

## HOW TO WRITE A TERM PAPER

### I. Formalities

- make sure you know how long the paper must be according to the *Modulhandbuch*; as a rule of thumb, all papers should be about **15 pages** long (including table of contents and bibliography)

- you have to meet the required number of pages according to the following **layout**:

font size: text 12pt

type: Times New Roman, justified (=Blocksatz)

spacing: 1,5 line spacing

margins: 2,5 cm top/bottom/right; 4cm left margin for corrections

new paragraph: first line indented 1,25cm

footnotes (if you use them): font size 10 pt

bibliography: second (and following) line indented 1,25cm

citational style: short references in brackets in the text.

- make sure the paper is **layouted in keeping with the institute's style-sheet** (downloadable from homepage!);

A term paper consists of

- **a cover-sheet** incl. title of seminar, title of paper, your name, contact data, immatriculation number, which module you wish to take and the exam number (*Prüfungsnummer laut Anmeldung*)
- **the table of contents** (divided by Arabic numbers: 1., 2., 2.1., 2.2, 3.,...)
- **the text** consisting of introduction, main part and conclusion
- **a bibliography**: additional research is expected! you should consult at least 10 titles of research literature (monographs, journal articles) which must all be cited conforming to the department style-sheet (<http://www.anglistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/studium/downloads/>)
- a signed declaration of non-plagiarism (*Eigenständigkeitserklärung*).
- If in combination with a lecture: *Teilnahmeschein Vorlesung*.

### II. How to write a term paper

1. find your topic: think about a question that genuinely interests you and that is complex enough to bear a 15-page discussion. The topic should have a well-defined purpose and proceed from a genuine research question.

2. Reformulate your topic into a series of questions (as trained in the expert sessions!)

<i>Golden rule: Ask simple questions and question simple answers.</i>
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3. read up on that topic: find out whether your question has already been answered by scholarly criticism (in that case, try to find a new angle on your chosen topic or try to find different primary texts that may offer a new line of argument); whether there are aspects you have not thought about yet; what methods other scholars have used to find answers to their questions. Use **databases** to find out what critical texts are there: MLA, ABELL, LION, JSTOR,... and **only then use the OPAC** to find out which are available from your library!

4. compile extracts of the book chapters/articles that you deem most relevant for your topic and that you want to quote, engage or disagree with in your paper. Do not forget to add page references throughout – even if you do not quote directly, you will have to specify which page(s) you take an argument from! Failing to acknowledge the sources of your information amounts to plagiarism.

5. try to articulate your own interest in the question and your position vis-à-vis scholarly debate: do you agree with the debate so far? where do you disagree and why? how can you contribute to this debate?

6. do not start writing before you have a clear concept of which questions you want to raise, what your line of argument is, which passages from the primary texts you want to quote and analyse to support your argument, which critical sources you want to cite or refute and when. Are the steps of your argument coherent and persuasive? What additional information does your reader need to understand your point? Are your quotations (from primary or secondary material) relevant to the point under discussion?

## WRITING THE TEXT

### a) **the preface/ introduction**

- should be written at the end of the work process, when you know what you have actually argued!

- should explain **what** your topic is, **why** it is important and **how** you will approach it

> **WHAT**: it is not necessary to repeat the title of your paper; it is, however, necessary to explain what the idea or the problem behind it is. Make sure you introduce the terms, concepts and texts that are indicated by the title of your paper. Part of this is also explaining why you have chosen a specific literary text or genre as the object of your analysis (and maybe which ones you did not take into account).

> **WHY**: Why are you treating this topic (critical or social relevance rather than personal interest called for)? What are key questions arising from the topic? How far have they already been solved? You can do this by, e.g. quoting or summing up a position in research and explaining why you are taking a different point of view, etc.

> **HOW**: How do you proceed? What critical concepts do you use? what critical terms may have to be explained? (e.g. the "queer"; "identity"; "subjectivity"; "interpellation"; theories of the construction of gender, of the relation between

discourse and power; etc). It is not enough to say where you take a concept from; you must explain it and give an idea what you need it for.

- should not be a mere list of what is to come, but rather state why you have chosen specific authors or texts, how the steps of your argument follow each other, etc.

