

How to Write an Academic Term Paper¹

This style sheet provides basic guidelines for writing research papers in the LITERATURE section of our English Department. If your teacher gives you any other specific instructions on writing papers, you should, of course, follow those guidelines instead. In cases of doubt, please ask your instructor. This style sheet is based on the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. For detailed questions, please consult the MLA Handbook. Purdue University generously provides an Online Writing Lab that we also recommend: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>. There you can always find the most updated version of MLA citation style.

1. Finding a Topic and Developing a Research Question

First of all, pick one or two texts (depending on what your task is; for a BA thesis this could even be more than two) that you are most interested in. Keep the topic of the seminar in mind, then find a leading question that you would like to explore in more detail. If you choose two texts, you can do a comparative analysis and investigate your question in both texts.

Possible topics are, for instance:

Representations of death and dying in American poems from Puritanism to the 20th century
Gender roles in Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*
Patterns of knowing in contemporary American detective novels
Gender and surveillance: the role of women in *The Hunger Games* and *The Circle*
Dystopia and the Nation: Representations of the State in Ray Bradbury's and Suzanne Collins's novels
Structures of female initiation in Sarah Orne Jewett's and Philip Beard's fiction

Please make absolutely sure to discuss your topic with your instructor to have it approved!

Once you have your topic, it is important to develop a research question. This will give stability and coherence to your entire argument. What are you looking for in your paper? Phrase your aims and methods for yourself, then develop the question from there.

For example:

"Unreliable Narration in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories"

In my paper I will deal with the short stories "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe. Using, among others, Ansgar Nünning's theory of unreliable narration, I will investigate the ways in which language and the narrative situation construct an effect of surprise, undermine our sense of knowledge and reality, and manipulate our understanding of the major characters in these stories.

→ Questions: how is unreliable narration realized in these texts, how does it function, and what are its effects?

OR: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory": The Function of Space in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In my paper, I will examine the representation of different spaces and their functions in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

→ Questions: How are these spaces coded as geographical, political, social, and cultural spaces? How does language work in these codings? What is the relevance of space for the discussion of slavery?

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Sibylle Machat and Elahe Haschemi-Yekani for their inspiration and text passages. This footnote is also a note on plagiarism: please always make sure you list your sources!

2. Research

Once you know what you will be writing about, please use the library databases and catalogs for research. For more contemporary texts, TV shows, or films, you may also want to consult well-known online or print media for reviews (e.g. *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, etc.). Please do not start with Google, and do not use websites such as seminararbeiten.de or sparknotes.com. Your research should be academic, and you should consult a substantial number of sources. If your paper is about Poe, for example, you don't necessarily have to go through everything ever written about him, but you might want to consult more recent sources (and their bibliographies) – you'll soon find out which works are most widely cited.

Make use of the library tutorials!

Use the MLA database (you can access it through the Hochschulnetz):

ZHB Flensburg homepage → Suchen & Finden → Recherche → Wo Sie Literatur suchen → Datenbanken

This will take you to „DBIS“ (Datenbankeninformationssystem); click on „Anglistik, Amerikanistik“ and scroll down to “MLA International Bibliography”.

The MLA database lists all (or most) of what has been published about a certain author and/or book, so you'll find your references for the bibliography here. Through the library search system (SFX) you can also find out where to get the book or article. Our library is small and currently not too well equipped, so interlibrary loan may be necessary. Do start early!

Compile all sources you can find into a bibliography. Even at this early stage, format your entries according to MLA citation style already. In the end, your bibliography should contain all works cited and consulted (i.e., all the sources you read about your topic).

In addition to researching an author and a specific work, please do use the *Oxford English Dictionary* for definitions of terms (if, for instance, you write about “initiation,” your introduction or theoretical chapter should contain a definition of the term; so the *OED* is the source to turn to, also for etymological explanations).

Do not rely dominantly on Wikipedia; it may give you a first overview, but you should mainly use academic online and print sources (we do have access to JSTOR, for instance).

3. Re-reading and Excerpts

The next stage is to go back to your primary text/s and to re-read them with your topic in mind. Do use highlighters and bookmarks, and take notes as you are re-reading. Mark all passages that are relevant for your topic. You can write into your book's margins while you read, but it also helps to type up the most relevant quotes and write down your ideas. The sooner you start writing down actual sentences, the better.

As you read your secondary sources, you should also take notes and create excerpts right away. What is the central argument of a text? What examples does the author use? What is your own opinion on these arguments? Type up a few “crunchy” quotes that best summarize the thesis and arguments of each book/chapter/article.

4. Outline and Structure

You should compose a table of contents: structure your paper logically and keep changing and improving your outline as you go along.

