RMA MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THESIS MANUAL(2025-2026)

The RMA History program trains students to become independent researchers who can develop their own research project in a chosen field of expertise. The **Research MA Thesis** offers proof of that ability. The RMA thesis is written in English and counts approximately **30,000 words**. The thesis project is supervised by an experienced researcher from Utrecht's History Department.

This thesis manual helps you to plan your thesis from the very start of your studies.

- The section '**Thesis Project**' outlines a basic time schedule for your work on the thesis in blocks 3 and 4 of the second year, highlighting the interaction with your thesis supervisor.
- The section on the '**Thesis Lab**' describes the meetings that students run along the way, in order to share insight and help keep each other on track.
- The '**Handing in, Evaluation, and Graduation**' section lays out the procedure and standards for the grading of your thesis, as well as details on procedures around (timely) graduation.

Overview of key dates/steps in the process:

Task	**How/where?**	**When?**
Articulate a research topic	-	April 2025 + Research Design
Thesis information meeting	Hybrid meeting (email invite)	Wed 2 April 2025, 15:15-17:00
Find a supervisor	Contact them!	By 1 June 2025
Register for the thesis	Email studiepunt.gw@uu.nl	Between 3-21 June 2025
Submit research proposal	Create a Zaak in OSIRIS	By 1 September 2025
Submit the thesis	Create a Zaak in OSIRIS	13 February 2026, by 23:59 GMT+1
Graduation	Academiegebouw Utrecht	May 2026

THE THESIS PROJECT

In blocks 1 and 2 you will spend a total of 800 hours on your thesis project. The end result will be an RMA History thesis of approximately **30,000 words**, excluding footnotes and bibliography, written in **English**. There is a margin of +/- 10% for this word count. (Please discuss with your supervisor whether you should include quotations in other languages in the original or in translation; for quotations translated by you, it is generally good practice to put the original versions in the footnotes.) As for references, it is common practice in the field of history to use footnotes (and a bibliography) rather than in-text-citations.

The **deadline for submission** of the final thesis is **13 FEBRUARY 2026**.

Finding a supervisor: any permanent member of faculty in the Department of History and Art History can act as your supervisor. This includes all faculty who teach in the RMA, but it includes many more – anyone who is listed as 'Assistant Professor/Universitair Docent' or more senior. Please note that the ability of a member of the faculty to act as your supervisor depends on their existing teaching load: it is possible that they simply have too many teaching commitments already, so make sure to inquire in time.

What to expect from your supervisor. The successful and timely completion of your thesis project depends on your own independent management of the project *and* a good working relationship with your thesis supervisor. It is important to be realistic about how much time supervisors have: they 'receive' a total of 26.4 hours for each thesis supervised. This covers individual meetings, but also the time needed to read and comment on proposals and drafts, read and evaluate the final version, and to act as second reader for another thesis project. It is therefore important to make the most of meetings by being well-prepared.

To meet the final deadline, it is crucial to have a clearly formulated topic before the end of the current academic year (2024-2025). We therefore expect you to have settled on a topic and **to have met your supervisor by the end of block 4. To arrange a meeting, you should contact your supervisor before the end of May.** We will hold an RMA Thesis meeting on 2 April 2025 to discuss any questions you might have at that stage. You will receive an invitation via email.

By 1 September 2025, you must hand in a proposal (at least two pages, but up to ca. 3,000 words excl. footnotes and bibliography) of your thesis topic. This proposal must have been **previously discussed with your supervisor in block 4 – during the summer, supervisors will not be able to offer feedback.** The proposal will also be read by the second reader, who will have to agree to it before you can start the project. The supervisor acts as the conduit between the student and the second reader at all times – the student and the second reader are not to discuss the project, to ensure the second reader's ability to offer their impartial evaluation. **To submit the proposal, start a Zaak in OSIRIS** (HUM: thesis proposal RMA).

Between 3-21 June 2025, **you will have to officially enroll yourself for the Thesis** by sending an email to Studiepunt (studiepunt.gw@uu.nl).

Note on human-subject research: if your research involves interacting with living human subjects, such as by carrying out interviews or surveys, please consult the Faculty checklist

(https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/practical-info, under 'Human-subject research') and discuss this with your supervisor. While usually easy enough to manage, issues like obtaining informed consent and data management need to be addressed before you commence your work.

