

National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg School of Social Sciences

Approved by
Academic Council of the
MA programme
"Data Analytics for Politics and Society"
13.11.2025

GUIDELINE
on Pre-Defense of the Master Thesis
Field of study 39.04.01 Sociology, 41.04.04 Political Science
MA Programme "Data Analytics for Politics and Society"

Academic Supervisor:

Aleksei B. Sorbale _____

St. Petersburg, 2025

General provisions

1. The minimal version of the Pre-defense MA Thesis should contain the completed introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology and methods, and preliminary empirical analysis, as well as (anticipated) results and conclusion.
2. There Pre-defense of the MA thesis implies the submission of the written text and oral presentation. The grade for the Pre-defense Master thesis is a summary of the grades provided by the academic supervisor for the written text and the defense committee for the oral presentation.
3. Pre-Defense Master Thesis is to be submitted via cloud disk by **April 10, 2026, 18:00 (Moscow time)**

STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

The Pre-Defense Master Thesis should include:

1. Cover page
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Main part
 - a. Literature review
 - b. Theoretical framework
 - c. Methodology
 - d. Empirical analysis
 - e. Anticipated/Achieved Results
5. Conclusion
6. References
7. Appendices

All the sections above (except for the Appendices) are mandatory. Appendices should be included as needed.

The **Cover page** should be formatted according to the rules below. The cover page is the first page of the Pre-Defense Master Thesis, but it should not contain the page number. The cover page should include the following information in English:

- university, faculty and department;
- author's first and last name;
- supervisor's position, degree, last name and initials;
- place and year of completion (see **Appendix 1** below).

The **Abstract** is a short summary of your MA Thesis and should include:

- the research goals;
- the research methods and the sampling procedure;
- the (anticipated) results of the study;
- the Master Thesis structure.

The abstract should be written as one paragraph, on the first page, above the main text, and should be separated from it by two lines. The word “**Abstract**” should not be included.

The headings for the main MA Thesis parts (**Introduction, Literature Review, Theory, Methodology, Empirical analysis, Conclusion**) should be written on a separate line and are not followed by a period. The subheadings of the Introduction section (**Background, Problem statement, Delimitations of the study, Professional Significance, Definitions of key terms**) should be written on the same line with the main text and are bolded and separated from the main text by a period.

The subsections of the **Introduction** should explain the relevance of your research topic (**Background**), should state the research aims and objectives (**Problem Statement**) and should discuss, if possible, the professional significance of the study and/or the originality of the research (**Professional Significance**). In the introduction, you should also determine the delimitations of the study (**Delimitations of the Study**) and, if relevant, include definitions of key terms (**Definitions of Key Terms**), with references. Recommended word count: 4000-8000 characters.

The main part of the MA Thesis prepared for Pre-defense should consist of three parts. Main Body is not written as a heading; you should use the headings reflecting the following components: **Literature Review, Theory, Methods, Empirical analysis, Anticipated Results**, which should be written on a separate line and are not followed by a period. The main part should include the following:

- A review of literature on the topic,
- Theoretical framework,
- The rationale for the choice of research methods,
- A (preliminary) empirical analysis
- A description of the anticipated results (or results achieved by the submission deadline for the Pre-defense MA Thesis).

The literature review should discuss the current state of the problem in the chosen research area and provide a rationale for the chosen research focus. The text of the review should be analytical; in-text citations should be formatted in APA 7th edition style (Author, date). Recommended word count: 9000-16000 characters.

Theory should discuss the theoretical grounds of the given research, outline the theoretical framework(s) adequate for the analysis of the given cases in the given context. Recommended word count: 5000-10000 characters.

The **Methodology** section should include a description of the chosen methodology and provide a rationale for its choice. It should also include the description of the chosen data, methods of data collection and analysis, variables' sources and encoding rules. Recommended word count: 2000-5000 characters.

Empirical analysis should provide the description of the (preliminary) steps for analyzing the collected data, observation of the constructed models and the implemented technical operations. Recommended word count: 5000-10000 characters.

The **(Anticipated) Results** section should contain a description of the (anticipated) results of the study; the stated results should align with the stated aims and the methods chosen. Recommended word count: 2000-5000 characters.

The **Conclusion section** of the Pre-defense MA Thesis should be a coherent summary of the research results and how they align with the aims, objectives and professional significance stated in the introduction. Recommended word count: 3000-6000 characters.

The **References section** should be a list of sources used during the study. They may include articles, monographs, books, reference literature, etc. and information from academic electronic resources. The reference list should be alphabetized by authors' last names and should follow the APA 6th edition standard. At least 30 key English-language sources are recommended. If it is necessary to use sources in Russian, they should be formatted in Russian and included at the end of the list. The reference list should contain all the sources used in the text.

