



Amsterdam University College

Capstone Guidelines 2026-2027

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1. Introduction

These guidelines provide an overview of the bachelor thesis ('Capstone') process and rules at Amsterdam University College. The document addresses learning outcomes, supervisor and reader responsibilities, assessed components, and grading procedures. The guidelines are reviewed and updated annually, based on (student) evaluations and recommendations of the Capstone Quality Assessment Committee.

1.1 Intended Learning Outcomes

The Capstone¹ is the culmination of skills, knowledge and approaches students have acquired from their curriculum, *and therefore it must be completed during their final semester at AUC*. Students are expected to carry out research within a specified timeframe, under the supervision of a faculty member (core or partner). The research process should include the following activities: gather information and sources, formulate a thesis statement or research question, situate the research within an academic field of study, set objectives for the project, establish a methodology, and communicate the findings clearly and coherently in a polished piece of scholarly work.

Intended learning outcomes:

1. The student can identify a suitable topic for Capstone research, formulate and articulate the objectives of a thesis, and situate the work within an academic field of study.
2. The student can analyse and evaluate the most relevant scholarly work of the chosen academic field of study and synthesise this overview within the thesis.
3. The student can locate and use a suitable methodology and can effectively and professionally engage with primary or secondary data sources to develop the objectives of the thesis.
4. The student can interpret and critically evaluate key findings and connect them to foundational concepts within an academic field of study.
5. Based on the key findings, the student can discuss limitations, articulate future lines of research, and gesture towards or identify areas of relevance beyond academia.
6. The student can write a comprehensive and coherent thesis that meets the requirements of academic writing in the academic field of study.
7. The student can effectively communicate the results of their research through writing as well as by reflecting on, discussing and/or presenting their research.
8. The student works independently, shows initiative, and takes ownership of the Capstone process and results. Furthermore, the student takes feedback seriously and processes it appropriately, is able to manage their work and to keep to agreements and meet deadlines. The student demonstrates sufficient critical and reflective competency.

These learning outcomes contribute to the following intended learning outcomes of AUC's programme, as listed in the Academic Standards and Procedures (AS&P, Section 2.3): 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2f, 2g, 3a, 3b, 3d, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 5b, 7a, 7b, 7c.

1.2 Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity

A bachelor thesis can only be written in the field of the student's major, whether the work is focused on one discipline or incorporating several disciplines within their major. Of course, AUC strongly encourages students to approach their Capstone from a multidisciplinary perspective as this would be a natural extension of the programme's curriculum. If a

¹ Throughout the document when the word Capstone is used, its usage includes all assessed components. The word Thesis, on the other hand, refers solely to the final written product (Final Thesis).

student chooses a Capstone project that includes major-transcending interdisciplinarity (e.g., Social Sciences & Humanities, Social Sciences & Sciences, or Humanities & Sciences), then it is expected that the student's Capstone would still need to qualify as a research project within the student's major. Students undertaking a major-transcending, interdisciplinary Capstone must have an academic with a PhD in a discipline within their major as primary supervisor from the start of the project. They may additionally involve a second supervisor from another discipline, who can serve as an advisor. The primary supervisor is also the examiner and is responsible for grading the assignments and entering the grades in Datanose. Supervisors can arrange amongst themselves if and how they divide the 15 supervision hours that are available for each individual Capstone project. Finally, students who choose a major-transcending, interdisciplinary Capstone must contact the relevant Head of Studies (from their declared major at AUC) before undertaking the project and receive written approval from that individual.

1.3 Writing a Capstone in the age of AI

AUC acknowledges that the use of GenAI tools by students and lecturers is widespread. In line with AUC's AI policy, instead of prohibiting its use during the Capstone process, AUC leaves the choice to utilise GenAI to Capstone supervisors and students, with the default position being that responsible use of GenAI is allowed. Supervisors must discuss with their supervisees, both at the start of the process and around deadlines for assessments, what responsible use of GenAI tools entails during the research writing process of the Capstone. A summary of this meeting must be recorded in Datanose, as part of the grading rubric for the Research Proposal assignment (this is the moment when it is formally recorded in Datanose, but the meeting should take place at the start of the Capstone process). To help discuss what responsible use of AI tools entails, supervisors can take inspiration from the AI-instructions created for students by the team of AUC's Advanced Research Writing course (see Appendix).

From product to process

Furthermore, to safeguard assessment validity in the age of GenAI, the assessment structure reflects a stronger emphasis on students' engagement with the research-writing process. As a way of actively engaging students in the Capstone project, we have increased the number of oral assessments and supervisors are asked to assess the (development of) the students' academic competency skills (see Section 4 for assessment structure).

More information about AUC's AI policy is available on student.auc.nl.

1.4 Capstone Supervisor and Capstone Reader

Students are responsible for finding an appropriate supervisor for their Capstone; supervisors are responsible for finding a reader for the research project in consultation with the student.

Requirements for supervisors

Students can only be supervised by an AUC Lecturer (core faculty staff members, partner faculty staff members teaching at AUC, or faculty staff members teaching at AUC on a short-term basis) or by a member of an AUC partner institution (UvA, VU or Amsterdam UMC). The supervisor must have completed a PhD, have a research background in the student's major, and should principally supervise theses within their field of expertise.

In cases where a Capstone supervisor does not have a PhD, equivalence needs to be demonstrated based on publication record and independent research experience. The student can ask their potential supervisor if they have a publication record and independent research experience and then share this information with the Capstone Coordinator by sending an email to capstone@auc.nl. The Capstone Coordinator will then consult the Board of Examiners, who will ultimately decide if an exception to the PhD criterion can be made. The Capstone Coordinator will share the BoE decision with the student.

