

## Tips + Tricks for Seminar Courses and Thesis Writing

This guideline describes some formal issues and tips, as they apply to seminar papers and BA/MA theses.

### Passing Requirements for a Seminar:

To pass a seminar, your paper must at least be graded as “ausreichend” (satisfactory, 4.0). In addition, your presentation must also be successful.

### Term Paper:

#### Aim

In a seminar, students have to cope with the relevant scientific literature and write a term paper drawing on this literature. Each student receives one or more references as an introduction to the topic. It is a part of the course requirements to search on your own for additional relevant scientific literature.

Valuable tools for literature searches are:

- Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.de> )
- Social Science Citation Index via Web of Knowledge (Link [https://dbis.ur.de/detail.php?bib\\_id=ubfm&colors=&ocolors=&lett=f&tid=0&titel\\_id=2142](https://dbis.ur.de/detail.php?bib_id=ubfm&colors=&ocolors=&lett=f&tid=0&titel_id=2142) )
- “Econis Datenbank”, “Institut für Weltwirtschaft” in Kiel (<http://www.zbw.eu/datenbanken.htm> )
- „Econlit Datenbank“ ([http://info.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/fach\\_liste.html?fach=wiwi](http://info.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/fach_liste.html?fach=wiwi))

Newspapers and magazines, like “Spiegel”, “Focus” etc., are not considered scientific literature. Avoid using them, except for illustrating the public debate on your topic or to give some motivation (usually in the introductory chapter of your paper, see below).

Beware of using expert reports that were commissioned by some group of interest, e.g. Greenpeace or trade unions. While they may be executed in a proper manner, there is a substantial risk of them being only partly objective.

Try to avoid online resources. If you use online resources, pay attention to the reliability of the information and report the date of access.

**Note:** Academic journals usually provide PDF downloads of their published articles. These downloads are not considered online resources in the sense of the preceding remark about online resources. In fact, you are explicitly encouraged to use them. A list of economics journals that are considered to be usually of decent quality can be found, e.g., at <http://www.handelsblatt.com/downloads/9665428/1/journal-ranking.pdf> (the higher weight, the more respected the journal tends to be).

### Main body of paper

The term paper should describe the main arguments of the literature in your own words based on your own red line. Do not give just pure lists of keywords!

Stick to your topic! Do not write on topics of other seminar participants. If you “accidentally” read something on another seminar topic while searching for literature, you can contribute your knowledge in the discussion during the seminar meeting.

Your term paper (or thesis) should be written in a way that allows other students in the same semester to understand it without reading the original literature. Use a clear and accessible description, but avoid colloquial language. Clearness requires an accurate style. Do not use imprecise expressions like “several countries import great quantities of some goods” and avoid judgments unless you give a clear basis for your judgment.

Bad example: “I do not think that the proposed tax is a good tax.” Acceptable example: “Seen from an allocative perspective, the disadvantage of the proposed tax is a distortion of the decision to incorporate.”

The first chapter of your paper will be the introduction, in which you explain the specific (research) question(s) and the composition of your paper. Your introduction should explain and motivate the focus of your paper and may name aspects that are beyond what the paper can deal with. Elaborating on a precise question will help you separate relevant from irrelevant literature.

The last chapter will consist of your conclusions, i.e., the answers towards the question, based on the arguments in your paper. Do not make ad hoc personal statements, but try to conclude from what you have learned from the literature and empirical evidence. Your answers may be tentative if the literature is found insufficient to provide definite answers. A summary of the content is not necessary when you write a term paper of 15 pages, but can be part of the last chapter of a longer BA or MA thesis. In the last chapter you may also give your outlook for further research or developments based on the information you gathered in the text.

## Giving references

We expect you to express yourself in your own words. Only if you write in your own words, your reader has a chance to infer whether you have understood what you are writing.

Copy and paste from other people's work is strictly off limits. **This is a University, not a copy shop.** (Apologies to all of you who knew before!) Copying word-by-word of external texts (completely or partially) as well as translating literally, is no adequate seminar performance, but plagiarism. Copying without quotation is prohibited and will result in failing the course or the thesis.

You have to indicate clearly all references in your text, including origins of graphs and charts. The word “reference” does not only refer to direct or indirect quotation, but also any usage of other peoples’ thoughts and papers.

Note that you are also using a source if you closely copy its structure.

Use “short references” by indicating name, year of publication and page used in your text, for example “Huber (1987, p. 56)”. The complete bibliographical reference (including editor, location, journal, etc.) is located in the reference list, NOT in a footnote.

