ACADEMIC WRITING GUIDE

B.A. European Cultures and Society

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1 Introduction

In the world of academia, writing is one of the core tenets of learning, teaching and dissemination of knowledge. European Cultures and Society (EUCS) is a natural part of that world and having a good understanding of academic writing is crucial. Alongside of succeeding in your written assignments and presentations, academic writing allows you to organise your ideas and arguments successfully on paper. Writing a paper fulfils several functions; first, the students sharpen their ability to work methodically on a research question and to develop an argument in an analytically convincing way. Second, they learn to conduct independent research to support their arguments and relate it to existing academic research. By writing term papers, students learn to work with different sources and utilise them. Third, writing and research help to familiarise students with the process of academic writing and present their research results in a well-structured and convincing paper. In this way, students acquire key qualifications that enable them to cope better with future challenges, whether inside or outside the academic world. In the following, common questions regarding written assignments are answered.

Aim of this guide is to provide you the basic topics and rules of academic writing. Writing a paper is a challenging activity. Of course, it should be, yet challenging does not mean it has to be an arduous process. Many of the problems students struggle with when writing papers are easily avoidable. The following advice can help you avoid some unnecessary difficulties while gaining certain skills to understand better how to write academically. Most of all, academic writing is a craft and an art that relies on practice. Therefore, the more you write, the easier it becomes.

2 The content of a paper

How to start: Finding a topic and developing a research question

As already indicated, you write your work in the context of a course. So, make sure you know what the lecturer's expectations are and what the requirements for each module or submodule examination are. This may concern the citation style, the length and structure of the work, the choice of topic, the method to be used, the number of texts to be consulted, etc.

The beginning of the writing process consists of finding your question, topic and main point. In some modules, questions are given which are to be answered in the paper, in others the topic is to be settled in consultation with the responsible lecturer. Furthermore, the paper can consist in summing up a given presentation and the following discussion or the presentation of a project. In other modules, the papers are to be written on topics from several disciplines. So, before beginning to plan your paper, it is a good idea to analyse the question or the task set, making sure you understand what sort of answer or paper your lecturer is expecting you to produce.

So let's take a look at possible tasks for your paper. In some cases, you should explain, compare, evaluate, describe, debate, elaborate, etc. In others you should answer what- and how-questions or use theories, choose cases or give examples. It is quite important to consider the different aspects you have to deal with accordingly. When choosing your **topic or research question**, make sure that it is not formulated too broadly. Therefore, please come to your lecturer's office to discuss your research question or topic. The clearer the research question and the more work you have done with it, the more productive the discussion with the lecturer can be. If you still have problems with the research question, do not hesitate to contact him or her again.

Familiarise yourself with the topic and start researching it

If the subject of your paper is clearly identified, you can familiarise yourself with it and think about how to deal with it. Often, you will be able to use content from the course. In addition, however, you will also need to research and read other literature. To be able to fall back on the contents of the course and the literature you should **make notes**. You should highlight or underline the important passages, the main thesis and arguments. You should also make extra notes where you refer to important quotes, sum up arguments and even write a short summary of the text. The short summary, called an excerpt, is particularly helpful for texts that you work with frequently, in order to remind you the crucial points.

The first and main art in doing research is **reading**. Yet, reading academic texts is different from reading novels or newspaper articles. First of all, it is useful to do a bit of a background check before approaching your topic. Who wrote the text? In which discipline or school of thought? When and where was the article written? To which academic debate or current problem does the text refer? It is important to detect the problem that the article is dealing with, the key question, the hypothesis, the main arguments that are being employed, the concepts and key terms that are being used, which conclusion is reached, etc. It is equally important to take a look at the references the author uses, either to support his/her own argument or to refute them. It is important to do a background check on these main sources and references in order to further understand the intellectual context of the text. In the end, the most important part is your own reflections upon the arguments of the author, after carefully analysing them.

Academic sources will be the cornerstone for your work throughout your years in university and even in further future. Before even analysing or taking down notes, you should first find the sources that are relevant to the focus of your work.