Supervisors are allowed to supervise a maximum of five projects per academic year. Exceptions to this rule can only be made by the Capstone Coordinator after consultation with the Director of Education.

Requirements for readers

supervisors are responsible for finding a reader for the research project in consultation with the student. We strongly recommend working with supervisor and reader pairs that form a mix of AUC core faculty and Uva/VU/Amsterdam UMC partner faculty. This allows for variation in assessment pairs and creates an opportunity to bring in additional research expertise from different faculties. If a Capstone project has two supervisors due to its major-transcending interdisciplinarity, then the supervisor who is the formal examiner will be in charge of finding a reader. Only one reader is needed in these situations even though there are two supervisors.

Readers must either be an AUC Lecturer or a member of an AUC partner institution (see above). In exceptional circumstances, the Capstone Coordinator can give a supervisor and student permission to find a reader outside of AUC and its partner institutions, but this permission will only be granted if the coordinator is convinced that looking outside of the existing institutional network is necessary. Supervisors and students should contact the Capstone Coordinator about this if they have any questions.

The reader must have completed a PhD and have a research background in the student's major. In cases where a Capstone reader does not have a PhD, equivalence needs to be demonstrated based on publication record and independent research experience. The student or supervisor can ask their potential reader if they have a publication record and independent research experience and then share this information with the Capstone Coordinator by sending an email to capstone@auc.nl. The Capstone Coordinator will then consult the Board of Examiners, who will ultimately decide if an exception to the PhD criterion can be made. The Capstone Coordinator will share the BoE decision with the student.

Readers are allowed to assess a maximum of five Capstones per academic year. Exceptions to this rule can only be made by the Capstone Coordinator after consultation with the Director of Education.

Pre-law track students entering 'Civiel Effect schakeljaar vrijstellingstraject'

For pre-law track students who wish to eventually enter the *Civiel Effect schakeljaar vrijstellingstraject* at the UvA law faculty, the Capstone supervisor must have a graduate degree in law (LLM, JD or PhD, or equivalent).

To find a supervisor, students should feel free to contact individuals in their immediate network (e.g., lecturers that they have had during their studies), but they should also look beyond that network as well. A good starting point would be [AUC's faculty website](#), but students can also find potential supervisors by looking on the UvA and VU websites (searching relevant faculties and departments, et cetera). Also, [the Capstone page](#) on the AUC Student Information site has a list of past supervisors and readers, categorised by major.

1.5 Capstone Coordinator

The Capstone Coordinator is responsible for monitoring and improving the Capstone process, including the Capstone Guidelines. The Capstone Coordinator can also serve as a Capstone supervisor. To ensure that no conflicts of interest or problems arise in this situation, the student can consult with the relevant Head of Studies if needed.

Whenever questions or problems arise within a Capstone project, the Capstone Coordinator is the first point of contact (capstone@auc.nl), for supervisors and readers as well as students. Please contact the coordinator as soon as questions or problems emerge so they can mediate/intervene in an adequate and timely fashion.

2. Timeline and Deadlines

- Students are advised to start thinking about and contacting possible supervisors early in their fifth semester (see timeline below), just as they start *Advanced Research Writing*. Students who are planning to study abroad, and would therefore take Advanced Research Writing in their fourth semester, are advised to make earlier contact with possible supervisors, or they should be prepared to contact potential supervisors while they are on exchange.
- The student and supervisor should meet at least four times over the semester. The suggested meeting times are as follows: an initial meeting, ideally held at the beginning of the semester; a meeting after the Research Proposal is completed and assessed; a meeting either after the Writing Update is completed or after the Draft of Thesis is completed; and a meeting to hold the Oral Defence. It is left to the discretion of the student and supervisor to plan additional meetings if desired.
- The first of these meetings should be held at the beginning of the semester in which the Capstone will be carried out. This meeting should be used to discuss the student's initial ideas for the Capstone project and the supervisor's guidelines/perspective on responsible use of GenAI tools during the Capstone process (see Section 1.3 above).
- It is the supervisor's responsibility to find and assign a reader (in consultation with the student). We recommend this consultation happens either at the beginning of the semester (during the first meeting) or closer to the mid-point of the semester (during the second meeting). Both the student and the supervisor will be able to add the reader's details onto Datanose once the Capstone draft has been submitted.
- It is important that the student and supervisor agree on the expectations for the Writing Update during the meeting in which the feedback from the Research Proposal is given.
- All students are strongly advised to adhere to the Capstone Timeline. Note that the Final Thesis deadline is fixed: Capstones uploaded after the final deadline will automatically receive a 1.0 (see sections 5.2.2, and 5.2.3). *The supervisor and student can agree on slightly adjusted deadlines for all assessed components of the Capstone except the Final Thesis deadline.*
- *Important to note:* Students should be aware that supervisors and readers have 12 working days to provide feedback on assessments. Improper planning on the student's part does not constitute an emergency on the supervisor's part. Furthermore, the student should realise that the Capstone is 12 ECP, which amounts to a total workload of 336 hours, or 21 hours per week for 16 weeks.

