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Guidelines for Academic Writing

Seminar papers, bachelor and master thesis

Chair of Applied Microeconomics

Viadrina European University

November 9, 2020

- ▶ These guidelines shall help you to set up your own research question, find and read academic literature and write up a properly lay outed and formatted seminar paper or thesis at the Chair of Applied Microeconomics.
- ▶ If it is your first time writing an academic paper we additionally recommend to go to the library and study a handbook for academic writing!
- ▶ Consider courses, workshops and offers from *Schreibzentrum*.

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Topic and Research Question

We expect that you chose and suggest a topic and a research question.

- ▶ Your topic should be related to one of the core areas:
 - ▶ Applied Microeconomics
 - ▶ Applied Econometrics
 - ▶ International Economics
 - ▶ Labour Economics

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The initial objective is to formulate a research question!¹

- ▶ A research question is not simply your title or topic.
 - ▶ Usually a profound literature search is needed before a research question can be formulated.
 - ▶ Afterwards you should be able to identify a very specific issue that you want to discuss combining existing literature and own analysis.
 - ▶ The research question may be narrowed down extremely.
- ⇒ We expect you to come up with a topic and research question!

¹Check [Developing strong research questions](#) and [Research question examples](#) on Scribbr.

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A good research question is essential to guide your research paper or thesis. It pinpoints exactly what you want to find out and gives your work a clear focus and purpose. All research questions should be:²

- ▶ Focused on a single problem or issue.
- ▶ Researchable using primary and/or secondary sources.
- ▶ Feasible to answer within the timeframe and practical constraints.
- ▶ Specific enough to answer thoroughly.
- ▶ Complex enough to develop the answer over the space of a paper.
- ▶ Relevant to your field of study and/or society more broadly.

²Sourced from

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Some steps on the Way to a Research Question

- ▶ Understand the topic!
 - ▶ What are the definitions of the key terms in the field of research? Which links exist between these terms? In which ways can the topic be interpreted?
- ▶ What would be interesting to investigate?
 - ▶ Formulate several questions that come to your mind. Think about who would benefit from an answer to these questions. Decide which of these questions would generate most valuable implications.
- ▶ Collect and review literature that deals with your chosen question!
 - ▶ Do not read every paper that seems to fit thoroughly. Try to get an overview of the literature published on this topic. Try to use the most recent publications!
- ▶ Narrow down your research question!
 - ▶ Try to focus on a specific problem of interest. Try to find questions that can be answered by a synthesis of the existing literature.

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1. Description of an observed situation.

- ▶ Typically involves defining and classifying of known issues.
- ▶ An example is a literature overview.
- ▶ You are expected to go beyond a mere description of known facts!

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2. Relationship between observed phenomena.

- ▶ Typically involves the investigation of the relationship between two or more variables.
- ▶ The result can be the finding of a correlation or a trend between the examined variables.

3. Causality.

- ▶ Typically involves the attempt to discover a causal relationship between two or more observed phenomena.
- ▶ Often no causal relationship can be proved. A correlation between the examined variables will then be the result.

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4. Explanation / Methodology

- ▶ During your literature search you probably will find contradictory results on the same topics. This will often be caused by different approaches, the authors used. In this case you should examine:
- ▶ What are the assumptions used?
- ▶ What are the models used?
- ▶ Why did the authors use them to tackle the certain issue?
- ▶ Are there other possible approaches?

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- ▶ You can suggest and discuss a title with your supervisor.³
- ▶ Once fixed in the thesis application form, it cannot be changed.
- ▶ Your title will be printed on your certificate.
- ▶ Technical details:
 - ▶ All words in the title are to be capitalized except definite and indefinite articles, prepositions of all kind and coordinating conjunctions.
 - ▶ Example:
German Foreign Direct Investment in Poland: An Investigation into the Regionalisation Pattern and the Role of Special Economic Zones.

³Not identical with your research question.