There are numerous ways of **researching or finding literature**. First of all, your library would be a valuable source for books and printed articles. In addition to the library stock at the Europa-Universität Flensburg (https://www.zhb-flensburg.de/en), you may also benefit from several Danish university libraries to rent books and articles, both physically and online (https://bibliotek.dk/eng). You can order books, essays and other resources that are not held in the collection of the Campus Library Flensburg (ZHB) or in any other library in Flensburg as inter-library loans. With a **VPN** you can access Europa-Universität Flensburg's internal network

directly via the internet and then use services which are otherwise only available on campus such as, for example, access to files located on the server or to library catalogues which are not available otherwise.

Beside libraries, which offer both physical and online opportunities for researching literature, the online world hosts an incomprehensible number of sources, containing multitudes of disciplines, topics and focus. Considering the sheer size of these databases, it is not that hard to get lost while looking for sources online. However, certain websites and databases could give you a head start and help you to develop a good understanding of searching for sources. For example, *Google Scholar* is a good starting point, as the website functions as a search engine for academic databases. Similarly, there are several databases, such as JSTOR, that may help you find academic articles to further your knowledge of the topic you are working on. The key issue here is relying on scholarly, peer-reviewed and recognized sources. Regardless of how valuable they may seem, opinion pieces, newspaper articles or encyclopaedic entries should not be the core of your literature. Therefore, your search for literature should focus on academic literature.

You can use various programs to manage your literature. Throughout the campus "**Citavi**" is used as a reference management programme. You can download Citavi to your personal computer at no charge. For Mac users "Mendeley" can prove an useful alternative.

Structuring Your Text

You should make a **plan** before you start writing. Most students produce more coherent papers when they begin with a plan, even if that plan gets modified in the process of writing the essay. The plan needs only be a broad outline, indicating the main topics of each paragraph. But putting your plan down on paper will probably help you to start writing the paper properly, and save you from writing large sections which end up deleted. For some people the process of writing a plan is also the process of planning the paper itself: it's not as if the plan exists in the mind and then is simply transcribed onto paper. Rather, until the student begins writing a plan, no plan exists.

You're writing an academic paper. Therefore, you work on a research question, test a hypothesis with a certain research method, or argue for a thesis. In general, a paper consists of three parts: **an introduction**, where you present your main question and your hypothesis, **a main part**, where you elaborate your argument in-depth, reflect upon possible counter-arguments in order to refute them, and **a conclusion**, where you sum up your reasoning. In writing a paper you may utilize a more flexible structure, in particular, when it comes to the main body. Still, the outline of a paper may prove useful in order to structure your thoughts before indulging in the writing. Therefore, doing an outline for yourself may serve as an orientation while laying out your arguments. With this structure in mind, you can use the learned and newly adopted content and specifically take note of further texts. In addition, you can locate your thoughts in the paper.

The **introduction** is the first chapter. Here you present your research question, the research method, the structure of your task, and the sources you will use. You also clarify your interest

in the question and place your research question in a context, e.g. with regard to existing literature, current politics or the historical context. Make sure that in a few sentences you clearly state the argument of the paper and the specific steps you will take in the body of the paper to make that argument convincing. The key aspect of the introduction is to provide answers to following questions: "what the paper is about", "why does the topic matter" and "how are you going to argue your key points".

In the **main body**, existing research is used to develop the argument. Make sure that you select the sources according to their quality, i.e. the relevance for your question. Whether you rewrite or quote directly, make sure you indicate the quote correctly and specify the exact source you are quoting. However, do not use too many direct quotations.

Be sure to follow a common denominator when working on your assignment. Don't get lost in aspects that aren't relevant to your argument. Always ask yourself: is this relevant to my own research question? Close each chapter with a brief assessment of how and why it is important for your research question.

Each paragraph must contain a thought that is relevant to the argument or analysis you are presenting. The first sentence of a paragraph summarizes the main idea to be presented in the paragraph. It is explained in the paragraph. As soon as a new thought begins, you begin a new paragraph.