Student deadlines for 2026-2027, Semester 1

Date	Task
Fri 4 September, 23:59	Add the supervisor's name and contact information to Portal.
Mon 5- Fri 9 October	Complete Oral Assessment Research Proposal
Wed 28 October, 23:59	Upload Writing Update to Portal.
Wed 18 November 23:59	Upload Draft of Thesis to Portal.
Wed 9 December, 23:59	Upload Final Thesis to Portal.
Mon 14- Fri 18 December	Complete Oral Defence

Student deadlines for 2026-2027, Semester 2

Date	Task
Fri 18 December, 23:59	Add the supervisor's name and contact information to Portal.
Mon 15 – Fri 19 March	Complete Oral Assessment Research Proposal .
Wed 7 April, 23:59	Upload Writing Update to Portal.
Wed 28 April, 23:59	Upload Draft of Thesis to Portal
Wed 19 May, 23:59	Upload Final Thesis to Portal.
Mon 24 – Fri 28 May	Complete Oral Defence

Supervisor (and Reader) deadlines, 2026-2027

Date	Task
<i>Semester 1:</i> Mon 5- Fri 9 October <i>Semester 2:</i> Mon 15 – Fri 19 March	Complete Oral Assessment of Research Proposal . Submit grade to Datanose within 12 working days of the assessment taking place.
<i>Semester 1:</i> 19 November – 8 December <i>Semester 2:</i> 29 April – 18 May	Submit Academic Competencies grade to Datanose after student's submission of Draft and before submission of Final Thesis.
<i>Semester 1:</i> 19 November – 8 December <i>Semester 2:</i> 29 April – 18 May	The reader's name and contact information must be added by either the supervisor or the student to Datanose; it is the final step before the Final Thesis is uploaded.
<i>Semester 1:</i> Mon 14- Fri 18 December <i>Semester 2:</i> Mon 24 – Fri 28 May	Complete Oral Defence . Submit the grade to Datanose within 12 working days of the assessment taking place.
Semester 1: 8 January Semester 2: 2 June	Submit the Final Thesis grade to Datanose within 12 working days of the thesis submission deadline. Please note: if a student has been granted an extension, the grade must be submitted within 12 working days of the new assessment deadline.

3. Supervisor and Reader Responsibilities

3.1 Supervisor

The role of the supervisor is to guide the student through the entire Capstone process. Therefore, it is necessary for a student to have the same supervisor throughout the project.

Specific supervisor responsibilities include:

- Providing guidance, suggestions and feedback on all graded and non- graded parts of the Capstone;
- Setting up at least four meetings with the student during the Capstone process;
- Monitoring progress;
- Confirming that all thesis requirements have been met;
- Finding and assigning a reader (in consultation with the student);
- Reporting any suspicion of plagiarism and/or fraud to AUC's Board of Examiners (see section 5.2.4 of this document and Appendix 2 of AUC's AS&P);
- Grading all assessed assignments in Datanose;
- Referring the student, if academic writing guidance is needed, to the AUC Writing Centre (for more information, see [here](#));
- Contacting the Capstone Coordinator (Capstone@auc.nl) in case a student is unresponsive to email communication for an extended period.

3.2 Reader

The role of the reader is to evaluate the Final Thesis. They are *not* to be involved in Capstone project as it progresses throughout the semester; their role is only to independently assess the Final Thesis of the Capstone. The reader should not consult with the supervisor while grading the Capstone thesis. Note: if the reader suspects plagiarism, they should follow normal procedures as outlined in AUC's AS&P (see section 5.2.4 of this document).

If a reader feels insufficiently competent to assess a thesis, they should contact the Capstone Coordinator to find a solution.

4. Assessed Components

4.1 Research Proposal Oral Assessment

The first step in the Capstone process is developing a research proposal and presenting it in an oral assessment. During this assessment, the supervisor evaluates whether the topic and approach presented in the proposal are sufficient and feasible. Additionally, the proposal must serve as an assurance that the supervisor and student share the same expectations in terms of research goals, activity, and workload. It should demonstrate the student's ability to compile research; select, evaluate and analyse sources; and situate the working research question or thesis within a specific research context. The proposal should include an informed description of the research design and methodology as well as a strong indication of the significance of the question or thesis within the academic field.

The research proposal can be presented as a PowerPoint presentation containing the components listed below. Supervisors may wish to deviate from this format and ask students to write a full proposal instead. In both cases, however, the assessment will be based on the oral presentation and the student's ability to answer questions about the content of the proposal. Please note that students in a supervision group may attend each other's oral assessments. The supervisor determines the extent to which peers may participate by asking questions. The supervisor remains responsible for completing the grading rubric.

4.1.1 Overview of Proposed Research

- Title and subtitle (if applicable). The title should be brief, descriptive and specific, and should reflect the importance of the proposal by providing a clear statement of the project's subject.
- Name of author (with affiliation: AUC) and email address.
- Name of supervisor (with affiliation: AUC, VU, UvA, Amsterdam UMC) and email address.
- Name of reader (with affiliation: AUC, VU, UvA, Amsterdam UMC) and email address. (Note: the reader may not be known at this point; often this topic is not discussed and/or decided by this time).
- Name of tutor
- Date of submission
- Name of major
- A list of abbreviations, if applicable
- Summary: a self-contained description of the activity to be undertaken, including: (a) overall project goal(s) and supporting objectives; (b) general plans (activities) to accomplish project goal(s); and (c) larger significance of the study.
- Five keywords/key phrases

4.1.2 Description of Proposed Research – either in bullet points on slides or written out in full proposal

- Introduction: A brief description of the project, including the rationale, research objectives and questions to be addressed. The broader relevance of the research question and/or thesis should also be addressed, not only across the academic field, but also beyond it in terms of societal, cultural, environmental, political, and/or interdisciplinary implications.
- Research context: In this part, students should situate their working thesis or research question within the scholarly discussion of their selected topic in the academic field. Key studies that have been used to generate the question or thesis should be identified, grouped, and synthesized. Secondary questions arising from a survey of the approaches taken to the subject, or from specific studies, should be identified and tested against the thesis or question.
- Methodology: In this part, students should identify and describe the discipline-specific or interdisciplinary methods required to conduct their analysis of the data and/or primary and secondary source materials in developing their research question or thesis. While these methods will vary across disciplines, students must demonstrate an awareness of the range of methods available and provide their

rationale for the selected methods. At this point in their studies, students should be aware of what methods are available and appropriate for their project. If a student has any questions about the availability and appropriateness of a specific method, or about their complete methodology, then the student should discuss this with their supervisor. The Capstone Coordinator and the Heads of Studies are also available for further consultation.

