

# Writing a master thesis – some advice

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# Beginning of paper

- Describe what does your paper (master thesis) contribute with?
- Why this is interesting and important
- Clarify how your paper takes the literature or our knowledge forward.
- What is novel in the paper

# On “novel” in *research* papers

*For example*, it can be considered novel if

- Well-known application in new area
- A new insight
- Existing theory is generalised
- Various existing papers, methods, theories are brought together for the first time
- An overview, meta-analysis or other type of analysis that has been done or written before

# Focus

- Declare your focus, in the beginning of your paper
- “We focus on design-based estimation. An alternative is model-based estimation (Valliant et al. 2002).” + some argument + brief discussion of differences between these approaches
- Covering too much will only result in a mess.

# Title

- What to emphasise?
- Compare:
  - “Variance estimation for functionals”
  - “Handling survey weights in jackknife variance estimation”

# The Introduction

- Broad background
- Specific background
- What is unknown - > research question
- Contents of paper
  - > A “funnel”

# The Discussion

- Interpretation/analysis of findings (first)
- Some repetition, but not the same wording (summary, key findings, why it is important)
- Put findings into context
- Ideas for further work

# Assumptions

- State why your assumptions are reasonable
- and/or that the assumption is common (with a reference)
- and/or if it helps exposition or the arguments
- If it is an assumption you are forced to make, admit it and discuss it.
- Some focus here as well, not any trivial assumption



# Efficient style

1. Bethel proposed an algorithm (Bethel (1985))  
useful to determine total sample size...
  2. Bethel (1985) proposed an algorithm for  
finding the minimum sample size..
  3. The Bethel (1985) algorithm finds the  
minimum sample size
- Are words like “certainly”, “of course”, “in  
fact” necessary?

- Clarity usually preferred to cleverness and elegance
- Rather few *research* papers are really clever. You see more useful and sound papers than clever papers.
- Wit and elegance in style is nice but very hard to achieve without losing clarity – best avoided

# Style

- Not too informal. No “isn’t” or words like “wiggly (curve)”. “Flipside” is debatable.
- No storytelling: “After having looked at the data, I turned my attention to the design”
- Not too formal, may look turgid or bombastic
- “Kill your darlings”