The **conclusion** summarises the results of your arguments or analysis, draw conclusions and assess their relevance. Don't just give a short summary of your main chapters. Instead, present your results in the academic context you mentioned in the introduction. Do not hesitate to draw your own conclusions and identify aspects that could be addressed in future research.

Writing Your Text

You should start writing sooner rather than later. The process of defending your position in writing is, as we've seen, often a process of thinking things through, not of transcribing thought. Your model should not be that of doing research on a topic and then writing up what you have discovered. The act of writing should stimulate your thought, and perhaps send you back to your books and notes to clarify an issue, or check up on an idea. Some students don't begin to write a paper until very near to its deadline. If you have a tendency to procrastinate about your writing, bear in mind that the process of writing a first draft of a paper is a way of exploring the issues. Don't let your subconscious trick you into thinking you need to do much more research before beginning to write. You will be amazed at how the ideas emerge when you are writing.

Academic Language

Proper language plays an essential role for the expression and clearness of your arguments. Academic writing takes place in a formal context and your work is expected to be clear and straightforward. Choosing words that are appropriate in your writing can convince the readers that your work is serious, well-thought and important. Therefore, while writing your paper, you should put extra effort in your grammar choices and express yourself accordingly.

Following examples show some common mistakes regarding the academic language and offer alternatives.

Examples

The use of formal vocabulary

- Do not use contracted forms   don't, can't, aren't > do not, cannot, are not
- Use strong and direct verbs   to get > to obtain, to achieve
- Avoid employing vague words   things > aspects, matters, component
- Avoid subjective words   good, bad > advantage, disadvantage

The use of *appropriate* transitions and connectors

- Adding: Furthermore; Additionally; Moreover
- Contrasting: However; In contrast; Nevertheless
- Cause: For this reason; Due to; As a result
- Effect: Therefore; Thus; Consequently
- Purpose: In order to
- Emphasis: Particularly; Above all; Especially
- Examples: For example; For instance; Such as
- Concluding: To conclude; To summarize
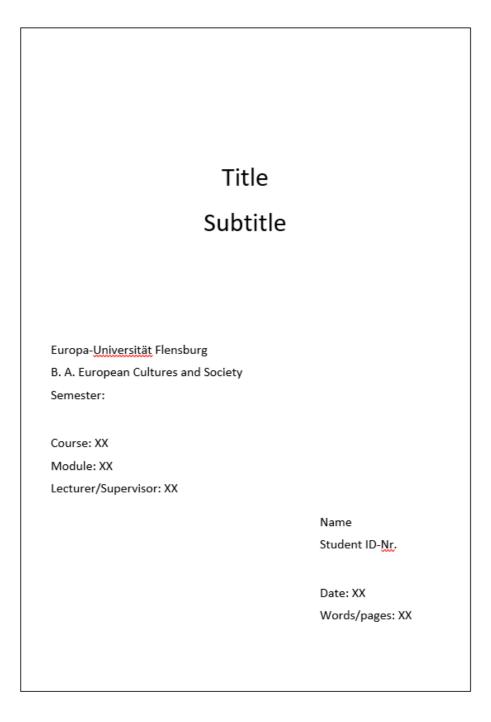
3 The formal requirements for a paper

The formal correctness is one of the criteria for the evaluation of the work. In addition to the formal structure of your paper, spelling, grammar and citation are also relevant for formal correctness. Serious errors in these formalities may result in you not completing the assignment. All writing that is handed in must be typed and proofread carefully for spelling and other errors. The following tips are rather general. Therefore, please ask your lecturer if you are unsure about certain aspects. Another important formal requirement is the Anti-Plagiarism Declaration, which is an important must for all submitted papers throughout your education in EUCS; the details of the declaration are provided in the upcoming sections.

Formatting

- Paper size and color: white A4 format paper and black ink
- Line spacing: 1.5 throughout the paper (except quotations, footnotes or references)
- Font and font size: 12-point (footnotes and setoff quotations 10-point); Times New Roman
- Margin: the margin to be left on all sides generally runs up to 1 inch (2.54 cm)
- Page numbers: use Arabic numerals for numbering all pages consecutively, except the title page.
- Put the page number preferably at the center or the left of the top or the bottom of the page.

