

How to write a seminar paper

– An introductory guide to academic writing –

1 General

- Your paper must be an original piece of work. Translating and / or rewriting entire original publications or parts of them is no independent scientific work. When writing a paper, the main focus is on discussing the topic of your paper.
- The title of your paper depends on your selected topic and must not be modified.
- Your paper should provide a well-structured presentation of a series of arguments with relevance to your topic. Instead of listing all arguments that come to your mind, you will want to make a choice of significant arguments and outline them in a comprehensible way for your readers.
- You are expected to use scientific literature while working on your topic. When presenting the results of a scientific essay, it is also important to outline the underlying hypotheses (model assumptions, data set, empirical approach, etc.). For reasons of space, no essay can, of course, be presented in detail. The aim is thus to develop a comprehensible, intuitive explanation of the approach and of the main findings.
- A sound seminar paper is more than a mere enumeration of arguments. Therefore make sure to develop a sensible line of argumentation.

2 Structure

- Make sure to produce the number of required pages indicated in the syllabus of the seminar. That number refers to the length of text and does neither include tables, figures, indexes nor appendices.
- A seminar paper consists of the following elements (in order): cover page, table of contents, lists of tables, figures and abbreviations (where necessary), main text, list of references, and appendices (where necessary). Common abbreviations like “i.e.” or “e.g.” are not to be included in the list of abbreviations.
- The pages of the main text, references, and appendices must be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals. However, the table of contents as well as the lists of figures and abbreviations should be consecutively numbered in Roman numerals.
- The main text is divided into sections, starting with an introduction and finishing off with a conclusion. The purpose of the introductory section is to present the topic. Moreover, you should illustrate your central hypothesis and outline your method of analyzing it. The concluding section should provide a summary and, in addition, give a critical assessment of the topic and provide an outlook for further research questions.
- All sections and subsections are required to follow a consistent numbering system. If you choose to divide a section into subsections, there obviously must be at least two of them, i.e. if there is a subsection 2.1.1, it has to be followed by 2.1.2.
- In general, the structure and dimension of the paper should keep a reasonable balance, i.e. if you are to write a 12-page paper, pay attention not to break down the subsections beyond the third level (e.g. 1.1.1).
- If you wish to include additional material or documents in the appendix, make sure they are relevant, but not critical for understanding the paper, and refer to them somewhere throughout the text.
- Each table and figure have their own heading, follow a consecutive numbering system, and present information about the source. In case a table or figure does not have a specific source because you have developed it yourself, write “own table” or “own figure”. If tables

and / or figures are a part of your thesis, do not forget to refer to them somewhere in the text.

- The paper should provide a visually appealing and clear overview. This means, for instance, that the headings of sections and subsections stand out clearly against the rest of the text, and that there is appropriate text spacing between paragraphs and sections.
- Verify linguistic correctness: Please mind your syntax, grammar, punctuation, and wording.
- What you write should make sense and wording should be precise. Therefore it is strongly recommended you use technical terms whenever possible.
- Your fellow students should be able to understand your paper without previously reading scientific texts about your topic. So when writing, always bear your target group in mind.

3 Formatting

- Write your paper on the computer and print it one-sided.
- Recommended margins and font size:
 - o Margins: left 3 cm, right 2.5 cm, top 2.5 cm, bottom 2.5 cm
 - o Main text: line spacing 1.5, font size 12 pt, font Times New Roman or Arial
 - o Footnotes: line spacing 1.0, font size 10 pt, font Times New Roman or Arial
- If you make use of mathematical formula, make sure to indent and number them for easy readability. Microsoft Word has an Equation Editor, and also programs like Latex or Matlab offer adequate solutions.