- ▶ Enrol for
 - ▶ Abschlussarbeiten für Applied Microeconomics (Prof. Geishecker)
 - ▶ <https://moodle.europa-uni.de/course/view.php?id=8780>
- ▶ You can chose between writing in the first or second block, with the respective deadlines.
- ▶ Here you upload your suggested topic and research question (in one sentence) as well as a proper literature list of articles that you have read and deemed relevant for your question
- ▶ Watch out for the deadlines on Moodle.

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Literature Search

The literature search is essential for you to succeed!

- ▶ Focus on recent papers published in scientific economic journals (or as so called discussion or working papers)!
- ▶ You can expand your body of relevant literature by
 - ▶ Examining the bibliography of a paper at hand (*“Which literature was interesting for the authors of the article you are reading?”*).
 - ▶ Using the “cited-by” function at scholar.google.de. (*“Which authors found the article interesting you are reading?”*).

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- ▶ Typical academic sources are:
 - ▶ Journal articles (e.g. *American Economic Review*, *Journal of International Economics*)⁴
 - ▶ Working papers (use final paper instead when available!)
 - ▶ Reports (from organizations, e.g. WTO)
 - ▶ Books and collected volumes
 - ▶ Textbooks (concerning methods)
 - ▶ Online encyclopedias (Wikipedia, Gabler, etc.) and news articles are no valid academic source!
 - ▶ Still, the sources mentioned on Wikipedia can be useful.
 - ▶ You may occasionally refer to such sources, e.g. an Economist article to motivate a scientific question or to put it in context.
- ⇒ You have access to most journals via Campus Network.⁵

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_economics_journals

⁵Use VPN from outside: https://www.ikmz.europa-uni.de/de/it-dienste/netz_server_dienste/internetzugang/vpn/index.html

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- ▶ You will certainly read a lot empirical papers.
- ▶ Although this can be challenging, a good understanding of the logic and the main arguments of the paper does not depend on a deep understanding of the technical details.
- ▶ We recommend amongst others:
 - ▶ Prof. Matt Masten (2015) “How to Read Empirical Papers”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1AKPtPZqyI>
 - ▶ Morgan Kenneth (2010) “How to Read an Empirical Research Article” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=legYfGC46y4>
 - ▶ Chow & Lewis (2011) “How to read an empirical paper” (PDF)

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“How many pages do I need to write?”

⇒ Not the right question to ask!

⇒ Better: How many pages do you need to sufficiently motivate, explore and discuss your topic and research question!?


▶ The following numbers refer to text pages:⁶

▶ Seminar paper: 10 pages

▶ Bachelor thesis: 20 pages

▶ Master thesis: 30 pages

▶ Discuss the scope and extent of your paper with your supervisor.

⁶Title page, lists, figures, bibliography etc. do not count as a text page. 

Ingredients of a (scientific) paper:

- ▶ Titlepage
- ▶ Table of Contents
- ▶ List of Figures, Tables, Abbreviations, Symbols
- ▶ Abstract
- ▶ Text
 - ▶ Introduction
 - ▶ Main Part
 - ▶ Conclusion
- ▶ List of References
- ▶ Appendix
- ▶ Statement of authorship

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The title page contains:

- ▶ Title of the paper
- ▶ Author's full name
- ▶ Author's matriculation number
- ▶ Handover date
- ▶ Name of supervisor/s
- ▶ Name of the Chair of Applied Microeconomics

You may include the Logo of Viadrina European University.

- ▶ All academic papers contain an abstract.
- ▶ The abstract is written in English (even if your work is German).
- ▶ The abstract comes right before your first text page starts (probably the introduction) and right after all lists (of figures, tables, abbreviations).
- ▶ Use a pagebreak after the abstract.

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- ▶ Motivate your topic: include descriptive statistics or graphs (“*at least one number*”).
 - ▶ State your research question clearly.
 - ▶ Name methods, theories or data used to meet this objective.
 - ▶ Outline the structure of the remaining paper (you may briefly summarize your findings).
- ⇒ *Finalize the introduction at the end.*

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- ▶ Embed your work in the current state of research (literature review)
- ▶ Give clear definitions to avoid ambiguity of terminology
- ▶ Explain methodology and results
- ▶ Refer to the research question:
Was it possible to answer it? If not, why?
- ▶ Discussion of results

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- ▶ Slightly more than a summary.
 - ▶ Refer to the research question once more.
 - ▶ Implications for future research or potential policy implications (if applicable).
- ⇒ Do not introduce new strings of reasoning!