- **Ethics:** In cases where the Capstone project requires human participants, the AUC Ethics Committee's [checklist](#) must be completed and added to the proposal. If the Capstone project is part of another, broader project, and as such has already been approved by an Ethics Committee, then this form does not need to be filled out, but written proof of prior ethical approval from an accredited METC (Medisch Ethische Toesingscommissie) needs to be included, also see <http://www.ccmo.nl/en>. For animal experiments proof of approval (Project License number) from the Central Authority for Scientific Procedures on Animals (Centrale Commissie Dierproeven, CCD) should be provided, see <https://www.centralecommissiedierproeven.nl>.

If students or supervisors are looking for further guidance with regards to ethically approaching the research, they should visit [the "Ethics & Integrity \(in Research\)"](#) page on the AUC Student Information website.

4.1.3 Works Cited

All references cited should be complete and the referencing style should conform to one of the standard style guides in the academic field, e.g. MLA, APA.; if a student is unclear about what style would best fit their project, then they should consult with their supervisor. If a student submits a PowerPoint presentation, they should include one or more slides listing all the references.

4.1.4 Format and word count

- **Proposals presented as PowerPoint presentations:** There is no minimum or maximum number of slides, as long as the slides include the components listed above under 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3. The slide design should be clear and well-designed.
- **Written out proposals.** The word count range for written out research proposals (including footnotes; excluding title, summary, works cited, appendices, and one-page reflection) is between 1.500 and 2.500 words. This range applies to students in all majors.

Grading

The supervisor will grade the Research Proposal either during or shortly after the oral presentation and discussion of the proposal using the grading rubric that is available on Datanose (also see Section 6 – grading rubrics). The rubric consists of the following criteria: 1) quality of research question, 2) ability to reflect on selection and analysis of sources, 3) methodological choices and justification, 4) ability to justify and critically reflect on research choices (see Section 6).

We advise supervisors to ensure consistency between qualitative comments, rubric levels, and research proposal grades.

To avoid grade inflation, please keep the following benchmarks in mind:

- 7-8 range: signals a more than sufficient to good academic outcome
- 8-9 range: students who show an above-average performance
- 9 or higher: demonstrates extraordinary performance, hardly ever encountered

Finally, the supervisor should make sure that the student is able to proceed with their research at this point of the project. If the supervisor feels like the research question/thesis statement or the methodology is insufficient at this point, then it should be made clear to the student that the direction of the project needs to be revised or rethought.

4.2 Writing Update (formative, ungraded assessment)

The student is expected to engage actively in the research-writing process and keep on top of drafting throughout the Capstone. For this reason, the supervisor and student agree upon a writing sample early in the Capstone process (a significant writing update, such as a first chapter, a description of the experimental set-up or a presentation of preliminary results, etc.) that should be handed in around midterm as a sign of progress and an opportunity to receive feedback.

4.3 Draft of Thesis (formative, ungraded assessment)

Three weeks before the final deadline, a full draft of the thesis should be handed in. It is highly recommended this version is as close to the final product as possible for the student to receive constructive feedback. The supervisor may choose to give an indicative 'mock' grade using the rubric of the Final Thesis.

4.4 Final Thesis

The Final Thesis (the finished product of the Capstone) should reflect the student's overall achievement throughout the curriculum. It should demonstrate the acquisition of research, writing, and critical thinking skills within and/or across disciplines; the ability of the student to work independently; their capacity to design and execute a complex research project; and their ability to make broader connections to other disciplines and/or society. The Final Thesis should be structured according to disciplinary conventions agreed upon by the student and supervisor and should be consistent in its use of either British English or American English.

The Final Thesis should contain the following information for submission:

- Optional: inclusion of a short text accompanying the Final Thesis in which the student describes the revisions made between the Draft Thesis and the Final Thesis.
- Title and subtitle (if applicable): The title should be concise and specific as well as provide a clear statement of the subject of the research.
- Name of author (with affiliation: AUC) and email address
- Name of supervisor (with affiliation: AUC, VU, UvA) and email address
- Name of reader (with affiliation: AUC, VU, UvA) and email address
- Name of tutor
- Date of submission
- Student's major
- Word count of main text (see end of this section)
- Abstract: a self-contained description of the activity undertaken, including: (a) thesis statement or research question; (b) methods; and (c) results or findings of the study (suggested word range: 150 - 250)
- Five keywords/key phrases, at minimum
- A list of abbreviations, if applicable
- Introduction (see 4.1.2)
- Research context (see 4.1.2)
- Methodology (see 4.1.2): even though there are disciplinary differences in how transparently the methodology is reported, it is mandatory to include a separate section on this for empirical theses in the (social) sciences. It is highly recommended for literature reviews and theoretical work to include a section on how the material was sourced (i.e. database use, search terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria for sources, et cetera).
- For pre-law track students who wish to eventually enter the Civiel Effect schakeljaar vrijstellingstraject at the UvA Law Faculty, at least 50% of the Capstone must be based on a legal problem statement. A legal problem statement is defined as a clear legal research question that meets the following criteria: (1) it is embedded in the disciplinary context, i.e. sources of law and legal literature; (2) it states the importance and/or the socio-legal relevance of the question within legal theory; (3) it explains the different underlying (legal) concepts and elements; (4) it describes the research methods as used by the student to address the question. The Capstone supervisor of a qualifying project should send an email to the Pre-Law Track

