

State of the Art Paper & Research Master's Thesis

Course guide 2023-2024

Course codes	FTR-FIRM-RE-01 (State of the Art Paper) FTR-FIRM-TH-01 (Research Master's Thesis)
Study load	10EC and 30EC
Programme	Research Master's in Philosophy
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1. General description and learning objectives

Students of all specialisations of the Research Master's in Philosophy conclude their programme by showing that they are aware of the state of the art of their field and by demonstrating that they are able to contribute to it. They do so by writing the *State of the Art Paper* in their third semester, followed by the *Research Master's Thesis* in the fourth and final semester. The latter consists of both a journal article and a PhD research proposal, giving them a head start for an academic career.

By writing these texts, students show that they meet the exit qualifications of the programme (see paragraph 4 of the EER). Their work shows they have knowledge of their specific domain of philosophy, understand how it relates to the overall domain of philosophy, and that they have knowledge and insight into the professional field of qualified philosophers. They moreover show that they can apply this knowledge by carrying out a research project, and that they are able to independently form judgement with respect to the authors and issues they have treated in the chosen field of specialisation. Finally, they demonstrate their ability to communicate the results of their research to a specialised audience, both in written form and orally during the defence.

This document describes the nature of the State of the Art Paper and Research Master's Thesis, as well as the assessment criteria and practical information about the process and deadlines. **It is important that both students and their supervisors are aware of the content of this document. Take time to go through the details together at the start of the supervision process.**

For questions, reach out to the Research Master's programme coordinator, Frank van Caspel, via philosophyRM@ru.nl.

2. State of the Art Paper

2.1 Content

In the third semester of the programme, students start working on the topic of their Research Master's Thesis by writing a State of the Art paper (10 EC). The aim of the State of the Art paper is to define the status quæstionis of a well-defined area of research on the basis of an analysis of pertinent literature, and to identify lacunae and promising areas of ongoing research.

At the start of the semester, the student and their supervisor should determine what the general topic of the Research Master's Thesis will be. The supervisor should then guide the student as they make an inventory of relevant literature to study.

It is then up to the student to read and process the material and to write a document which reflects the state of the art with respect to the topic of their Research Master's Thesis. Exactly what kind of document this should be is up to the student and their supervisor to determine. It could be mostly an overview article summarizing the debate, but it could also be an argumentative piece arguing for an as of yet unestablished research lacuna.

2.2 Criteria and assessment

Due to the broad range of topics and approaches within and between specialisations, it is not possible nor desirable to set up strict guidelines for the State of the Art paper. However, there are some basic requirements which it needs to fulfil:

- it is around 10,000 words but no more than 12.500;
- it is based on ca. 500 pages of relevant literature (primary and secondary sources);
- it demonstrates that the student had read and properly understood the relevant literature;
- it clearly delineates a *specific debate*, suitable for writing a journal article;
- it explicitly identifies areas of ongoing research and/or lacunae in the debate;

The State of the Art Paper is not graded, but receives either a pass or fail. The result is determined by the supervisor, based on whether the basic requirements have been met. It is also encouraged that the supervisor requires the student to orally present the result of their investigations, for example during a department research meeting.

The student and supervisor should make a realistic planning at the start of the semester and agree to an explicit and appropriate deadline for the paper. This deadline should be early enough that it allows the supervisor to determine the result before the end of the semester. The student turns in the State of the Art paper via the course's Brightspace page, after which the supervisor checks for plagiarism, assesses the work and processes the result in OSIRIS (either 'V' for pass or 'NVD' for fail).

If a student has questions about the result they contact their supervisor for an individual appointment.

3. Research Master's Thesis

The fourth semester of the programme is fully devoted to the Research Master's Thesis. The thesis consists of two parts: a journal article (20 EC), and a research proposal (10 EC).