Structure and Parts of an Academic Paper

A paper always has the same structure: Cover page, table of contents, introduction, main part, conclusion, bibliography and anti-plagiarism declaration. If required, you can add a summary, an abstract or an appendix. On the following page, please find an example of a **cover sheet**. It includes all the information the cover sheet of a paper needs to have:

Title

Subtitle

Europa-Universität Flensburg

B. A. European Cultures and Society

Semester:

Course: XX

Module: XX

Lecturer/Supervisor: XX

Name
Student ID-Nr.

Date: XX
Words/pages: XX

The cover page is followed by the **table of contents**. The table of contents gives the reader a quick overview of your work. It gives a first impression of whether you have approached the topic appropriately. Take your time to judge whether you have assigned sufficient written

space to each aspect of your argumentation in the paper. When you have finished writing, read your table of contents carefully. Confirm whether the chapters and subchapters show that you have a clear and structured paper. Make sure that the different parts fit together and that the different chapter headings provide meaningful information about the content of the chapter.

As already discussed in relation to the structuring of the text, a work generally consists of three parts: the introduction, the main part, the final part. The main body is divided into several chapters. The following overview gives an example of the contents that may be contained in the parts of the paper.

Example: General Outline of a Paper

Introduction:
- Declare the topic, and the academic field and debate
- Present the main problem, and the consequent research question
- Explain the relevance of the topic, and research question as the purpose
- Present your thesis/hypothesis
- Present the methodological approach
- Sum up what you will do in the course of the paper

Main part:
- Theoretical/conceptual background
- Literature Review of the field/debate
- Explanation of research design and the methodology
- Introduce theories and approaches that support your argumentation with a relevant theory or concept
- Discuss also theories and approaches that refute your argument, and reflect upon their counter-arguments
- Argumentation has to be backed by proper sources: approve or disapprove with your statement/thesis in a logical fashion
- Take the reader by the hand to make her understand your argumentative point
- Stay focused on your research question
- Consider different sources and indicate quotations
- Every part of your paper is constructed similarly to the overall paper and, thus, also structured accordingly, with an introduction, main part and conclusion

Conclusion:
- Summarize your argumentation and come to an overall conclusion
- Do not integrate new information, sources or quotations
- Closing your paper in drawing back to the beginning and answering your research question

Bibliography/References/Works Cited
- Include every citation used throughout the paper
- Don´t list literature not used in the paper (in text or via reference in the footnotes)
- Style of citation dictates how you should include your sources to the bibliography

4 Referencing and good scientific practise

Using sources

Good sources are important for the quality and validity of an academic paper! But keep in mind that your paper should be based on your *own* line of argumentation. Other sources should be used to *support* your claim(s). When writing a research paper, it is important that you develop your own line of argumentation. Additionally, you should back up your ideas with information taken from other sources. Whenever another source has been used, quoted or paraphrased, you need to identify it accordingly. With the help of proper sources you can underline and stress your own line of thought and, thereby, convince the reader of your argumentation. Within your academic work, sources can be used either by <u>direct quotation</u> or by <u>paraphrasing</u>. When using sources it is important to reference them either through <u>in-text references</u>, <u>footnotes</u> or <u>endnotes</u>.

