

Guidelines for Academic Writing and Academic Presentations

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Content

1.	Goal of your final paper or thesis.....	3
2.	Select a topic	3
3.	Derive your research question.....	4
4.	Prepare your exposé	4
5.	Present your final paper exposé, results, or research design in the seminar or colloquium	4
6.	Structure of your final paper/thesis.....	5
7.	Literature review, referencing literature, bibliography.....	5
8.	Editing your final paper or thesis	6
9.	Format of your final paper	6
10.	Coversheet of BA/MA thesis.....	7
11.	Content of your final seminar paper or BA/MA thesis.....	8
12.	Length.....	9
13.	Submission of final papers, BA or MA theses	9
14.	Grading and assessment criteria for final term papers & theses:.....	9
15.	Instructions for student presentations.....	10
16.	Project management as part of your research project.....	13
17.	Using artificial intelligence in producing your seminar paper or final thesis	14

1. Goal of your final paper or thesis

The goal of your final paper or thesis is to show that you are capable of independently using the content and methods learned during your studies and applying them to a theoretically and practically relevant research question. You will have to work with the literature listed on the syllabus and in addition, conduct your literature review using the additional library and online resources. Independent work in this context means, that you come up with your research question, conceptualize it in the context of an area of interest, derive a researchable topic, consult with me, and then work through the steps discussed in class to prepare your final paper or thesis.

You will have to show that you can a) structure a research problem in a logical way, b) present your literature review (cite and reference the seminal sources (books, peer-reviewed academic articles, or databases), c) derive your research question from an empirical phenomenon or the existing literature in your field of study, d) prepare an appropriate research design, including data generation and analysis, derived from the research question, e) write up your qualitative findings, f) critically assess and discuss your findings and explain how they add to the existing state of theory.

2. Select a topic

Students will derive their topics related to the core issues discussed in the seminar or their area of interest (to write a final thesis). Your topic can either be derived from the literature to show a gap in the existing literature, from an empirical phenomenon you observed during your internships, from a newspaper article as a description of a current issue the government or society at large is facing, or your individual experiences interacting with public administrations.

In the seminar, we will derive your research question using an exercise from the Writing Center. We will especially focus on two issues:

- a) Is this question answerable and researchable (in the format of a BA or MA final seminar paper or thesis)?
- b) Can we limit the problem area so that you focus on one specific sub-problem or issue?

It is your task to improve the research question in the subsequent sessions until you can present a coherent exposé about halfway through the seminar or colloquium.

3. Derive your research question

A research question is the question that guides your literature search, gives direction for your study, determines your research design (what data do you need, and subsequently given the data and cases you have chosen, how do you have to analyze the data, and therefore determines the methodology).

Use the [three-step exercise](#) from the University of Konstanz's [Writing Center](#) to repeatedly rephrase your research question and its sub-question(s).

4. Prepare your exposé

The **exposé** is a short 2-5 page summary to clarify some of the main issues you will address in the final paper or thesis. It is the basis for the outline of the final paper/thesis, the starting point for the literature search and review, the development of your work plan, and for a conversation with your (co-) advisor. It will eventually become the introduction chapter of your thesis.

The exposé includes the following items:

- topic of your paper, including its theoretical and practical relevance,
- research question(s), hypotheses or assumptions,
- aim or goals of your paper/thesis,
- current status of the literature in the field that you are studying – research gap, problem,
- research design (method – deductive or inductive, data generation procedure, data analysis steps)
- research material (including subjects/cases selected, data needed – primary sources such as interview or survey data collected by you, secondary data from existing data sets or databases, sources – literature, news, formal government records) and the selection criteria for this material
- main chapters of your paper,
- milestones and timetable.

5. Present your final paper exposé, results, or research design in the seminar or colloquium

In some of the seminars (VS), students will have to present at least their exposé halfway through the semester, and in other seminars an additional progress report of their final paper at the end of the semester. Presenters can use between 10-15 minutes for their presentations (depending on the class size) and will receive peer-to-peer feedback as well as input from the advisor.

Suggested **outline** of the exposé and final paper presentations:

- Research question and aim of the paper

- Motivation for the research question
 - Why is this topic theoretically relevant and practically interesting?
 - Research gap, underdeveloped explanations, and connection to the class content
- Research steps (how will you reach this goal?)
- Main part: Develop your argument, explain your theses or assumptions based on existing research frameworks and literature
- A summary of (preliminary results) and questions/topics for discussion

6. Structure of your final paper/thesis

The structure of the paper depends on the research design you developed based on your research question (whether you are using a deductive or inductive approach). We will discuss how to come up with a research design in class.

