



Guidelines for Academic Writing of Final Papers, BA and MA Theses

Guidelines for Academic Presentations

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1. Goal of your final paper

The goal of your final paper is to show that you are capable to independently use the class content and apply it to an academic research question. You will have to work with the literature listed on the syllabus and conduct your own literature review using additional library and online resources. Independent work in this context means, that you will have to come up with your own research question, conceptualize it in the context of the class, consult with me, and then work through the steps discussed in class to prepare your final paper.

You will have to show that you are able to a) structure a research problem in an 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 collection and analysis, derived from the research question, e) critically assess and discuss your findings and explain how they add to the existing state of the literature.

2. Select a topic

Students will derive their own topics related to the core issues discussed in the seminar. 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, a newspaper article as a description of a current issue government or society at large are facing, or your individual experiences interacting with government.

In each 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 (in the format of a BA or MA final seminar paper)?; and b) can we limit the problem area so that you focus on one specific sub-problem? It is your task to improve the research question in the subsequent sessions until you can present a coherent exposé about half-way through the seminar.

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).

Resources:

- https://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/research-questions.original.pdf
- <https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/tutorials/question>
- https://libraries.indiana.edu/sites/default/files/Develop_a_Research_Question.pdf

4. Prepare your exposé

The **exposé** is a short 2-3 page summary with the purpose to clarify some of the main issues you will address in the final paper. It is the basis for the outline of the final paper, the starting point for the literature search and review, to develop your work plan, and as a basis for a conversation with your advisor.

The exposé includes the following items:

- topic of your paper,
- research question(s), hypotheses, assumptions,
- aim or goals of your paper,
- research design (method – deductive or inductive, data collection 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
- current status of the literature in the field that you are studying – research gap, problem,
- main chapters of your paper,
- milestones and timetable.

5. Present your final paper results

Students will have to present their exposé half-way through the semester and a progress report of their final paper at the end of the class. 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 relevant and interesting?
 - Research gap, underdeveloped explanations, and connection to the class content
- Research steps (who will you reach this goal?)
- Main part: Develop your argument, explain your theses or assumptions based on existing research frameworks and literature
- Short summary of (preliminary results) and questions/topics for discussion

6. Structure of your final paper

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: review of the existing literature and discourse in academia based on publication dates or of the historical development of the phenomena under study.
- Discourse branches in the literature: This is different than 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 under Professor Mergel's supervision is attendance in Proseminar I where you will learn how to conduct a literature review, how to cite references, and how to create a bibliography. 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 via **KIM**: Both Endnote and RefWorks are used to store the literature you find and can then be used to cite the selected 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: <https://www.kim.uni-konstanz.de/en/literature/literature-management/> and review YouTube videos to learn how to use the tools.

As output style use **Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition**, 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. Writing your final paper

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.

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 rule 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,
- 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. Length

Number of pages (only the main text, excluding title/cover page, table of content, bibliography and appendix):

- Final seminar papers (Hausarbeiten):
 - BA 12 pages
 - MA 15 pages
- BA thesis: ca. 30 pages or 10.000 words
- MA thesis: No limitations

11. Content

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 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)**

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

VIII. **Bibliography (Literaturverzeichnis)**

IX. **Signed declaration of independent work**

(Erklärung über die selbständige Verfassung der Arbeit)

12. Submission of final papers

The most important piece of advice for your submission: Make sure that you have reviewed your paper. That means, you read it a view times, corrected mistakes, and made sure it is complete.

Submissions are only accepted in paper 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) during the summer semester. On the cover page, your paper will include the following information: title of your paper, submitted to: title of the seminar, faculty advisor's name, your name, student ID number, and the submission date. Please don't forget to include the signed for indicating that you worked on this paper independently. Dates are available on the department's homepage:

<https://www.polver.uni-konstanz.de/service/formalitaeten/fristen-und-termine/>

Submissions are accepted **in paper format only** on or before the due date in Professor Mergel's faculty assistant's office (D245) Mondays-Thursdays, 10:00am-noon.

13. Grading and assessment criteria (discussed in class):

- 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 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
 - Acknowledgement of sources and quotations
 - Attractive design and careful layout