Department of Political Science
University of Cologne

Guidelines
Consultation Meeting and Progress Documentation for Bachelor's and Master's theses at the Department of Political Science

Version: March 2026

Background: Final Thesis as a Combined Examination

The final thesis is designed as a combined examination consisting of two components. The first examination component is the Bachelor's or Master's thesis. The second examination component consists of a progress documentation in which students document their work process and learning progress during the preparation of the Bachelor's or Master's thesis. A central element of the progress documentation is the reflection on a mandatory individual advisory meeting between the student, the supervisor who proposed the topic, and/or the second examiner, which takes place during the thesis writing period.

Consultation Meeting

After registration and before submission of the final thesis, an advisory meeting takes place. This meeting is scheduled and carried out by the first advisor or the second advisor. Before the meeting, the student sends a current version of the research design as the basis for the discussion. The meeting is documented using the template provided by the Faculty Examination Office and is sent to the student within three working days of the meeting date. This protocol must be attached to the progress documentation when the thesis is submitted.

As a general principle, the appropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the thesis process should also be discussed during the advisory meeting.

Generally permissible uses include:

- Brainstorming ideas and obtaining initial information prior to writing the final thesis
- Creating a structured outline or an overview of relevant literature
- Checking spelling and grammar
- Translations
- Use as a measurement tool for data analysis (e.g., computer-assisted analysis of political speeches)
- Support with software programming and debugging

Inappropriate uses include:

- Unedited incorporation of AI-generated content.
- Using content from AI that you present as your own work
- Changing your writing style
- Explaining concepts or creating a literature review in your thesis

If AI is used, and if required by the supervisor, the specific points at which it was applied, as well as the prompts used, must be documented.

Progress Documentation

The progress documentation is an independent examination component in addition to the final thesis. Its purpose is to:

- Make the individual work and learning process during the thesis transparent,
- Reflect on the independent development of the thesis, and
- Demonstrate how feedback from the advisory meeting was incorporated into the subsequent work process.

The progress documentation is not a summary of the thesis and not a second academic paper, but serves to reflect on the student's own work and learning process.

Content Requirements (Minimum Criteria)

A progress documentation that is graded as passed should cover the following points:

(a) Reflection on the advisory meeting and any further meetings with the supervisor

- Brief contextualization of the meetings (timing, phase of work)
- Presentation of the key comments or feedback
- Reflection on
    - how this feedback was taken up, or
    - why certain suggestions were deliberately not implemented

The decisive factor is not completeness, but a reflective engagement with the feedback.

(b) Reflection on the student's own work process

Please address selected aspects that are central to your thesis, for example:

- Key decisions made during the course of the thesis (research question, method, data, structure),
- Challenges, detours, or dead ends and how you dealt with them,
- Changes compared to the original plan.

The focus should be on explanations and learning processes, not on a chronological retelling.

(c) Use of tools, in particular AI tools

- Brief description of the purposes for which tools were used
- Reflection on the role, opportunities, and limitations of this use in your own work process
- If required by supervisor: overview of the AI prompts used in the thesis (similar prompts may be summarized as examples)

The use of tools is not problematic per se; what matters is the reflective assessment of their role in the student's own work process.

Formal Requirements

- Length: minimum 2, maximum 4 pages of text (plus appendix)
- Style: reflective; first person (“I”)
- Structure: freely chosen, but clearly organized
- Appendix (mandatory):
    - Advisory meeting protocol
- Optional Appendix:
    - Sketches, (planned) timeline, work notes (not relevant for grading)
    - If AI was used: overview of the AI prompts and AI models used

Assessment

The progress documentation is graded as “passed” or “not passed.”

The documentation will be graded as “not passed” in particular if:

- there is no recognizable reflection on the student’s own work process,
- the text remains largely general or interchangeable,
- there is no reference, or only a formulaic reference, to the advisory meeting,
- no independent engagement with decisions and learning processes is evident.
- information on AI prompts used is missing (if required)