Direct Quotations

Quotations must be transferred one-to-one and accord with the original in words, spelling, and internal punctuation. Every change must be clearly acknowledged. Use […] whenever you change something from the original wording. In order to have a running text, do not drop quotations into the text without warning. Rather, use introductory phrases by mentioning the author's name, to prepare readers for the quotation. *Examples are*: According to XX, "…" / As XX mentions, "…".
Quotations of up to three lines are integrated into the main text with quotation marks. Quotations of more than three lines are placed in an extra paragraph, set-off by a line spacing of 1.5 and indention (one inch or ten spaces from the left margin). Within this paragraph use a line spacing of 1. Quotation marks are possible, but not required, since these characteristics already indicate the quotation.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means presenting another scholar's idea in your own words. It is *insufficient* to change the words of the original sentence: the words and the sentence structure should differ from the original, however, without changing the content and the basis of the idea or the argument. Given that the idea behind the paraphrased sentence stems from someone else's work, you need to recognize that work by referring to it in the text, or in a footnote/endnote – eg. (see XX, page c). Refer to the paraphrased literature at least at the end of each paragraph that contains a paraphrasing. It is not enough to refer to paraphrased literature only in the end of each page or chapter. The reader should know when and how long exactly you follow another author´s argument.

Citation Styles

While you are writing a paper, citations are the key to developing the theoretical background, your own arguments, your analysis, and some other important aspects. It is also the best way to avoid any possibility of plagiarism. Citations show that you rely on and use knowledge from respected and recognized academic sources. Every citation in your paper should be present both in the text and at the end of your work in the bibliography. There are several recognized citation types, including APA, Harvard, and Chicago. Depending on your lecturer and the subject area you are focusing on, you can use different styles, but before you do, we recommend that you consult your lecturer.* Considering the multidiscipline nature of the EUCS, having a good understanding of several citation styles is important; this also will be helpful in your further education and career, as understanding citation and its styles is extremely helpful with organising your ideas and your writing.

All three styles require the same basic information, but the order and the importance of this information varies, partly because different academic areas highlight different elements of a source when referring to previous research.

The **Harvard, APA** and **MLA** styles are **"in-text" citation styles**, which means that you give some information about the source immediately after the quote, but leave the rest for the bibliography. The **Chicago style** relies more on the use of **footnotes or endnotes**. Regardless of the style being used, the idea is to enable the reader to find the correct source in the bibliography, which is where the complete reference will be found. Be aware that you should ask your lecturer if there are specific requirements regarding the citation style for the respective paper.

Harvard (APA – American Psychological Association)

In-text (book) citation:

… therefore a scientifically founded interdisciplinary engagement with Europe is

essential (Mayer, 2016, p. 368).

References:

Mayer, M. (2016) *The Study of Europe*. Flensburg: EUF Publishing.

The <u>Harvard style (APA)</u> was invented and introduced by the Harvard University and is for example used in the humanities. Since humanities research shows how one scripture influences another, the Harvard style emphasizes the name of the author and the page in the original text you are using. This information allows scholars to easily locate the exact

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* For the rules and regulations of Economics, Political Economy lectures and assignments please refer to the following website: https://www.uni-flensburg.de/en/cia/teaching/academic-writing/

sentences they are analysing. APA style referencing is an extension and further codified version of Harvard style: although there are minor differences, two styles are both applicable in social sciences and having an in-depth knowledge of one allows you to use the other skilfully too.

Chicago

    In-text (book) citation:

… therefore a scientifically founded interdisciplinary engagement with Europe is essential[1].

    Footnote/Endnote:

[1] Martin Mayer, *The Study of Europe* (Flensburg: EUF Publishing, 2016), 368.

As long as you continue to refer to the same source, you can continue using "Ibid., page number". Ibid. comes from the latin *Ibidem*, which means in the same place.

The alternative to in-text citation is to use footnotes that contain source information at the bottom of the page. The **footnote style** we demonstrate here is <u>Chicago Style</u>, defined by the University of Chicago. This style is particularly popular in historical research. In developing a historical explanation from several primary sources, the use of footnotes allows the reader to focus on the evidence rather than being distracted by the publication information about that evidence. Footnotes/endnotes can be viewed when someone wants to track down your source for further research.

MLA (Modern Language Association)

    In-text (book) citation:

… therefore a scientifically founded interdisciplinary engagement with Europe is essential (Mayer 368).

    Works Cited:

Mayer, Martin. *The Study of Europe*. EUF Publishing, 2016.

Another citation style is MLA; a citation style, which is mostly, employed by literature and cultural study disciplines.

