



## LITERATURE THESIS INFORMATION FOR SUPERVISORS & EXAMINERS

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### 1. LITERATURE THESIS FORENSIC SCIENCE

The literature thesis is a mandatory part of the MSc in Forensic Science and is scheduled for 5 European Credits (equals a workload of 140 hours). The student will obtain in-depth knowledge on a specific forensic topic by studying and analysing state-of-the-art scientific literature. Writing the literature thesis is an assignment in which the student has to work independently, choose a topic, make one's own time planning, formulate a research question, find and select the relevant scientific literature and write a critical review thereof. The student is also expected to provide one's own opinion on the topic, to point out possible shortcomings of the existing knowledge and to suggest how new research could provide new insights in the future. The results of the thesis have to be presented during a colloquium (presentation) and mini-symposium (pitch).

The research skills described above are important to master for any scientist. A very good report displays a high level of understanding of the forensic context, in other words it displays a "forensic awareness". A forensic literature thesis answers questions such as "What does the forensic community need?" and "How could this innovation be used in forensic practice?".

#### 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course the student is able to:

1. formulate a forensic scientific research question to direct and focus the literature review.
2. select relevant literature from domain and forensic scientific journals that relate to a forensic science topic, and evaluate the scientific quality of the articles based on study design, methodology, and statistical analysis, documenting the search strategy in an appendix.
3. critically evaluate and review scientific literature related to a forensic science topic.
4. develop an own perspective and opinion in relation to a forensic science topic after studying relevant scientific literature.
5. write a consistent, well-structured scientific thesis in academic English on a forensic science topic on the basis of available scientific literature, demonstrating the ability to uphold scientific integrity throughout the literature research.
6. present the results of the forensic literature thesis orally to a scientific audience.
7. summarise the results of the forensic literature thesis in the form of an oral pitch presentation to a broad audience.

#### 1.2 CONTACT INFORMATION MASTER FORENSIC SCIENCE

All logistic and planning issues are dealt with by the UvA and can be reported to the coordinator and assistant coordinator.

- Coordinator Literature Thesis:  
prof. Arian van Asten ([A.C.vanAsten@uva.nl](mailto:A.C.vanAsten@uva.nl))
- Assistant coordinator Literature Thesis:  
dr. Yorike Hartman ([Y.Hartman@uva.nl](mailto:Y.Hartman@uva.nl))

### 1.3 ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The supervisor is the first point of contact for questions regarding the Literature Thesis. The supervisor is a scientist (PhD candidate or academic staff member) or a forensic expert at the faculty, institute or company where the literature thesis takes place.

To act as a supervisor should roughly in total take 10 hours. It is expected that the supervisor:

- helps the student to start the thesis during a start-up meeting (1,5 hours),
- has discussion meetings, answers questions and provide directions when the student gets stuck (2,5 hours),
- reads the concept thesis, provides feedback to the student but is **not** actively involved in re-writing or editing the thesis (2 hours),
- advices the examiner in the assessment of the report and colloquium, this includes reading the report and attending the final presentation of the thesis, usually in December (4 hours).

### 1.4 ROLE OF THE EXAMINER

The examiner is a permanent member of staff at the Faculty of Science, or holds an appointment as a professor with a special chair or as full professor, at the Faculty of Science, AUMC or NFI. The examiner has a PhD and has a relevant background in forensic science and has a BKO certification. CLHC coordinators are often examiners. The MFS Examinations Board can make an exception if these criteria are not met, but the examiner in any case needs to have a PhD and a relevant forensic background.

The examiner is appointed by the MFS Examinations Board and in this capacity has the responsibility for the grading process, as well as the mandate to register the different components and the final grade. The examiner is responsible for the assessment of the academic level of the literature thesis.

To be an examiner typically requires 4 hours, this includes reading the final report, being present at the colloquium providing grades and feedback. The supervisor advises the examiner in the grading.

The examiner is **not** involved in the supervision of the Literature Thesis.

## 2. ASSESSMENT

### 2.1 LITERATURE THESIS REPORT

As a guideline, a Literature Thesis of 5 EC should contain approximately 5.000 – 6.000 words (about 8-10 pages long), excluding appendices and the list of references, and should be based on 20-40 scientific articles and book chapters. Considering the time available and the level of the students, the topic should be well defined and should not be too generic or vague.

### 2.2 COLLOQUIUM

During the colloquium, the student should present a 15 minutes overview of the thesis, followed by approximately 15 minutes of discussion. The audience consists of Forensic Science students, the supervisor and examiner, plus interested staff.