3.1 Journal article requirements

The journal article should be written with publication in a specific journal in mind. This should ideally be a *general philosophical journal* within the field of the student's specialisation, not a specialized journal focused on too narrow an audience. The length and structure of the journal article can therefore vary, as the standards for journals as well as those within philosophical sub-disciplines can differ. The article must, however, satisfy a number of criteria:

- it should be written with the target journal's audience in mind, while still making clear to all (philosophically trained) readers what the relevance of the research and its conclusion is;
- the word count should be appropriate for the target journal, ideally based on the author instructions provided by the journal;
- it is the result of independent research;
- it makes an original contribution to the field of research;
- it responds to a clearly formulated, well circumscribed and relevant question or problem, which reflects the state of the philosophical debate;
- it displays traditional qualities of a philosophically worked-out argument such as consistency, sound analysis, coherent argumentation, etc.;
- it shows knowledge of the relevant literature;
- it contains an abstract, references, quotations, appendices, and bibliographies that conform to the standards of the philosophical sub-discipline in which the student specialises.

3.2 Research proposal requirements

The research proposal takes the characteristic form of an application of the type that one might submit in response to a PhD position at a Dutch university or to apply for a research grant of the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO). Students and their supervisors are very much encouraged to look for specific vacancies or calls for PhD research proposals in both the Netherlands and abroad, and to tailor the proposal with that opportunity in mind. As such the specific form of the proposal can vary, but it must be readable by a wide academic audience and contain the following components:

1. Title of the project;
2. Summary of the theme and aim of the project (maximum 200 words*);
3. Description of the proposed research: background/status quaestionis; aims/research questions; methods; scientific and social relevance of the research project (maximum 2500 words, excluding the bibliography*);
4. Key words;
5. Timetable (work schedule covering 3 à 4 years);
6. Summary for non specialists (500 words*);
7. Bibliography;
8. Curriculum vitae.

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*These are a guideline: if the specific vacancy or call at which the proposal is aimed requires different limits, follow those.

3.3 Faculty Thesis Poster Day

Every semester, about one month before the thesis deadline, the faculty organizes a festive Faculty Thesis Poster Day, where all master's students showcase their work in progress to each other in a low-threshold manner through a poster (which is not graded). For Research Master's students in particular, this is an excellent chance to practice this format of presenting, and they are expected to participate. Supervisors are encouraged to visit as well.

Posters should be made with the aim of informally telling passing fellow students (who do not have specific background knowledge) what the aim and relevance of the thesis are, within 3-5 minutes. They should contain at least:

- The title of the thesis.
- The main claim(s)
- The key authors discussed.

Students can also include the structure of their argument in bullet points (e.g. by including the titles of the chapters). The thesis poster day in the first semester is on **Monday November 27th** between 15:30-17:30h, and in the second semester on **Monday May 6th** between 15:30-17:30h. **Practical details about the Thesis Poster Day will be communicated via Brightspace.**

Given that the Faculty Thesis Poster Day will be held around one month before the thesis deadline, it would be a natural time for students to submit a first full draft of their journal article and research proposal to their supervisors.

3.4 Deadlines and supervision

To ensure the student is able to graduate on time, each semester has deadlines for turning in (both parts of) the Research Master's Thesis:

- The deadlines for students writing their thesis in the first semester of 2023-2024 are **January 7th** (first examination opportunity) and **February 4th** (resit).
- The deadlines for students writing their thesis in the second semester of 2023-2024 are **June 2nd** (first examination opportunity) and **June 30th** (resit).

Students may only turn in their thesis with the approval of their supervisor. A student whose supervisor does not think that the thesis is ready for examination by the time of a deadline, loses that examination opportunity. In that case, or in case the thesis is too late, the supervisor registers a 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) in OSIRIS for that particular examination opportunity. See section 3.8 for an overview of the deadlines.

In light of the deadline, it is important that students and their supervisors make a specific and realistic roadmap for finishing the thesis as early in the process as possible. Students are entitled to five meetings with their supervisor. If their thesis does not get a passing grade in their first attempt, they are entitled to a further one meeting before the deadline of the re-sit, in which they discuss the committee of examiners' written feedback to their thesis.