Coordinator (name available on Capstone Canvas page) with the Capstone Coordinator in CC. In the email, the Capstone Supervisor states that the project meets the requirements. The Pre-Law Track Coordinator will then forward this email to the Board of Examiners so that the student can receive an official confirmation from AUC.

The final structure of the Capstone can vary widely between Capstones in different disciplines. The student should discuss the structure with their supervisor if they have any questions. Generally speaking, the student should consider how to optimise the structure of the project (e.g. number of chapters/sections/subsections) in order to write a coherent and clearly structured Capstone.

4.4.1 Sciences and Empirical Social Sciences

- **Results/Findings:** A succinct characterisation of the findings is given, complemented with a visual presentation in tables, charts and/or figures, if possible and appropriate. The writing should be centered around the presentation of the data (qualitative or quantitative). In a literature review thesis, this section succinctly summarises the findings of the sources in a logical narrative.
- **Discussion/Analysis:** The results are connected to the literature in the academic field, particularly to theoretical debates. Assumptions and inherent limitations of the study are also discussed, and the section may conclude by considering the broader relevance of the research findings (beyond the discipline), such as societal, cultural, environmental, or policy implications.

4.4.2 Humanities and Theoretical Social Sciences

- **Discussion/Analysis:** The discussion comprises the main section of the Capstone. It offers a focused inquiry into a topic with original analysis and argumentation. The contours of the thesis, as well as the methodological approaches employed, will vary according to academic field and discipline, but it develops by drawing from specific texts and/or artefacts, considering these within an established research and/or theoretical framework, and detailing the analysis or interpretation.

4.4.3 Conclusion

- The conclusion should provide a succinct summary of the argument in light of the findings, the significance of findings within the broader theoretical foundations of the discipline, and the scope for additional future research.

4.4.4 Reference list

- All references cited should be complete and consistent, and the referencing style should conform to one of the standard style guides in the academic field, e.g. MLA or APA; if a student is unclear about what style would best fit their project, then they should consult with their supervisor.

4.4.5 Word Count

- The word count range for the Final Thesis (including footnotes and image, table, and graph captions; excluding title, abstract, works cited, and appendices) per major is:
 - Science majors: between 5.000 and 10.000 words
 - Social Science majors: between 7.500 and 12.500 words
 - Humanities majors: between 7.500 and 12.500 words
 - Interdisciplinary (across majors): between 5.000 and 12.500 words

If a student cannot reach the word count or must exceed the word count, they should ask for written permission from their supervisor and reader to hand in a document that is outside of the official word count (please note: the Capstone Coordinator does not need to be informed). Uploading a Final Thesis that is under or over the word count without approval may affect the final grade (see Final Thesis Rubric, criterion 7 'effective communication').

Grading

The supervisor and reader will grade and provide substantive written feedback on the Final Thesis on Datanose.

The grading rubric for the Final Thesis consists of seven criteria: 1) quality of research question, 2) review/synthesis of the literature, 3) methodology, 4) analysis and argument, 5) discussion and implications, 6) organization and structure, and 7) effective written communication (see Section 6). In the default Datanose setting, the total weight of 100% has been evenly divided across these different categories, except for the 'effective written communication' criterion, which has been assigned a maximum weight of 10%. Supervisors can choose to manually adjust the weights for first 6 criteria (except for the 'effective written communication' one) in the Excel sheet that is available on Datanose. If a supervisor deviates from the default setting, they should communicate and motivate these changes to the student before the student submits the Final Thesis.

Furthermore, we advise supervisors to ensure consistency between qualitative comments, rubric levels and final grades.

4.5 Academic Competencies

Throughout the thesis process, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to engage critically and independently with their research and writing. These academic competencies are assessed through students' engagement with the supervision process and their development over the course of the semester. The assessment focuses on four areas: 1) progress and engagement with feedback; 2) preparedness for and engagement in supervision meetings; 3) critical and reflective competency; 4) and ownership, independence and responsibility (see Section 6 for rubric). These competencies are assessed on an ongoing basis through supervision meetings and the work undertaken between them.

Grading

The supervisor completes the rubric after the final supervision meeting, before the final thesis is submitted and the oral defence takes place. The rubric therefore assesses the student's engagement with and development over the course of the thesis, rather than the quality of the final thesis itself. Supervisors are encouraged to make brief notes on students' developing academic competencies throughout the semester to support an assessment based on the process as a whole, rather than primarily on its final stage.

4.6 Oral Defence

The Capstone process concludes with an oral defence. During the defence, the student briefly presents their research (3–5 minutes), highlighting the research question, key findings and/or main aspects of their research process. The presentation is followed by a discussion with the supervisor and at least one additional participant, such as a second reader, fellow Capstone student or faculty member, who asks questions about the research. The student is expected to explain and justify their research choices and to respond thoughtfully to critical questions about their work.

The oral defence is intended to evaluate not only the quality of the research, but also the student's understanding of and ability to critically reflect on the research process and the choices made.

