



[Master's Program Guide]

Insights from Seniors on

Graduate School Life and the Process of Thesis Research



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What is a Master's Program?

The master's program is a graduate-level course designed to provide high-level knowledge and skills in a specific field to students. Typically runs for two years, it is accessible to those who have completed their undergraduate studies. Upon admission, students undertake prescribed coursework and, upon successful submission and evaluation of a thesis presenting research findings, are given a master's degree. The academic master's degree (碩士, Master) signifies the minimum qualification to teach at the undergraduate level. It encompasses degrees obtained through general graduate programs (academic degrees) and degrees obtainable from professional graduate schools, specialized graduate schools, and industrial graduate schools (non-academic degrees).

What is a Master's Degree Thesis?

A thesis paper is typically a lengthy research thesis written as a requirement for obtaining a degree. The purpose of a thesis is to demonstrate the student's ability to conduct original research in their field of study and contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Especially for a master's thesis, its objective is to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the existing body of knowledge (in the research topic) and to show that the student has been trained to conduct independent research as a researcher. Following these criteria, a master's thesis must undergo evaluation by an examination committee and pass to be eligible for submission.



It is a requirement for students to write a thesis that must pass evaluation in order to be awarded the degree in most university master's/doctoral degree programs. However, in the field of arts, creative works may be created in lieu of a thesis and evaluated for degree conferral.

Non-Academic Degree

As mentioned earlier, it is often a requirement to submit a thesis for degree conferral in general graduate schools. However, even in specialized graduate schools, professional graduate schools, or general graduate schools at Sungkyunkwan University, there are certain majors where writing a thesis is not mandatory. In such cases, it is possible for individuals to choose to write a thesis and graduate according to their personal preferences. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the graduation requirements specific to one's affiliated graduate school.

[Contact Information for Department Offices]

Department Office Contacts : <https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/life/office.htm>



Procedures for Thesis Progression

The progression procedure of a thesis is not significantly different from that of a regular paper, since you are an untrained researcher, you should undergo the process under the guidance of the advisor. As the thesis research is your own, it is crucial to remember that significant decisions should be made in consultation with the advisor, while also maintaining autonomy in your thoughts and actively driving the research forward.

Research Progression

There are many books available in the library that provide information on the progression and writing of a thesis. Below is a brief introduction to guide you through the flow of research. If you seek more detailed assistance, consider searching for books in the library or referring to videos on YouTube for further guidance.



1 Exploration and Selection of Research Topic

The most unfamiliar and challenging process in graduate school is ‘writing a thesis.’ Selecting a research topic is the very first task in the process of conducting thesis research. Once the research topic and corresponding hypotheses are determined, the research design and methodology are aligned accordingly. Therefore, seniors often consider the selection of a research topic as the most difficult and crucial stage in the process of conducting thesis research.

The research topic refers to the area that you will delve into deeply in your research (it can be thought of as the key keywords that appear at the bottom of a research abstract). Since master’s degree research is mostly conducted by beginners, rather than choosing overly broad and extensive topics, it is advisable to select a limited scope that one can realistically handle.

The exploration of a research topic is carried out through empirical observations and literature review. It involves confirming your areas of interest or curiosity and reviewing previous research in that field. Reviewing prior studies allows for the refinement of initial questions and the specification of research problems using ‘variables’ (Kim, Hyesuk et al., 2013). Your area of interest may encompass subjects that have sparked interest during coursework, curiosity experienced through personal observation or experiences, or issues encountered in daily life or work that you are eager to address.

Appropriate research topic



- A topic that aligns with my interests and passions.
- A topic suitable for receiving guidance and training from the advisor.
- A topic where I can gather and analyze data within my capabilities.
- A topic with a clear research target and scope that is not overly extensive.
- A meaningful topic in my area of interest for my career
(research or employment, etc.).

2 Literature Review

Literature review involves reading and summarizing books, papers, and materials. It occurs at various stages and serves multiple purposes throughout the research process. In the initial stages of research, the first objective of the literature review is to explore and select a topic of interest, as mentioned above. During the topic selection phase, the literature review helps not only through experience but also by examining recent research topics through literature, identifying keywords of interest.

Secondly, the objective is to connect the area of interest with theory. Even if the area of interest stems from personal experience or curiosity, for scientific research, it is essential to define how the phenomenon of interest is conceptualized or operationalized, and how it relates to existing theories. Therefore, while reviewing prior research on the chosen topic, you need to learn about the area, identify and

operationalize variables of interest, verify if there are any unexplored research questions in previous studies, and establish the relevance of the topic to existing theories.

Exploring Prior Research: Refer to Tips for Master's Thesis Writing

Part 3. Exploration and Review <https://youtu.be/GCzKc1w4wc0>



3 Development of Testable Hypotheses/Models

This is the stage where one concretizes the questions and variables they want to verify within the chosen topic of interest.

In this phase, concepts learned through literature review are applied to construct variables such as independent and dependent variables. Logical inferences about the relationships between each variable are made, and these are formulated into testable

statements, referred to as hypotheses. According to Kerlinger and Lee (2000), testable hypotheses imply that the variables involved are measurable. Research projects are structured based on the extent to which something can be observed and measured because research must involve aspects that are observable and measurable. Therefore, if a hypothesis is not testable, research on that topic becomes impossible (Elmes et al., 2012).

4 Research Design

Once hypotheses or models are formulated, the most suitable methodology for testing them is determined. Research methods such as interviews, observations, surveys, experiments, etc., are selected, and detailed methods and procedures are designed within each research method to ensure reliability and validity. Reference to prior studies is made during this phase as well, considering how variables were manipulated or measured, the sequence and procedures of the research, and any extraneous variables that need consideration. Also, attention is given to ensure ethical considerations. Particularly, some research involving human subjects requires approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), so it is essential to seek and obtain such approval. To design a research study effectively, it is necessary to learn about research methods and designs. Participation in collaborative research, projects, and involvement in senior colleagues' research in the lab often provides practical experience with the procedures. At this stage, graduate research typically undergoes preliminary review, and feedback from the review committee is received to modify research hypotheses/models or methodologies as needed.