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Students who do not manage to successfully complete their thesis within the semester should re-enrol for the course in the next semester (note that there is no thesis supervision over the summer), and make a specific planning with their supervisor for finishing the thesis that semester. Take note that a completed thesis *may be turned in before that semester's deadline*. Make sure to follow the procedure for assessment described in the next section.

If a student does not manage to successfully complete the thesis within two semesters, they must contact the study advisor before enrolling for a third time. The study advisor will then see whether there are any study related barriers that the faculty might help with. Of course students facing issues with the thesis may make an appointment at any time to discuss these with the study advisor (via their student portal).

3.5 Procedure for registration, assessment and defence of the thesis

1. **At least one month before the intended submission date** (generally one of the deadlines listed above), the thesis supervisor requests the examination board to appoint a committee of examiners (CoE), using a web form available on the faculty's intranet.
2. The examination board appoints the CoE, consisting of the 1st examiner, the 2nd examiner, and the permanent examiner. Generally, the 1st examiner will be the thesis supervisor. The 1st examiner informs the student about the members of the CoE.
3. If the supervisor considers the Research Master's Thesis ready to be defended and believes it meets the formal requirements, the student submits it via the course's Brightspace page and notifies their supervisor via email. If the thesis had not been submitted at the time of a deadline, the supervisor registers a 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) in OSIRIS for that particular examination opportunity.
4. The thesis supervisor then checks the thesis for plagiarism. If plagiarism is suspected, this is reported to the examination board, and the procedure is suspended. If no plagiarism is detected, the supervisor submits the thesis using a web form available on the faculty's intranet.
5. Within 2 weeks after submission, all examiners complete the assessment form and submit their reports (only) to the permanent examiner, and:

If the thesis is judged *insufficient* by one or several of the examiners:

- i. A 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) is registered by the permanent examiner in OSIRIS;
- ii. The supervisor shares and discusses the committee's written concerns with the student;
- iii. The student must revise the thesis to meet the examiners' objections, and the procedure is then resumed from step 3.

If the thesis is judged to be *sufficient* by all examiners:

- i. The permanent examiner determines the final mark for the thesis by averaging the individual assessments;
- ii. The 1st examiner informs the student that the thesis has been deemed defensible (without sharing the grade);
- iii. The student then contacts the examiners to plan a date, time and place for the defence, which takes place before the 1st and at least one other examiner (normally the 2nd examiner).

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6. The defence lasts an hour, which includes no more than 10 minutes at the start during which the student gives a presentation on the thesis. If the student wants to use presentation tools for this, it is their responsibility to set these up on time. After the presentation the examiners question the student, wherein the 2nd examiner gets the first opportunity to do so. Then the student leaves the room while the examiners determine the grade for the defence, after which the examiners share the *provisional* grade for the thesis with the student. The examiners then send the assessment form to the permanent examiner.
7. The permanent examiner determines the *final* grade and sends all forms to STIP for registration of the result in OSIRIS. The permanent examiner also sends the final assessment form to the 1st examiner, who forwards it to the student.

3.6 Formal requirements for the thesis

Besides the requirements for the journal article and research proposal listed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, the thesis must meet these formal criteria:

- The thesis should be submitted as a single PDF file in A4 page format.
- It must contain a title page, a journal article and a research proposal.
- It should be written in good, clear and grammatically correct English.
- The title page must specify:
 - o The article's title and that of the research proposal
 - o Author's name and student number
 - o Supervisor's name
 - o The date of submission
 - o The following text:

Thesis for obtaining a "Master of arts" degree in philosophy
Radboud University Nijmegen
- The reverse of the title page must state:

I hereby declare and assure that I, [name student], have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated. Place: ... date: ...
- The journal article's lay-out and typesetting should resemble that of papers in the journal for which it was written, and the research proposal should follow the formatting guidelines for the application at which it is aimed.

