for making a thesis possible in your company. This page summarises what you can expect and what the student needs from you.

What the thesis offers you

- A well-founded analysis of a concrete question in your company.
- Interviews with 5–8 (bachelor) or 12–15 (master) experts – internal and external.
- Recommendations with an implementation plan; at master level with milestones and responsibilities.

What the student needs from you

- Access to relevant data and documents.
- Support in finding interview partners, including customers and partners.
- A permanent contact person and regular short meetings.
- Sufficient time for the thesis alongside internship tasks.

What a thesis can – and cannot – deliver

- The thesis is committed to the evidence. Results may be uncomfortable; that is often where their value lies.
- It is an examination performance of the student, not a consulting project with a predetermined result.
- Confidential content can be protected by a confidentiality clause; interviews are anonymised.

Working with me

A joint meeting at the beginning helps to align expectations – please feel free to contact me. At the end, it is worth having the results presented in the company: many recommendations only become projects then.

Appendix: Title page template

Margins: top approx. 10 cm, bottom approx. 5.5 cm, left and right at least 3 cm; all elements centred. Title 16 pt, subtitle 14 pt, "Bachelor/Master Thesis" 14 pt, other elements 12 pt, all bold.

Title of the Thesis

Subtitle

Bachelor Thesis / Master Thesis

at Hof University of Applied Sciences

Faculty of Business

Degree programme ...

Submitted to
Prof. Dr. Stefan Wengler
Alfons-Goppel-Platz 1
95028 Hof

Submitted by
First name Last name
Student ID
Address

Hof, DD.MM.YYYY

Appendix: Interview protocol template

Interview	
Code	I_
Date, duration, mode	
Function of interviewee	
Type of organisation	
Recording	☐ yes ☐ no
Interviewer(s)	

Topic block (from guide)	Key statements (verbatim quotations in "...")	Own observations
1		
2		
3		
4		

Protocol written on: _____ Sent to interviewee on: _____ Confirmed on: _____

Appendix: Consent form template

Adapt this template with your company where necessary.

Consent to participate in an expert interview

Thesis: [title] · Author: [name] · Hof University of Applied Sciences, supervised by Prof. Dr. Stefan Wengler

The interview serves exclusively the purpose of this thesis. Participation is voluntary. I can end the interview at any time and withdraw my consent without giving reasons.

☐ I agree that the interview is recorded. The recording is used only to create a transcript or protocol and is deleted after the grading process.

☐ I agree that anonymised quotations from the interview are used in the thesis. My name will not be mentioned; my function and the type of organisation may be stated.

Place, date: _____ Signature: _____