5 Conducting a Pilot Study

Before officially undertaking the main research, a pilot research/test is conducted to test and prepare for the research on a smaller scale. The pilot research/test is similar to the actual research but conducted on a simplified scale, allowing for the examination of specific details related to research materials, tools, and procedures.

6 Conducting a Study

After conducting a pilot research/study and analyzing it to check for any flaws in the research design and implementation, such as the manipulation effects of variables or measurement outcomes, the main research is then conducted.

7 Result Analysis and Interpretation

Once data collection is complete, the results are analyzed to verify the hypotheses. During this process, it is crucial to determine the most suitable analytical tools and methods for testing one's hypotheses. Learning about data processing and analysis is necessary for this purpose, and reference to prior studies can also guide the selection of appropriate analysis methods. Methods for presenting and interpreting results are learned and applied through coursework, prior studies, and experiences with data analysis in collaboration with senior colleagues or within a research lab.

8

Thesis Presentation and Publication

Once the research is completed, the process of writing and publishing the thesis begins. In reality, researchers often write portions of the thesis, such as theoretical background, research methods, and hypotheses, during the research process. After the research is finished, the results and discussion are added. If you wish to publish your thesis as a regular article in an academic journal, you can modify the length and flow of the manuscript. Additionally, you may undergo peer review by experts in the specific field, and upon successful evaluation, publish it in the academic journal. Regular journal articles are subject to more rigorous scrutiny by experts in the field as they are publicly accessible to a wider audience, both within and beyond the academic community.

The difference between a thesis and a typical logical essay lies in the fact that a thesis often presents new results through research or experimentation, aiming to assert and contribute something novel. A thesis, like a general paper, systematically and logically presents one's academic research results, opinions, and arguments in a specific format. The process includes selecting a research topic, literature review, research design and implementation, data analysis, and conclusion derivation (Reference: Wikipedia).

Differences between a thesis and a typical academic journal paper

Category	Thesis	Academic Journal Paper
Purpose	Degree Acquisition	Disseminating /Sharing New Research Findings in the Academic Community of the Relevant Field
Volume	Around 100~400 Pages	Around 20~40 Pages
Format	Subject to the regulations of the affiliated institution (university)	Subject to the regulations of the respective academic society (journal)
Reviewers	Professors appointed as reviewers, in addition to the thesis advisor (3 for master's thesis, 5 for doctoral dissertation)	Evaluators appointed by the academic society (3 to 5 members)
Disclosure Status of Reviewers	Disclosed	Not-disclosed
Publication Method and Timing of the Thesis/Paper	Publicly available at the affiliated university upon graduation	Publicly available in the same issue of copy, in accordance with the regulations of the society

Source : Natural Campus Library, Myungji University 'Proper Thesis Writing Techniques for Novice Researchers'

<https://youtu.be/1YSnNR1jcys>

[Reference Material] Classifying Academic Achievements

<https://hanyang-kr.libguides.com/c.php?g=677569&p=6183542>

Recommended by Seniors!

Things to Prepare Before Entering a Master's Program

Setting Goals and Setting Areas of Interest

Why do people enter master's programs? As you read this, think about the reasons you entered graduate school. Despite having various purposes for pursuing graduate education, entering graduate school is not a result of committing a sin.¹⁾

Some individuals pursue graduate studies for personal growth and intellectual curiosity. Others enter graduate school to establish networks with experts in their field and obtain a degree that can enhance their careers, including those aiming for a Ph.D. Some people pursue a master's degree to realistically enhance their academic credentials, while others seek to acquire specialized knowledge and skills for their current or prospective jobs, aiming for higher salaries or better career opportunities.

There is no inherently preferable expectation or purpose among the various ones. However, what is crucial is to clearly define why one is entering graduate school and what one aims to achieve during the graduate program.

1) According to a humorous saying on the internet, if a boy commits a sin, he goes to a juvenile detention center, and if a university student commits a sin, they go to graduate school.

In reality, most people have some purpose and goals for entering graduate school, even if not explicitly defined. It is essential to be aware of these reasons. Afterward, it becomes important to explore and decide whether entering graduate school is necessary to achieve what one desires. If so, one can determine which university and degree program align with their goals and which professor's guidance would be suitable. Having a clear objective allows for establishing priorities in graduate school life and academics and prevents being swayed by external factors.

Why did professors and seniors at Sungkyunkwan University pursue graduate studies and how?

* Necessity of Graduate School Admission

https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/prepare/why_need.htm

* Sharing of Admission Cases

[:https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/prepare/why_ex.htm](https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/prepare/why_ex.htm)



Exploring and Meeting with Advisors

If you have determined what your goals are during your master's program (or graduate school life), as mentioned earlier, you will decide on the university, major, and advisor. Among these, the advisor is the most important but often challenging figure to contact, as many may not know how to approach them. However, professors are also individuals before being professors. Reflecting on how you typically navigate relationships, it is possible to reach out without violating etiquette and effectively present yourself.

If we summarize the experiences of your seniors in searching for an advisor, it can be outlined as follows

1 Choose a suitable advisor by exploring potential options while in undergraduate studies

The easiest and most efficient way to adapt quickly to graduate school is when you have already identified a professor during your undergraduate courses. Through classes, there is a time for both the professor and the student to explore each other. The professor can assess the student's attitude and academic abilities in advance, and the student can anticipate the professor's mentoring style. Naturally, you can request a meeting and use this opportunity to propose or receive suggestions for activities like participating in research labs, studies, or working as an undergraduate research assistant, thus preparing for graduate school life in advance. Therefore, if you are interested in pursuing graduate studies, it is recommended to carefully observe professors in your specific field of interest (e.g., a sub-major in psychology such as cognitive psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, etc.) while taking classes in your third or fourth year. Requesting a meeting to discuss graduate

school admission is advised. However, it's important to note two things during this process. Firstly, check whether the sub-major in a different university aligns with your goals. Failing to explore opportunities in other universities due to current difficulties and fears might lead to missing out on valuable chances. Secondly, avoid showing interest in too many professors. Over-committing does not leave a good impression in any relationship.