## b) the main part

Your tasks when dealing with a topic (and actually in each single subsection/ paragraph) are:

- *arguing* (finding a point of view on your topic which you support with arguments taken from your text)
- *explaining and demonstrating* (i.e. supporting your arguments with relevant examples from your text)
- *discussing*, i.e. summing up, drawing conclusions, evaluating (use secondary literature to support your view or to argue against).

## structuring elements

- use your headlines to state the respective field of your observation and to make a statement in the respective question; headlines must correspond to those given in table of contents.

- write chapters that actually offer answers: Every chapter you write must strictly refer to your question. Begin each chapter with a look back on the question you are now about to answer. You move from chapter to chapter with a look at what you were able to prove and what questions arose with these your observations.

- divide all your sections into paragraphs (which are indented at the beginning); one paragraph = one main idea: don't jump from one idea to another or jumble them all into a heap!

- avoid one-sentence-paragraphs: a **paragraph** signals an argumentative unit which usually consists of a **topic sentence** (announcing what this paragraph will discuss, stating a hypothesis, introducing a new idea), **an argument** (1+ sentences explaining the relevance of this point and how it functions; think of arguments as an answer to the question 'why is this so?' – 'because...') **and examples** (usually from the primary text to support your argument). Sentences within a paragraph should cohere logically; if you have a mere string of sentences that stand individually (and thus would need a paragraph of their own), you have to re-think your line of argument.

- avoid ending a paragraph on a quotation; always provide a frame for quotations, i.e. sum up the key point of the quotation and relate it to your own argument!

- avoid summaries of content since your reader will be familiar with the primary texts themselves: not what happens is of interest, but why – NB: this does not apply to theoretical concepts or secondary literature, which must be introduced and the relevant points briefly summarised!

- use conjunctions and adverbials to organize your argument logically: however, since, although, thus, on the one hand – on the other hand, to begin with, to conclude, to sum up, etc.

### c) the conclusion

- should not explain the topic again; this should be clear by now. The point is rather to sum up in what relation the text(s) discussed stand to the topic of your paper, how the individual readings add up to a result that is an answer to the question(s) raised in the introduction. If you feel that you have not come to a result, rethink your topic, methods and argument.
- Use the conclusion to think of questions you have or might not you have been able to answer. Evaluate your own work.

### III. How to deal with research by others

1. Summarise the present view(s) in a section at the end of the introduction, or (if necessary) in greater detail at the beginning of a respective chapter on methodology/ theoretical concepts: Are there different viewpoints available? Did certain arguments evolve in the course of the debate? (This will enable you to state more clearly where you are with your own contribution.) Do you wish to offer a revision of or addition to theoretical concepts? Why?

*Golden rule: Do not follow others' opinions blindly but discuss them critically.*

2. Quote research sources where this is necessary:

- **Common knowledge** about works such as publication dates need no reference. Mention it casually where it clarifies a point you make: e.g. Marlowe wrote his *Jew of Malta* (1589 or 1590) without knowing Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1600).
- **Common sense views** (on "the Elizabethan period" or "morals of the Victorian age") are problematic: as stark generalisations, they are usually incorrect when looked at more closely. Refer to them only where you want to criticise them.
- **Scholarly knowledge** we would not have without the work of a particular scholar (e.g. archival information he/she made available, a book he/she first moved into the debate, a new concept he/she proposed) has to be referenced in a footnote or within brackets in the text.
- Generally, **all views and opinions of other experts** must be acknowledged and evaluated: What led this scholar to formulate such a view? Do you agree with it? Why (not)? Does your research substantiate or revise this particular view?

*Golden rule: Consider your own paper and reflect where you would feel exploited and disrespected by readers using your thoughts, your analysis, your conclusions without stating that they received this insight from your work.*

In times of Wikipedia and **the copy-paste-syndrome**, correct use of secondary material has become an important issue. It is absolutely necessary to adhere to the ethical standards of scholarly research. What does this mean exactly?

- always acknowledge your sources: you can name explicitly scholars and their

opinions in the text ("As Ina Schabert points out in her literary history, ..."), followed by reference in brackets or in a footnote (according to the style sheet). Showing you have read and digested the relevant secondary criticism is part of your task! Don't pretend others people's ideas (probably well known to your seminar leader anyways) are your own – you're not being asked to invent the wheel anew but to engage in a scholarly debate with other critics.