Appendices are a part of the text, which is supplementary, but necessary for a better presentation of the study. They should include reference materials that are not essential for understanding how the research problem was solved. Appendices may contain tables, graphs or formulas that support some parts of the MA thesis. It is not appropriate to include information that is essential for understanding the main part of the MA thesis into the appendices.

Appendix 1. Pre-Defense MA Thesis Title Page Template

FEDERAL STATE AUTONOMOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION
FOR HIGHER PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Faculty St. Petersburg School of Social Sciences

Student's full name

THESIS TOPIC

MASTER'S PROJECT

Field of study: 39.04.01 Sociology, 41.04.04 Political Science

Degree programme: Data Analytics for Politics and Society

Supervisor:

Supervisor's degree

Supervisor's Full Name

Saint Petersburg 2026

FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

1. Pre-defense MA Thesis volume

Pre-defense MA Thesis volume is 30000 – 60000 characters.

2. The guidelines for the Pre-defense MA Thesis formatting

The graphic design of the paper should be made in accordance with the requirements of APA 7th edition style. The main requirements are listed hereinafter.

2.1 Requirements for the headings and subheadings formatting.

Headings and subheadings have two-level structure. The recommended fonts are Times New Roman and Arial.

2.1.1 Headings

Headings are centered and bold. All words except articles, conjunctions and prepositions are capitalized.

2.1.2 Subheadings

Subheadings are left-aligned, italicized. All words except articles, conjunctions and prepositions are capitalized.

2.2 The text should:

- be typed in 12 or 14-point Times New Roman font.
- have minimal page margins as follows: 30mm left, 10mm right, 20mm top, and bottom.
- include a page number on every page except the title page.
- have 1.5-line spacing.
- avoid paragraphing in a such a way that the first line of the paragraph is the last line of the page or the last line of the paragraph is the first line of the page.

3. Quoting requirements

For citing the in-text citation is used, footnotes are not allowed. An in-text citation consists of the author's last name and year of publication; when quoting, also page numbers should be included. Paraphrasing is preferred to quoting.

3.1 Quotes of fewer than 40 words

When citing a section of text fewer than 40 words, double quotation marks are used directly before and directly after the quote. The author's last name, year of publication and page numbers should be given.

Recommended examples:

- 1) She stated, "...(quotation)..." (Miele, 1993, p. 276), but she did not clarify which behaviors were studied.
- 2) Miele (1993) found that "... (quotation)..." in this case (p. 276), but what will the next step in researching this issue be?
- 3) According to Adams (1984), stakeholders include "... (quotation)..." (p. 24).
- 4) Based on the stakeholder theory Adams originally proposed a definition "... (quotation)..." (1984 p.24).

3.2 Quotes of 40 words or more

If the quote contains 40 words or more, then it should be placed in a separate block that begins on a new line and is indented in its entirety, double space is used to separate the block quote, quotation marks are not used. Information in brackets should be given after the last period.

4. References requirements.

- The list of references includes only the works that are referenced in the text of the MA Thesis and should be given on the last page of the paper with the word 'References' appear centered on the top of the page.
- The references **are sorted alphabetically** and formatted using a hanging indent of 0.5 inch. A standard source reference begins with the author's surname, followed by a comma, then the initial(s) of his or her first name. (year of publication). *The title of source: subheading (if there is any) also capitalized.* Publishing house: the name.

Example:

Anderson, F. J. (1989). *Developments in second-language acquisition*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Books and journals titles are italicized; only the first words of heading, proper names and abbreviations are capitalized.
- For sources of the same author, the sources are listed based on the publication date of the source, listing the oldest source first.
- If there is no available author, then the title of the source is recorded in place of the author, when citing the shortened title is given.
- For alphabetizing students may use functions of Microsoft Word, citation managers (e.g. Zotero, Mendeley) or online generators of bibliographic sources, for example, EasyBib.

GRADING

Grade for the Pre-Defense Master Thesis covers research skills which students are expected to apply while writing the text. The Pre-Defense Master Thesis is graded by the academic supervisor of the student's MA thesis and the defense committee, according to the following formula:

$O_f = 0,5 * O_{as} + 0,5 * O_{dc}$, where O_{as} is a grade by the academic supervisor of the student's MA thesis and O_{dc} is a grade by the defense committee.

For the pre-defense, the academic supervisor should not write a full-scale review but should only provide the grade for the respective MA Thesis. The grade should reflect the following criteria (see **Appendix 2** below).

The Pre-defense committee in the assessment of the MA theses should be guided by the criteria put in **Appendix 3** below.

The final grade becomes known to the student after the oral part of the Pre-defense.