2 Decide on the school and department and explore advisors.

If you have a specific major in mind, narrow down a few renowned universities offering that major. Compile a list of professors within that school and department. Many professors have personal websites, so utilize them to find information on their research interests and recent projects. Examine whether they have conducted independent research, but also focus on collaborative research with their mentees, as it can help you assess if their research aligns with your future projects. If a professor's website is not available, use academic paper search engines (e.g., Google Scholar, RISS, specific academic journals) to search for the professor and review their publications.

3 Explore advisors based on your research interests.

If you have a specific field or topic you are interested in researching, use academic paper search engines to find papers related to that field or topic. By closely examining the authors of these theses, you may identify researchers who primarily focus on the same research area. Not all researchers become advisors (note: in most Korean universities, only full-time faculty members can be advisors), so confirm whether the identified researcher is a full-time faculty member by checking the department's website. After verification, send an email requesting a meeting.

If you are not currently an undergraduate student, utilizing both the second and third approaches is possible. If you have a clear idea of the research topic you are passionate about, the third approach may be more suitable. In cases where a specific school's system is crucial or when considering your career, prioritizing the university or department over the advisor may be necessary. In such situations, a strategic approach aligning your interests with the research topics of potential advisors becomes essential.

After exploring advisors, it is most common and typical to request a meeting via email. Trying to obtain a professor's contact information forcefully or visiting their office without prior notice may be awkward for anyone, not just professors.

When sending an email, instead of proposing to be your advisor right from the start, wouldn't it be better to express your interest in the professor's research topic and express your desire for a meeting? While each professor may have a different style, if you're unsure how to approach, start by introducing yourself, stating your specific research interests, and explaining why you are particularly interested in contacting them. Request a meeting with the professor in a polite and respectful manner.

Familiarizing Yourself with Research Lab Life

In graduate school, the importance of not only the advisor but also peers, both seniors and juniors, and the culture of the research lab cannot be overstated. Graduate students have diverse lifestyles - some may conduct research at the library or home, only going to school for meetings and classes, while others may follow a more structured 9-to-6 routine in the research lab. The dynamics of one's graduate school experience, as well as academic pursuits, can vary significantly depending on the peers with whom you spend long hours. Some research labs may mandate the 9-to-6 schedule, making it essential to consider the atmosphere and the work style of the peers when choosing a lab. If possible, it is recommended to not only have meetings with professors but also seize the opportunity to meet with current master's and doctoral students in the research lab. This allows you to observe the lab's atmosphere and work practices. Meeting with senior students provides valuable insights into graduate school life and obtaining information about the lab. If direct meetings with lab members are not feasible, seeking input from graduate students in related fields can still offer a general understanding of the lab environment and dynamics. If you have already entered graduate school, consider that your interactions and the culture you contribute to can significantly shape your experience.

Status and Admission Preparation Guide for Sungkyunkwan University Graduate School

BK21, Department/Research Lab Status:

<https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/prepare/introduce.htm>

Graduate School Preparation Guide:

https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/prepare/information_step1.htm

Insights from Seniors!

Tasks to Undertake After Entering a Master's Program

Graduation Requirements for Obtaining a Master's Degree

To obtain a master's degree at Sungkyunkwan University, following certain criteria must be met. Therefore, after completing the master's program, fulfilling the following requirements becomes essential. Let's first explore the graduation requirements for obtaining a master's degree:

However, the following criteria are general, and they may vary depending on the specific department. It is crucial for individuals to verify the requirements of their affiliated department. Additionally, it's important to note that many research labs may have additional research activities or lifestyle expectations beyond the graduation requirements. Thus, individuals should be aware of and consider these factors when pursuing their master's degree.

※ It is essential to refer to the administrative academic system information through the links provided below. For detailed matters, please contact the administrative office or department office of your affiliated department to ensure a smooth progress in completing the educational curriculum and obtaining your degree.

[Information on Academic System]

Guide to Academic System for Graduate Degree Programs

<https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/edu/system.htm>

Guide to Academic System for Graduate Theses and Graduation Requirements
https://www.skku.edu/skku/edu/bachelor/ca_de_schedule01.do

[Contacts for College Administration and Department Offices]

Contact information for department offices

<https://gradschool.skku.edu/grad/life/office.htm>

Contact information for college administration offices

https://bit.ly/2023skku_officetele



1 Registration and Accumulation of Credits

- Enrollment for a minimum of 4 semesters, completing around 24 credits (Around 36 credits for non-academic degrees)
- Mandatory completion of courses on thesis writing and research ethics (typically taken in the first semester)
- For arts/natural sciences, compulsory completion of safety education each semester
- Maintaining a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or above

2 Thesis Submission Qualification Exam: Generally consists of 2 major subjects and 1 foreign language subject.

- Exemption from the foreign language exam is possible with a certified score (refer to departmental criteria for certification standards).
- The number of exam subjects and passing criteria may vary by department (e.g., a foreign language exam consisting of 2 subjects in some departments).

3 Thesis Writing²⁾ and Evaluation: Preliminary Review + Final Review

Depending on the major, mandatory participation in international conferences and publication of papers in academic journals may be required.

- Depending on the major, the thesis may be substituted with publication in SCI or SSCI-level, or KCI-level academic journals.

4 Thesis Submission

- Depending on the major, writing the thesis in English may be mandatory.

2) In this document, the term “Thesis” refers to both master’s theses and combined master’s and doctoral theses. If necessary to distinguish from doctoral theses, they will be specifically labeled as master’s thesis and doctoral thesis.

