



MSc in ACCOUNTING, AUDITING AND CONTROL

MASTER'S THESIS GUIDELINES

1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the guidelines for the writing of theses within the Master's Degree Programme in *Accounting, Auditing and Control* at the School of Economics and Management, University of Florence, as approved by the Board on 16 July 2025.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide clear and shared instructions, addressed to both students and faculty, regarding the qualitative and procedural requirements of thesis work. In particular, the document defines the distinction between a standard thesis and a research thesis, identifies the qualitative elements required to achieve the highest grade, and provides operational information for candidates and supervisors intending to submit a proposal for honours to the Examination Committee. These guidelines are intended to complement and align with the regulations of both the University and the School of Economics and Management. In the event of any conflict between the provisions contained herein and those established at the University or School level, the latter shall prevail, and the conflicting provision in this document shall be deemed inapplicable.

2. TYPES OF THESES

Within the Master's Degree Programme in Accounting, Auditing and Control, two main types of final theses can be distinguished: the standard thesis and the research thesis. This distinction is not merely formal, but reflects different levels of depth, autonomy, methodology, and innovativeness. In no way does the classification between standard and research thesis imply a predefinition of topics, which may range from purely theoretical or scientific issues to the analysis of real-world business problems, including internship theses and case studies.

The **standard thesis** is characterized by a low degree of innovativeness and by a limited autonomous acquisition of analytical and methodological tools by the candidates. These theses are primarily based



on knowledge acquired during one or more courses within the degree programme and do not introduce significant elements of originality or critical depth.

Standard theses generally exhibit the following characteristics:

- a predominantly descriptive approach;
- absence of an explicit methodological framework;
- lack of original scientific contribution;
- limited or not clearly evident critical thinking.

While they may still represent a valuable educational experience, such theses are not considered eligible for honours and typically receive a maximum of 5 points in the final evaluation.

The **research thesis** is distinguished by a higher level of autonomy, rigor, and depth. It involves the independent acquisition and application of knowledge, tools, and methodologies that are not typically provided within the degree program, but are instead selected, reworked, and critically employed by the candidates throughout their thesis work. A research thesis is characterized by:

- the clear formulation of a research question or objectives;
- the explicit adoption of a methodological approach consistent with the research goal;
- the presence of critical thinking in the analysis of literature, data, and emerging implications;
- an original contribution, not necessarily in an academic sense (e.g., a scholarly publication), but as the autonomous development of ideas, interpretations, or evidence that enrich the analysis.

The research thesis goes beyond the descriptive approach typical of the standard thesis, adopting instead a scientific inquiry framework based on a solid logical and argumentative process. For this reason, research theses may be awarded up to 7 points in the final evaluation and are considered eligible for the highest grade and for a proposal of honours, provided that the qualitative requirements set out in the following section are met.

To clarify the epistemological and methodological foundations of the research thesis, this document includes an epistemological bibliography, which candidates are strongly encouraged to consult.

3. RESEARCH THESIS FORMATS

For evaluating the distinctive features of a research thesis, two main alternative formats may be considered: the monographic thesis and the academic paper.



A **monographic thesis** is characterized by a broad and structured scope, aimed at systematically and critically exploring a relevant topic, properly framed within the appropriate theoretical and scientific context. Despite the variety of possible structures, the monograph follows methodological criteria outlined, among others, in the guidelines of the Accademia Italiana di Economia Aziendale (AIDEA). This type of thesis seeks to develop an extensive and thoughtful discussion, capable of offering an original contribution through an in-depth exploration of the literature, conceptual models, and – where applicable – empirical evidence. In particular, it is important to distinguish between systematization monographs and research monographs, as defined in the AIDEA guidelines.

The **academic paper** format is more concise in length but particularly dense in content, which must be specialized, up-to-date, and ideally focused on frontier topics in current research. This format follows the typical structure of a scientific paper, with a clear and rigorous sequence of sections, generally including: introduction, literature review and theoretical background, definition of research questions or development of hypotheses, research methodology, presentation of results, critical discussion, and conclusions. All major methodological approaches – quantitative, qualitative, mixed, or critical – are accepted, provided they are applied in a conscious and coherent manner with respect to the research objectives.

4. QUALITATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARDING OF HONOURS

The thesis represents a fundamental stage in the educational path of the Master's Degree Programme in *Accounting, Auditing and Control*, to which a significant number of credits (ECTS) is assigned. For this reason, it is important to clarify the qualitative elements that the Examination Committee must take into consideration when determining the final grade.

The awarding of the highest grade with honours (*cum laude*) is not automatic and requires the simultaneous fulfilment of a set of conditions, which must be verified by the Examination Committee. In particular, an excellent thesis rests on three fundamental pillars, all of which must be verified:

1. **Marks Weighted Average:** the weighted average, expressed in one hundred and tenths (out of 110) and calculated according to the criteria set by the School of Economics and Management, is a necessary condition for eligibility for honours. Currently, the Teaching Regulations set a minimum threshold of 105/110;



2. **Quality of the thesis:** the quality of the thesis is assessed based on its coherent classification as a research thesis. Therefore, the thesis must meet the requirements of either a monographic thesis or an academic paper, as outlined in these guidelines. The Committee will evaluate the work in proportion to the level of study, avoiding the application of standards belonging to more advanced academic paths (such as PhD-level expectations). However, the following core elements of a research thesis are essential: a clearly formulated research question or objective; the adoption of a coherent and explicit methodological framework; the independent acquisition and application of knowledge beyond that provided in the degree programme; critical engagement with the literature and findings; and overall coherence among objectives, approach, and conclusions.
3. **Thesis defence:** the viva defence of the thesis in front of the Examination Committee is a key component of the overall assessment. It offers the opportunity to explore and verify the knowledge and skills autonomously developed by the candidate. This aspect is increasingly relevant in light of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and serves as a crucial tool for confirming the candidate's genuine command of the work. Moreover, argumentative clarity and effective communication are essential transversal skills for both professional and academic success. For this reason, only excellent and fully conscious thesis defences may be rewarded with honours. In case of a proposal for honours, the Committee will conduct a thorough assessment of the candidate's reasoning and discussion abilities.

5. THE HONOURS THESIS PATHWAY

The following section outlines the procedural steps required for theses intended for honours consideration. Failure to comply with the steps described below will invalidate any request for honours by the candidates or their supervisors.

At the beginning of the thesis process, **the candidate must express their intention to undertake a research thesis** by sending an email to the Program Coordinator, copying their supervisor. The email must indicate the intended graduation session, the thesis topic, and whether the work is framed as a monographic thesis or an academic paper. Following an individual meeting to verify the necessary prerequisites, **the supervisor confirms the candidate's intentions**. This preliminary declaration allows the Program Coordinator to assess the actual workload undertaken by the candidate and its



consistency with the number of ECTS awarded for the final thesis (currently ranging from 15 to 24 ECTS, corresponding to 375–600 hours of work).

Within the deadline for thesis validation established in the official calendar of the School of Economics and Management, **the supervisor must submit to the Program Coordinator both the final thesis and a document framing the work as a research thesis worthy of honours.** This document must specify:

- whether the thesis should be considered a monograph or an academic paper;
- which knowledge and skills were acquired and applied by the candidate, beyond those generally provided by the degree program;
- the research question or objective, the methodological approach adopted, and its consistency with the subject of study;
- the presence of critical thinking in the analysis of literature, data, and the resulting implications;
- the nature of the original contribution, intended as the autonomous production of ideas, interpretations, or evidence – even in the absence of any intention to publish the work scientifically.

The Programme Director will forward the thesis and the explanatory document to all members of the Examination Committee, who will review the work and prepare for the discussion with the candidate. During the public defence, the candidate must demonstrate mastery of the subject matter and full awareness of the work carried out.

6. TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

In order to allow candidates and supervisors to comply with this document, the guidelines shall apply starting from the April 2026 graduation session. In the meantime, Examination Committee members are reminded of the importance of verifying the three conditions outlined in Section 4 when awarding the highest grade with honours.



REFERENCES

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