Appendix 2. Assessment Criteria for the Academic Supervisor

Thesis Components	Assessment Criteria	Grade (10-point scale) (indicative) 0,1,2,3 – unsatisfactory 4,5 – satisfactory 6,7 – good 8,9,10 – excellent
Problem Statement	<i>The work has clearly communicated relevance and positioning</i> <i>The research problem, topic, goals and questions are clear, correctly formulated and well-communicated</i> <i>Research questions match with the thesis problem statement</i> <i>Thesis problem statement and goals match with the thesis content</i>	
Theoretical Analysis	<i>The review matches with the thesis problem statement, RQs/goals</i> <i>The review covers key research areas related to the problem (including at least 30 key international sources) and provides a critical overview of key research areas</i> <i>The thesis has clearly communicated, correct and grounded in literature theoretical model (e.g., RQs are clearly presented and theoretically motivated, proposed hypotheses are explicitly formulated and theoretically supported)</i> <i>Employed research strategy matches with the theoretical model</i> <i>There is a clear connection with the literature and reviewed theory in the discussion of the results</i>	
Data Collection and Method	<i>RQ match with data and method employed</i> <i>The validity of the methodology, data collection, and research design (including sampling strategy) is motivated based on the critical analysis of relevant studies</i> <i>Data and methodology are critically evaluated, limitations of the study are discussed (including sample bias discussion)</i> <i>Data gathering process (or database search and selection), systematization and preprocessing performed according to quality standards</i> <i>Data is of sufficient quality and quantity to answer RQs</i> <i>The degree of the author's involvement in the data gathering process in case of the primary data use</i>	
(Preliminary) Data Analysis	<i>Choice of the tools and methods is reasonable and well-motivated</i> <i>Methods of analysis are applied correctly</i> <i>Data analysis process and limitations are critically analyzed</i>	
(Anticipated) Results	<i>Research independence is demonstrated</i> <i>The obtained results are credible and of importance to the research or practice</i> <i>Conclusions are theoretically motivated, empirically grounded, independent, reasonable and concise, showing a clear connection with RQs/goals</i> <i>Match between the proposed activities and recommendations and study goals</i>	
Structure and Formatting	<i>Literacy and consistency</i> <i>Cohesiveness and coherence</i> <i>Formatting of the text, tables, and figures, reference list</i> <i>The correctness of the professional thesaurus and concepts usage, adherence to academic style</i>	
Final Grade (not necessarily the arithmetic average of the criteria above)		

Appendix 3. MA Thesis Assessment Form for the Pre-Defense Committee

Thesis Components	Assessment Criteria	Coefficient	Grade (10-point scale) (indicative) 0,1,2,3 – unsatisfactory 4,5 – satisfactory 6,7 – good 8,9,10 - excellent
Problem Statement and Theoretical Analysis	<i>The work has clearly communicated relevance and positioning</i> <i>The research problem, topic, goals, and questions are clear, correctly formulated and well-communicated</i> <i>Research questions match with the thesis problem statement</i> <i>Thesis problem statement and goals match with the thesis content</i> <i>The review matches with the thesis problem statement, RQs/goals</i> <i>The review covers key research areas related to the problem (including at least 30 key international sources) and provides a critical overview of key research areas</i> <i>The thesis has clearly communicated, correct and grounded in literature theoretical model (e.g., RQs are clearly presented and theoretically motivated, proposed hypotheses are explicitly formulated and theoretically supported)</i> <i>Employed research strategy matches with the theoretical model</i> <i>There is a clear connection with the literature and reviewed theory in the discussion of the results</i>	30%	
Data Collection, Method and (Preliminary) Data Analysis	<i>RQ match with data and method employed</i> <i>The validity of the methodology, data collection, and research design (including sampling strategy) is motivated based on the critical analysis of relevant studies</i> <i>Data and methodology are critically evaluated, limitations of the study are discussed (including sample bias discussion)</i> <i>Data gathering process (or database search and selection), systematization and preprocessing performed according to quality standards</i> <i>Data is of sufficient quality and quantity to answer RQs</i> <i>The degree of the author's involvement in the data gathering process in case of the primary data use</i> <i>Choice of the tools and methods is reasonable and well-motivated</i> <i>Methods of analysis are applied correctly</i> <i>Data analysis process and limitations are critically analyzed</i>	20%	
(Anticipated) Results and Contribution	<i>Research independence is demonstrated</i> <i>The obtained results are credible and of importance to the research or practice</i> <i>Conclusions are theoretically motivated, empirically grounded, independent, reasonable and concise, showing a clear connection with RQs/goals</i>	20%	
Delivery, Presentation and Question Answering	<i>Demonstrated level of expertise in the topic, correctness in the usage of the professional vocabulary and sociological concepts</i> <i>Clarity, logic, professionalism of the delivery</i> <i>Time Management</i> <i>Structure of presentation and visual quality of slides</i> <i>Clarity and scientific support of the arguments</i>	30%	

	• <i>Clear and full answers to the committee questions</i>		
Final grade of the Committee (calculated based on the weighted grades on different components of the MA thesis)			