#### **Date and location**

The date for the colloquium should be arranged with the supervisor and the examiner, in such a way that both can attend. In exceptional cases (*e.g.* the supervisor lives abroad or has sudden obligations), the colloquium can be given in absence of the supervisor. In that case, the supervisor and examiner have to determine the grade of the report beforehand and only the examiner will assess the colloquium. The colloquium cannot continue if the examiner is not present, because the examiner has the official authority to establish and register the grades. In case the examiner cannot be present the colloquium has to be rescheduled.

The colloquium is usually organised at Science Park or at the institute where the Literature Thesis takes place. Students can visit on location or can follow the presentation online. To that end, the presenting student organises an online link. All colloquia are therefore organised as a hybrid session (partly on-site, partly on-line).

## 2.3 GRADING

The grade for the report and the colloquium is determined by the supervisor and examiner. The process is as follows:

- First, prior to the colloquium the thesis must be checked for plagiarism in DataNose by the examiner (Access to the plagiarism report is available as a link next to the uploaded report). The plagiarism report should be checked in detail by the examiner. The literature review must meet scientific integrity standards with respect to referencing to the work of others. Irrespective of the score, the examiner checks if the student has worked according to the academic standards. If after correction of the score (i.e. for short sentences, references, and quotes):
  - o a relatively small number of reported matches remains, this can be discussed directly by the examiner with the student as part of the feedback.
  - o a significant number of reported matches remain, the examiner informs the student and supervisor and an improved version of the thesis needs to be submitted by the student.
  - o The examiner contacts the Research Project coordinator immediately in case of significant scores and when there is a suspicion of deliberate plagiarism and potential fraud. The coordinator will inform the Examinations Board that will assess the case and decide on required measures.
- Also, prior to the colloquium both the supervisor and examiner individually fill in the assessment form for the report that can be found on the [CLHC website](#) in the form of an Excel file with which the grade can be calculated automatically. There is a grading form available for the colloquium assessment as well. **Please read these forms carefully to learn what we expect of the student.**
- The supervisor and examiner directly after the session or on agreed later point in time provide detailed feedback to the student, explaining the grade and also providing tips and tricks so the student can improve his/her knowledge and skills. In addition, the use of GenAI tools is discussed, and if GenAI tools were used it is discussed and documented how the student has used GenAI (see Use of GenAI in MFS for the policy regarding the use of GenAI). The supervisor and examiner also ask the student to provide feedback on the process and the supervision. The final assessment of the Literature Thesis report and Colloquium will be filled in by the Examiner via DataNose using a digital assessment form.
- In the grading process the supervisor has an advisory role. The examiner is appointed by the MFS Examinations Board and in this capacity has the responsibility for the grading process, as well as the mandate to register the different components and the final grade online. The examiner is responsible for the assessment of the academic level of the literature thesis.

**Please note:** If the deadline for writing the thesis is exceeded by more than 3 months without prior notice by the student to the programme management, the thesis will be assessed as insufficient. If this happens please contact the coordinators of the course (see contact information on page 1).

## 2.4 WHAT TO DO IF THE REPORT IS INSUFFICIENT?

In order for the student to pass the course, all components and the final grade have to be sufficient, i.e. at least a five and a half (5.5). It can occur that the work the student delivers is not of sufficient academic quality. If it turns out that the final report is still not sufficient 2 days prior to the colloquium, the following procedure should be followed:

- the colloquium will go ahead and will be graded.
- the student will be informed that the report is not sufficient and will get feedback on how to improve the report.
- student, supervisor, and examiner decide on a new deadline to hand in the report (max. extension allowed is one month after the original colloquium date) and inform the coordinators of the course (see contact information on page 1).
- **NB: The final version will be judged taking into account that the first attempt was not sufficient. The new report cannot be graded higher than a 7.0. In addition, a 7.0 is only appropriate in the event that the second attempt has remarkably improved the report.**

## 2.5 WHAT TO DO IF THE COLLOQUIUM IS INSUFFICIENT?

In order for the student to pass the course, all components and the final grade have to be sufficient, i.e. at least a five and a half. It can occur that the work the student delivers is not of sufficient academic quality. Although very rare, if it turns out that the colloquium is not sufficient the following procedure should be followed:

- the report will be graded.