- ▶ Font type: Use a standard font type (e.g. Times New Roman, Calibri, Computer Modern)
- ▶ Font size: 12pt (1.5 line spacing)
- ▶ Margins: 2cm left, 2.5cm top, 2cm right, 3cm bottom
- ▶ Don't use indentation
- ▶ Use justification of text
- ▶ Page numbering:
 - ▶ Title page: none
 - ▶ TOC (and all lists): Roman numerals (I, II, III, ...)
 - ▶ Text (beginning from Abstract): Arabic numerals (1,2,3,...)

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- ▶ Give the audience the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time with the least ink, in the smallest space → Data-Ink-Ratio.
- ▶ Avoid chartjunk (weird fonts, 3D, shading, underlines).
- ▶ Substance over Design.
- ▶ Provide high quality (high resolution) graphs if possible!
- ▶ Create your own table, bar chart, scatter plot if possible.⁷
- ▶ Only copy graphs when they are complex, important to your work and you don't have access to original data (cite source in the description and bibliography).

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⁷Why you shouldn't use pie charts - Tips for better data visualization < > ☰ 🔍 ↺

- ▶ Always explain and discuss tables and figures in main text.
- ▶ Place tables and figures only in the appendix in case they are very long or you discuss part of it.
- ▶ Center and number tables and figures.
- ▶ Give meaningful and self-explaining captions to tables and figures.
- ▶ Captions should be concise but comprehensive. Additional information (e. g. source of data) should be given as a description.
 - ▶ Find more information on figures and tables: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/figures-and-charts/>

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Example from University of New England:

Students who are assisted with writing skills during assignment writing can show significant improvement in their assessment marks. Godwin (2004, pp. 24-26) describes an assignment intervention initiative whereby students who obtains less than 50% on the essay could resubmit, provided they consulted a study skills adviser at least twice. After resubmission, each student had made an improvement in their mean score between 21.5 and 31.5 marks (Figure 1). In the next semester, student results in assignments continued to show the same progress in their capabilities.

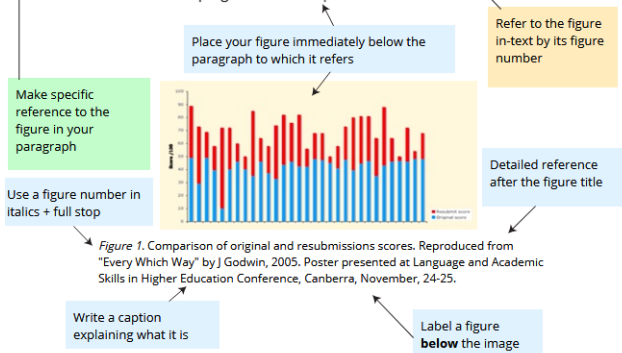


Figure 1. Comparison of original and resubmissions scores. Reproduced from "Every Which Way" by J Godwin, 2005. Poster presented at Language and Academic Skills in Higher Education Conference, Canberra, November, 24-25.

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Personally signed statement of authorship on the last page:

“I guarantee that this seminar paper/thesis was written by myself and that I have used no other sources than those mentioned. All sentences or passages quoted or paraphrased in this paper from other people’s work have been specifically acknowledged by clear cross-referencing to author, work and page(s). This holds also for drawings, sketches, graphic images, and for sources from the Internet.”

“Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Seminararbeit/Abschlussarbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Die Stellen der Seminararbeit, die anderen Quellen im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen wurden, sind durch Angaben der Herkunft kenntlich gemacht. Dies gilt auch für Zeichnungen, Skizzen, bildliche Darstellungen sowie für Quellen aus dem Internet.”