Key Tasks for Each Semester in Writing the Master's Paper

For many graduate students who worry about when and what tasks to undertake during the master's program and want to ensure they are not missing anything, senior students have shared their experiences through group interviews based on receiving a master's degree at Sungkyunkwan University. The following content summarizes the tasks undertaken by graduate students in the humanities and social sciences as well as the natural sciences at each semester. For non-academic degree seekers, although they must take dense courses each semester, the tasks do not vary significantly by semester. The content below is primarily organized based on examples from academic degree seekers. We hope that you can use this information as a guide to navigate your own graduate school life and academic journey effectively.

However, just like graduation requirements, it's important to note that the types and levels of tasks required each semester can vary based on the academic field, major, and advisor. Additionally, requirements for applying for thesis (preliminary) reviews and eligibility criteria for the thesis submission qualification exam may differ depending on the affiliated department. Please be aware of these variations depending on your department.

Semester	Period	Major Tasks
	Pre-admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring information about the advisor and researchers / Pre-admission meeting with professors • Enable to participate in undergraduate research student, graduate school internship and research credit system, etc. (Participation is common for natural science majors, and during this period, seminars in research labs and learning methods for utilizing research equipment are conducted) • When entering the graduate school of the university that one has got the bachelor's degree from, it is possible to apply for the combined bachelor's and master's degree program (refer to the school's website for details)
1st Semester	March ~ August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration/Credit completion: Course registration (9 credits) *, Learn major fundamentals and theories, take courses on Academic Writing and Research ethics (+ For arts and natural science majors, completion of safety education is mandatory every semester) • When an advisor is not assigned, search for / have meetings with potential advisors • Adaptation to the research lab: Form relationships with advisor, seniors, and peers • Thesis research - Explore and select research topics: Select consultation with the advisor • Literature search and review • Participation in research (1st to 3rd year): It is common for natural science majors to participate as research assistants from the 1st year
	September ~ December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration/Credit completion: Course registration (9 credits), take Research Methodology (or individual study in research methods) • Thesis research - Select research issue (2nd to 3rd year): Select specific research issues within the research topic • Thesis research - Design and prepare research progress • Participate in research: Participate in research lab projects, train in research progress (conduct experiments and analysis, data collection, master methodology)
2st Semester		

2st
Semester

January
~
February

- Others - Language study, prepare for foreign language proficiency for the Nonjashi**
- When advisor is not assigned, recommendation for selection until the 2nd year research issues within the research topic
- Prepare for research design and progress (prepare survey questions, experiment materials, etc.). (+ Depending on the research lab, train for publishing papers on collaborative research, Enable to present papers at conferences)

3st
Semester

March
~
June

- Registration/Credit completion: Course registration (9 credits) (+ For arts and natural science majors, completion of safety education is mandatory every semester)
- Comprehensive Examination: Exemption of Nonjashi (Thesis submission eligibility exam) / Apply for thesis defense (late February to early March)/ Exam administration (late March)
- Apply for thesis guidance and evaluation: Apply for advisor and preliminary evaluation (mid-April)
- Prepare preliminary evaluation manuscript: Comprise introduction, theoretical background, formulation of research issues and hypotheses, research methods, expected results, and significance of the research
- Preliminary evaluation (May~June) and submit evaluation results
(+ Conference presentations)
※ Some majors require thesis writing in English (expanding trend)
※ Some departments substitute thesis publication for thesis submission

July
~
August

- Revise research model and manuscript based on preliminary evaluation results
- Pilot study, prepare and inspect research materials, etc

4st
Semester

September
~
December

- Apply for thesis defense: Apply for final defense/ Make payment of defense fee (mid-October/early November)
- Conduct research, data collection (main survey, main experiment), and data analysis
- Write and proofread the thesis: Revise manuscript based on preliminary evaluation + write results and discussion
- Thesis defense (November ~ December) and submit defense results
(+ Conference presentations)

4st Semester		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit the thesis manuscript (confirmation documents, online files, printed copies, each 1 copy to the administrative office)
	January ~ February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for future career after graduation (Start doctoral studies or prepare for jobs) • Conference presentations or publication of papers: Publishing thesis in academic journals is a separate process from thesis writing

* When entering graduate school in a different major, you may be required to take prerequisite courses from the undergraduate curriculum.

** Thesis Submission Qualification Exam: Sometimes referred to as a “Nonjashi”.

It is an examination conducted to prove eligibility for thesis submission and varies by department. Typically, it consists of [2-3 subjects selected by the department and a foreign language exam.]

This exam is generally taken in the third semester, and the result is indicated as Pass/Fail.

Source: Educational Development Center (2022). Master’s Degree FGI(Focus Group Interview)

The time-frames written above are based on the assumption of enrollment in the first semester. In general, refer to the ‘This Year’s Graduate School Academic Schedule’ below, and for more detailed information, be sure to check with the administrative office or the department office (refer to p.20) to avoid missing any procedures.

[Check this year’s graduate school academic schedule.]

https://www.skku.edu/skku/campus/skk_comm/event.do

1st semester



Registration/Credit Completion

The number of credits required varies by department, but typically it is around 24 credits, with non-academic degrees often requiring more credits. As 24 credits correspond to 3 credits per 8 courses, it is common to take 3 courses in the first semester (1st term), 3 courses in the second semester (2nd term), and 2 courses in the third semester (3rd term) upon enrollment. However, if your background in the major is insufficient, such as when entering a graduate school in a different major from your undergraduate studies, it may be necessary to consult with your advisor and take undergraduate courses as prerequisites. The registration period usually takes place in mid-February and is conducted on the Sungkyunkwan University course registration site (<https://sugang.skku.edu>). In the first term, it is recommended to take foundational theory courses, but there may be essential designated courses by the department or advisor, such as thesis writing methods and research ethics, so be sure to check and register. Especially for the College of Arts and Sciences and majors in natural sciences, though not regular courses, safety education must be completed each semester.

