STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY
Department of Social Anthropology
HT11/VT14/KN

Writing a Master thesis

The **thesis** should be about **30 000 - 35 000 words, using Times New Roman, 1 ½ spaced lines**. Give the thesis a good and interesting **title** and **use subtitles** throughout the text.

The thesis must have an **abstract** of about 200-250 words. Include at the end of the abstract **keywords (3-4 words).** Keywords are listed in terms of **relevance.** A thesis written in Swedish must have a **summary in English**. The summary should be 2-3 pages (800-1000 words)

Your **language use must be clear and correct** and you should strain yourself to **present a well-written thesis.** Do not complicate your language by unnecessarily formal and distancing wording, entangling yourself in obscure statements - that is not a criteria of good academic writing.

Writing a thesis means developing the ethnographic material which emanates from your fieldwork, and here your field report should be very useful. It is the ethnographic material that is the focus of your analysis and which lends its specific meaning to your theoretical reasoning, your research question. This means that your main contribution is how you manage and work with your material – whether documents or data from participant observation – how you present it, analyse it, the concepts you see as relevant, how you connect your analysis to theoretical discussions in the literature that you read.

Writing also means continuous reading. It is vital that you combine writing and reading. As you read, thoughts in relation to your material come to mind – write them down as you go along. Fill out parts of your text that seem relevant at the moment. If you get stuck writing, it can sometimes be fruitful to take a break and read.

Remember to write down your references, articles and books, so that you do not forget where you read something!

We have different ways of writing, both in terms of style and ways of organizing our labor of writing, and in terms of prior experience. There is no really 'best way' of writing but there are nonetheless conventions of academic writing that you cannot ignore. Academic writing nonetheless varies according to different disciplinary traditions, so anthropology has developed particular ways of writing. This you can note in reading various publications, articles, monographs.

For example, see how articles are written in publications such as:

Ethnos, Journal of Anthropology
American Anthropologist
Anthropological Quarterly
Current Anthropology
Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (JRAI)

American Ethnologist
Anthropology and Education Quarterly
Ethnography
Annual Review of Anthropology
Medical Anthropology Quarterly
Journal of Linguistic Anthropology
PoLar: Political and Legal Anthropology Review
Journal of Refugee Studies
Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies
Ethnic and Racial Studies
Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment
Visual Anthropology Review

These journals, as well as others, are found online and in print at the university library. They are valuable as sources of orientation in anthropological theory, to help you build up your arguments, and to find references relevant to your own work, as well as styles of writing and constructing an academic text. It is no less important and useful in this context to read monographs and see how such texts are composed.

Take note of how an abstract is written, how an introduction presents the main issue and research questions, and presents an argument, how subtitles in the text are formulated and dispersed throughout the text, how a text is divided into paragraphs, how a conclusion relates back to the text and the main issue presented in the introduction.

When you use your ethnographic material, use it actively, let it speak to the issue(s) you are concerned with through detailed description. Do not make abstract theoretical statements that are not at all grounded in your material.
For example, it is not enough to state that, *'women's situation is more difficult and precarious than that of men in the rural households of country X'*. You have to demonstrate in what way women's situation can be said to be more difficult. This can be accomplished by way of describing what they and others do, how the rural household is organized, and how people in different contexts talk about gender, family, economy, etc. In other words, describe situations, events, conversations in which the actors are involved directly. Thereby, you can also incorporate excerpts from interviews, if this seems relevant.

Let the reader become acquainted with your field and those of your informants that appear in your thesis and speak to the problem you are set on analyzing. Just making statements about how things 'are' as if it were an indisputable fact is not convincing. But neither is it convincing or useful to pile up details without reflecting over them and connecting them to the issue/problem with which you are concerned.

Using interviews: Interviews are often long and we usually pick out parts of them to show ways of expressing, references to opinions, development of an argument or how a particular interview situation shifts, etc. When you quote from an interview and then comment on it, do not repeat what the person(s) says in the interview by just rewording, telling the reader what is already obvious. The point is, what do you want to show with the interview, how does it relate to your general description and argument? Or did you include it just to prove your point? In any case, you need to integrate it into your general description and analysis.

Example (fictive) of an interview comment:

Interviewer: Is there a difference between being a mother or a father?

Informant: Yes, I think so, we think differently. I am the one who worries, he is never worried. I think we focus on different things. I get more worried if she doesn't eat, but he is more worried if she has a cold or if she doesn't seem to breath properly, he also worries about her mobility.
Interviewer's comment in the thesis text: Here we see how the mother perceives herself as the one who worries, as against the father. However, at the same time she describes how she and the father worry about different things, since they are said to think differently.

As you see, the comment is just really repeating what the informant said, but in somewhat different wording. This is not analytical, it just describes again what is being stated, there is no analysis of meaning, what the aim is with using this quote.

By demonstrating how things work and their relevance for your specific research questions you can make your analysis of your ethnographic material much more relevant and convincing, as well as thought-provoking.

A sketch of how a thesis is organized:

1. Introduction (ca 5-6 pages)
Stating the central research problem that the thesis is about, the main theoretical issues and argument, and how the thesis is structured

2. Presenting the field and method – a general background to the field, the issue, etc. Can also include an historical 'background' that you deem to be relevant.

3. The two-three main chapters which ethnographically describe and develop the analysis in relation to the theoretical issues presented in the introduction

4. Concluding remarks (ca 5-6 pages) – discussing and summarizing the main points of the thesis, connecting with the questions and problems presented in the introduction and throughout the main chapters.

5. Notes
They are either put at the end of the page where they occur or at the end of the thesis.
Notes should not be used excessively or just for references to literature, rather to note some additional information or elaboration that does not quite fit into the flow of the text, but is nonetheless of specific interest.

6. References
These include all texts that you have referred to in your thesis. See how a reference list is compiled in the journal *Ethnos* and follow that concept.