Model schedule: below is a basic model you can use to plan with your supervisor. Note that how you plan is entirely up to you and your supervisor – the specifics of any given project, or circumstances outside the project, may mean that a different plan is more suitable.

week 1-3	**week 4-6**	**week 5-9**	**week 10-12**	**week 13-15**	**week 16-18**	**week 19-20**

In the first three weeks, you write the first draft of the introduction of your thesis. The introduction is one of the most important elements of your thesis and often needs to be revised several times. The introduction needs to contain all of the following elements:

- Research question (explicitly formulated as such and preferably including sub-questions)
- An overview of relevant historiography
- A brief sketch of the historical background
- An explanation of the methodology you will use
- An overview of relevant theories you will use
- An explanation of the type(s) of primary sources you will use and how these have been selected
- A remark on the (academic and social) relevance of your research project

In addition to this you decide, together with your supervisor on the planning of your thesis project, notably the time you will take to collect and analyze your data, and the submission of draft chapters.

week 1-3	**week 4-6**	**week 7-9**	**week 10-12**	**week 13-15**	**week 16-18**	**week 19-20**

This is the most challenging phase of the thesis project. You have your work laid out for you and you will now spend your time collecting and analyzing data.

You meet at least three times with your supervisor who gives feedback on your intermediate products and explicitly evaluates your progress. Together you determine which sources still need to be processed and you review your initial time schedule.

week 1-3	**week 4-6**	**week 7-9**	**week 10-12**	**week 13-15**	**week 16-18**	**week 19-20**

By now you have completed your data collection and analysis, even though you may have to revisit some sources to resolve particular problems (identified by you or your supervisor).

Your work in these weeks consists of the writing of a full draft of your thesis, based on the progress texts that you developed while you analyzed your data. Together with your supervisor, you schedule the writing of draft chapters (and the conclusion) over a five-week-period (week 13-17).

At the beginning of week 18, you hand in your draft thesis. While the supervisor is reading, you complete your footnotes and bibliography, you perfect any tables, graphs, and illustrations, and you work on the layout for the final submission.

At the end of week 18, you receive your supervisor's feedback. Together you determine which revisions you will make.

week 1-3	**week 4-6**	**week 7-9**	**week 10-12**	**week 13-15**	**week 16-18**	**week 19-20**

This week is spent on the revision of your thesis, as agreed with your supervisor. You submit the final version to your supervisor (the first reader) and your second reader in week 20.

THESIS LAB

Purpose: the thesis lab provides support for students while writing their thesis by offering a friendly, informal environment in which to discuss the progress of the thesis project.

Organization: the thesis lab is organized by the students in coordination with the Thesis Coordinator. The RMA student assistants can help with logistical aspects like room bookings. In the past, a Teams environment was used to share information. The thesis lab should be responsive to students' actual needs, so it would be important to survey these and check in from time to time if the lab is working optimally for everyone.

Content: in previous years, the thesis lab has been composed of ca. 7 sessions. Meetings were a combination of student-led sessions, discussions with guest speakers from across the Department, and workshops with Wellbeing Trainers and Career Services. Apart from this, the thesis lab included focused writing sessions (up to two per week), 15-minute check-in meetings at the start of each week, and occasional social get-togethers.

Example schedule: below is a simplified example of a previous cohorts' schedule. It is recommended to check in with the Thesis Coordinator and the previous cohort's organizers for more detail and suggestions on what has worked well in the past.

Week	**Thesis lab goal**	**Thesis Lab Description**
3	**Proposal pitch and buddy matching**	Online Meeting. Among students. Pitch our theses and make review groups/pairs
5	**Writing a Good Introduction/Share research plans**	Hybrid Meeting. Christiaan van Bochove workshop on introduction. Students share research plans
7	**Planning a Thesis I/Peer Review Introductions**	Hybrid Meeting. Bastiaan Bouwman on planning a Thesis Project.
9	**Managing Primary Sources**	Meeting on handling primary sources.
11	**Planning a Thesis II**	Hybrid Meeting. Wellbeing Services to host a session on week planning, productivity, work/life, etc.
15	**Focused Editing Workshop led by Flora Roberts.**	Hybrid meeting. Bring a 1500-2000 word portion of your thesis to be edited during the lab.

19	**How to write a good conclusion**	Hybrid Meeting. Christiaan van Bochove workshop on writing a good conclusion.
23	**Career Services: Where to Look for Jobs and Job Interview prep**	Hybrid Meeting. Career Services workshop on looking for jobs and preparing for a job interview.
24	**THESIS DEADLINE**	

HANDING IN, EVALUATION, AND GRADUATION

DISCLAIMER: The formal examination rules are laid down in the OER of the RMA History Programme (https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/history-ma/practical-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/education-and-examination-regulations)

Submitting the thesis. You will have to upload your thesis on Osiris Zaak (see for precise information https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/history-ma/curriculum/masters-thesis, under 'submitting your thesis'). You will add your supervisor to the Zaak (HUM: RMA Thesis Evaluation); your supervisor will in turn add the second reader.