Advisor Selection and Adjustment to the Research Lab

If an advisor has not been assigned even after admission, it is recommended to explore and select an advisor during the 1st term (refer to p15-18). For non-academic degree seekers, advisors may be randomly assigned in the 3rd term, but for academic degree seekers, having an advisor selected is crucial for the practical progress of degree-related research. Once an advisor is selected, focus

on adapting well to the advisor and research lab while building a solid foundation in the fundamental skills that need to be trained in the lab. Rather than seeking relationships with peers and seniors only when needed later, it is advisable to establish good relationships with peers and seniors during the 1st term. Seniors often emphasize that colleagues played a significant role both psychologically and academically during the challenging graduate school journey.

Thesis Research - Exploration and Selection of Research Topic³⁾

The first step in the epic journey of writing a thesis is the exploration and selection of a research topic! The exploration of research topics can be derived from literature, existing research topics in the lab, recommended topics from the advisor, projects the student is involved in, work experiences, social issues, and articles. However, when selecting a topic for the thesis research, it is essential to consider one's own interests and passions while consulting with the advisor for the final decision. The master's thesis demonstrates that the student has been trained as an independent researcher. Therefore, for master's students who may lack experience and training, it is crucial to seek the advisor's agreement and guidance rather than deciding on a topic independently. In the same vein, when deciding on a thesis topic, it is advisable to choose a topic that the advisor can guide well. Since advisors may not be capable of guiding every topic, selecting a topic that aligns with the advisor's expertise and interests would be ideal.

3) It can be considered as the main area of interest in the research and can be viewed as the key keywords written at the bottom of the abstract.

Literature Search and Review

Literature searches should be consistently conducted at various stages throughout graduate school. To facilitate this, seniors often utilize library literature searches and frequently use Google Scholar. By examining the video linked below, one can learn various tips, such as setting up alerts for keywords in Google Scholar to stay updated on the latest research or organizing reviewed literature (using tools like Korean/Word, Excel, Notion, etc.) for easy retrieval when writing theses in the 3rd to 4th terms.

Research Participation

Graduate research is akin to riding a bicycle or swimming. No matter how diligently you study, it is essential to accumulate practical experience and undergo training. To achieve this, it is necessary to participate in research projects in the lab or assist seniors in their research. This provides an opportunity to learn the actual research process and thesis writing beyond textbooks. Depending on the lab, such training may lead to conference presentations or published papers. Humanities and social science majors seem to have many research participation opportunities in the 2nd term, while natural science majors often start participating in projects as research assistants from the 1st term, gradually acquiring skills in managing research equipment. By the 3rd to 4th terms, they may even lead projects and train juniors, taking on roles like Project Manager (PM).

Seniors will tell you!

Tips for Writing a Master's Thesis

Parts1. Procedure for Conducting Degree Research <https://youtu.be/WGwtspkQhWQ>

Parts2. Exploration and Selection of Research Topics <https://youtu.be/YNACBsX4JSM>

Parts3. Literature Search and Review <https://youtu.be/GCzKc1w4wc0>



2st semester



Registration/Credit Acquisition

Similar to the 1st term, in the 2nd term, students typically take 9 credits across 3 courses. During the 2nd term, it is common to take a research methodology course or study it independently. This is because in the following term (3rd term), students will actually begin their thesis research. Therefore, it is beneficial to familiarize oneself with research methodologies that will be utilized in their own thesis research. Learning various research methods such as surveys, experiments, and the analysis tools to be used (SPSS, SAS, Mplus, Python, R, etc.), as well as basic statistical concepts and specific validation methods, is crucial. If the research methodology for the thesis has been decided or there are potential options, it is advisable to focus on studying these in advance!

Thesis Research - Selection of Research Problem

In the 1st term, many students may not have selected their research topics. If the topic and research problem have not been determined yet, prioritize the process of exploring and selecting a topic. Once the research topic is chosen, proceed to formulate specific research problems, i.e., testable concrete hypotheses. To achieve this, it is essential to establish a logical basis for hypothesis derivation and gather literature-based evidence effectively. A good research problem is one that has not been previously validated, has a logical derivation process, and can contribute academically. If there are assignments involving short papers in the courses, using them to explore research problems and conducting literature reviews can be a beneficial strategy, connecting coursework with the thesis writing process.

Thesis Research - Research Design and Preparation for Research Progress

If you need to conduct experiments right in the 3rd term, it is recommended to roughly complete the research design and preparation during the winter vacation period. Research design includes finalizing variables, manipulations, and measurement methods for each variable, as well as determining research materials and detailed procedures. The timing to start the thesis research varies depending on the major, guidance from the advisor, and your personal growth pace, but conducting preliminary research in the 3rd term provides stability.

Other

In preparation for the busy 3rd term, some students take the language proficiency test ahead of time. Additionally, writing a thesis research proposal allows you to identify any areas where preparation is lacking and thoroughly address those aspects during the winter break. If your advisor has not been assigned yet, make sure to choose an advisor by the end of the 2nd term. While the department may assign an advisor in the 3rd term, it's beneficial to proactively seek out an advisor who aligns well with your interests and conduct a meeting before an advisor is randomly assigned.

3rd semester



Comprehensive Examination

often referred to as the “Nonja-si,” is an assessment of academic capabilities and competencies required for writing and submitting a thesis. Typically conducted in the 3rd term before the preliminary and final defenses, the exam is subject to department-specific regulations. The passing criterion is usually set at 70 points, and candidates have the opportunity to retake unsuccessful subjects. Generally, the application period for the exam is in early March of the 3rd term, with the actual exam taking place at the end of March. It is crucial to stay informed about the application process by checking announcements from the administration or department office to avoid missing the application window. Some senior students may prepare in advance for the foreign language section by obtaining certified language proficiency scores or taking specific courses to be exempt from this part of the exam. The specific criteria for language proficiency exemption may vary by department.

Submission of Application for Thesis Supervision and Evaluation

This application is submitted for the preliminary defense, and it usually involves submitting formal documents related to the selection of a thesis supervisor and the preliminary defense process. This submission is typically done in mid-April at the department office or affiliated administrative office.

