

Practical help for MIEPP students to structure an empirical master thesis

For all formal requirements, please see the document *Guide Written Assignment*.

Note: citations must be clearly indicated and plagiarism will result in the grade “fail”.

The structure outlined below by defining Chapters and sub-sections is not a strict and rigid corset but rather a useful framework for beginners in academic writing. The function of each subsection is specified [in squared brackets and in grey color].

Abstract

Summary of the paper’s question addressed, methods and findings with 100-150 words.

1. Introduction

- The general topic [motivation, convey importance of topic]
- The paper’s
 - Question [narrow the reader’s expectation and focus minds]
 - Method [choice of tools, reasons for this choice]
 - Findings [key take-away and lesson]
- The related literature(s) [clearly structured according to subject/question, theory/empirics,]
 - main messages [inform the reader of previous findings]
 - the paper’s contribution [other researchers should care about results]
- Outline of the paper’s section [guide the reader]

2. Data and Methodology

- If applicable: Brief historical and/or political background of episode [if case study]
- Data [facilitate replication]
 - Sources
 - Definitions of variables used in study (ordered by relevance)
 - Summary statistics (of all key variables including units)
 - Limitations (data gaps or drawbacks)
 - Use of dataset in previous literature
- Theoretical foundations and empirical strategy [clarify procedures and use of tools]
 - The empirical strategy [familiarize with tools and avoid misunderstandings]

- Extent to which strategy is used in previous work, how it is adapted [motivate or justify use of specific modelling choice]

3. Results

- Baseline results
 - Main finding and narrow interpretation of coefficients, including economic interpretations. [describe findings and lay out their economic meaning]

Examples:

 - "...a one percent (unit) increase in the independent variable is associated with a X percent (unit) increase in the dependent variable..."
 - "...going from the 25th percentile of the distribution of the independent variable to the 75th percentile of its distribution would imply a change in the dependent variable of..."
 - This is large (small) compared to the overall variation in the independent variable...
 - *If applicable*: How did previous literature address similar questions?
- Robustness [show that results did not emerge by sheer chance only]
 - Alternative specifications – motivate why
 - Possible concerns and how they are addressed
- Discussion and interpretation [explain broader meaning and implications of results]
 - What the findings may imply in the broader sense
 - The limitations of the analysis

4. Conclusions

- Summary of the paper – brief repetition of motivation, question, findings.
- Policy implications (if appropriate)
- Remaining open questions and possible future analysis

References

Related papers, mainly academic (starting point: key references, their references and google-scholar cites)

Key references, selected according to

- publication rank (journal ranking, impact factor)
- citations (e.g., google scholar)

Appendix

- Additional details on data (Figures and Tables)

- Additional Estimation Results

Typical mistakes to avoid:

- unspecific research questions (Example: "It is interesting to know the trends...")
- many parallel thoughts at the same time (rule of thumb one idea or message = one paragraph).
- unexplained acronyms
- overly long sentences
- passive (instead of active) voice