Plagiarism statement. Please sign the plagiarism rules awareness statement (https://students.uu.nl/sites/default/files/gw_algemeen_plagiarism-awareness-statement.pdf) and upload it on Osiris Zaak together with your thesis, as an additional attachment.

Extending the deadline. If you are not able to finish your thesis by 13 February 2026 – and if you have some sufficient legitimation for this – you can continue to work on your thesis into the second semester. However, supervisors may not be able to provide supervision during this time and therefore we do not advise this scenario. In case of an extension, the thesis must be submitted by **13 March 2026** at the latest, but you will have to make explicit arrangements with your thesis advisor about this.

Grading your thesis. The thesis will be evaluated by your supervisor and a second reader. The grade awarded for a thesis will be motivated by a written evaluation form covering the aspects stated in the assessment form. The thesis supervisor registers the final grade in OSIRIS Zaak and OSIRIS Resultaat.

What happens if the final version of the thesis is rejected? If the supervisor and the second reader agree that the final version of the master's thesis does not deserve a grade of 6 or higher, the student has failed this particular part of the master's programme. If the grade is at least 4, the student will be given the opportunity to revise his/her thesis, using the comments provided by the first and second reader. This revised version must be handed in within a month after having received the grade and feedback. If the grade accorded after the first reading is lower than 4, or if the grade of the revised thesis is lower than 6, the student will have to repeat the module and start from scratch with a different topic.

Examination date. The date of examination will be the last day of the month in which, according to the results as registered in Osiris, you have fulfilled the examination requirements of the programme. This means that your exam will be dated 31 August 2026 if the last results (including the thesis) have been registered in August. If your last grade is registered in July, the exam will be registered on 31 July 2026. Please note that you will not be eligible for a *cum laude* graduation if your examination date is after 31 August 2026.

Graduation ceremony. If you fulfill all requirements for the diploma by 31 August 2026, you will receive your diploma during a graduation ceremony in October 2026 in the Academy Building in Utrecht. You will receive an official invitation with the exact time and details a few weeks in advance. *If you have any questions about the graduation ceremony, please enquire with the Examensecretariaat Geesteswetenschappen*: examensecretariaat.gw@uu.nl.

Graduation ceremony for international students. For (international) students who must leave the Netherlands before 1 September 2026 (and only for this group) an additional ceremony will be held in late August 2026. If this applies to you, please inform the Education Office (ows.gw@uu.nl) that you need to take part in this ceremony. Please note that in order to qualify for this ceremony, your final grades will need to be registered in Osiris before 31 July 2026.

RMA Thesis evaluation form

The RMA thesis supervisor acts as the first evaluator and is responsible for the communication between evaluators, the completion and filing of evaluation forms, the registration of the final grade in Osiris, and for informing the student of both the final grade and its substantiation by the evaluators.

The RMA thesis evaluation process consists of four stages:

(1) The first and second evaluator assess the thesis independently of one another; each fills out an evaluation form and determines a **provisional grade**.

(2) The first and second evaluator determine the **final grade** jointly on the initiative of the first evaluator within **10 working days** of receipt of the thesis by the first evaluator. In certain circumstances a third evaluator may be consulted (see third evaluator form), in which case the final grade will be determined within **20 working days** of receipt by the first evaluator; the student should be informed of this fact by the first evaluator. Should the first or second evaluator revise her/his provisional grade after consultation with other evaluator(s), he/she must change the relevant points on her/his evaluation form and – for the second evaluator - send the revised evaluation form to the first evaluator. The first evaluator will remove 'Provisional grade' from the forms submitted by the first and second evaluators and replace it with 'Final grade'.
(3) The first evaluator informs the student of the final grade and its substantiation by:

- Sending an email with the grade and substantiation and/or;
- Organising a final meeting in which the grade and substantiation are discussed and/or;
- Sending the student the final grade form.

(4) The first evaluator registers the final grade in Osiris and files the evaluation forms of the first, second, and (possibly) third evaluator.