Generally, include references in-text and not in footnotes. A footnote “[1] cf. Huber (1987, S. 56).” is unnecessary, because you can write the reference in your text: “As Huber (1987, S. 56) has shown,

..." or: "Sometimes it is argued (Huber 1987, S. 56) ...". Use footnotes only in context with explanatory sentences, for example "[1] In contrast to the presented arguments, Huber (1987, S. 56) states..."

Every reference has to be listed in the reference list at the end of the term paper (see below). There is a one-to-one correspondence between references in the text and in the list of references: all sources in the text appear in the list of references; all items in the list of references are actually used in the text or footnotes.

Try to avoid direct quotations, because they will most likely not fit to your style of writing. In addition, frequent direct quotations may be a signal to the reader that the author has not fully understood the argument and wants to hide behind quotes avoiding to use his/her own words. If a quote seems necessary, use quotation marks for the text you have quoted. Use three dots [...] to indicate gaps in the quotation and point to additional included or omitted emphases by using footnotes or in brackets [ ]. Example: [emphasis in the original] or [emphasis added]. If you translate a quotation, you may give the original text in a footnote. If you detect a typo in the original you should reproduce it in the quote and use [sic] after the misspelled word to indicate.

Before handing in your paper, we strongly recommend to let other people read it. Even if the person (e.g. your partner) is not a fellow student, he or she may be able to check whether your essay is understandable or if you made mistakes in your style. Linguistic mistakes, like spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, influence the grading negatively in two manners. First, they signal insufficient accuracy. Second, grammatical errors may make it difficult to understand what you want to say.

Explain all your graphs and charts. No chart or graph must go unmentioned and undescribed in the text. Provide the source of the data in a note to the table or graph.

### Scientific writing: what does it mean?

Scientific writing implies:

- Discussion along a research question or a closely related set of questions.
- Traceability: sources should be made clear to allow the reader to check the arguments and facts. If your thesis contains empirical work, describe it so that a reader could replicate what you have done.
- Systematic discussion and clear red line. (In genuine new research it also means using consistent scientific methods.)
- If normative judgements are made, the reader should be able to understand the underlying criteria for judgment.

### Some literature on how to write a term paper:

Barras, Robert (1996): Students Must Write. A Guide to Better Writing in Coursework and Examinations, 2nd ed., Routledge: London.

Crewe, Phyllis and Mary R. Lea (1998): Writing at University. A Guide for Students, 2nd ed., Open University Press: Buckingham.

Niederhauser, Jürg (2011): Duden. Die schriftliche Arbeit, Duden: Mannheim.

## Layout

Your layout is also important for your paper, as a harmonized layout is required to allow comparing the length of papers.

For term papers at the Chair of Public Finance:

- Margin: on the left 3 cm, on the right 2.5 cm, at the top 2.5 cm, bottom 2.5 cm
- Spacing: 1.5, font size: 12 pt, font: Times New Roman
- Footnotes: single-spaced and font size: 10 pt

Your term paper should be some 15 pages of text (excluding reference list). “Wahlpflichtmodul mit Seminarcharakter”: some 10 pages. For details confer the Syllabus.

A BA thesis should be some 30 pages (+-10%) and a MA thesis some 40 pages (+- 10%); in both cases excluding appendices and references lists.

Every graph and every chart has its own title and numeration. Number graphs and charts consecutively.

Every page (except the front page) has a number. Page counting starts with your introduction (page 1). Use Roman numerals (I, II, III, ...) for pages before your introduction (e.g. table of content and list of abbreviations).

Order:

- Front page
- Table of contents
- If necessary: list of used acronyms, summary of graphs and charts and a list of symbols used
- Main text, starting with the introduction and ending with the conclusions
- Reference list
- Appendix (if necessary)

The front page of a term paper contains: title and number of your topic, title of seminar, name of lecturer, chair, date, your name, e-mail address, major, number of semesters studied, and (voluntarily) your matriculation number. Use the exact title as it is written on your thesis registration form or in the syllabus!

**Do not alter the title** without written permission! The examination office will refuse to accept your bachelor's or master's thesis if you depart from the title initially agreed on.

## Language

You may use the generic masculinum, as it is still common, for example, in tax laws and other official documents. Alternatively, you may want to confer the university recommendations on this:

[https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/57630150/Geschlechterinklusive\\_und\\_diversitätssensible\\_Sprache](https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/57630150/Geschlechterinklusive_und_diversitätssensible_Sprache) .

In general, the chair **does NOT** consider the gendering issue as a relevant issue when grading your thesis or paper.