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References and Bibliography

- ▶ Use an author-year-title format (e.g. APA).
- ▶ Use in-text citation explicit (not in footnotes or parentheses!).
 - ▶ *Shaver (2019) shows that interaction terms (as well as high degree terms) confound within and between variation in the fixed effects framework. Thus, Giesselmann and Schmidt-Catran (2020) point to the necessity of double demeaning interaction terms in the fixed effects context.*
- ▶ Primary sources should be used.
 - ▶ An exception can be made in case when the original source is not available. In this situation a secondary source can be used.
- ▶ Avoid direct quotations.

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- ▶ List only cited references and to cite only listed references.
 - ▶ Alphabetic order by name of first author
 - ▶ Starts on a new page.
 - ▶ Slightly different features for journal articles, books, working paper, book chapters, reports, internet resources , ...
- ⇒ Software can control for consistent citation style and bibliography.

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Books:

- ▶ author(s), year of publication, title, publisher and place of publication
- ▶ Example: Greene, William H. 2000. *Econometric Analysis*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall International.

Journal articles:

- ▶ author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the journal, journal issue and number, page numbers
- ▶ Example: Gaston, Noel. 2002. "The effects of globalisation on unions and the nature of collective bargaining," *Journal of Economic Integration*, 17 (2), 377 - 396.

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Discussion papers:

- ▶ author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the institution, issue and number of the discussion paper
- ▶ Example: Otoo, Maria Ward. 1997. "The Sources of worker Anxiety: Evidence From the Michigan Survey," Discussion Series 1997-48, Federal Reserve Board Finance and Economics Discussion Series.

Articles in anthologies or collected volumes:

- ▶ author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the publisher, the anthology title, page number, publisher and place of publication
- ▶ Example: Deardorff, Alan V. 2000. "Fragmentation Across Cones," in Sven W. Arndt and Henryk Kierzkowski, eds., *Fragmentation and International Trade*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 35 - 51.

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Sources from the Internet:

- ▶ author, title of publication and the Internet address must be indicated
- ▶ Example: German Marshall Fund.2007. "Perspectives on Trade and Poverty Reduction,"
<http://www.gmfus.org/economics/tpsurvey/2007TPSurvey-FINAL.pdf>.

Plagiarism:

- ▶ Copying a series of words or sentences (or graphs, tables, etc.) without giving reference where they come from.
- ▶ Using concepts, ideas or facts from different origin without giving reference where they come from.
- ▶ Especially: Paraphrasing another source (although citing it) and only changing a few words / substitute with synonyms!

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How to avoid it?

- ▶ If you cannot summarize an “idea” in your own words and copy it from another source, use quotation marks and refer to the source!
- ⇒ “Anti-plagiarism” through many direct quotations does not improve the quality of your paper!
- ▶ If you draw on the findings, opinions or any information from a source, cite and reference the source according to the guidelines!

Plagiarism is easier to detect than one might think, and results in a guaranteed fail!

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A reference management software is highly recommended.⁸

- ▶ e.g. Microsoft Word + Zotero / Citavi
- ▶ e.g. LaTeX + JabRef
- ⇒ Ease of citing and referencing
- ⇒ Instantly update all references
- ⇒ Instantly create a bibliography
- ⇒ Takes control of the citation style

⁸See different examples and explanations at
[https://www.ub.europa-uni.de/de/hilfe/bibliothek-von-a-z/
Literaturverwaltung-und-Wissensorganisation-_allgemein_/index.html](https://www.ub.europa-uni.de/de/hilfe/bibliothek-von-a-z/literaturverwaltung-und-wissensorganisation-_allgemein_/index.html)

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Seminar in Applied Economics

- ▶ Examination regulations recommend to attend at least one seminar before writing the thesis.⁹
- ▶ At the moment we offer:
 - ▶ Bachelor Seminar in Applied Economics
 - ▶ Master Seminar in Applied Economics
- ▶ For frequency, content and description see the current syllabus.

⁹§ 8 (1) 3 In Vorbereitung auf die Bachelorarbeit wird den Studierenden empfohlen, mindestens einen Leistungsnachweis im Studium mit einer Seminararbeit zu erbringen. 