- the student will be informed that the colloquium is not sufficient and will get feedback on how to improve their presentation skills.
- the student, supervisor and examiner decide on a new date for the colloquium (max. extension allowed is one month after the original colloquium date) and inform the coordinator of the Literature Thesis Course (see contact information page 1).
- **NB: The final assessment will be judged taking into account that the first attempt was not sufficient. The new grade cannot be higher than a 7.0. In addition, a 7.0 is only appropriate in the event that the second attempt has remarkably improved.**

## 2.6 CALCULATION OF THE FINAL GRADE

All components will be graded on a scale from 1 to 10, with a maximum of one decimal after the point. These grades are used to calculate the final grade. In order to pass the course, all components and the final grade have to be sufficient, i.e. at least a 5.5. When a student has not fulfilled this requirement, the examiner will register the mark 'did not fulfill all requirements' (NAV) whether or not the averaged grade is sufficient.

The components will be weighted as follows:

1. Literature thesis report (50%)
2. Presentation colloquium (40%)
3. Presentation mini-symposium (10%; will be assessed by the coordinators of the course)

## 2.7 RELATION between LEARNING OUTCOMES, ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS and EXIT QUALIFICATIONS of the MASTER

The table of specification (in Dutch toetsmatrijs) displays the relation between the learning outcomes of the course (see page 1), the assessment components of the course (1 = report, 2 = colloquium, and 3 = mini-symposium), and the exit qualifications (EQ) of the Master's Forensic Science (see below).

**Table of specification**

Learning Outcome	Components	EQ 1	EQ 2	EQ 3	EQ 4	EQ 5	EQ 6	EQ 7	EQ 8	EQ 9	EQ 10
1	1, 2								x		
2	1								x		
3	1, 2								x		
4	1, 2								x		
5	1							x			
6	2									x	
7	3									x	

### Exit qualifications of the master

At the end of the study programme, graduates will be able to

#### Knowledge and understanding

1. explain the forensic process in detail, including the actors and their roles, and understand the judicial context.
2. describe the most common traces and the corresponding forensic expert areas, the scientific principles of the techniques used in those areas and the appropriate methods for the analysis and interpretation of the data generated.

#### Applying Knowledge and understanding

3. apply their forensic knowledge to a basic forensic case including the definition of appropriate hypotheses and the use of the Bayesian paradigm for the interpretation of evidence.

4. independently identify relevant forensic issues, to formulate appropriate research questions, to develop an experimental set-up and to design a project plan and implement that plan.
5. work professionally with others in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams in unfamiliar environments related to the field of forensic science.

### **Making judgements**

6. review situations critically and in a systematic way and to draw inferences on the basis of incomplete information while being aware of the limitations of these inferences.
7. assess and interpret the role of forensic science in society and determine the standards that are required for forensic investigations and reflect on associated societal challenges and issues.
8. recognise the forensic relevance and potential of state-of-the-art scientific developments in their science discipline and to integrate these developments to make innovative forensic contributions

### **Communication**

9. communicate findings and conclusions with solid argumentation both orally and through written reports to expert and non-expert audiences in a legal, scientific and broader societal context

### **Learning skills**

10. independently acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in new situations, to reflect on their contribution and to plan their future professional development accordingly.

## **2.8 VISIBLE LEARNING TRAJECTORIES**

The MFS has established five Visible Learning Trajectories (VLTs) that provide cohesion within the curriculum.

- Forensic Process and Societal Context
- Forensic Traces and Analysis
- Interpretation of Evidence
- Research, Development and Innovation
- Personal Development and Professional Attitude

These VLTs represent the key areas that the MFS students need to master to confidently meet the final qualifications of the MFS and to function successfully in a forensic role in the criminal justice system.

The relation between the learning outcomes of the course, the learning trajectory objectives and the EQs are visualised in the [Visible Learning Trajectory Tool](#).

## **3. FRAUD and PLAGIARISM**

This course uses the general fraud and plagiarism rules of the UvA.

Fraud and plagiarism are seen as the intentional action or inaction of a student aimed at hindering the assessment of his/her knowledge, insight and skills. All submitted written reports are automatically checked for plagiarism. When blocks of text are found to be copied without proper references, the Examinations Board will be notified. Suspicion of fraud during the exam will be send to the Examinations Board. The Examinations Board has the authority to terminate your participation in the master course.

See the [general fraud and plagiarism rules of the UvA](#) and the programme specific [Teaching and Examination Regulations](#).

## **4. OVERVIEW OUTLINE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### In general:

- The student is responsible for making a planning independently and finishing on time.
- The student is expected to take the initiative with regards to planning meetings and informing the supervisor and examiner on time.

