

Notes on Writing Term Papers¹

**All term papers need to be discussed and approved by me before you start writing!
So please make sure to book an appointment for my office hour in time.**

1. Academic Writing

- your paper should present an argument in written form, so make sure that you have a leading question and a thesis statement (following from that question)
- a subtitle might help structure your leading question
- do not simply summarise primary or secondary sources and do not accumulate a number of individual statements
- you need to provide a coherent argumentative structure
- a term paper brings together: your research interest, a subject of study (a text or a number of texts if you wish to compare them), a concrete topic/leading question, the secondary sources and your academic discussion of those

2. Choosing a Topic

- a topic needs to be academically relevant: you cannot simply discuss why you liked or disliked a text/character etc.
- you should base this on your own (research) interests
- focus on the primary source: what is interesting/unusual about a text? Are there formal characteristics you are interested in or specific historical or cultural contexts of a work of fiction? What has been said about the text in other academic writing?
- you should provide a close literary analysis of your primary material – which you will have to have read more than once
- set realistic limits: you cannot (and are not expected to) deal with every aspect of a work: make an informed decision on which aspects you want to focus

3. Finding Secondary Literature

- while you are not required to cite all secondary sources that are out there, make sure to use available resources such as the university library catalogue and databases (if you have not done so already, make use of library tutorials): all available at: <http://www.zhb-flensburg.de/>
- most importantly the MLA bibliography should be your starting point to look up what books, articles or book chapters might be relevant (the **MLA bibliography** can be accessed in the university network via **DBIS** on the library webpage)
- you might need to use interlibrary loan (Fernleihe) to get hold of some of the material (via the GVK - Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog)

¹ For a more comprehensive guideline, you might also want to consult “Some words on the mystery of writing a term paper” by Dr Machat that served as an inspiration for this guide and includes more comprehensive comment on some of the points mentioned here. To be found on her webpage.

- do not rely on sources like Wikipedia (these might help to give a first overview); but use and reference academic online and print resources
 - o Oxford Dictionary of National Biography or Kindlers Literatur Lexikon (available online on the university network) for information on authors
 - o Encyclopaedia Britannica (available online on the university network) for general queries
 - o Glossary of Literary Terms and Introductions to Literary Studies for terminology (can be found in the Handapparat Däwes “English and American Literature” in the library)
- especially for longer papers such as BA and MA theses reference manager software such as Citavi helps to keep your references in order (free full licenses are available for all students of the University of Flensburg: check the library webpage)

4. Outline

- once you have found a leading question and relevant secondary sources, you need to come up with a logical structure
- in your outline, try to avoid over-general terms such as “main part”
- **introduction:** should describe the relevance of the topic and your chosen guiding question, it should make the reader curious and explain the basic structure of the paper without summarising each part in detail
- **main body:** should be structured into relevant sub sections with individual headings; needs to introduce and discuss relevant theoretical concepts and provide textual analysis/close reading of your primary source in relation to your study question and the introduced theoretical concepts
- **conclusion:** this is not a summary of the paper. Avoid simply repeating what you said before: you should pointedly alert the reader to your central findings
- most importantly in a term paper: avoid redundancy!

5. Theoretical Foundation of Your Research

- you need to put your argument in relation to the academic discussion (no ornamental name-dropping)
- you need to use literary terms correctly (is it a metaphor or a simile? a hetero- or homodiegetic narrator?: use reference works such as M.H. Abrams’ *A Glossary of Literary Terms* to double-check)
- literary interpretation of content should always be linked to an analysis of the formal composition: “exploring the form of the meaning and the meaning of the form” (Meyer 58)²
- voicing an “informed opinion” means that you can agree or disagree with other authors by arguing with what is postulated in their texts
- avoid clichés and over-generalisations by all means
 - o (“human beings have always loved reading books” – instead you should present ideas like this: In *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt argues that the success of the novel form is linked to the increased importance of publishers and booksellers in eighteenth-century England (cf. Watt 53).

² Cf. Meyer, Michael. *English and American Literatures*. 4th exp. ed. Tübingen: Francke, 2011.

6. Citing and Bibliography

- **plagiarism is not acceptable and will result in your failing the paper!**³
- beware that not referencing correctly is a form of plagiarism, too
- always, *always* acknowledge the sources you are quoting from, no matter if you are doing so directly (Watt 25) or indirectly in a paraphrase (**cf.** Watt 25) – you need to provide page references for both.
- use both paraphrase and direct quotes: but make sure they make up no more than 1/3 of your paper
- in a paraphrase make sure to explain what the author is arguing **in your own words** (do not simply change a word here and there)
- quotes that are longer than three lines (or, roughly, 40 words), need to be justified (Blocksatz), indented (eingerückt) and are put into single line spacing. Also, they do not require quotation marks.
- quotes shorter than those three lines belong into the regular text and are put into double quotation marks (English: “text” – not German: „text“)
- quotes that will now be quotes within quotes (where, for instance, the secondary source you want to quote uses a quote from your primary text) turn double into single quotation marks for the interior quote.
- avoid second-hand quotes: always try to quote from sources directly
- **quotes alone never replace argumentation: make sure that you explain what you are trying to show with a quote**
- a term paper should not read like a string of quotations with some connecting sentences in between them, but rather showcase your own work, your own thoughts, with quotations supporting your line of argument
- you need to follow a documented citational system: I strongly recommend to follow the conventions suggested by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in their 2009 edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed.)⁴
- **in-text citing** is preferable to footnotes which should be reserved for information you might want to provide but which is not relevant enough to be included in the regular text

Citing works with one author:

“It was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris” (Hemingway 36).