There are several different approaches on how to structure your paper:

- Chronological: a review of the existing literature and discourse in academia based on publication dates or the phases of its historical development of the phenomena under study.
- Discourse branches in the literature: This is different from the chronological order (by date) because discourses might take different pathways and develop in parallel. Here your task might be to identify the invisible colleges (= schools of thought that developed over time). You will have to show the logical development of the topic.
- Comparison of similar cases – not necessarily in chronological order – but ordered by importance or internal logic (for example phases).
- Hierarchical outline so that the reader can follow your research steps and outcomes: Motivation of the topic (introduction), current state of the literature including definitions or the core issues, research question, literature review (state of the literature in your research field) from which you derive either hypotheses or assumptions, research design (including case selection, data, collection, analysis), findings, conclusion, and discussion.

Use every opportunity that is provided to you to discuss your outline with me. I offer short check-ins at the beginning of each class, weekly office hours, your exposé presentation with peer-to-peer feedback, and your final paper presentation at the end of the seminar. It is up to you to make use of these opportunities to receive feedback.

7. Literature review, referencing literature, bibliography

A prerequisite for attending a BA or MA seminar is attendance in Proseminar I and II where you will learn how to conduct a literature review, how to cite references, how to create a bibliography, and how to develop a research design. In addition, students writing their BA or MA theses have to be able to create a research design taught in Proseminar II.

Students have to use one of the bibliography software tools provided for free at the University of Konstanz' IT department ([KIM](#)): Both Endnote and RefWorks

can be used to store the literature you find and cite in your text. When you use one of the references in your text, both tools automatically create a bibliography at the end of your MS Word document. [Download the software for free via KIM](#) and review YouTube videos to learn how to use the technology.

As an output style, use the [APA Style Guide](#) in its most recent version, using the Author-Date method of citing and referencing (currently used by both the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory and Public Administration Review – the premiere journals in Public Administration).

8. Editing your final paper or thesis

You are responsible for **grammar and spelling mistakes**. Not using **at least your spell checker** will result in point deductions. Use your text editor's automatic spell check and *then* read the text aloud to yourself, so that you can identify immediately whether a sentence makes sense or not. There are also free AI tools available, such as Grammarly that can help you identify spelling mistakes.

Use your text editor's suggested automatic **numbering of your chapters**. But make sure that your subheadings add up. If you say *a*, make sure you also say *b*, otherwise you might not need bullet points or subheadings.

Use these rules of thumb: **KISS (Keep it Simple, Stupid)**

- make it concrete instead of vague,
- use active voice instead of passive voice,
- avoid two negatives,
- use simple sentences instead of long convoluted sentences, and
- avoid jargon, at the same time, remember you are writing for an academic audience (use the right vocabulary of your discipline!).

9. Format of your final paper

The following formatting guidelines will be checked and are part of your final grade – no exceptions:

- Paper: DIN A4, white
- One- or double-sided printing
- Font size: 12 Pkt.
- Font type: Times New Roman
- Paragraphs are formatted justified (or block in German)
- Line spacing: 1,5
- Page margins: left 2,5 cm / right 3 cm
- Add your page numbers at the bottom right of each page (starting on the second page)

10. Coversheet of BA/MA thesis

[Titel der Bachelor- oder Masterarbeit]

Masterarbeit

vorgelegt von
[Vorname Nachname]
[Matrikelnummer]

an der

Universität
Konstanz



Sektion Politik – Recht – Wirtschaft

Fachbereich Politik- und Verwaltungswissenschaft

1. Gutachter: (Titel, Vorname Nachname)
2. Gutachter: (Titel, Vorname Nachname)

Konstanz, Angabe des Jahres

11. Content of your final seminar paper or BA/MA thesis

[for BA and MA theses, please also check the instructions of the Prüfungsamt and the Prüfungsordnung]*

- I. Cover sheet**
 - Name of the university, department, institute
 - Name of the faculty member
 - Title of the seminar
 - Semester (for example Winter semester 2016-2017)
 - Submission date
 - Title (and or subtitle) of your paper
 - Type of submission (final paper, or bachelor/master thesis)
 - Submitted by: Your name
 - Your address, phone number, and email address
 - Student ID number
 - Your current semester (Fachsemesteranzahl) and field of study (Studiengang)

- II. Content (Inhaltsverzeichnis)**
 - Preferably automatically created using MS Word
 - Each line includes the chapter number, chapter heading, and page number
 - No special formatting is required (avoid bold, italics, etc.)