Preliminary Examination

An internal examination committee composed of professors within the university is formed, and the preliminary examination manuscript is submitted to the committee members about 2-3 weeks before the examination. Usually, a short period of around 10 minutes is given for the examination, and the results are typically announced on the same day. Once the official documents regarding the examination results are submitted to the school, the administrative process is completed, confirming the passage of the preliminary examination.

Research Design and Manuscript Revision

During the vacation, based on the feedback from the examination, the research design of the main study is modified, and the paper is revised, including theoretical background, hypothesis formulation process, etc. Detailed preparations for the actual research progress are then completed.

4th semester



Submission of the Thesis Defense Application

It is an application for the final defense, and usually, by mid-October, formal documents for the final defense must be submitted along with the payment of the thesis defense fee.

Research Execution, Data Collection, and Analysis

Conduct the main survey or experiment, collect data, and simultaneously initiate data analysis. Since the final defense typically takes place in December, completing data collection by October is advisable.

Thesis Writing and Proofreading

Concluding the thesis writing by adding the results and interpretations to the preliminary defense draft. However, in reality, it is common not to use the preliminary defense draft as it is, and many researchers rewrite their manuscripts. The discussion section includes the interpretation of results, logical explanations for whether hypotheses are supported or not, connections with previous research, significance and limitations of the study, and a research summary. Similar to the preliminary defense draft, it is advisable to exchange feedback and revisions with the advisor 2-3 times for the final defense manuscript.

Final Defense

Similar to the preliminary defense, an internal examination committee composed of professors within the university is formed. The final draft of the thesis is submitted to the defense committee 2-3 weeks before the final defense. The final defense often lasts for approximately 15 minutes, and the results are typically announced on the day of the examination.

Submission of Thesis Manuscript

After passing the final defense, administrative procedures are completed by submitting required documents, the thesis file, and one printed copy to the university by early January. Therefore, even after the December assessment is concluded, many individuals are often busy making revisions to their thesis based on feedback from the examination committee.

Career Preparation After Graduation

This period, which includes preparing for doctoral programs, employment, etc., is also part of the 4th stage. While many individuals might be too busy to focus on practical preparations until they have completed the entire process of submitting their dissertations, it is advisable to at least decide whether to pursue a doctoral program or enter the workforce (even if it's not immediately). Making such decisions early on helps minimize unnecessary gaps in planning.

Conference Presentation or Paper Publication

This involves publicizing the dissertation not only within the university but also externally. While not mandatory, it is advisable for graduate students who wish to continue their research careers, as it contributes to building a professional profile. Some graduate students present posters or oral presentations at domestic or international conferences related to their research topics. More proactively, they may submit manuscripts to domestic or international academic journals, undergo peer review, and, upon acceptance, get them published. Depending on the department, achieving publication in certain recognized journals (e.g., SCI, KCI) might even exempt the student from preliminary and final evaluations, so it's important to set clear goals. While the standards for journal publications are higher and more rigorous than for dissertations, aiming for journal publications can offer the advantage of skipping the dissertation writing and evaluation process, and the manuscript length is usually shorter, making it a viable option for consideration.

Senior's insights!

Challenges arising during the master's program and coping strategies for them

The master's program is a period when you experience graduate school for the first time, and it can be challenging for everyone due to limited experience in paper writing. To proactively identify and address factors that may make your academic journey difficult or precarious, let's explore the academic challenges that seniors have shared and the coping strategies they found helpful in overcoming them.

Academic Challenges and Coping Strategies		
	Academic Challenges	Coping Strategies
1	Lack of understanding about graduate school life	Preparation for graduate school, Attendance at graduate school orientation, and collaboration/support from colleagues
2	Guidance style and attitude of the advisor	Effort in communication, Prepared interaction, Advice and assistance from seniors
3	Challenges in self-management	Rest and reward arrangement, Specific goal setting, Stimulate motivation for learning, Psychological support from peers
4	Difficulty in research and paper writing	Senior's assistance, Exploration efforts



Lack of Understanding about Graduate School Life

This refers to occasions where individuals enter graduate school with insufficient understanding of the research, academic, and overall aspects of graduate life, or fail to understand the academic system properly. Problems, such as delays in graduation due to the inability to submit necessary administrative documents may arise.



Preparation for Graduate School, Attendance at Graduate School Orientation, and Collaboration/Support from Colleagues

Before entering graduate school, try to connect with individuals who are currently attending or have graduated from graduate school. Through them, explore the processes involved in conducting research at the graduate level. Meeting people from various majors and universities will be helpful in understanding the typical ecosystem of graduate school. After admission, make sure to attend the university-wide orientation or required courses (e.g., on paper writing and research ethics) to gain a good understanding. Moreover, refer to the academic schedule and regularly check the graduate school's website to ensure you don't miss any administrative schedules. Most importantly, engage in regular communication with people in the graduate school community to exchange information about research and administrative matters, making sure nothing is overlooked.



Lack of Understanding about Graduate School Life

Challenges include the absence of the advisor, the advisor's passive attitude or lack of support, and professor-centric thesis guidance that doesn't consider students' interests and abilities. However, above all, the most significant difficulty for graduate students is not knowing how to communicate with their advisors.

“I found it challenging that the advising professor suggested that it might be a good field to explore, and asked me to give it a try though I’ve never taken classes or studied on a related topic before.”

“In fact, the professor, as a figure, still feels quite formidable to me, so it’s not easy for me to initiate conversations with them.”



Efforts in Communication

Let’s accept the stories from seniors who say it’s difficult to meet the advisor even after graduation and try to be at ease. Instead, it may help to somewhat overcome the difficulty by creating frequent opportunities for communication within the permissible limits set by the advisor and consistently demonstrating such efforts. Instead, making frequent communication opportunities within the limits allowed by the advisor and consistently demonstrating such efforts would be helpful in somewhat overcoming the difficulty. We often perceive our advisor as a challenging figure, and as a result, we may tend to engage in only necessary communication or showcase our achievements. However, getting to know each other takes time, and interacting with individuals who find communication challenging is also true for the advisor. Let’s make an effort to seek guidance on important decisions, focusing on the progress and challenging aspects first. In reality, there are instances where, out of concern that the advisor might find it bothersome, we proceed with our thesis

without consulting or obtaining approval. However, this can later result in wasted efforts over an extended period. Just as midterm reports are important in the workplace, it is crucial to closely collaborate with the advisor throughout the process of advancing the thesis. Additionally, it is important to honestly communicate about the challenging aspects or alternative approaches considered better than prolonged lack of progress.