Grading

The supervisor will grade the Oral Defence either during or shortly after the assessment using the grading rubric that is available on Datanose (also see Section 6). Please note that the quality of the 3–5 minute presentation is not assessed separately. The presentation provides a starting point for the defence and serves to introduce the research; the assessment focuses on students' understanding, critical reflection, justification of research choices, and ability to respond to questions and discussion.

5. Capstone Grades

5.1 Relative Weights of Components

The final grade is calculated by applying the specific criteria to the grade components below:

- Research Proposal Oral Assessment, graded by Supervisor (20%)
- Writing Update, assessed by Supervisor (formative)
- Final Draft, assessed by Supervisor (formative)
- Academic Competencies, graded by Supervisor (10%)
- Oral Defence, graded by Supervisor (20%)
- Final Thesis, graded by Supervisor (25%)
- Final Thesis, graded by Reader (25%)

The separate components of the Capstone, as well as the final Capstone grade, will be calculated using AUC's grading scale (1 – 10).

5.2 Grading Procedures

Once the supervisor and reader grades (per Capstone) have been handed in, the final Capstone grade will be calculated on Datanose. The grading process should be completed 12 working days after the final deadline. Grade discrepancies may cause delays, but students will be informed by a member of the Capstone team of the estimated delay.

5.2.1 Grade Discrepancies/Single Failing Final Thesis Grade

If the supervisor's and the reader's Final Thesis grades differ by more than 1.5 points or in case one assessor gives the Final Thesis a non-passing grade, the Capstone Coordinator will ask the relevant Head of Studies to mediate and write a short report of a discussion between the supervisor and reader. The aim of this discussion is to see whether it is possible to reduce the gap between the two different Capstone grades to less than 1.5 points or come to an agreement about whether the Capstone is worthy of a passing grade. If agreement on either, or both, of these issues is not possible, then the Head of Studies will appoint a third assessor and will advise the Board of Examiners of the calculation of the final grade based on the three different grades. The BoE decides on the Final Thesis grade (50%) and will communicate their decision to the Capstone Coordinator and Capstone Administrator.

5.2.2 Failed Final Theses and the Capstone Retry

A student will receive a non-passing Capstone grade if either the Final Thesis is submitted after the deadline or if the Final Thesis receives a cumulative non-passing grade after it is assessed by both the supervisor and reader. These students must then go through the Capstone Retry process.

In the Capstone Retry process, the student is allowed ten days (not including weekends and holidays) after the final grades have been entered into Datanose to remedy the failure by revising the Final Thesis. If a student has failed the final thesis, the supervisor and/or reader should inform the student by email and copy the Capstone Coordinator in. The student will then attempt to incorporate as much feedback as possible within the ten-day period. Once the period is over, the student will hand in the revised Final Thesis, which will be assessed using the same criteria as before. That said, the student should not assume revision of the Final Thesis automatically leads to a passing grade. The original comments from the assessors should not be seen as a checklist; the revised Final Thesis can still be assessed as non-passing.

If a student still receives a non-passing grade after their second attempt, the student will need to write a new Capstone in the following semester (using a different research question/thesis) since Capstone failures can only be remedied once a semester. A change in supervision may be advisable but is not officially required.

If a student asks and receives a course reduction that includes the Capstone, then they should register for the Capstone the following semester. The student is not allowed to continue with the same Capstone project (thesis/research question) if any parts of the Capstone were assessed in the initial semester.

5.2.3 Extensions

If a delay is reasonably expected, Final Thesis extensions should be requested from the Board of Examiners (via auc.nl/servicedesk) at least two weeks before the final deadline, except in cases of force majeure. Extension requests will be evaluated by the Capstone Coordinator, who has been mandated by the Board of Examiners to make decisions about extension requests. Extension requests should be properly motivated and include documentation when necessary, including proof that both the supervisor and reader approve of the extension request (screenshots of emails would suffice). Students who want to appeal a denied extension request can submit a request to the Board of Examiners within six weeks of receiving a denied extension request.

5.2.4 Academic integrity: plagiarism and Fraud

Students are expected to maintain academic integrity throughout the thesis process. This includes appropriately acknowledging and referencing sources, being transparent about the use of AI and other tools, and honestly reporting their research methods, data and findings. Students remain responsible for the integrity, accuracy and authorship of the work they submit.

The supervisor and reader should perform plagiarism checks on all submitted files in Datanose. Suspected plagiarism and fraud will be handled according to the regulations governing these topics (AS&P, Appendix 2). Note that drawing from/elaborating on materials from a student's own work in Advanced Research Writing while working on the Capstone project does not count as self-plagiarism if clear references and/or citations are made (i.e. if a Capstone student recycles substantial parts of work produced in ARW and clearly indicates when and where they're doing so, for instance by an explanatory footnote, it will be considered permissible use of earlier work). Of course, a student should consult their supervisor first if they wish to elaborate on their work from ARW; this conversation would likely happen during the initial meeting between student and supervisor. Additionally, the student may draw from and reuse material from their capstone Research Proposal when writing the Final Thesis, but they should discuss this matter first with their supervisor as well. No citations would be necessary in this situation.