### Statutory declaration

All term papers and theses have to include a signed declaration in which you declare that you have composed the present thesis yourself and without use of any other than the cited sources and aids.

Please use the template available at [http://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dateien\\_pruefungsamt/Formulare\\_Merkblaetter/Ehrenwoertliche\\_Erklaerung.pdf](http://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/fileadmin/user_upload/dateien_pruefungsamt/Formulare_Merkblaetter/Ehrenwoertliche_Erklaerung.pdf)

### Reference list

Every paper contains a reference list at the end. Pay attention to a consistent style. We recommend the following style.

#### a) Books:

Schöb, Ronnie (1995): *Ökologische Steuersysteme. Umweltökonomie und optimale Besteuerung*, Campus: Frankfurt, New York.

#### b) Essays from anthologies and collected volumes:

Sinn, Hans-Werner (1983): „Die Inflationsgewinne des Staates“, in: E. Wille (ed.), *Beiträge zur gesamtwirtschaftlichen Allokation. Allokationsprobleme im intermediären Bereich zwischen öffentlichem und privatem Wirtschaftssektor*, Verlag Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, pp. 111-166.

#### c) Journal articles:

Thum, Marcel (1994): „Network Externalities, Technological Progress, and the Competition of Market Contracts“, *International Journal of Industrial Organization* 12 (2), pp. 269-289.

d) If you use unpublished papers, for example discussion or working papers (“preprints”), make sure the paper actually is unpublished. If it has already been published, always cite the published version. If the paper indeed is unpublished, you may cite it like this:

Koskela, Erkki and Ronnie Schöb (1998): *Why Governments Should Tax Mobile Capital in the Presence of Unemployment*, CES Working Paper Series No. 175, Munich University.

e) “Internet Sources”. If, despite all your efforts to find “hard” literature, you can only cite internet sources to back important facts or claims, you may do so as follows:

OECD (2011). Public comments received on the administrative aspects of transfer pricing, [http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_33753\\_48340470\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3746,en_2649_33753_48340470_1_1_1_1,00.html), accessed 8 September 2011.

Preston, Peter (2011). *Treasure islands: Tax havens and the men who stole the world* by Nicholas Shaxson, *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/22/treasure-islands-tax-havens-shaxson-review>, accessed 7 October 2011.

With reference to e), please note what Wikipedia says about citing Wikipedia in scientific papers ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citing\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citing_Wikipedia), accessed 13 December 2011):

“As with any source, especially one of unknown authorship, you should be wary and independently verify the accuracy of Wikipedia information if possible. For many purposes, but particularly in academia, Wikipedia may not be an acceptable source; [hyperlink reference omitted, the author] indeed, some professors and teachers may reject Wikipedia-sourced material completely.”

List all references (irrespective of whether it is a book or article, etc.) in alphabetic order of the author’s surnames. List chronologically in case you cited more than one paper of an author. If your order is still not clear, list the titles alphabetically and add “a”, “b” etc. to the year of publication, so the reader can allocate the citation to the appropriate paper.

Salop, Steven (1973a): "Systematic Job Search and Unemployment", *Review of Economic Studies* 40 (2), pp. 191-201.

Salop, Steven (1973b): "Wage Differentials in a Dynamic Theory of the Firm", *Journal of Economic Theory* 6 (3), pp. 321-344.

### Submission of bachelor’s and master’s theses:

For turning in the thesis, please observe the rules by the examination office.

Master’s theses:

<https://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/studium/studierende/pruefungsorganisation/allgemeine-informationen/masterarbeit.html>

Bachelor’s theses:

<https://www.wiwi.uni-frankfurt.de/studium/studierende/pruefungsorganisation/allgemeine-informationen/bachelorarbeit.html>

**Please note that in addition to these requirements a BA or MA thesis must also be submitted electronically (PDF) on a USB stick jointly with your bound copy to the examination office. In seminars, please follow the instructions in the Syllabus.**

### Presentations in seminars:

- Time limit: confer the syllabus or the information handed out in the seminar (depends on number of participants).
- It is not possible to present all aspects of the topic in such a short time. Therefore, it is important that you make your main point. Sometimes you will need to refine and narrow your topic for the presentation.
- Practice your speech before you give it. You are not allowed to exceed the time limit.

- Usually in a presentation, graphs and examples are better than complicated formulas and derivations.
- Use a beamer for your presentation.
- Avoid repeating the presentations of your fellow students. If you notice intersections with your presentation, make that aspects short and mention that this was already said before. Use the time you have saved by going into details of your main statements. Pay attention to your audience. Keep eye contact to your fellow students and do not read off your presentation!