- III. List of tables and graphics (if applicable) (Tabellen-/Abbildungsverzeichnis)**

(this also means that tables and graphics have to be numbered – large tables and graphics go into the appendix)

- IV. Introduction/Einleitung**

- V. Main text (Hauptteil) including literature review, research design, data collection and analysis, findings**

- VI. Conclusions (Schlussbetrachtung) including limitations**

- VII. Appendix (for large tables or graphics)**

- VIII. Bibliography (Literaturverzeichnis)**

- IX. Signed declaration of independent work (Erklärung über die selbständige Verfassung der Arbeit)**

Make sure that you select the newest version of this document from the website of the Department of Politics and Public Administration.

12. Length

The length of BA and MA theses are set by the formal examination board of the Department of Politics and Public Administration (only the main text, excluding title/cover page, table of contents, bibliography, and appendix):

- i) Final seminar papers (Hausarbeiten):
 - (1) BA 12 pages
 - (2) MA 15 pages
- ii) BA thesis: max. 10.000 words
- iii) MA thesis: max. 20.000 words

Important: Make extra sure to stay within these page/word limits. Several colleagues have expressed that they won't read and evaluate more than the set maximum number of words for BA and MA theses!

13. Submission of final papers, BA or MA theses

The most important piece of advice for your submission I can provide is to make sure that you have reviewed and re-read your submission. That means, you read it a few times, correct mistakes, and make sure it is complete. One way to find mistakes and errors is to read it out loud to yourself.

Submission of final papers:

Submissions are accepted in pdf format to be submitted on **March 31** (BA students) or **April 15** (MA students) for the winter semester, or **September 15** (for both BA and MA) at the end of the summer semester – including the declaration form of independent work.

Submission for BA and MA theses only go through the registrar's office (Prüfungsamt): Deadlines for BA and MA theses are provided to you individually by the university.

Before you submit, make sure to request a code for the **Turnitin** upload so that your submission can be checked for plagiarism.

14. Grading and assessment criteria for final term papers & theses:

- I. Introduction, explanation, and research question:
 - Definition, putting into context, and explanation of the topic
 - Clear and relevant research question
- II. Literature review/theoretical framework
 - Scope and relevance of the studied literature
 - Critical and independent discussion of the literature
 - Clear elaboration of the gap in the literature
 - Well-defined research hypotheses
- III. Explanation of design and execution of research
 - Explanation of data collection strategy and method of analysis
 - Explanation of fit between methodology and research aim

- Validity and reliability of the research
- IV. Results
 - Data collection and data analysis are well-executed
 - Quality of data
 - Presentation of results: complete, to the point, insightful
 - Useful visual material (figures, tables)
- V. Conclusion / Discussion
 - Answer to the question based on literature and empirical research
 - Broader implications of the findings for research and policy
 - Critical appraisal of own research process
- VI. Write-up and presentation
 - Clear and functional structure of the thesis
 - Language and flow of the text (check your text! Clear statements! Avoid unnecessary complicated or fill words, correct use of terms)
 - Acknowledgement of sources and quotations
 - Attractive design and careful layout

15. Instructions for student presentations

Your presentation consists of **three** parts:

- a) A **formal consultation with Professor Mergel** at least one week before your class presentation. Bring your structure, a draft of your handout, and questions that you couldn't solve as a team or that were not answered in this guide.
- b) An **in-class presentation** (see instructions below). A **paper version** is to be handed in to Professor Mergel and a **PDF version** needs to be sent by email to Professor Mergel on the day of the presentation.
- c) A **handout in paper format** that you distribute in class and a **PDF file** sent to Professor Mergel on the day of the presentation.

I. **Goals of your presentation**

- To present the essential theories and empirical results in a comprehensive and appealing talk, that makes use of different types of media, such as PowerPoint presentations, Flipchart, meta plan, if necessary, video clips.
 - Not a (bullet point) list of all existing theories or all available empirical results and research questions;
 - Instead: Inform about a topic with the relevant aspects or issues that are related to the broader context of the seminar and show the research streams, their contributions, and a research gap.
 - Organize either along relevant (central) questions, relationships between constructs, commonalities, or contrast extreme positions,
- Provide your critical assessment of the existing constructs in the broader context of the seminar topic and explain your choices.
- Provide questions and moderate a discussion by including the other participants.