Use substantial headlines for chapters; please do NOT use general terms such as “main part”.

Use subchapters (2.1) only if there are MORE THAN ONE! (If you have a chapter 2.1, you need a chapter 2.2, as well!)

For instance:

1. Introduction: Approaching Poe
2. Theories of Unreliable Narration
3. Functions and Effects of Unreliable Narration in Poe's Tales
 - 3.1 The Use of Language and Narrative Situation
 - 3.1.1 Narrators' Self-Descriptions
 - 3.1.2 External Points of Reference
 - 3.1.3 The Use of Stylistic Devices
 - 3.1.4 The Narrative Situation
 - 3.2 Effects of Unreliable Narration
 - 3.2.1 Structural Effects
 - 3.2.2 Cognitive Effects
 - 3.2.3 Emotional Effects
4. Puzzling the Reader: Conclusion

Or, for the Huck Finn topic and just the main part:

- 2 Huck's Spaces
 - 2.1 "Sivilization" in the Douglas Household
 - 2.2 The Old South
 - 2.2.1 Geographical Dimensions
 - 2.2.2 Political Dimensions
 - 2.3 The Mississippi River

Your outline is the skeleton that keeps your argument together; make it as logical, clear and plausible as possible.

5. Composition

Please begin your introduction generally, then lead gradually toward your topic. Your final sentence of the introduction should be your thesis sentence, i.e., the essence of your paper in a nutshell.

Throughout your paper, write meaningful, logical, and consistent paragraphs. Avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Create transitions from one paragraph to the next.

At the end of your main argument, please summarize again (in different words, and from a different angle maybe) what your major point is. Then lead readers gradually out of your paper by opening up the perspective (again to something general). Add a new point in your conclusion: an outlook for the future, a related argument, or something topical.

6. Citation and Issues of Form

A word on PLAGIARISM:

Do not plagiarize (i.e., steal other people's ideas). Plagiarism is fraud, it's illegal, and we pursue a zero-tolerance policy. If you get caught passing other people's phrases as your own, you will not only NOT pass the class, but a note will be added to your file that you plagiarized. In extensive cases (or when it concerns BA or MA theses), plagiarism may lead to expulsion from the University. Do not ruin your career: it's easy to properly quote your sources.

As for citation and bibliography, please use **parenthetical citation according to MLA** style and consult Purdue University's Online Writing Lab for all details.

Note that punctuation is different in English! There is no comma before "that"! And for quotes, please note the following:

Shelley held a bold view: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (794).

or:

"Poets," according to Shelley, "are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (794).

If you omit something from the quote (or change or add something), please indicate this by square brackets:

Original: Postmodern Culture, then, has a contradictory relationship to what we usually label our dominant, liberal humanist culture.

Quote: In her influential study, Linda Hutcheon argues that "[p]ostmodern culture [...] has a contradictory relationship to [...]our dominant, liberal, humanist culture" (6).

Longer quotes should be indented entirely:

As Linda Hutcheon summarizes:

What contemporary theory and fiction have both undergone [...]is what I earlier called the revenge of parole: speech-act theory, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and other formalizations on the level of theory are matched by historiographic metafiction's stress on the enunciation, on the subject's use of language and the multiple contexts in which that use situates itself. (168)

Do NOT use abbreviations such as *ibid.* or *op.cit.*

1. A book with a single author:

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

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.

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.

Marquart, James W., Sheldon Ekland Olson, and Jonathan R. Sorensen. *The Rope, the Chair, and the Needle: Capital Punishment in Texas, 1923-1990*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1994. Print.

Boyer, Paul, et al. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. Lexington: Heath, 1993. Print.

3. More than one book by the same author

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Picador, 1987. Print.

---. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Plume, 1987. Print.

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 author's name, like this:

Clemens, Samuel Langhorne (Mark Twain). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 1884. New York: Penguin, 1959. Print.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. 1977. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.

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

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

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

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym et al. 3rd ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1989. 649-60. Print.

6. An article in a journal

Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Journal* Volume. Issue (Year): pages. Print.

Poole, Ralph J. "Cannibal Cruising, or, 'to the careful student of the Unnatural History of Civilization.'" *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46.1 (2001): 71-85. Print.

Sollors, Werner. "Ethnic Modernism, 1910-1950." *American Literary History* 15.1 (Spring 2003): 70-77. Print.

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.

Bibel, Sara. "'The Walking Dead' Season 5 Finale is Highest Rated Finale in Series History, Garnering 15.8 Million Viewers." *TV By the Numbers*. 30 March 2015. Web. 4 Sep. 2015.

8. Citing a film

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

The Village. Dir. Manoj Night Shyamalan. Perf. Joaquin Phoenix and Bryce Dallas Howard. Touchstone, 2004. DVD.