Prepared Interaction

Alongside communication efforts, engaging in prepared interactions is crucial. Overly dependent attitudes with inadequate preparation during communication with the advisor can potentially sow the seeds of discord. Instead of seeking permission with statements like ‘I’ve obtained the questionnaire, can I use it as is?’, present the situation as ‘I acquired the questionnaire and conducted a review. The reliability, validity, and appropriateness for the target age group seem suitable. However, upon closer examination of the items, I identified a need for adjustments. What do you think about making modifications like these?’ and provide both the original questionnaire and the preliminary proposed modifications for discussion. How does that sound? In the case of a paper, it can be challenging if it appears too casual, as if you sent your writing to the professor without even self-reviewing. If I were to put myself in the advisor’s shoes, wouldn’t I appreciate proactive interactions prepared for receiving feedback? (Reference:)



Advice and Assistance from Seniors

Since it may not be feasible to consult and discuss everything with your advisor, utilize the experience of seniors. Seniors can offer insights and support that align with your perspective. Changing your advisor's guidance style may not be easy. Reflecting on the original intention behind choosing this advisor before entering the program, and gaining an understanding of the advisor's style and training intentions through knowledgeable seniors can help reduce unnecessary emotional distress. Also, when feeling hurt by the advisor's minor words or actions, it is essential to vent frustrations with colleagues, seek comfort from seniors, and, above all, restore your well-being through personal stress management methods. Recognize that this entire process has meaning and an end, and find strength within yourself.

“...During the third term, when I was asked to conduct additional research on top of what I had done, I felt a lot of stress, wondering if I was lacking or if doing more research would allow me to graduate in the next semester.

However, later on, I realized that, in the professor's perspective, presenting domestic papers initially and progressing to international conferences later was considered a growth curriculum tailored to my development”

“When I find myself in a situation where it's truly unavoidable for me to meet the deadline, I usually communicate with the professor in advance. I explain that due to certain tasks and responsibilities, it seems challenging for me to meet the deadline, and in most cases, they understand and are accommodating...”



Reference Material: Appropriate Expectations for the Advisor

The entire process of a research paper is conducted autonomously and independently by the researcher, but on the other hand, it also involves seeking approval and assistance from the advisor. Therefore, finding the right points for interaction is crucial.

However, finding this appropriate balance is easier said than done. It can vary depending on the advisor's style and one's own preferences, as well as the research topic. Nevertheless, it's important to note that in the case of a thesis, the author is the researcher, and the advisor plays a guiding role in the process. Therefore, significant decisions related to the paper (e.g., selecting the topic and hypothesis, choosing research methods, making crucial decisions during the research process, paper writing and editing) should be discussed in advance with the advisor, but the detailed execution should be carried out by the researcher. While the advisor may not give clear Yes or No answers for various reasons, within this context, it is expected that the researcher will grow and gain insight during the process of conducting the paper (Kim Hyesook, 2013). Therefore, it would be excellent to approach the topic with a proactive and autonomous attitude, aiming to achieve an appropriate level in conversations with the advisor, while maintaining an attitude of accepting the advisor's suitable advice and guidance. Above all, instead of waiting for the advisor's contact, it would be beneficial to be prepared and reach out to the advisor appropriately.





Challenges in Self-Management

In the course of graduate studies, motivation can wane, and health or lifestyle issues due to stress may arise. A highly autonomous lifestyle can paradoxically lead to complacency, and an overwhelming number of projects and research tasks can hinder self-management. Whatever the cause, it is crucial to periodically address mental aspects such as anxiety and lethargy that may arise in both personal and academic life. Managing physical well-being, avoiding a lack of exercise, and preventing drastic changes in weight are essential for overall well-being.

“ Indeed, I consider the most challenging aspect of my graduate school life to be situations where my motivation for studying diminishes, commonly known as a ‘slump’ in academic motivation...”

“I’ve had significant concerns and anxieties about whether I can graduate by completing my thesis when other friends are gaining work experience, getting promotions, and advancing in their careers...”

“In my case, as I’ve been under a lot of stress, I found myself engaging in overeating. Consequently, my weight has rapidly increased, my health has deteriorated, and the constant sitting has led to eye discomfort as a basic issue. Additionally, I’ve started experiencing pain in my back and neck ...”





Rest and Reward Arrangement

As graduate students whose studies and research serve as a profession, it is natural to contemplate how to dedicate more time to these pursuits. However, it is equally important to manage physical well-being and take quality breaks to provide vitality to both study and research. Take care of your physical well-being by incorporating activities like stretching in the morning, a walk after lunch, or monthly outings like hiking. During these breaks, you might gain new perspectives on aspects of your research that were previously challenging. Seniors say utilizing various hobbies such as social gatherings with colleagues, watching movies, playing games, or traveling as suitable rewards that can reinforce your research. However, it's crucial to allocate appropriate time so that these breaks or hobbies can serve as rewards for restarting your research efforts.



Specific Goal Setting, Motivation for Learning

Let's establish concrete and achievable process goals, practicing their execution. Goals, such as those aimed at achieving the purpose of entering graduate school, are often considered challenging to accomplish all at once or may seem far off, extending well beyond the point of graduation. Large and ambiguous goals can sometimes be difficult and even appear impossible to achieve. In such cases, let's set simple, easy, and specific process goals and focus on their execution. Assessing where you want to be by the end of each semester and visually confirming what has been accomplished can help you feel a sense of achievement and move forward. If a whole semester seems too far, break down the tasks you need to do now and concentrate on executing each one, even if they are small, to experience a tangible sense of accomplishment. Assigning yourself tasks that can stimulate and motivate you is also a useful approach when facing a lack of motivation.

