

Guidelines for Preparing a Thesis Paper for Oral Examinations in Sociology

@Lehrstuhl für Soziologie mit dem Schwerpunkt, Märkte, Organisationen und Governance

1. What is a thesis?

The term “thesis” originates from Ancient Greek and refers to a statement or proposition put forward as a starting point for argument and discussion. In sociology, a thesis is not a mere statement of fact, but an interpretive, theoretically informed, and debatable claim about a social phenomenon.

The purpose of the oral examination is, among other things, to demonstrate your ability to develop, justify, and critically reflect on theses. A thesis paper helps structure the examination conversation and shows that you are capable of engaging with a topic in a scientific and argumentative way.

2. How to formulate a strong thesis

Characteristics of a good thesis:

- Clarity and precision: concise, clear, and easy to understand – ideally one sentence, two at most.
- Argumentative stance: a good thesis takes a position and invites discussion. A good test is: *Can a counter-thesis be formulated?*
- Sociological content: a strong thesis refers to social structures, processes, or practices and can be supported or challenged using sociological concepts.
- Theoretical grounding: ideally, your thesis can be embedded in a theoretical framework (e.g., Bourdieu, ...).

What to avoid:

- Factual statements: e.g., “Jena is located in Thuringia.”
- Trivialities or generalities: e.g., “Family is important for socialization.”
- Vague or unclear formulations: e.g., “There are many problems in society.”
- Polemics or exaggeration: e.g., “Sociology has completely failed.”
- Unexplained technical language: Remember: you must be able to explain all terms and concepts in the exam.

3. Sample sociological theses

- Public housing contributes to gentrification processes in certain urban districts.
- Companies respond to sustainability regulations less out of conviction than as a strategic market adaptation.
- The idea of the 'good life' in Western societies reproduces consumer behavior that hinders ecological transformation.
- The implementation of ESG criteria in corporate governance reinforces existing inequalities instead of reducing them.

- Social media contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse and the re-politicization of consumption.

4. Examination requirements

- Oral examinations are part of the exam regulations (§9 of the BA/MA examination regulations).
- The exam is intended to demonstrate that you:
 - have sufficient foundational knowledge of the module,
 - can identify connections, and
 - can integrate specific issues into broader contexts.
- Duration: generally 30 minutes.
- The thesis paper serves as a thematic guide for the exam conversation.

5. Requirements for the thesis paper

Content requirements:

- For each exam topic: at least two theses; typically four in total.
- Optional: a brief justification per thesis (max. approx. 100 words).
- Be prepared to explain any terms and concepts used in your theses during the exam.

Formal requirements:

- Please include your name, course title, and exam date on the paper.
- Provide a bibliography of the literature you used (using a common citation style).
- Submit your thesis paper at least 48 hours before the exam via email to the examiner.

6. Preparing for the exam – Practical tips

- Start early with topic selection and thesis development.
- Coordinate with your examiner regarding focal points, reading lists, and expected depth.
- Practice explaining key terms aloud – as preparation for the oral setting.
- For each thesis, be prepared to:
 - outline 2–3 supporting arguments,
 - address possible counterarguments,
 - cite examples or empirical evidence.
- Use digital tools if helpful – e.g., mind maps.

7. Still have questions?

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions about the exam or your thesis paper. We're happy to support you in preparing confidently and effectively for your examination.