4 References

- Your selection of literature should focus on the relevance to the topic, not on an easy access to the publications.
- All sources used are to be included in the list of references. In general, the cited sources should be the original ones. Sources are commonly listed in alphabetical order by author.
- Focus on citing officially published articles. Discussion papers or working papers should only be taken into account if they have not been published in journals or books.
- Sources that have not been used throughout the text must not be included in the references.
- Books and articles in edited volumes have the following appearance:
 - o Skern, T. (2011): Writing Scientific English: A Workbook. 2nd edition. UTB, Stuttgart.
 - o Weingast, B. R. (2008): "The Performance and Stability of Federalism: An Institutional Perspective", in Ménard, Claude (ed.), Handbook of new institutional economics, Springer, Berlin; Heidelberg, pp. 149-174.
- Articles in journals appear as follows:
 - o Thomson, W. (1999): "The Young Person's Guide to Writing Economic Theory", in: Journal of Economic Literature, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 157-183.
- Research work which has not yet been published, e.g. working papers follow this format:
 - o Meyer, H. (2003): The Welfare of Quotations – An Empirical Approach, Lehrstuhl Discussion Paper 26, University of Mannheim.
- If a book, essay, etc. has more than three authors, only the name of the first author appears both in the bibliography and in the reference, followed by the additional "et al.":
- Kochar, K., et al. (2006): India's Patterns of Development: What Happened, What Follows. NBER Working Paper No. 12023
- If you cite several publications of one and the same author, the references will appear in chronological order. However, should you use several sources by one particular author from the same year of publication, these are distinguished by adding lowercase Latin characters

to the year of publication, e.g.: Meyer, H. (2007a) and Meyer, H. (2007b).

- Use online sources only if they are not available in a different format. In addition to specifying author, year, and title, also give details on the URL and the date of access.

5 Citing sources

- Arguments, ideas, findings, etc. derived from the literature or from other sources must be cited accordingly, except for generally recognized and known facts. In case the paper was not produced independently or if sources or tools were used without citing them, it will be graded "Fail" in accordance with the examination regulations of the respective degree program.
- Quotations which are direct and identical to the original source are enclosed within double quotation marks. The omission of a single word is marked with two suspension points, whereas the omission of two or more words is indicated with three suspension points. Quotations within a direct quotation are enclosed within single quotation marks. When rephrasing something, no quotation marks are needed. Avoid direct quotations. Only use them if it is not possible to express a concept in a shorter and more concise manner.
- Make sure to cite the references of each quotation. This is usually done by placing a short reference in the text or by inserting a footnote. What's most important is that your reference allows to unambiguously identify the original source. Individual emphasis has to be designated as such.
- A short reference contains the name of the author, the year of publication, and the page number of the cited source. If the quotation extends over two pages, write *pp. number of first page f.* If, however, the quotation extends beyond two pages, use the format *pp. number of first page ff.* (e.g. Meyer, 2003, pp. 15 ff.) A footnote separates comments or references from the running text. The reference can be full¹ or short².

¹ Meyer, H. (2004): The Welfare of Quotations – An Empirical Approach, Lehrstuhl Discussion Paper 26, University of Mannheim, pp. 15 ff.

² Meyer, 2003, pp. 15 ff.

6 Further information

6.1 Bibliographic research

- The topic is to be studied by consulting academic literature.
- There are better search engines than Google and Wikipedia for researching literature, e.g. databases like Econlit, OPAC, LexisNexis, or Jstor.
- [Here](#) you can access the databases of the University Library.
- If you wish to find out where a specific essay was cited (in order to get from old publications to new ones with a similar topic), visit: Web of Science (Social Science Citation Index)
- You can easily find published essays by searching the name of the journal in the [online catalog](#) of the University Library. When searching for working papers, it is best to directly visit the website of the publishing institution (e.g., www.nber.org, www.cepr.org, www.cesifo.de).

6.2 Further reading

This guide provides a set of basic rules on how to write your seminar paper. You will find more details in the vast literature on scientific writing. Below there is a small selection of examples:

- Eco, Umberto (2015): How to Write a Thesis, MIT Press.
- Macgilchrist, Felicitas (2014): Academic writing, UTB, Stuttgart.
- Wallwork, Adrian (2013): English for academic research: writing exercises, Springer, NY; Heidelberg
- Swales, John; Feak, Christine (2012): Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Siepmann, Dirk (2011): Writing in English: a guide for advanced learners, 2. rev. and extended ed, Francke, Tübingen; Basel.