6. Grading Rubrics

Oral Assessment Research Proposal Rubric

Criteria	Insufficient (I)1–5.5	Weak-Sufficient (S)5.5–7.2	Good (G)7.3–8.5	Very Good/Excellent (E)8.6–10
1. Quality of research question and academic relevance	The research question is unclear, too broad, insufficiently relevant, or not feasible. The student demonstrates limited understanding of the research focus and its academic significance.	The research question is sufficiently clear, relevant and feasible, but may still require refinement. The student can explain its basic academic relevance.	The research question is clear, relevant and well-defined. The student can explain its academic significance and how it relates to existing research.	The research question is highly focused, relevant and well-motivated. The student critically reflects on its academic significance and potential contribution to the field.
2. Ability to reflect on selection and analysis of sources	The student provides limited justification for source selection and demonstrates insufficient ability to evaluate or analyse sources.	The student can explain the selection of relevant sources and demonstrates a basic ability to discuss their contribution to the research.	The student provides a well-considered justification of source selection and demonstrates critical engagement with sources.	The student demonstrates sophisticated reflection on source selection, quality and relevance, and critically positions sources within the broader research context.
3. Methodological choices and justification	The proposed methodology is insufficiently developed, inappropriate, or poorly aligned with the research question. The student cannot adequately explain or justify methodological choices.	The proposed methodology is appropriate at a basic level and sufficiently connected to the research question. The student can provide some justification for methodological choices.	The proposed methodology is appropriate and clearly aligned with the research question. The student can explain and justify their methodological choices.	The proposed methodology is carefully considered and strongly aligned with the research question. The student demonstrates awareness of methodological alternatives, limitations and implications.
4. Ability to justify and reflect on research choices	The student is unable to explain the reasoning behind key research choices or reflect on limitations, challenges or alternatives.	The student can explain the main research choices and identify some relevant considerations or limitations.	The student can clearly justify research choices and critically reflect on strengths, limitations and possible improvements.	The student demonstrates strong ownership of the research process, providing insightful justification and critical reflection on choices, alternatives and implications.

Final Thesis Rubric

Use the rubric to determine the final grade and ensure that all qualitative feedback (e.g. in-text comments) references the rubric criteria. This ensures transparency and consistency. Justify the overall grade in the corresponding section of the Final Thesis form on Datanose (recommended length: 300–600 words).

Criterion	Insufficient (I)0–5.5	Sufficient (S)5.5–7.2	Good (G)7.3–8.5	Very good / Excellent (E)8.6–10	weight
Research question / thesis statement	Poorly articulated; insufficiently informed or supported by academic sources.	Clear and suitable; sufficiently informed and supported by academic sources.	Well-articulated and sufficiently complex; clearly situated in an academic field.	Focused and complex; addresses a viable research gap with potential for an original contribution.	TBD
Literature review / research context	Limited use of relevant research; insufficient peer-reviewed sources; inappropriate use of online sources.	Sufficient coverage of relevant academic sources; review approach is apparent.	Comprehensive and critical coverage; systematic review approach.	Effectively synthesises relevant literature and clearly situates the research.	TBD
Methodology	Unclear, inappropriate or absent; insufficient connection to the research question/thesis. Ethical requirements not met.	Appropriate and clearly articulated; suitably applied; sufficient quality and ethically sound where applicable.	Methodological choices show awareness of a range of approaches; high-quality application.	Innovative methodological approach to the research question/thesis.	TBD
Analysis and argument	Weak or absent argument; flawed or absent analysis. Findings do not adequately address the research question.	Sufficiently developed argument and analysis; methodology applied appropriately; claims/findings supported by evidence.	Consistent, well-developed and rigorous analysis; clear coherence between findings and research question.	Clear awareness of the analytical process; findings effectively communicated through argument and appropriate visual evidence.	TBD
Discussion and implications	Implications/relevance unclear or disconnected from results. Further research is unspecific; limitations not addressed.	Implications clearly described; some attention to relevance, further research and limitations.	Implications and relevance discussed comprehensively in relation to findings; limitations and further research addressed.	Compelling account of the broader academic or societal significance of the research.	TBD
Organisation and structure	Disjointed, incomplete or incoherent; sections or paragraphs inadequately developed.	Complete and generally coherent, though uneven in places.	Coherent and effectively organised; paragraphs unified and well developed.	Cogently structured; sections contribute to a cohesive and compelling narrative.	TBD
Written communication: language, style and layout	Unclear or insufficiently concise; frequent language errors; formatting and style requirements not met.	Generally clear and understandable; appropriate grammar, formatting and style, with some errors.	Clear and convincing scholarly writing; follows disciplinary conventions with limited errors.	Compelling, clear and accessible scholarly writing; consistently follows disciplinary conventions with very few errors.	10%

Oral Defence

Criteria	Insufficient (I)1–5.5	Sufficient (S)5.5–7.2	Good (G)7.3–8.5	Very Good/Excellent (E)8.6–10
Understanding of the research	Limited understanding of the research; unable to adequately explain key aspects, such as the research question, methodology or findings.	Basic understanding of the research; able to explain its main aspects, although some explanations lack clarity or depth.	Good understanding of the research; able to clearly explain its main aspects and how they relate to one another.	Thorough and nuanced understanding; able to explain key aspects clearly, accurately and insightfully.
Critical analysis and reflection	Little critical analysis or reflection; strengths, limitations, implications or alternative perspectives are not adequately addressed.	Some critical analysis and reflection; identifies relevant strengths, limitations or implications, but discussion may lack depth.	Clear critical analysis and reflection; discusses relevant strengths, limitations, implications and/or alternative perspectives in a well-considered way.	Sophisticated critical analysis and reflection; offers insightful discussion of strengths, limitations, implications and alternative perspectives.
Justification of research choices	Unable to adequately explain or justify important research choices.	Can explain and provide some justification for the main research choices, although reasoning may be underdeveloped.	Clearly explains and justifies the main research choices, demonstrating an understanding of their rationale and implications.	Provides well-considered and convincing justification of research choices, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of their rationale, alternatives and implications.
Ability to respond to questions and engage in discussion	Struggles to answer questions or provides only basic responses; limited ability to engage with challenges or alternative perspectives.	Answers questions adequately and engages in discussion, although responses may lack depth or require prompting.	Responds thoughtfully and confidently to questions, elaborating on answers and engaging meaningfully with critical questions and alternative perspectives.	Engages in a sophisticated and constructive discussion; responds critically and convincingly to questions and demonstrates independent thinking.