“And while juggling projects, I found that the requirements and schedules demanded by those projects were quite clear. The tasks had a logical flow, making it possible for me to integrate my research seamlessly and use them as milestones to progress in a similar manner.”

“So, without real drive and a clear goal to pursue, achieving that goal within the designated timeframe becomes truly challenging. Starting with minimizing procrastination and not postponing tasks that can be done today, even in small steps, has been my approach.”

“...Whenever there is an educational conference every year, I always tried to participate, whether it was presenting a poster or a paper. Such experiences from academic conferences have actually been a great source of stimulation and assistance.”



Psychological Support from Peers

The process of studying and conducting research in graduate school is challenging for almost everyone. Seniors, gathering their voices, unanimously stated that the most significant help during this process came from the support of their peers. The practical information and experiences that colleagues possess serve as valuable resources and inspiration. Knowing that I'm not alone in facing difficulties provides comfort to my heart and becomes the energy to start anew.

Firstly, what allowed me to endure and complete my master's program was the presence of colleagues, both in the doctoral and master's programs...

Having peers to share the journey with, maintaining harmonious relationships with those living in the lab, and progressing together would play a crucial role.”

“... There were many moments when my mental state crumbled, but every time I talked to my seniors, juniors, and peers, I realized that I wasn't alone in facing difficulties. Through those conversations, we encouraged each other, recognizing the challenges we all were going through, and I received a lot of emotional support in those moments.”

“... Not only exchanged information but also shared experiences of challenges and stress in similar aspects of studies through my peers. Discussing frustrations and stress during the learning process and offering support to each other have been immensely helpful... I believe I received significant assistance from my peers.”



Difficulty in Research and Paper writing

The difficulty of research and paper writing itself, the most important task in the graduate master's program, was also mentioned as an impediment to academic

adaptation. In particular, since most master's students have no experience in research and thesis writing, seniors said that each process feels difficult and difficult in itself. For example, there were cases where satisfaction was low compared to the time and effort invested in the course of the research, and where and how to write the thesis felt unclear. But, among them, it was often difficult to find research topics in particular.

“I felt overwhelmed and uncertain even in the process of writing my paper, ... I thought more practical and detailed assistance would be genuinely helpful.”

“... “In my opinion, the most challenging point of writing a paper, was deciding on the topic. I found it particularly difficult to determine what the focus of my research should be.”.”

“ When it comes to study, I always felt a sense of tangible output corresponding to the effort I invested even though my study efficiency might not be the best. However, with research, I did not always feel that the results were as definitively positive for the effort I put into it.”





Senior's Assistance

In many cases, graduate school progresses in a mentorship-oriented fashion. There may be various reasons, but I believe it is challenging to standardize the teaching of research and paper writing due to its reliance on practical 'implementation', much like riding a bicycle. Therefore, trying it out for yourself is the most important, and if it's challenging to start from scratch, it is crucial to indirectly experience or observe various cases. It is to say that before trying it out firsthand, it is important to grasp the experiences of seniors who have already gone through this process.

Participating, even in a small role, in the research or projects undertaken by seniors, and observing how they handle research-related tasks up close, is a valuable resource for distinguishing effective methods from less effective ones. If this is also challenging, creating connections with seniors and hearing a multitude of insights about research experiences is also possible. Moreover, after initiating one's own research, seniors are a resource for seeking assistance or consultation in quickly addressing various difficulties and challenges encountered, compared to seeking help from your advisor. For these reasons, if a research lab is structured with regular academic activities such as periodic seminars with the advisor and seniors, or collaborative research projects with seniors, it is essential to actively leverage these activities.

“Next, not only fellow students but also seniors and advisors were of great assistance. It was beneficial to have an environment where both senior colleagues and advisors, who could immediately point out if the research direction was not suitable or not, were frequently accessible.”

“So, the doctoral students here took the lead in publishing a significantly higher number of papers. As a result, we were able to actively participate by contributing to some papers. This, I believe, has been the most crucial aspect of our involvement.”

“For master’s students, since they had joined relatively recently, they had a bit less understanding of the research lab. On the other hand, for doctoral students, many of whom had been here for a longer period, they took more proactive roles in leading seminars and providing guidance on how to proceed with research in the future.”



Exploration Efforts for Research Topics

Seniors say that there are no shortcuts to finding research topics, and it is crucial not to neglect efforts to explore various avenues, including literature review, in the process. However, starting within too broad a scope can be overwhelming. Thus, it is helpful to identify research topics within the broader framework related to one’s interests, the lab’s research focus, recent keywords relevant to one’s career, or by connecting various keywords. (For more details, refer to p.6, p.26~28)



Extracurricular Academic Activities outside the Research Lab

It can be quite daunting when there is no research lab, and it may feel overwhelming if there are no peers or seniors to share experiences. However, most

likely, there are a few colleagues or seniors working with the advisor, so make an effort to interact with them actively. If this is challenging, engaging in extracurricular academic activities outside the research lab is also an option. Interacting with graduate students from other sub-fields within your major, attending conferences in your field, or even connecting with students from entirely different disciplines can provide opportunities to share difficulties encountered in the specific research process and learn from each other's approaches. While the specifics may differ, there can be shared experiences in the overall research journey that can be valuable to exchange.

“... I think it was beneficial to network with graduate students outside of my own research lab. Even if it's not your own lab, connecting with students from other institutions and collectively utilizing group intelligence through networking allowed me to expand my knowledge and learn collaboratively ...”

“... In the department I belonged to, there were external invited lectures, and master's or doctoral graduates from the same university sometimes took the initiative to lead special lectures. I believe these sessions were very helpful for my research.”



※ Note: Graduate Learning Methods seminar by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Held annually during the summer and winter breaks.

Every summer and winter break, please check the school's website for event/seminar announcements





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