3.7 Assessment criteria and weighting

Article (60% of the final mark)	
Topic and research question (30%)	demarcation of the topic; status quaestionis; originality of the contribution; formulation of the research question
Structure (20%)	structure of the article; separation between main issues and side issues
Presentation and style (20%)	readability, clarity and conciseness; explanation of central concepts and main premisses; clear perspective; critical distance
Quality of the argumentation (30%)	
Project proposal (30% of the final mark)	
Scientific relevance (20%)	of the proposed research; status quaestionis; delimitation of the research question
Presentation and style (30%)	readability by a wide academic audience; clarity and conciseness; explanation of the research problem, key concepts and main premisses
Approach and methods (25%)	suitability of the approach, relative to the objectives; feasibility of the work plan
Originality (25%)	of the objectives and/or the approach
Defence (10% of the final mark)	
verbal expression; relevance ; soundness	

3.8 Deadlines/procedure

Deadline / procedure 1st semester 2023-2024

48	27-11 t/m 01-12	Faculty Thesis Poster Day	
		Supervisors request examination board to appoint committee of examiners.	
49	04-12 t/m 08-12		
50	11-12 t/m 15-12		
51	18-12 t/m 22-12		
52	25-12 t/m 29-12	WINTER HOLIDAYS	
1	01-01 t/m 05-01	Deadline 1st opportunity: 7 January (student submits via Brightspace)	
2	08-01 t/m 12-01 T1, week 1	8 January: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form. 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 19 January.	
3	15-01 t/m 19-01 T1, week 2	SUFFICIENT 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.	INSUFFICIENT Thesis supervisor informs student about the committee's concerns.
4	22-01 t/m 26-01 T1, week 3	Student revises thesis.	
5	29-01 t/m 02-02	Thesis defense	
6	05-02 t/m 09-02	Deadline 2nd opportunity: 4 February (student submits via Brightspace) 5 February: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form. 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 16 February.	
7	12-02 t/m 16-02	SUFFICIENT 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.	INSUFFICIENT Student re-enrolls for the thesis in the new semester.
8	19-02 t/m 23-02	Thesis defense	
9	26-02 t/m 01-03		
10	04-03 t/m 08-03		

Note: students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. The supervisor must agree that the thesis is ready for evaluation. A student whose supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready at the time of the deadline, loses the 1st exam opportunity. Student and supervisor must then work towards the re-sit.

Note: again, students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. If the supervisor does not approve, the student must enroll for the thesis again in the next semester, at which point supervision will resume.

Deadline / procedure 2nd semester 2023-2024

19	06-05 t/m 10-05	Faculty Thesis Poster Day	
		Supervisors request examination board to appoint committee of examiners.	
20	13-05 t/m 17-05	Deadline 1st opportunity: June 2 (student submits via Brightspace)	
21	20-05 t/m 24-05		
22	27-05 t/m 31-05		
23	03-06 t/m 07-06 T2, week 1	3 June: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form. 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 14 June.	
24	10-06 t/m 14-06 T2, week 2	SUFFICIENT 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.	INSUFFICIENT Thesis supervisor informs student about the committee's concerns.
25	17-06 t/m 21-06	Student revises thesis.	
26	24-06 t/m 28-06	Deadline 2nd opportunity: 30 June (student submits via Brightspace)	
27	01-07 t/m 05-07 HT2, week 1	Thesis defense	1 July: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form. 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 12 July.
28	08-07 t/m 12-07 HT2, week 2		SUFFICIENT 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.
29	15-07 t/m 19-07	SUMMER HOLIDAYS	
30	22-07 t/m 26-07		
31	29-07 t/m 02-08		
32	05-08 t/m 09-08		
33	12-08 t/m 16-08		
34	19-08 t/m 23-08		
35	26-08 t/m 30-08	Thesis defense	

Note: students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. The supervisor must agree that the thesis is ready for evaluation. A student whose supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready at the time of the deadline, loses the 1st exam opportunity. Student and supervisor must then work towards the re-sit.

Note: again, students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. If the supervisor does not approve, the student must enroll for the thesis again in the next semester, at which point supervision will resume.