Academic Competencies

Criteria	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good	Very good / Excellent
Progress and Engagement with Feedback	Makes insufficient progress between meetings and/or does not adequately respond to feedback. Feedback is ignored, inconsistently addressed, or implemented without clear understanding.	Makes appropriate progress and generally responds to feedback. Shows an adequate understanding of what needs to be addressed.	Makes consistent progress and engages constructively with feedback. Uses feedback to improve and develop the research and/or writing.	Makes substantial and purposeful progress. Engages critically with feedback, using it to strengthen the research and make informed improvements.
Preparedness for and Engagement in Supervision Meetings	Is inadequately prepared and/or unable to explain the current state of the project or identify issues requiring attention. Engagement in meetings is largely passive.	Comes adequately prepared and can discuss the main issues relating to the project. Responds appropriately to questions and guidance. Can identify and discuss key strengths, weaknesses, challenges and decisions in the research process, with some reflection on their implications.	Comes well prepared, identifies relevant questions or challenges, and uses meetings purposefully to advance the project. Regularly evaluates research decisions and challenges critically and reflects meaningfully on their implications and on their own development.	Is exceptionally well prepared and takes an active, purposeful role in meetings. Clearly identifies priorities, raises substantive questions, and makes effective use of supervision. Demonstrates sophisticated critical and reflective thinking. Evaluates decisions, assumptions, challenges and alternative approaches thoughtfully and uses reflection to inform subsequent action.
Critical and Reflective Competency	Demonstrates limited ability to critically evaluate research decisions, challenges, progress or development. Reflection is largely descriptive or absent.			Demonstrates a high degree of ownership and intellectual independence. Proactively identifies what needs to be done, makes well-reasoned decisions, and takes responsibility for the direction and development of the project.
Ownership, independence and Responsibility	Relies heavily on the supervisor to identify problems, make decisions or determine next steps. Takes limited responsibility for the project.	Takes responsibility for completing agreed tasks and can make appropriate decisions with guidance.	Works independently, takes ownership of the project, and makes appropriate decisions while recognising when guidance is needed.	

Appendix – Policy on using GenAI in Academic Writing Skills and Advanced Research Writing

The course Advanced Research Writing aims to teach advanced academic writing skills to the (academic) writers of the future. As teachers, we have no doubt that the writers of the future will do their writing supported by AI technology. Therefore, we also believe that today's students need to learn and practice using AI technology critically and responsibly in their writing.

Generative AI technology and the advantages, disadvantages and risks of using AI tools like ChatGPT will be topics for discussion in this course. Moreover, students are permitted to use generative AI technology in working on their writing projects for this course, provided they adhere to certain rules and guidelines, as outlined in this document and to be discussed further in class.

Rules & Guidelines

1. Students may use generative AI technology to support their writing, in ways similar to how internet search engines, grammar and spell checkers, and (online) dictionaries and thesauruses are used.
2. Students may use generative AI as a source of information and to generate content, as long as they use the tool as an assistant, not an author. Instructions on how to do this are provided further down this document.
3. If students use generative AI tools, they must provide full transparency about how they use them. Instructions on how to do this are provided further down this document.
4. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with the advantages as well as disadvantages and potential risks of using generative AI. These topics will also be discussed in class.
5. Students who make use of generative AI tools in their writing assignments remain fully responsible for the texts they submit.
6. The "Regulations governing fraud and plagiarism" (AS&P, Appendix 2) apply to any assignment submitted in the course, written with the help of generative AI or not.
7. These Rules and Guidelines apply exclusively to the course Advanced Research Writing. In other contexts, such as the Capstone, students should contact their teacher or supervisor for permission and guidelines on the use of generative AI tools.

How do you use generative AI as an assistant, not an author?

Generative AI can perform and can even take over certain tasks for you, but you should remain in charge of the overall writing and thinking processes at all times. This means you need to use generative AI critically and responsibly. Do not take over information generated by generative AI tools unthinkingly. And do not incorporate generated output into your text immediately and without acknowledgments. In short, be smart, not lazy.

How can you offer complete transparency about your use of generative AI?

When you use generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT as a source of information, you should treat them like any other source of information you use in your academic writing. Thus, when you incorporate information presented to you by a chatbot, you must summarize, paraphrase, and/or quote it, attribute it clearly and provide a correct citation. (The technical details will be discussed more fully in class). Do note, however, that you should critically evaluate the quality and reliability of the information you have generated, just as you would with other forms and sources of information.

When you use generative AI to brainstorm ideas, to grammar-check, style-check, and/or enhance your writing, to generate content (including outlines,

larger sections of text, or bibliographies), or any other uses, you should explain your approach clearly and in sufficient detail. You can do so, for instance, in an explanatory footnote or as part of your methodology section. Additionally, you are required to save and provide full access to your complete chat history for your project. If you use ChatGPT, for example, you can give access by clicking on the “share chat” button and pasting the link in your methodology section or explanatory footnote.

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