EVALUATION FORM RMA THESIS

STUDENT INFORMATION
Name:
Student number:
Degree programme:
ECTS:
Title of thesis:
Date submitted:
SUPERVISOR/1ST EVALUATOR INFORMATION
Name:
Department:
2ND EVALUATOR INFORMATION (not involved in supervising the student)
Name:
Department:
EVALUATION BY: ☐ Supervisor ☐ 2nd Evaluator
Provisional grade: Final grade (jointly determined by supervisor and 2nd evaluator):
Date:

FORMAL PRECONDITIONS

Preconditions	Assessment	Comments
Correct use of language (sentence structure, spelling, punctuation)	☐ met ☐ not met	
Table of contents and summary	☐ met ☐ not met	

Notation and list of sources in accordance with formal rules in the field	☐ met ☐ not met	
Design and layout in accordance with degree programme guidelines	☐ met ☐ not met	
The extent of the thesis is in accordance with the program guidelines (see program book)	☐ met ☐ not met	

Note: If one of these formal preconditions has not been met, the supervisor may decide not to evaluate the content of the thesis. The student will be given one opportunity to make corrections. The standards for meeting/not meeting the preconditions are determined by the degree programme (e.g. number of language mistakes tolerated).

EVALUATION OF THE CONTENT

The evaluator first gives an assessment of each of the nine categories below, and then uses the "Substantiation" section to support the proposed grade by commenting on relevant strong and weak points of the thesis.

Categories 1 to 10 *must* all be assessed pass when handing out a passing or higher grade (category 10 only if applicable).

1. RESEARCH QUESTION	☐ fail	☐ pass
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & ACADEMIC RELEVANCE	☐ fail	☐ pass
3. METHOD	☐ fail	☐ pass
4. ANALYSIS	☐ fail	☐ pass
5. CONCLUSION	☐ fail	☐ pass
6. USE & CITATION OF SOURCES	☐ fail	☐ pass
7. STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT	☐ fail	☐ pass
8. COMPOSITION & STYLE	☐ fail	☐ pass
9. INITIATIVE (to be filled in by the supervisor)	☐ fail	☐ pass
10. DEFENSE (IF APPLICABLE)*	☐ fail	☐ pass

* The ordinary thesis process does not provide for an oral 'defense'; this is only required in extraordinary circumstances.

SUBSTANTIATION

Please substantiate your proposed grade by commenting on relevant strong and weak points of the thesis, in particular those that address the first six assessment categories listed above.

SUBSTANTIATION
(Research question) *(Theoretical framework & academic relevance)* *(Method)* *(Analysis)* *(Conclusion)* *(Use & citation of sources)* *(Structure of the argument)* *(Composition & style)* *(Initiative)* *(Defense)* *(Additional remarks)*

Note: In commenting on the quality with which the student has demonstrated her/his academic abilities, please consider answering one or more of the following questions:

1. Research question: Is the research question developed according to the applicable academic standard in the research field? Was the research question formulated clearly? Were the sub-topics logically derived from the main topic? Was the research topic sufficiently focused, and was the reasoning behind this focus explained in the paper? Is it made sufficiently clear how the research contributes to the field in an original way?

2. Theoretical framework & academic relevance: Is the academic relevance of the research clearly stated? Are the sources relevant, representative and of sufficient academic quality? Does the research position itself critically/ in relation to the existing sources? Are the chosen theories and/or analytical concepts pertinent to the research question? Are the main concepts/terms clearly defined?

3. Accountability to the method: Are the research methods used adequate to address the research question? Are they used in the correct manner? Is the reflection on the chosen research and analysis method adequate? Is the method used to collect data described and justified in detail? Are the central concepts/terms clearly defined?

4. Results/Analysis: Are the results described clearly and systematically? Does the analysis correspond to the described method? Is there a sound balance between description and analysis? Is the knowledge of the field sufficient and used adequately?

5. Conclusion: Does the conclusion answer the main question? Is the conclusion more than just a summary? Does the student reflect critically on her/his own approach? Is there sufficient cross-referencing between the student's own (empirical) research results and the literature/theory? Does the student convincingly demonstrate the innovative character of the research, its impact on the research field and the resulting suggestions for further research?

6. Use & citation of sources: Is the choice of source material (primary and secondary) appropriate and of sufficient quality? Is there a sufficient distinction in the analysis of primary and secondary sources? Is the distinction between own analysis and work of others clearly indicated? Is the citation of sources adequate and accurate? Are citations used correctly?