### **Before starting the Literature Thesis:**

#### Student is responsible for:

- finding a topic either via the CLHC topic list or by providing his/her own subject;

- following the online approval procedure to get the topic approved.

### **Start-up meeting:**

#### Student is responsible for:

- organising a start-up meeting with the supervisor and having questions ready.

#### Supervisor is responsible for:

- helping the student to start the thesis by giving advice on:
  - the outline, planning, and providing a few first references,
  - how to approach the literature search (the right key words will help the student to find all relevant literature) and how to delineate the topic (this will improve the quality and value of the thesis).

### **During writing:**

- student and supervisor can arrange discussion meetings online or at the institute of the supervisor, other contact is usually via e-mail. (In total, the supervisor has approximately 2,5 hours available for this).

#### Student is responsible for:

- writing the literature thesis independently,
- contacting the supervisor when he/she gets stuck (e.g. when there is too much or too few literature),
- scheduling discussion meetings, the feedback moment (see next step) and the date, time and location for the colloquium with the supervisor and examiner,
- registering the presentation date on DataNose (otherwise they can't upload their thesis later on) and on Canvas.
- making sure supervisor and examiner are aware of deadlines (e.g. when they can expect to receive the final version and should make time to read the thesis).

#### Supervisor is responsible for:

- answering questions and providing directions when needed,
- providing guidance when a student gets stuck because there is too much or too little literature found. (e.g. if much literature on the topic exists, the supervisor can limit it by setting a time frame for the review (e.g. the last 5 or 10 years) or selecting a specific forensic evidence type or application.),
- not being actively involved in re-writing or editing the thesis, the quality of the thesis is expressed in the grade.

### **At the latest 5 working days prior to the colloquium:**

#### Student is responsible for:

- handing in a concept version on time,

#### Supervisor is responsible for:

- reading the concept thesis and providing feedback.

### **At the latest 2 working days prior to the colloquium:**

#### The student is responsible for:

- sending the final version of the thesis (via e-mail) to the supervisor and examiner and confirming that the supervisor and examiner have received the thesis.
- uploading an electronic copy of the final thesis on DataNose.

#### Examiner is responsible for:

- checking the report for plagiarism after it has been uploaded (access to the plagiarism report is available as a link next to the uploaded report). The literature review must meet scientific integrity standards with respect to referencing to the work of others. Irrespective of the score, the examiner checks if the student has worked according to the academic standards. If after correction of the score (i.e. for short sentences, references, and quotes):
  - o a relatively small number of reported matches remains, this can be discussed directly by the examiner with the student as part of the feedback.
  - o a significant number of reported matches remain, the examiner informs the student and supervisor and an improved version of the thesis needs to be submitted by the student.

- The examiner contacts the Research Project coordinator immediately in case of significant scores and when there is a suspicion of deliberate plagiarism and potential fraud. The coordinator will inform the Examinations Board that will assess the case and decide on required measures.

#### **At the colloquium:**

##### Supervisor and examiner are responsible for::

- discussing the grades of the thesis and the colloquium by using the [MFS LT grading forms](#) provided online, which are used to obtain an objective score and provide valuable feedback, the supervisor has an advisory role in this.

##### Examiner is responsible for:

- filling in the online assessment forms on DataNose to register the grade (the examiner will be notified through an automatic e-mail about the online procedure). The examiner is appointed by the MFS Examinations Board and in this capacity has the responsibility for the grading process, as well as the mandate to register the different components and the final grade online. The examiner is responsible for the assessment of the academic level of the literature thesis.

## **5. Use of GenAI in MFS**

Within the Master Forensic Science, students are allowed to use Generative AI (GenAI) to support their learning process. For example, they can use large language models (LLMs) to help their self-study by generating flashcards or generating explanations of concepts. GenAI should be a support tool to help them reach the course's learning objectives, not a system to which they delegate activities that are meant to promote their learning. The course coordinator has final say on which use cases are permissible or not within their course.

**Students may not use GenAI to create any content they submit for assessment**, regardless of whether it's graded numerically or on a pass/fail basis. The **only exception** is if an assignment description explicitly allows GenAI use. In such cases, permissible use is delineated by the course instructor.

**Never share personal information, research data, or course materials with a GenAI system, except for UvA AI Chat.** This UvA-hosted system was built with GDPR compliance and data security in mind. If in doubt about sharing information, don't share. Students can always check with their course coordinator whether any intended use case is responsible.

**Teachers are never allowed to use GenAI to grade student's work.** They may, however, use it to formulate their feedback. Only tools allowed by UvA should be used in research and education. If there is no UvA license for software, use cannot be mandatory in education. This implies that learning objectives must be achievable without the use of non-licensed tools. UvA AI Chat can be used, if used with due consideration and care.

