

Bachelor Thesis

Session 1: General Information

Tommaso Tulkens

Erasmus School of Economics & Tinbergen Institute
March 24, 2026

Plan for today

- ▶ General information about the bachelor thesis
 - ▶ Timeline
 - ▶ Requirements and expectations
- ▶ The research process
 - ▶ What makes a good research question?
 - ▶ How to develop a research idea
 - ▶ How to finish the thesis on time

Outline

General Information

Standards and Requirements

General Advice

General Information

Bachelor Thesis Timeline

March 11	Student–supervisor matching completed
March 24	Session 1: Timeline and requirements
April 6	Session 2: Developing a research question and proposal
April 13	Session 3: Econometrics refresher - identification strategies
25th of April	Proposal submission
Early to mid June	Final draft submission
July – early August	Thesis submission period

General Information

Bachelor Thesis Timeline

March 11	Student–supervisor matching completed
March 24	Session 1: Timeline and requirements
April 6	Session 2: Developing a research question and proposal
April 13	Session 3: Econometrics refresher - identification strategies
25th of April	Proposal submission
Early to mid June	Final draft submission
July – early August	Thesis submission period

Recommended target: finish the thesis by the end of June

General Information

Bachelor Thesis Timeline

March 11	Student–supervisor matching completed
March 24	Session 1: Timeline and requirements
April 6	Session 2: Developing a research question and proposal
April 13	Session 3: Econometrics refresher - identification strategies
25th of April	Proposal submission
Early to mid June	Final draft submission
July – early August	Thesis submission period

Recommended target: finish the thesis by the end of June

- ▶ **To graduate within the academic year** Thesis must be booked in Osiris by **August 31** ⇒ submit thesis by **August 7**

General Information

Bachelor Thesis Timeline

March 11	Student–supervisor matching completed
March 24	Session 1: Timeline and requirements
April 6	Session 2: Developing a research question and proposal
April 13	Session 3: Econometrics refresher - identification strategies
25th of April	Proposal submission
Early to mid June	Final draft submission
July – early August	Thesis submission period

Recommended target: finish the thesis by the end of June

- ▶ **To graduate within the academic year** Thesis must be booked in Osiris by **August 31** ⇒ submit thesis by **August 7**
- ▶ **To enroll in the MSc** Thesis must be booked in Osiris by **August 1** ⇒ submit thesis by **July 10**

General Information

Feedback on the Bachelor Thesis

▶ **When to expect feedback**

- ▶ Main feedback period: April
- ▶ The value of feedback is highest in the early stages of the project. Work early on, it's worth it.

▶ **Small questions**

- ▶ Bundle small questions together
- ▶ Send a message on TMS (**email should not be used**)
- ▶ I usually respond within one day

▶ **Bigger questions**

- ▶ Request a 1:1 meeting (3-4 per student excluding plenary sessions)
- ▶ Send files, text, or other relevant material in advance
- ▶ Book a few days ahead so I have time to review
- ▶ Meetings can also be held to discuss feedback on the proposal and the initial draft

▶ **Written feedback**

- ▶ On the proposal and the initial draft
- ▶ Covers literature review, empirical strategy, and writing
- ▶ I aim to respond within one week

General Information

Booking 1:1 Meetings

My availability

- ▶ Until the 10th of April: Mondays or Wednesdays are the best days, Thursday is urgent
- ▶ In general 09.00-11.30 + 13.30-18.00
- ▶ Mostly available for in-person meetings
- ▶ From June: some meetings may be online due to conferences

How to schedule a meeting

- ▶ Send a **message on TMS** with:
 - ▶ the proposed date and time
 - ▶ your question(s)
 - ▶ relevant text, files, or results
- ▶ Cannot be booked less than 3 working days in advance

Standards and Requirements

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Conduct independent research:
 - ▶ generate a research idea
 - ▶ identify and process relevant information from the literature
- ▶ Develop empirical skills:
 - ▶ identify relevant data sources
 - ▶ potentially collect your own data
 - ▶ potentially combine different databases
- ▶ Write a comprehensive thesis

Standards and Requirements

The Thesis Proposal

- ▶ **Length:** Approximately 5 pages
- ▶ **Required Content:**
 - ▶ **Research Question (RQ):** Clear, specific, and well-defined. What are you studying and why is it interesting or relevant?
 - ▶ **Literature Review:** Brief context of how your question relates to existing academic literature.
 - ▶ **Data:** What datasets will you use? Are they accessible? How will you collect or combine them?
 - ▶ **Methodology:** What is your empirical strategy? How will you address identification and potential endogeneity?
 - ▶ A planning

General Advice

Common Mistakes in Bachelor Theses

▶ Research question is too broad

- ▶ “What are the macroeconomic impacts of AI?” “What determines economic growth?”
- ▶ A good thesis answers a **specific and well-defined question**

▶ Unclear identification strategy

- ▶ Correlations are presented as causal effects
- ▶ The empirical strategy does not clearly address endogeneity
- ▶ Need not have perfect identification if you have a very interesting/novel question. Trade-off!

