

PH Weingarten  
English Department  
Course: How to write academic assignments  
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## **Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers**

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## 1. Purpose

These guidelines have been established in order to set mandatory guidelines for works which are submitted to the English Department. Therefore, its aim is to help you write and format your academic papers (e.g. Seminararbeiten, Modulprüfungen, Portfolios, Term Paper,...).

Section two to five briefly describe requirements for all academic writing. Section six focuses on term papers, section seven looks at the bachelor thesis, and section eight is about the master thesis. This will help guide you in your writing of these assignments.

## 2. Stylistic Advice

Avoid subjective statements: there is nothing wrong with using the first-person singular, but personal opinions do not belong in an academic text (note the difference between 'My main interest is in redesigning task formats, which is why I will first discuss task-based approaches...' and 'I liked the film a lot' – the former is perfectly acceptable while the latter is irrelevant). The more personal and individual your approach ('I think it is a very good film...'), the less the reader will feel included in your argumentation. The more neutral and high-register your expressions, the more of an authority you will seem to be. The more precise your expressions, the more convincing you are. The more you manage to mention other scholars in a meaningful way – to support or contrast your own thesis –, the more easily your reader will feel convinced.

Precision in writing means you express your ideas with clarity – sometimes this includes defining certain terms. However, you do not need to explain set terminology in your field of research – in other words, you can expect your reader to know what a metaphor or focalization is; simply apply the terms. Do not use terminology that you are not entirely familiar with (for example, there is a grave difference between image and imagery).

We expect your writing to be respectful in terms of inclusion and diversity. This means, for example, that you can use the gender-neutral language and nonbinary singular pronoun 'they' instead of 'he or she'. Example: 'Students should be allowed to write about a topic they like.'

### **Language to avoid:**

Your style of writing should be formal. Avoid contractions (use 'cannot' rather than 'can't; 'going to' and never 'gonna', etc. ), substitute phrasal verbs and aim for a high register (you can recognize the respective words by their Greek or Latin origin, e.g. 'When Tess returns to her family...' instead of 'When Tess gets back'). Do NOT use:

- empty phrases ('basically', 'it can be said')
- fuzzy, imprecise or ambiguous expressions ('kind of', 'anyway')
- generalizations ('everybody knows that...')
- exaggerations (use exclamation marks sparingly)
- subjective, judgmental or conversational expressions ('totally', 'really', 'horrible')
- self-explanatory or obvious statements ('The essay will end with a conclusion')
- repetitions (use synonyms or antonyms if you want to stress the content)

### 3. Spelling and Formatting

Please use either British or American English and do not mix them in your paper. Also, proofread your paper for spelling or grammar mistakes before you hand it in. Do not rely solely on a computer program to check for mistakes.

Format your paper this way:

- Paper format: A4, white
- Font: Times New Roman or Arial
- Font size: 12 pt (Times New Roman) or 11 pt (Arial)
- Spacing: 1.5
- A justified text (*Blocksatz*) and hyphenate only at syllable breaks or at a prefix or suffix.
- Headings: different fonts, font size, or use of bold are fine.
- Margins: 2.5 cm left and right
- Page numbers: Include page numbers in your work. They should start on the page of the introduction. Note that there is no page number on the cover sheet.
- Skip a line between paragraphs (please do not indent the first line of a new paragraph).
- The bibliography will be single-spaced. Please see the [APA website](#).

### 4. Plagiarism

Plagiarism (copying other people's work without naming the reference) will lead to a fail. Any suspicion of plagiarism will be examined using the Turnitin software or other resource. In order to show that you have understood this, please make sure to include a signed statement of plagiarism at the end of your work. You can visit [The University of Oxford's study skills and training page on plagiarism](#) to learn more. Also, the University of Oklahoma recommends you [think, write, and signal](#) to avoid plagiarism.

Include the plagiarism declaration from the Prüfungsamt and sign it.

### 5. Citations and Bibliography

The English Department uses the APA format. Complete instructions on citations and bibliographic entries can be found on the [APA website](#).

### 6. Term Papers

Your term paper aims at answering a clearly defined research question or statement that is related to the course you are writing the paper in and completing in that semester. You will critically analyze and research your topic (such as your own research project, material development, design of a lesson plan, contribution to your instructor's research project, etc.). Before you begin, meet your instructor to discuss a topic, purpose, type, and content of the term paper, your focused research question or thesis, and any other requirements for a term paper in their course.

This section provides specific information on different types of term papers that you may be required to write. Again, this list is not comprehensive and so, it is important that you talk to your instructor about the term paper topic and requirements for the course you are attending.

