

Near & Middle Eastern Studies

Department of Social Sciences

University of Basel

Guidelines for Master's
Examinations in the Master's
Degree Subject
“Near & Middle Eastern Studies”

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These guidelines are based on the new study regulations
active from fall term 2026 onwards



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1 Overview

The master's examination in the master's degree subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies is a one-hour oral examination that takes place in the last week of the semester of the respective examination semester you have chosen. The two master's examinations (one in each degree subject) can be taken separately in different semesters and are not coupled with the submission of the master's thesis. Registration for the master's examination usually takes place during the first two weeks of the desired examination semester. You will find the relevant links in Section 2 and the relevant deadlines at the following link:

<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/studierende/master-pruefung-abschluss/> (in German only)

2 Higher-Order Documents

Higher-order official documents already provide some initial information on the content and parameters of the master's examination. The fifth section of the "Guidelines for the Master's Degree: Subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies" states the following: "For the master's examination, the student and one examiner agree on two topics within the thematic and methodological scope of the degree program. Both topics will be covered in the examination. Neither of the two examination topics may correspond to a topic treated in a seminar paper (*Seminararbeit*) during master's studies in Near & Middle Eastern Studies. For the master's examination and master's thesis, the provisions of the Regulations on Master's Studies, §§ 22-28, apply in all other respects."

Article 21 of the "Regulation on Master's Studies of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Basel" (dated October 2018) must also be observed. At the beginning of this article, it states: "In each of the two degree subjects [...] an oral master's examination is taken. The two master's examinations may take place in different examination sessions. The study plans regulate the details." Section 4 of article 21 continues: "Admission to the master's examination in a degree subject is granted to those who have a) acquired 25 credit points in this subject, b) can provide evidence of at least one of the obligatory seminar papers (*Seminararbeit*) in the subject, c) have fulfilled any additional requirements (*Auflagen*), and d) have provided any language certificates." Please do not fail to read carefully the other provisions of these regulations: <https://www.unibas.ch/dam/jcr:18f59129-a4a3-4ad6-952e-51810526dd92/> (only in German available).

On the Faculty's website (<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/dokumente-merkblaetter/>) (please scroll down) you will find further information sheets and forms concerning your master's studies and the master's examination in particular. Of course, we recommend that you look through these information sheets as early as possible and to adjust your own schedule according to the information and regulations mentioned there. For the practical aspects, the "Master's examination information sheet" is of particular importance:

https://philhist.unibas.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/philhist/Dokumente/Studium/Master/MBL_Masterpruefungen.pdf (in German only).



Please note! These guidelines are not an official document of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In case of contradictions or ambiguities, the regulations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for the master's degree subject or the study plan for the master's degree subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies always take precedence.

3 Registration

The official registration for the MA examination is done within the first two weeks of the lecture period. Students must submit a current module allocation and a filled-out registration form. The form is available online four weeks prior to the registration deadline (<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/dokumente-merkblaetter/>). The documents have to be submitted via the web application <https://philapp.io/>.

You determine the two topics and the underlying literature directly with the examiner; the staff of the Student Administration Services of the Faculty is not involved in this process. Neither the topics nor the literature list will be shared with Student Administration Services; however, the topics and key issues will be recorded in a report during the examination.

4 Planning your Time

In contrast with the written bachelor's examination, the preparation for the oral master's examination is less tightly scheduled. Nevertheless, in view of the heightened requirements compared to the bachelor's examination, you should take extra care to plan sufficient preparation time. A rule of thumb for your scheduling can be: Start preparing at least three months before the scheduled exam date and finalize the topic and the literature list about two months before the scheduled exam date. Otherwise, you will not be able to read the literature in peace or prepare for the examination adequately.

5 Selection of Examiners

For your master's examination in the master's degree subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies, you are free to choose among any instructors at our seminar course who are authorized to give a master's examination. Do not worry that you may offend someone by choosing someone else. All instructors are happy to take responsibility for your examination, but all of them have so many obligations that they will not be sad if you should approach another person you trust. However, the Faculty Master's Regulations stipulate that this can only be instructors who hold a Ph.D.

Before registering for the master's examination, please contact an instructor of your choice at the Program in Near & Middle Eastern Studies who is authorized to administer the examination. In some subjects, such as German Studies, there are two examiners (one each for linguistics and literature). In the subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies, however, there is always only one examiner for the entire one-hour master's examination. The instructor must give her or his consent to the supervision of the examination before you register for the



master's examination. The designated examiner confirms her or his consent by signing the master's examination registration form.