#### **Within the Literature Thesis course, GenAI use is permitted for the following purposes:**

- as a learning assistant, structuring your learning plan including timelines, milestones and reflection on your learning process;
- to find, scan, analyse, and select relevant academic literature (although students must study all relevant papers in detail themselves and must always conduct literature searches independently to ensure the search is complete and correct);
- refining a research question through iterative feedback;
- as an academic writing coach, providing feedback on thesis structure, style, and grammar to improve readability and language of the work;
- as preparation for the discussion section of the colloquium and pitch, anticipating and practising for questions that could be asked.
- when in doubt if a specific use is acceptable in terms of scientific integrity the student should always ask the supervisor and/or the examiner.

**Note 1:** Whenever you use GenAI it is essential to provide complete transparency and explain in detail what you have used and how you have used it! In a thesis or report include this information in an appendix. Discuss GenAI use with your supervisor and examiner during project meetings and evaluation moments. Make sure to document and archive GenAI sessions to allow for more detailed review and discussion if needed. It also demonstrates and is part of responsible use.

**Note 2:** In all of this, it is essential that the student does not outsource essential academic tasks within the project exclusively to GenAI. GenAI can never be a (co-)author of the work and the student must remain fully responsible for and in control of the research and the dissemination of the results. This means that GenAI output must always be carefully checked by the student and that AI generated content cannot simply be copy-pasted.

**Note 3:** The use of GenAI is not mandatory and cannot be enforced by the supervisor or examiner (unless GenAI is part of the research assignment itself). This means that the student should be able to complete the project in a satisfactory manner without the use of GenAI if he/she so wishes.

**As further information an example from scientific practice: This is what Elsevier, publisher of a multitude of scientific journals, instructs authors on the use of GenAI when preparing manuscripts for submission<sup>1</sup>:**

***“The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in scientific writing***

***Please note this policy only refers to the writing process, and not to the use of AI tools to analyze and draw insights from data as part of the research process.***

*Where authors use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process, these technologies should only be used to improve readability and language of the work. Applying the technology should be done with human oversight and control and authors should carefully review and edit the result, because AI can generate authoritative-sounding output that can be incorrect, incomplete or biased. The authors are ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of the work.*

*Authors should disclose in their manuscript the use of AI and AI-assisted technologies and a statement will appear in the published work. Declaring the use of these technologies supports transparency and trust between authors, readers, reviewers, editors and contributors and facilitates compliance with the terms of use of the relevant tool or technology.*

*Authors should not list AI and AI-assisted technologies as an author or co-author, nor cite AI as an author. Authorship implies responsibilities and tasks that can only be attributed to and performed by humans. Each (co-) author is accountable for ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved and authorship requires the ability to approve the final version of the work and agree to its submission. Authors are also responsible for ensuring that the work is original, that the stated authors qualify for authorship, and the work does not infringe third party rights, and should familiarize themselves with our Ethics in Publishing policy before they submit.*

***The use of generative AI and AI-assisted tools in figures, images and artwork***

*We do not permit the use of Generative AI or AI-assisted tools to create or alter images in submitted manuscripts. This may include enhancing, obscuring, moving, removing, or introducing a specific feature within an image or figure. Adjustments of brightness, contrast, or color balance are acceptable if and as long as they do not obscure or eliminate any information present in the original. Image forensics tools or specialized software might be applied to submitted manuscripts to identify suspected image irregularities.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/generative-ai-policies-for-journals>, accessed August 2025.

*The only exception is if the use of AI or AI-assisted tools is part of the research design or research methods (such as in AI-assisted imaging approaches to generate or interpret the underlying research data, for example in the field of biomedical imaging). If this is done, such use must be described in a reproducible manner in the methods section. This should include an explanation of how the AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the image creation or alteration process, and the name of the model or tool, version and extension numbers, and manufacturer. Authors should adhere to the AI software's specific usage policies and ensure correct content attribution. Where applicable, authors could be asked to provide pre-AI-adjusted versions of images and/or the composite raw images used to create the final submitted versions, for editorial assessment.*

*The use of generative AI or AI-assisted tools in the production of artwork such as for graphical abstracts is not permitted. The use of generative AI in the production of cover art may in some cases be allowed, if the author obtains prior permission from the journal editor and publisher, can demonstrate that all necessary rights have been cleared for the use of the relevant material, and ensures that there is correct content attribution."*