### *6.1 Term Papers on Linguistic Topics*

In a linguistic term paper, your task is to extensively describe, analyze and discuss research concerning a specific statement or question. Usually, you start by explaining the theories or concepts that your thesis/question refers to. In the main body of your paper, you make use of this explanation of the topic to introduce possible advantages, controversies or challenges. You should make use of arguments and examples from other sources as well as data from (empirical) studies in order to form an objective, expert opinion on the issue. Try to include descriptions, explanations and examples to strengthen the different arguments. Do not only focus on the what – but also on the why and how which are just as if not more important.

Most, if not all, of your arguments will be taken from sources, i.e. the ideas/words of other researchers. In doing so, you should use as many indirect quotes as possible: by paraphrasing arguments, concepts and theories you can show your understanding of the content. While direct quotes are rare in linguistics papers, they are, of course, not forbidden, however, you should always explain their relevance and implications. It is always advisable to refer to the original works of the researchers you are concerned with. Do keep in mind the importance of searching for and citing current sources. A paper on bilingualism from the 70s, for example, will most likely be a much less useful source since so much research has been conducted since then. In addition, theories from that period have most likely been criticized or adapted. This is the result of researchers having changed their views as a result of scientific development.

Every claim that you make needs to be based on a source, including ideas that seem to be common knowledge. 'English has become increasingly important in the currently globalized world' without a reference, this is just a blanket statement. Also, linguistic papers do not need any 'interest catcher' in the beginning. You do not have to convince the reader of the relevance of your thesis/question – every linguistic topic is relevant and should, hence, be discussed.

### *6.2 Term Papers on English Foreign Language Teaching (EFLT)*

There are a number of things to consider when writing your term paper on EFLT. When writing a lesson plan, consider the target student group for the lesson or unit you are writing about. Present the school type, grade, and how your lesson is embedded in the unit to be taught. Base your planning on the competences described in the curriculum for your target student group. Also consider the different learning levels and differentiation needs. Be sure your planning is based on topical approaches and methods to teach English as a foreign language. This means that the lesson focuses on learning / teaching through interaction and tasks. Research and references will include teaching English as a foreign language as well as studies on your chosen teaching area. Make sure to use as much current research (2005 onwards) to keep your paper up to date.

For research papers on EFLT, you will describe an existing situation and analyze that description. There are a number of ways to do this including responding to it, evaluating it according to a set of criteria, examining it, or contrasting it to something else.

The structure of the paper should follow the standard requirements outlined in section 5.1 but may also include a detailed synopsis and discussion of data and empirical research. Collecting your own data is welcome if possible in the given time frame. Speak to your teacher about it to sort out what kind of data collection would / could make sense within the given circumstances. If you quote figures, images or graphs, make sure to state the source correctly below the image. It is also advisable to provide a list of figures at the beginning of the paper if you are using more than one or two such illustrations. Moreover, data should be reflected upon and analyzed. Discuss any data you include in your paper.

### *6.3 Term Papers on Literary and Cultural Studies*

Your paper can be expository or persuasive. In other words, the paper either aims to explain or describe phenomena neutrally (expository) or present a particular idea or your understanding of an issue, in which you convince the reader with facts and information that support your idea (persuasive). While topics can be derived directly from work in a given class, you are also welcome to bring in new ideas or media as long as they fit into the overall context of the respective module.

When it comes to finding and citing sources, information that is considered to be common knowledge need not be credited: this can be something that you find repeated in several different sources, or that you could have taken from any kind of dictionary or encyclopaedia (e.g. the German background of Queen Victoria's husband).

### *6.4 Term Papers about Films*

If you write a term paper about one or more films, remember that your focus should be on combining form and content: how do particular cinematographic devices like colour coding, montage or camera work contribute to showing a certain character's crisis or development; how do they play with or refute the viewers' expectations; how do they address certain issues? A film analysis should start with a section on the underlying theoretical framework (for example, explaining Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze before looking at how a filmmaker fetishizes women on screen). Make sure that in your close analysis, which follows the theoretical framework, you refer back to the main ideas from that first section of your paper and apply them to your sample work.

Your reader will know the films at hand and the basic terminology (for example, field sizes and shots), which means you can simply use the terms without explaining them, moreover a recapitulation of the film's plot is not required. the plot of the film. With a scene analysis, you might want to briefly explain the context by summarizing what happened before or what will follow. When you describe the action of the film, use verbs in present tense. When you refer to a particular scene, give the exact time frame in parentheses (58:45 – 1:01:12).

### *6.5 All other Term Papers*

Please speak to your instructor about the specific term paper requirements.

## 7. Structure of the Paper

Each paper consists of a minimum of 6 different parts: cover sheet, table of contents, introduction, main body, conclusion/discussion, and bibliography. Additional elements include: list of figures, list of tables, and appendix. These are presented below.