All three of these styles have different conventions on how to refer to a source in the text of your paper. Consistency of your citations is a very important aspect; you should learn the rules of the style you use and use them consistently throughout your work.

There are several different types of sources, books, articles, treaties, visual ones, online literature, etc., with different types of authorship, such a single or multiple author(s), works published by organizations or without known author(s). In-text references, footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, etc. all need to follow the same convention consistently. Luckily, there are computer programs and websites that support you with this. As indicated above EUF provides the program Citavi to its students but you can also find many citation engines online.

Plagiarism

The topic of intellectual property (i.e. authorship) is one of the most crucial issues in academia. *Plagiarism* is a breach of the ethical code in academics by using information without providing proper credit to the owner/author of the information. The extent of the plagiarized information may be one sentence, a whole paragraph or a simple quote; this does not change the fact that an information that belongs to someone else is being used without proper credit. As the author of your own article, the responsibility lies entirely with you; missing a citation, overlooking a quote and referring to an idea of someone else without in-depth research or proper credit is still considered as a breach of academic ethics. This applies to both intentional and unintentional cases. Overlooking or skipping, even a simple citation, without any intent to plagiarize, is still deemed as plagiarism, due to using a source without proper credit. As long as you follow the proper academic conduct and pay utmost attention to your work, unintentional plagiarism should not be an issue.

Yet, whether intentional or not, plagiarism will have certain consequences according to §14 (3) of the EUCS examination and Study Regulations. To avoid these possibly severe outcomes, the best possible way is to familiarize yourself with the details of citation and to comprehend the process of conducting research and academic writing.

Anti-Plagiarism Declaration

When submitting your papers, Europa-Universität Flensburg and EUCS require you to attach an *anti-plagiarism declaration* to your work. This declaration confirms that the submission is your own work and completed in line with ethical codes. Including this declaration to your final submissions, whether term paper or bachelor's thesis is crucial, one of the formal requirements and every student must do it out without exceptions.

Please attach the official Anti-plagiarism declaration (dated and signed). It is possible to find the anti-plagiarism declaration in the following link:

https://www.uni-flensburg.de/en/eucs/program-structure/documents

5 Further Information

This has been an overview about academic writing skills. You will further profit from the academic writing classes that EUCS offers. As complex and confusing the formal requirements might appear in the beginning, once you apply them, it will get easier. In any case, academic writing is a practice, and you will improve, while working on your texts. If you have any doubts

regarding the use of sources, the structuring of a text, you may just ask your lecturer who can give you a more detailed answer to your particular concern.

It is further important that you as students keep in contact with each other, because in your studies you do not only learn from books and from teaching, you also learn from each other, and thus in the common exchange among students. You can mutually revise and discuss your papers, before handing them in. You can hint to literature that you know, and that might prove useful for another student's paper. First of all, giving feedback on e.g. the outline of a research project or the argumentation of another student's paper will also help you reflecting upon your own work.

It is recommended to get feedback from the lecturers in consultation hours, after you have received your grade.

For any further information – when to hand in your thesis, whom to contact, where to print, and so forth – you may find all the required information on the website: https://www.uni-flensburg.de/en/eucs/information-for-students/enrolled-students/ (under "Bachelor thesis").

6 Checklist

Question	Is the (research) question clear and appropriate for a paper?
Supervisor	Has the writing project been discussed in detail with the supervisor?
Structure	Is the work clearly and properly structured? Does the work have the right scope?
Argumentation	Is the argumentation structure comprehensible? Are the arguments correct and convincing?
State of Research	Does the paper show the paper familiarity with the relevant literature and the current state of research on the subject?
Independence	Does the paper go beyond the mere paraphrase of literature and shows it a certain autonomy in interpretation and argumentation? Is the use of literature appropriate?
Citation	Is the citation correct and does it comply with the conditions of citation style?
Formatting	Are the formal requirements met?
Language	Is the style of academic work appropriate? Is the work free from grammar and spelling mistakes?

Good luck and success for writing your paper!