▶ Starting the empirical work too late

- ▶ Data problems and coding issues always take longer than expected

▶ Not asking for feedback early enough (please do this)

General Advice

Developing a Research Question

- ▶ Start by narrowing down your interests early
 - ▶ Think about topics that interest you
 - ▶ Start reading papers from top journals to get a sense of what others have done
 - ▶ *Quarterly journal of economics, american economic review, econometrica, review of economic studies, journal of political economy, american economic journal: macroeconomics, journal of the european economic association, review of economics and statistics, journal of monetary economics...*
- ▶ Evaluate potential research questions
 - ▶ Is it **interesting academically** or **relevant for policy**?
 - ▶ Is it **feasible** given the available data and time?
 - ▶ Does it contain some element of **novelty**?
- ▶ Once you have a research question, be able to answer three questions:
 - ▶ **Why** is this question interesting?
 - ▶ **How** will I answer it empirically?

General Advice

Starting from a Broad Interest

Does immigration cause crime?

General Advice

Starting from a Broad Interest

Does immigration cause crime?

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Yes. The role of immigration on crime is a key concern for voters, and often used as an argument against immigration.

General Advice

Starting from a Broad Interest

Does immigration cause crime?

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Yes. The role of immigration on crime is a key concern for voters, and often used as an argument against immigration.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Yes. Immigration, police, criminal justice.

General Advice

Starting from a Broad Interest

Does immigration cause crime?

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Yes. The role of immigration on crime is a key concern for voters, and often used as an argument against immigration.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Yes. Immigration, police, criminal justice.
- ▶ **Feasible?** Need to find an appropriate context and data. Sounds doable
 - ▶ What immigration?
 - ▶ Is there a country in which there is good quality data to answer this?

General Advice

Starting from a Broad Interest

Does immigration cause crime?

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Yes. The role of immigration on crime is a key concern for voters, and often used as an argument against immigration.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Yes. Immigration, police, criminal justice.
- ▶ **Feasible?** Need to find an appropriate context and data. Sounds doable
 - ▶ What immigration?
 - ▶ Is there a country in which there is good quality data to answer this?



Start narrowing the question

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

‘How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?’

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

'How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?'

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Not really. The question is very specific.

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

‘How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?’

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Not really. The question is very specific.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Only in a very narrow context.

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

‘How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?’

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Not really. The question is very specific.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Only in a very narrow context.
- ▶ **Feasible?** Potentially yes.

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

‘How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?’

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Not really. The question is very specific.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Only in a very narrow context.
- ▶ **Feasible?** Potentially yes.
- ▶ The problem: the question is **too narrow**. We learn very little about how immigration affects crime

General Advice

Avoid Making the Question Too Narrow

‘How do immigrant inflows in Flevoland affect arson crime rates between 2011 and 2014?’

- ▶ **Interesting academically?** Not really. The question is very specific.
- ▶ **Relevant for policy?** Only in a very narrow context.
- ▶ **Feasible?** Potentially yes.
- ▶ The problem: the question is **too narrow**. We learn very little about how immigration affects crime



Look for a question with broader implications

General Advice

A Well-Defined Research Question

Do refugee arrivals affect crime rates in the Netherlands?

General Advice

A Well-Defined Research Question

Do refugee arrivals affect crime rates in the Netherlands?

- ▶ **What do we study?**

- ▶ How refugee arrivals might affect localities
- ▶ How these effects might be alleviated (e.g. can refugees work?)

General Advice

A Well-Defined Research Question

Do refugee arrivals affect crime rates in the Netherlands?

- ▶ **What do we study?**

- ▶ How refugee arrivals might affect localities
- ▶ How these effects might be alleviated (e.g. can refugees work?)

- ▶ **Why is it interesting?**

- ▶ Migration a big topic, and will only increase (climate change, wars, etc)
- ▶ How can we work towards smooth integration?

General Advice

A Well-Defined Research Question

Do refugee arrivals affect crime rates in the Netherlands?

- ▶ **What do we study?**

- ▶ How refugee arrivals might affect localities
- ▶ How these effects might be alleviated (e.g. can refugees work?)

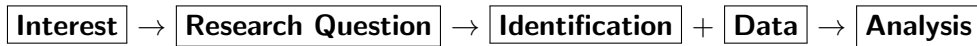
- ▶ **Why is it interesting?**

- ▶ Migration a big topic, and will only increase (climate change, wars, etc)
- ▶ How can we work towards smooth integration?

- ▶ **How do we identify the effect?**

- ▶ Utilize plausibly exogenous variation in refugee arrivals
- ▶ CBS statline
- ▶ check website of Pietro Biroli

From Interest to Research Project



- ▶ Many ideas fail because there is no clear link between these steps. But this is natural, **most ideas are supposed to fail.**
- ▶ Once you understand what you find interesting, start thinking about multiple potential research questions
- ▶ The more you discuss with colleagues, the quicker you realize if something is both **interesting and feasible**

Key Takeaways and Resources

Key takeaways

- ▶ Start thinking about your **research question early**
- ▶ A good research question should be
 - ▶ **Interesting or policy relevant**
 - ▶ **Feasible** given the available data and time
 - ▶ **Specific** but with broader implications
- ▶ Always think about **identification and data**
- ▶ Ask for **feedback early** if you get stuck

Resources

- ▶ For big questions: **30-45 minute 1:1 meetings**
- ▶ **For small questions: start with your peers!**
- ▶ See the manual for more detailed information

Last but not least

**Good luck and try to enjoy the
process!!!**