### 7.1 Cover Sheet

Your cover sheet can be divided into three components. The first one includes the name of the university, the title of the seminar, the name of the instructor, and the term in which you have attended the seminar. This part is followed by the title of your paper, which is centered and in bold. The last part comprises your personal information:

First Name Surname  
BA/MA Course Program  
PO 20xx, Module x  
X. Semester  
Student ID number  
E-mail address

The PH Logo may only be used together with: “vorgelegt an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Weingarten” or “Pädagogische Hochschule Weingarten”.

See the cover page of this document as an example.

### 7.2 Table of Contents

The table of contents shows the structure of your paper and lists all the titles of your chapters and subchapters including the respective page numbers (see page 2 of these guidelines for a detailed example). Use the decimal classification and avoid more than two decimal spaces. If needed, a table of contents for tables and figures comes after the table of contents. **Do not** write “Main Body” as the title of your chapters. Please use Arabic numerals to organise your different sections.

Example for a traditional term paper:

1. Introduction
2. Main Body
3. Conclusion/Discussion
4. Bibliography
5. Declaration of Plagiarism
6. Appendix (if necessary)

NOTE: The “Main Body” will have its own title based on the contents of that section. The number of sections depends on the content of your paper and may include sub-headings. Use the function in your word processing program to create the titles of each section, which will be larger and bold or in a different color, as can be seen in this document. Also, use the function in your program to create a table of contents so that the sections are linked to the table of contents. **Do not** create your table of contents by hand.

### *7.3 Introduction*

The introduction will present the topic, the purpose of your paper (why you are writing about this topic), background information, central question(s) and/or thesis statement, and the structure of your paper.

### *7.4 Main Body*

The main body will include a number of paragraphs which are organized under different headings (the name of the sections) and sub-headings. You will name the headings and sub-headings according to the content of that section. Do not name the heading “Main Body” or “Body”.

The main body often begins with a literature review or theory section. Therefore, the heading for this section would be “Literature Review” or “Theoretical Background”. This section discusses the central concepts, theoretical background models, and current research. Another section may also include a description and discussion of the empirical methods used in your research paper.

After providing this background information, the following sections will focus on ideas all of which are related to your main research question/thesis statement. Each section will have a main idea written in clear coherent and cohesive paragraphs, which each contain a topic sentence, supporting sentences (including cited sources), and sentences that discuss, analyze, and evaluate the topic and sources (as covered in the course Academic Writing).

The main body finishes off with a discussion section. This is where you critically reflect on your research, material, lesson plan, etc. It is often best to start this section by restating the problem or research focus, and what the evidence has shown. If your research aimed at testing certain hypotheses, then this section will discuss whether they were or were not supported by the evidence. Any deficiencies in the research design should be mentioned here, with suggestions for improvements. Here is where speculations about possible explanations for unexpected or surprising results can be made. Please support, if possible, any speculations with citations from the literature.

### *7.5 Conclusion*

The conclusion will bring all of the ideas together. It will bring the reader back to your research question(s) / thesis statement and discuss the theoretical and practical aspects presented in the paper. It will make connections between the research question(s) / thesis statement and the different areas presented and discussed in the body. The conclusion will also show what your term paper means to the topic of your research.

### *7.8 Additional Elements*

A list of figures and/or list of tables gives your reader quick access to the data in your paper. These lists go after the Table of Contents. Use the function provided in your word processor to create these lists.

An appendix is additional material that gives your reader a more comprehensive understanding of your paper. This might be the complete survey, handouts, or lesson plans used in your research. It is not included in the main body, but in its own section at the end of your paper.



The appendix is to be numbered separately. A list of these must be included and placed after the table of contents. The use of an appendix is to be coordinated with the supervisor of the thesis. In some cases, it is recommended to summarize the Internet sources used in an appendix. For bachelor or master theses, supplementary material may be added on a CD ROM (cf. respective examination regulations).

### *7.9 Length of the Paper*

Depending on the guidelines of your respective seminar or the module exam, the undergraduate term paper will be 7-10 pages long (max. 26,000 characters without spaces) and your graduate term paper will be 10-15 pages long (max. 39,000 characters without spaces). Bachelor thesis will be 35-40 pages long (max. 104,000 characters without spaces). Master thesis will be 50-60 pages long (max. 156,000 characters without spaces). This does not include the cover sheet, the table of contents, the bibliography or the appendix. Do not change the format described under section 4 in order to fill more pages or reduce pages.

Note: Since requirements may vary from teacher to teacher, please make sure to contact your teacher to discuss the details (including the length) of your paper before you start writing.

### *7.10 Term paper Grading Rubric*

Please see Moopaed.

## **8. Bachelor Thesis & Master Thesis**

Information about the bachelor and master thesis can be found on the English Department homepage under "Anforderung für den Leistungserwerb" and on Moopaed English Department.