- never ever copy-and-paste, either from printed or from electronic sources. This might be tempting because you think you can save time or that you cannot express the point so well in your own words. But taking a whole passage from its context and implanting it into your text will inevitably lead to shifts in perspective, argument and expression, which does nothing for your work and can lead to charges of plagiarism. Smoothing out these argumentative creases definitively costs more time than just writing one's own text. Also, articulating a thought in your own words will help you to think through your argument and result in a better paper.

- consult our the department's guidelines on what constitutes **plagiarism**.

#### **IV. Can I risk to state my own opinion - even if it contradicts my professor's?**

Most emphatically, yes! The most interesting work is the one which leads your readers to second thoughts. However, be careful not to give your private opinion ("I like Desdemona and think she does not deserve this treatment") or retreat into the safe realm of relativity ("Anyone might have his or her view..."). Any such interpretation is basically a plea not to discuss things any further but just to state different opinions. Rather, your task is to arrive at an informed, scholarly opinion by way of presenting a persuasive line of argument that your readers can follow and, if they want to, check back with the sources used – that is why you need to state all references to primary or secondary texts.

#### **V. When writing your paper**

Try to write grammatically correct, plain and coherent English (British English spelling), avoid colloquialisms, but also words and expressions which you are not sure about; avoid evasive language ("kind of"-statements); instead, try saying exactly what you want to say.

Do not use abbreviated verb forms (don't, I'm --> oral style only!) and colloquial language; aim for a scholarly style. If possible, try and have your paper proof-read by a native speaker or an advanced student before you hand it in.

**Before you hand in your paper EDIT it – check for spelling mistakes (your Word program has a function for this, use it!), consult a thesaurus, check the layout, check if all pages are numbered and complete, check if table of contents and headlines/ page numbers match.**  
A sloppily edited paper will suggest to your reader a sloppy argumentation.

#### **VI. Final steps**

- add a **bibliography**; citational style must be consistent and according to style-sheet!

- add a **signed declaration** that you have not committed plagiarism (the form *Eigenständigkeitserklärung*, downloadable from homepage).
- indicate on **cover sheet** which module you need this for, the exam number (*Prüfungsnummer*) under which you have subscribed, and in case you wish to combine this term paper with a lecture or an exercise, indicate title, semester and lecturer of this class.

Send an electronic document (.doc only, NOT .pdf or other open access formats!) via email to your lecturer AND hand in a printed version containing also the signed *Eigenständigkeitserklärung* by mail or in the **mailbox** outside room 5.E.19.

**V. style sheet – short version (you must further consult the institute’s style-sheet, downloadable from the homepage!)**

**layout:** paper DIN A 4

- type: Times New Roman or Arial 12pt, justified (=Blocksatz)
- line spacing: 1,5
- margins: left 4 cm, right, top and bottom 2,5 cm
- paragraphs: first line indented

**table of contents:**

- headlines with page numbers (1., 1.1., 1.2., 2., etc.).
- bibliography divided into primary works and secondary works ("bibliography" must appear in table of contents as last entry).

**footnotes**

- at end of each page (no endnotes!) in 10pt, superior Arabic numeration;
- footnotes contain additional information on the text or amplifications of the argument which would interrupt the line of thought in the continuous text above; sources should be referenced in brackets in the text, e.g. (Schabert: 43).

**quotations:**

- shorter than four lines: with quotations marks in the text.
- longer than four lines: all lines indented 2,5cm, size 11pt, single spaced, no quotation marks
- emphasis indicated by "(italics mine)" or "italics in the original".
- omissions or changes in a quote must be marked: "this point [...] proved of special importance" or "[his] wife" (when original reads "my wife").
- source reference: short references in the text (Schabert 1997: 31). The **complete reference is given only in the bibliography (see style-sheet).**
- when you quote poetry or drama, separate lines with a slash (/) in shorter quotes; in case of longer quotes, indent lines; give the exact line and range of the quote, eg. (2.1.139-42) or (ll. 9-14).

**page numbers:**

- insert in bottom right corner.