- Using academic standards to structure, select references, cite references, and format the handouts and other materials used during the presentation and the subsequent paper.

II. Formatting and preparing your presentation

- Use visually appealing resources to support your spoken word to help your audience absorb complex information
 - Focus on a few slides and not a flip book (“*Daumenkino*”). The rule of thumb is: 3 minutes per slide
 - Only add information to your slides that is difficult and complex to convey verbally or that is of the highest relevance (tables, graphs, definitions, technical terms, names)
 - Organize the main statements in 3 to max. 5 keywords/statements per slide
 - Structure your slides, and make them easy to read (large font size min. 18pt, highlight with italics or bold formatting)
 - *KISS* principle: Keep it simple and serious – avoid special effects and over-the-top animations
- Speak without reading from a script: Minimize the content on your slides, use keywords on index cards, but don’t add fully formulated sentences.
- Time yourself during one rehearsal and potentially shorten your talk.

III. Meaningful structure of your presentation

Organize your presentation following the structure below:

- **Introduction (15% of your time)**
 - Welcome and greeting of your audience
 - Introduce the topic by highlighting a specific research discourse by explaining the relevance of the topic and the connection to the overall topic of the seminar.
 - Derive the central or leading question (derived from the goals of your presentation): “*Why am I talking about what I am talking about?*”
 - Offer the structure of your presentation as an orientation for your audience and explain the relevance of each section (1-3 sentences).
- **The main part (70% of your time)**
 - Synthesize (= connect) the relevant facts of the topic.
 - Provide a meaningful thread (“Roter Faden”/Golden Thread): What is the internal structure that connects the facts or theories: either historically or chronologically, thematically following discourse branches in the literature, comparison/contrast of cases, or hierarchical (dominant, subcategories, etc.)
 - Make sure to highlight when a new topic/issue starts & explain how it relates to previous points.
- **Closing with your critical assessment (15%)**
 - Draw *your conclusion* by moving from synthesis to analysis: criticize the selected texts at the end of your presentation.

- Go back to your initial goals of your presentation (or leading question) and show how you answered this question. Formulate a few final theses for the subsequent discussion.
- Briefly concisely summarize your main messages.

IV. Discussion (Additional time allotment – independent of your talk)

- After your formal presentation, provide a transition to bridge between your talk and the discussion/conversation part with your audience by asking a specific question.
- Prepare an opening question that can be provocative to start the discussion, but at the same time obvious enough so that people can respond to it (not too complex). For example: “A question that is still unanswered/obvious/never talked about is...” -> Needs to have a clear connection to your presentation.
- Prepare a series of questions while you are working on your talk and write them down, but also allow questions from the audience.

V. Handout

- The header includes relevant information about the seminar & presentation: Chair’s name, seminar title, title of your presentation, your name date
- Length: max. 2 pages (1 sheet of paper)
- Format: Font size: 12pt, 1.5 paragraph spacing, Margins left: 1.5 cm; right, top and bottom: 2 cm)
- Well-structured following the structure of your presentation:
 - Don’t copy & paste long text elements
 - Summarize the key statements of your talk using the main statements of your presentation in comprehensible paragraphs
 - Follow the outline of your presentation
 - Large graphs or pictures are only allowed at the end of the handout (if at all necessary)
- Include referenced sources at the end, so that others can identify them. Quotes have to be referenced.

VI. Special instructions for group presentations

- Prepare all parts of the presentation, handout, and academic essay **together**. This will avoid double work, inconsistencies, or missing parts.
- Work on your **time management** (Who presents what? How are you transitioning from one speaker to the next? How are the parts connected?)
- Conduct at least one **dry run** to make sure everyone has equal amounts of time & quality of content to present.
- You will be **evaluated by your team members** and will be asked to evaluate the teamwork of your team.

VII. Academic essay accompanying class presentations & talks

- The beginning of your presentation follows the same structure as your presentation but is fully explained following academic standards of writing.
- Formalities are specified in the “Guidelines for Academic Writing” including all information on the cover page, structure, citations, reference style, formatting, etc.
- Length for seminars that require an academic essay accompanying a presentation: max. five DIN A4 pages.