Or, as Hemingway says, “it was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris” (36).

Citing works with multiple authors:

“Thus transformative media events do not respond to situations of urgency” (Katz and Dayan 168).

Citing more than one work by the same author:

To avoid confusing the reader as to which of the author’s books you are taking about, include a shortened form of the title to distinguish one work from the other.

“Who is the higher authority? Who do I call? Who saves me” (Doctorow, *Daniel* 188).

³ Cf. this helpful overview on plagiarism:
<https://www.uni-flensburg.de/?10099> and

http://www.uni-kassel.de/themen/uploads/media/handreichung_plagiate_studierende_2014_11.pdf

⁴ An overview of this style can be found, for instance, on the web page of the Purdue Online Writing Lab:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

“I wanted to log as many miles as I could before Bennett got up in the morning” (Doctorow, *Loon Lake* 141).

- all texts cited (not everything you read) need to be included in the bibliography (printing out a bibliography always helps in spotting inconsistencies)

There are rules for how you refer to different kinds of works in your bibliography – here is a list of some of the more frequently used:

In general: capitalise each word in the titles of books, movies, articles... – except for articles, short prepositions or conjunctions (unless one is the first word of the title). Titles of books, journals and movies are always put into *italics*. Titles of poems, internet articles or journal articles go into “double quotation marks”.

1. A book with a single author:

Lastname, Firstname. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication.

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

2. A book with more than one author (If there are more than three authors, you may choose to list only the first author followed by the phrase et al. (Latin for “and others”))

Lastname, Firstname and Firstname Lastname. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication.

Dayan, Daniel and Elihu Katz. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992.

3. More than one book by the same author

Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible – Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York and London: Methuen, 1986.

---. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.

4. A reprinted book

If it's a book by one author, then cite it like you would a book with a single author, but add the date of the original publishing after the title of the book, like this:

Doctorow, E.L. *The Book of Daniel*. 1971. New York: Plume, 1996.

5. A work in a collection (an article in a book)

Last name, First name. “Title of Essay.” *Title of Collection*. Ed. Editor's Name(s). Place of Publication: Publisher, Year. Page-Page.

Kristeva, Julia. “The Ethics of Linguistics.” *Modern Theory and Criticism – A Reader*. Ed. Lodge, David and Nigel Wood. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008. 349-58.

6. An article in a journal

Author(s). “Title of Article.” *Title of Journal* Volume. Issue (Year): pages.

Buehrer, David. “‘A Second Chance on Earth’: The Postmodern and the Post-Apocalyptic in García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*.” *Critique* 32.1 (1990): 15-26.

7. Citing a website

Editor, author, or compiler name (if available) as Last name, First name. *Name of Site*.

Version number (if available). Name of institution/organization affiliated with the site

(sponsor or publisher), date of resource creation (if available). Medium of publication. Date of access.

Russell, Tony. *MLA 2009 Works Cited: Electronic Sources (Web Publications)*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2009. Web. 1 December 2009.

8. Citing a film

Title. Dir. Director. Perf. Performers. Company, Year. Medium.

Igby goes down. Dir. Burr Steers. Perf. Kieran Culkin, Susan Sarandon, Jeff Goldblum. MGM Home Entertainment, 2002. DVD.

For a complete reference guide, see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition).

7. Language

- present your paper in grammatically correct and idiomatic English (be consistent in your use of either British or American English spelling)
- check your spelling (team up and proofread each other's papers before handing them in)
- avoid colloquialisms
- avoid passive constructions like: "In this paper it will be shown that".... But rather write: "This paper deals with" or "In the following, I will argue that" (you can use "I")
- check your punctuation (avoid exclamation marks and excessive comma use)

8. Formatting

- papers should be handed in as hard copy (print out – you can drop them off in my letter box, no. 75) **and** electronically (preferably as word files)

A term paper should include:

- **title page**
 - o the title page is not numbered and should include the following information:
 - name of university and department
 - current semester (e.g. SoSe 15)
 - date the paper is handed in
 - type and title of the course
 - lecturer's name
 - title (and subtitle) of your paper
 - your name, email, subject-specific semester
 - your Matrikelnummer!!!
- **table of contents**
 - o also not numbered: pagination begins on the first page after the table of contents!
- **main part** (don't call it that in the table of contents!)
- (appendix; only if needed)
- **bibliography**
 - o the pages you use for the bibliography do not count towards the page count of your paper

- Eidesstattliche Erklärung⁵
 - only needed for BA and MA theses
- a PDF copy of your thesis on a CD-ROM
 - only needed for BA and MA theses

Layout:

- font: Times New Roman, font size 12pt
- line spacing of 1.5 in regular text
- line spacing of 1.0 in indented quotes
- left and right margin should be 3 cm
- top and bottom margin 2 cm
- justify your text (Blocksatz)!

⁵ Can be downloaded here:

http://www.uni-flensburg.de/fileadmin/content/portale/studium_und_lehre/dokumente/info-und-beratung/spa-allgemein/anmeldung-ba-ma-thesis.pdf