6 Identifying Your Topics

During your designated examiner's office hours, you can propose topics for the master's examination and clarify them further in a joint discussion. The topics you chose for your seminar papers (*Seminararbeit*) may not be chosen again. Otherwise, there are no additional requirements or restrictions. Nevertheless, the examiners have the right to reject topics that are too similar or to ask for a reformulation. For example, the two topic proposals (a) "Postcolonialism" and (b) "Orientalism" would be too similar in content to be both accepted. As a rule, a general definition of the topic is sufficient for the first step of topic identification.

7 Choosing Your Literature

After your initial selection of the two topics, the next step is to determine the literature to be used for your examination. This literature must be chosen and proposed by the master's students on their own accord. The following rule applies: The selected literature must include at least two monographs and at least three articles from academic journals per topic. In the case of the two monographs, individual chapters can be proposed for selection; in the case of journal articles, the article must always be proposed in its entirety. Other genres of literature (e.g., online articles) can be added depending on the topic. The amount of reading per topic must be at least 600 book pages. After the literature list has been determined and the topics and literature list have been finalized, the designated examiner will give you the green light to carry on with further preparation.

8 Examination Procedure and Position Paper (*Positionspapier*)

The hour of time for the oral examination will be divided equally between the two topics at thirty minutes each. At least 72 hours before the master's examination, you must send the examiner a position paper (*Positionspapier*) of at least one page (at least 3,500 characters) on each of the two topics, in which you present and justify your basic insights and positions on the topic you have chosen. At the beginning of the respective part of the examination, you have the possibility to supplement your positions again or to emphasize individual points, but of course the position paper should not be presented again in its entirety.

9 Examination and Completion

The master's examination in the degree subject Near & Middle Eastern Studies consists of an oral examination of 60 minutes and is credited with 5 credit points. You will be informed of the grade of your master's examination immediately after the examination by the respective examination proctor. *All of us here in Near & Middle Eastern Studies wish you an enjoyable preparation time and best of success on the examination itself!*

10 Rating Criteria

All faculty members of our Near & Middle Eastern Studies unit use the following grading criteria when evaluating written assignments as well as the oral MA exam:

Evaluation criteria	Description	Scale MA Seminar Paper (and in case: Proseminar paper)	Scale MA Research Paper	Scale MA Thesis	Scale MA Oral exam
Formulation of the research question	› Independent formulation of a clear, appropriate research question › Clear definition and narrowing of the topic	15	10	15	10
Definition of key terms	› Key terms defined clearly, concisely, and accurately	10	5	10	10
Analysis and argumentation	› A thorough analysis of the chosen research question or topic › A convincing and balanced argument supported by relevant primary sources and secondary literature › A clear answer to the research question, illustrated with specific examples	20		20	20
Language	› Strong ability to express ideas clearly in the chosen language › Correct and precise use of technical terminology, correct and consistent transcription	15	5	15	10
Structure	› Clear structure › Goal-oriented build-up › The logical structure of the work is reflected in a concise and clear table of contents	15	5	15	
Literature and sources	› Appropriate selection of the supporting literature › Careful selection and clear interpretation and evaluation of primary sources	15	10	15	10

Evaluation criteria	Description	Scale MA Seminar Paper (and in case: Proseminar paper)	Scale MA Research Paper	Scale MA Thesis	Scale MA Oral exam
	› Correct and appropriate use of scholarly tools (particularly footnotes and the bibliography)				
Formalities	› Full compliance with formal requirements and citation rules › Appropriate use of the annotation system	10	5	10	
Translation	› Accurate and appropriate translation of the selected text passages		30		
Contextualization	› Effective contextualization of primary sources		10		
Summarize and explain	› Ability to reproduce the content of the texts read and to explain the central theses, themes, and elements				20
Evaluate, justify, and compare	› Ability to assess the texts read, justify these assessments, and compare texts or positions with each other				20
Discussion of the translation	› The translation can be explained convincingly in a conversation		20		
Final assessment discussion	› a final discussion regarding the content, structure, and reasoning of the written work, which may be requested by the evaluators if necessary				
		100	100	100	100

Note: If necessary, evaluators may request a discussion regarding the content, structure, and reasoning of the written assignments prior to the final evaluation.

Grading scale: < 59,9 = Fail; 60–67 = 4; 67,1–75 = 4.5; 75,1–83 = 5; 83,1–91 = 5.5; 91,1–100 = 6.