For a complete reference guide, see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition) and/or consult Purdue University's Online Writing Lab for all details.

7. Language, Proofreading and Finalizing

Make sure that your paper is written in proper academic language (do not use abbreviations and contractions such as "don't" or "aren't" in formal writing!). Please also make sure that it is grammatically correct. Proofread the paper before you hand it in, and run a spell check.

Avoid colloquialisms. Avoid passive constructions (NOT: "in this paper, it will be shown that" BUT: "this paper will show that"). Get rid of exclamation marks, unless in direct quotes.

Please hand in your paper in a printed version AND in an electronic version. You may submit the electronic version either through Moodle or through email. Add a post-it note with your word count, and please indicate whether you are using BE or AE.

Title Page

Table of Contents (itself not numbered and paginated, but listing the page numbers of all following chapters!)

Your Chapters

Bibliography

Layout:

Times New Roman, 12 pt, 1.5-spaced lines. For longer (indented) quotes of 5 lines or more, please use single-spaced lines.

Keep a margin of 3 cm left and right; top and bottom margin can be 2 cm or 2.54 cm.

And finally:

Verbs has to agree with their subjects.

Do not put statements in the negative form.

Don't use no double negatives.

Be more or less specific.

Proofread carefully to see if you words out.

If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.

A writer must not shift your point of view.

And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.

Remember, too, a preposition is a terrible word to end a sentence with.

Don't overuse exclamation marks !!!!!!!

Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten or more words, to their antecedents.

Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.

Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary.

Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.

Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.

NEVER generalize!

Always pick on the correct idiom.

No sentence fragments.

Eschew obfuscation.

Last, but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

(from William Safire's "Rules for Writing").

Sample: Title Page

Europa-Universität Flensburg

Seminar für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Proseminar: "College Life in American Literature"

Prof. Dr. Henry Higgins

Summer Semester 1954

**"I need some sugar or I'll die:"
The Importance of the Chocolate Bar for the
Academic Mind**

February 30, 1954

**Holden Caulfield
Auf dem Campus 7B
24943 Flensburg**

BA Bildungswissenschaften (English, Sports)

13th Semester

Student ID Nr. 1234578

Local or Global? Negotiations of Identity in T.S. Garp's novels

For at least the past thirty years, multicultural criticism has been predominantly circling around questions of identity. What can also be diagnosed in ethnic studies is an ever-popular presence of essentialist approaches with particular emphasis on origin and biological heritage. In times of open borderlines, mass migration, crumbling concepts of nation or culture, and increasingly vigorous forces of political correctness, this is an understandable move. As historian Arthur Schlesinger puts it, “[t]he more people feel themselves adrift in a vast, impersonal, anonymous sea, the more desperately they swim toward any familiar, intelligible, protective life-raft; the more they crave a politics of identity” (12). In this quest for certainties, however, a radical focus on separatism seems to stand in direct opposition to a peaceful global coexistence (cf. Schlesinger 12-14), as the recent proliferation of terrorism in the United States and in the Middle East has shown. On the one hand, humanity seems in need of group labels that are differentiated and protected against a loss of specifics; on the other hand, the global threats that arise from these struggles universalize our need for peace. In a formal and thematic analysis of two texts, *The Pension Grillparzer* and *The World According to Bensenhaver* by U.S.-American writer T.S. Garp, this paper investigates the challenges of identity construction in an increasingly transnational world. While both novels apparently focus on a limited region of rural New England, the novels' symbolism, character constellations, structures, and narrative points of view paint a global image of subjectivity and explore contemporary identity without losing any political relevance in universalist generalization.

Sample Bibliography

Works Cited

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- Däwes, Birgit, Alexandra Ganser, and Nicole Poppenhagen, eds. *Transgressive Television: Politics and Crime in 21st-Century American TV Series*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2015. Print.
- Dunne, Peter. "Inside American Television Drama: Quality is not What is Produced but What It Produces." *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. Ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. 98-110. Print.
- Garp, T.S. *The Pension Grillparzer*. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.
- . *The World According to Bensehaver*. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.
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- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne." *Werke: Die Geburt der Tragödie; Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I-IV; Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-73*. Ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari. München: dtv, 1988. 875-90. Print.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. 1991. Rev. Ed. New York: Norton, 1998. Print.
- Stratton, Jon. "Zombie Trouble: Zombie Texts, Bare Life and Displaced People." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2011): 265-81. Print.
- True Detective*. Created by Nic Pizzolatto. HBO, 2014. DVD.
- Wise, Sophie. "NBC's *Hannibal*: The Dichotomy of Elegance and Exploitation." *The Artifice*. 27 June 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2015.