16. Project management as part of your research project

Good planning is crucial for every research project. Spend some time before you start writing and engaging in your research project to come up with a detailed plan that clearly outlines the rules and responsibilities of every team member.

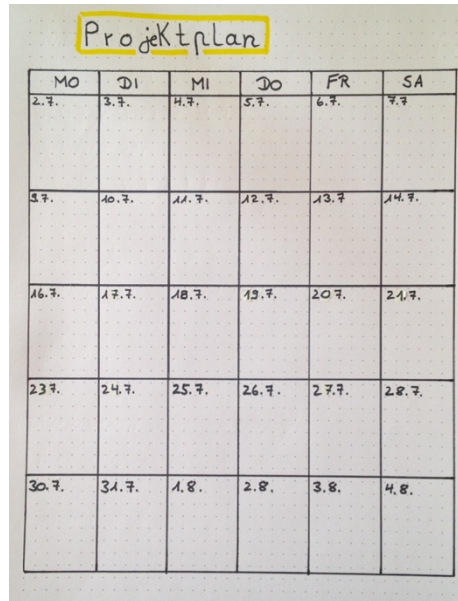
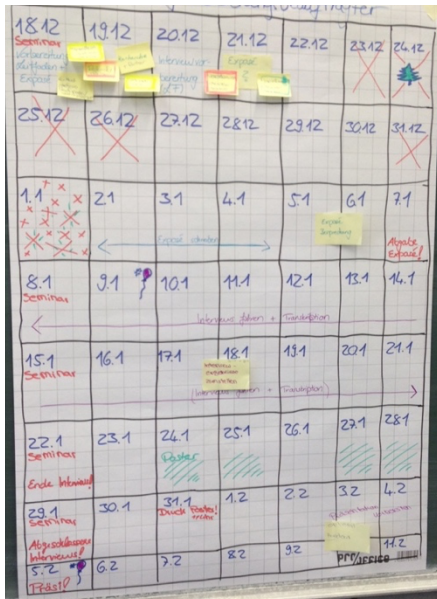
(a) Roles and responsibilities in group projects

- Define as a team how you want to work together. What worked well in the past?
- Who brings what kinds of skills to the project team? Can you distribute tasks based on preferences and skills?
- How do you want to communicate with each other? (Regular face-to-face meetings, online meetings, shared drives, etc.)
- What are the deadlines you need to set for each group member’s part, so each person knows when he/she has to deliver?
- What should each deliverable look like? Is it for example a collection of data or are you expecting the data from the questionnaires to already be typed up and analyzed? Transparency in the agreements is very important!
- Who will take notes? How do you rotate this task?
- Who is assigned to take the time and has the right to call for a vote while you discuss a controversial issue?
- What kind of vote does the group accept (majority rules, consensus, etc.)? Who plays the devil’s advocate and argues for the opposite side?
- Who serves as the spokesperson to outsiders (communication with interview partners, with the professor, etc.)?
- How do you deal with conflict in your group?

(b) Project Plan

Create a project plan and assign tasks to each group member. Starting at the submission or presentation date of your research project, go backward step-wise and include major milestones in your project plan.

Make sure to include time buffers to account for other tasks or life events during the semester. Be aware that you need time to review the results, for printing, etc. In some of my seminars, students have used the following timetables to plan out the remaining weeks until they have to present their findings:



Important milestones are tasks or accomplishments as part of the seminar plan that you should keep in mind when you prepare your project. They usually have a run-up time and constitute decisions or check points, or even include submission of part of your research project for review by the instructor. Only when you reach the milestones (or deliverables) defined in the syllabus, your project can be completed (and graded) successfully.

Review your project plan and its progress regularly to see whether you are going to reach the next milestone. If not, review what effect this will have on the following project phases.

Discuss with your team whether you are satisfied with the results you achieved so far. After completing your project, you should evaluate both the content and the process.

17. Using artificial intelligence in producing your seminar paper or final thesis

If you use generative AI tools as aids, understand that you are solely responsible for the accuracy of the content of the AI-generated passages, as well as for referencing other people’s thoughts and ideas according to the principles of good scientific practice.

In the case of an adoption of AI-generated passages that go beyond purely formal, stylistic corrections and/or translations, they need to be marked, and, in addition to the AI tool used, indicate the prompts that you have entered to create the content.