7. Structure of the argument: is the information presented in a professional and logical way? Is there a clear division into chapters and paragraphs? Is the argumentation clear and coherent? Are the paragraphs and sections coherent and sufficiently limited in scope? Is the reflection on the structure and form of presentation of sufficient quality?

8. Composition and style: Is the thesis written in an appealing and understandable manner? Is terminology used adequately and accurately? Is the English grammatically and stylistically correct?

9. Initiative: Is the development of the student in becoming an independent researcher of sufficient quality? Is there a sufficiently independent way of thinking? Has the student carefully utilised the feedback provided? Did the student respect agreements and deadlines? Did the student need much help during the process? If so, on which points (e.g. formulating a research question, familiarisation with the literature, structure of the argument, composition, language)?

10. Defense (if applicable)

Detailed grade description

Deficient (5):

The thesis does not have a central research question. It shows poor knowledge of the scholarly context and little evidence of independent thought. The research is superficial, unsystematic, and shows little effort. The argument lacks structure and the writing is vague or incorrect (the expression is poor at best, incoherent at worst.) It makes inadequate use of primary and secondary sources, and/or does not use or produce relevant data. The presentation does not meet professional standards.

Pass (6)

> A 6 is awarded to a thesis that meets (but does not reach beyond)
>
> the accepted standards in the field in terms of soundness of methods and argumentation.

The thesis has a central question and provides an answer. The presentation of sources meets professional standards and the argument shows knowledge of the academic context. The thesis shows evidence of independent research in the relevant field, using appropriate methods. At the same time, its grasp of the issues involved does not reach beyond the basic requirements of the field. The writing does not exceed the basic requirements of correctness and clarity.

*Good (*7)

> A 7 is awarded to a thesis that meets these standards and also makes available interesting and original results that merit attention (for instance in the form of being cited in scientific publications).

The thesis formulates and attempts to answer a central research question in a satisfactory way. It demonstrates a good basic understanding of the topic and of its complexities. It shows a good knowledge of the relevant academic context. It demonstrates solid coverage of the relevant data and of secondary and primary sources, using appropriate methods. The presentation and discussion of the data and sources is generally professional. The language is correct and the main points are made explicitly and in a structured way. However, the analysis may be derivative and lacking in discrimination. It exhibits some problems of relevance and structure. The evidence presented does not fully support conclusions, and it lacks detail and nuance. Expression may exhibit some deficiencies. It shows little evidence of independent thought or of critical reflection on methods and theories.

Very good (8):

> An 8 can be awarded to a thesis that makes a contribution to the field that in principle merits publication, though not necessarily in the form of an independent publication (this presupposes sufficient originality, and soundness of the research carried out).

The thesis formulates a research question clearly and provides a convincing answer to it. It demonstrates a sound understanding of the topic and the issues involved in it. It shows a broad understanding of the academic context. It demonstrates extensive independent research, using appropriate methods. It is coherently structured and argued. The conclusions are supported by detailed evidence. It is well expressed. The analyses are more solid than original. There is limited evidence of critical reflection on methods and theories.

*Excellent (*9):

> A 9 can be awarded to a thesis that makes a contribution to the field that is so original and convincing that it merits being brought to the attention of the international forum as part of a contribution in an A-level journal, and/or immediately qualifies the student for being admitted to further study at the PhD level.

The central question is very clearly formulated. It is very clearly situated in the relevant scholarly discussions and the writer shows an above average level of familiarity with the relevant scholarly context. It addresses all aspects of the topic and demonstrates careful and systematic research on appropriately selected sources or independently gathered data. It demonstrates critical reflection on methods and theories. It shows evidence of independent thought, knowledge of the field, and high-level insight and powers of analysis. The argument is balanced, well structured and effectively expressed, with specific, detailed and accurate use of evidence. It is scrupulous in its citation of primary and secondary sources and its adherence to bibliographic conventions.

Outstanding (10):

> A 10 can be awarded a thesis that makes a highly original and important contribution to the field and qualifies for acceptance in an international A-level journal.

The question is innovative and sharply formulated. It is shown to have considerable relevance to the scholarly discussions in the field. The thesis demonstrates a full command of the topic and the debates in the field. It shows evidence of original and independent thought but also of systematic, broad-ranging and thorough research in the field using appropriate methods. It shows exceptional insight and powers of analysis which fully reflect the complexity of the topic. It demonstrates an engagement with and critical approach to the scholarly debate. The argumentation is thorough, the examples are always precise and relevant, and the selection and synthesis of secondary literature are polished. The handling of bibliography and footnoting is up to professional standard and the style is precise, correct, and highly readable.