

NOTES ON THE PREPARATION OF ACADEMIC PAPERS: TEXT TYPES AND WORKING METHODS

All the information is of a general nature and should be discussed with the lecturer in question!

What is an essay?

Essays should demonstrate the ability to work scientifically. As with every academic paper, a bibliography and citations are required. With regard to the formal structure, a freer design is permitted. For example, the necessary organization of the text into sections of the argumentation without a formal subdivision into subsections. In addition, essays are generally characterized by a high degree of intellectual independence and originality. The essay is an attempt, but the seemingly modest genre is deceptive!

It is precisely their seemingly simple form that makes these short texts a touchstone. The ballast of a lengthy treatise, essays often clothe themselves in the guise of an aestheticized chit-chat. The literary genre suitable for philosophical reflection often presents itself as a partisan who is happy with any pamphlet. It is not doctrine that is called for, but scepticism and reflection. The essay places high demands on literary sensitivity and linguistic expression.

What is a term paper?

A term paper is a more extensive piece of academic work that is preferably written during the semester break in the library or at home. It fulfils all the requirements of the academic form. It contains a cover sheet with the title or topic of the paper and - in this order - an outline, an introduction, a main part with two or more sub-chapters and a summarizing conclusion. At the end, there is a bibliography in which all cited texts are listed, an appendix if required (for images, interviews, etc.) and the declaration of independence. The term paper deals with a question/problem on a topic of your choice and demonstrates the mastery of scientific citation, the discussion of specialized literature and the creation of a bibliography. Small term papers of 12-14 pages and large term papers of 18-20 pages (Bachelor) or approx. 25 pages (Master) are accepted. They do not differ in their form and quality. The large term paper merely leaves more space for the presentation or an additional chapter. The term paper demonstrates independent work on a scientific question.

What does a written exposé look like?

An exposé serves as proof of performance in the research colloquium. The exposé serves to provide an overview of a planned research project (thesis, dissertation, project proposal...) and to present it in a structured manner. On approx. 10-15 pages, the following elements are required: preliminary title, summary, thesis(es), research status, subject matter, hoped-for results, research status, subject, expected results, planned structure, preliminary bibliography. The exposé is written as a fluently readable, self-contained text. The general formal requirements apply. The exposé should be a relatively concise, clear and generally understandable presentation of the student's own work or research project. The project must be adequately scientifically contextualized (research question, method, state of research), the workload must appear feasible (structure, concrete work steps) and the relevance of the project should be recognisable (topicality, originality).

The following sections refer primarily to the preparation of term papers, but the comments on the procedure should also be helpful for essays and exposés.

A) What are the characteristics of a good paper?

Content:

A scientific paper basically requires:

- A well thought-out and clearly formulated question/problem;
- A well-thought-out structure: clear and careful organisation of the content;
- A comprehensible argumentation within each chapter and within the paper as a whole;
- Reflective and analytical abilities;
- Understanding of primary and secondary literature (knowledge of relevant specialist literature on the topic).

Biographies and summaries should only be included in the paper in exceptional cases - if they are part of the argument - and should be kept short!

Quality of content and style:

- Quality of the research question/problem statement; - Independence and originality;
- Quality and rigour of the argument and quality of structure and organisation;
- Reception of research literature: precision and intensity of treatment;
- Formal quality: completeness, structure, method of citation, references, layout, etc;
- Linguistic quality: comprehensibility, integration of quotations, expression, spelling, etc.

B) What are the steps that I will have to take?

Please consult the reading list provided for the course!

Preparation phase:

- Start with curiosity, let your intuition guide you;
- Develop a question and phrase it precisely;
- Discuss with your lecturer and fellow students;
- Do thorough research;
- Formulate a working title and create a preliminary (=first) outline;
- Create a timetable.

Development phase:

- Presenting facts/content, discussing issues, debating problems, arguing in relation to theses, substantiating arguments (quoting clearly and accurately);
- Organising arguments and developing your own position;
- Developing arguments, finding meaningful chapter headings, checking chapter structure for coherence;
- Use footnotes: comments, discussions, references to further reading, etc;
- Rethinking structure and argument, forming a clear and concise conclusion.

Finishing:

- Check transitions between chapters;
- Reread the work and make thorough (!) final corrections to content, form and language.