

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, RESOURCE AND SPATIAL ECONOMICS  
FACULTY OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
KIEL UNIVERSITY

# **Guidelines for Writing a Thesis or Seminar Paper**

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## 1 Preliminary Remarks

This pamphlet provides guidelines for the preparation of scientific seminar papers, bachelor's theses, and master's theses at the Department of Economics and the Institute for Environmental, Resource and Spatial Economics.

When preparing your seminar paper or thesis, make sure that everything you write can be understood by students in your course and level in your program. They should be able to follow your line of reasoning and repeat your main conclusions after carefully reading your work. It should not be necessary to have previous knowledge of the topic or the literature you cite. Use clear and coherent language, argue conclusively, explain all figures and diagrams, and, if necessary, give formal proofs.

After completing a draft, set it aside for a day or two, and then try to read it from someone else's perspective. Ask yourself whether the structure is good and the text is clear. Try to identify and correct any shortcomings yourself before handing in your work.

A basic requirement of any scientific work is satisfaction of certain formal criteria. The following chapters discuss the formatting guidelines, structure, etc. [Formatting templates](#) for LATEX and Microsoft Word are available.

You can find tips for writing your seminar paper or thesis in the ZBW Guided Walk "[Write your best assignment](#)".

## 2 Formatting Rules

Follow the formatting rules below. The [templates](#) comply with these rules. They also contain examples and further details.

### **Margins:**

Use margins with the following dimensions throughout the entire document:

Top: 2cm	Bottom: 2cm
Left: 3cm	Right: 4cm

### **Line spacing:**

Use 1.5-line spacing in the text, and 1-line spacing in footnotes.

### **Font and size:**

Use the font Times New Roman in font size 12 in Microsoft Word or Open Office or the default font and size in Latex. Footnotes must be in font size 10.

### **Justification and hyphenation:**

Always use justified text with hyphenation.

### **Page numbers:**

Do not number the title page. Number the contents and other directories with Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, ...) and the body text from the introduction to the sworn statement with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, ...).

### **Numbering of chapters:**

Divide your text into chapters (1; 2; 3; ...), sections (1.1; 1.2; 1.3; ...) and subsections (2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; ...). A bullet point 2.1.1 is nonsensical unless a bullet point 2.1.2 follows. Assign all chapters, sections, and subsections explicit headings.

**Paragraphs:**

Use paragraphs to divide meaningfully the body of the text within the chapters, sections and sub-sections.

**Numbering of figures, tables, formulas, etc.:**

Number figures and tables consecutively (Table 1, Table 2, ...; Figure 1, Figure 2, ...) and assign meaningful titles and references to them. Also number formulas consecutively ((1), (2), ...).

### 3 Structure

Scientific seminar papers, bachelor theses and master theses always have the same basic structure. You can adapt this structure to your specific purposes. The standard building blocks are:

Title page

Table of contents

Figure / Table / Abbreviation / Symbols directory

Main text (introduction, main text divided into sections, conclusion)

References

Appendix

Affirmation

**Title page:**

For bachelor's and master's theses, the title page has to comply with the requirements of the examination office. The title page contains the following information:

- Professor, Institute, Faculty and University
- Title of your work
- Type of work (seminar paper, bachelor's or master's thesis)
- Author, subject, semester and module, Stu-e-mail address, matriculation number, submission date
- Lecturer, supervisor, first referee and/or second referee

Do not use the seal of the Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel [CAU] and the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the CAU on the title page. The title of the thesis may be changed with the supervisor's permission.

**Table of contents:**

The table of contents gives an overview of the structure and contents. It should demonstrate your understanding and treatment of your topic. In addition, it should already identify a clear the common thread specific to your subject matter, i.e., the central theme throughout your argument. Make sure that the table of contents is understandable on its own and shows a well-balanced distribution of the contents. Display the full headings of the individual chapters, sections, and subsections. Give the page number where each chapter begins on the right hand side of the table of contents.

**Figure / Table / Abbreviation / Symbol Directory:**

If you use more than three illustrations/figures or tables or uncommon abbreviations or symbols in your thesis or paper, you must include directories. Separate directories of figures and tables should show the number, the label and the page of the figures and tables. Similarly, separate directories of abbreviations and symbols should include explanations of each abbreviation and symbol.

**Main Text:**

The main text forms the actual content of your work. It usually begins with an introduction in which you stimulate the reader's interest and present the topic, the problem, structure and aim of your work. The introduction also summarizes the most important results. In the main body of the text, you work out and discuss the solution to the problem, which is divided into sections and subsections. End your work with a chapter in which you summarize your findings, formulate some theses, or point out unsolved problems.

**Bibliography:**

Include all references cited in your text in the bibliography. For details on citation and references see below.

**Appendix:**

The appendix contains tables, data, questionnaires, proofs, derivations, etc., which represent ancillary information and might, otherwise, negatively affect the flow of the main text. The main text must make reference to the appendix. Do not use the appendix for outsourcing text that does not fit into the main text due to page restrictions. Include an appendix only when necessary.

**Affirmation:**

On the last page of the paper, you have to make a statement with the following wording and sign it (which also applies to digital versions):

I hereby declare that I have composed my *Bachelor/Master's thesis / Seminar paper "topic"* independently using only those resources cited and that I have as such identified all passages which I have taken from publications verbatim or in substance. I agree that my thesis may be checked for plagiarism using testing software.

Neither this thesis nor any extract of it has been previously submitted to an examining authority in this or a similar form.

*For Bachelor/Master's thesis:* I have ensured that the written version of this thesis is identical to the version saved on the enclosed storage medium.

Date, signature

Failure to comply with the contents of this statement will result in failure to pass the module. Please check the respective leaflets of the examinations office.

## 4 Content and Scope

The precise requirements for the content of the seminar paper, bachelor thesis, and master thesis depend on the type of work as well as the academic subject, specific topic and supervisor. The information provided here, therefore, is more general. Please pay particular attention to the notes from preparatory events and to the discussions with your supervisor.

The scope of your work should not exceed 12 pages of main text for a seminar paper (see paragraph 3), 25 pages of main text for a bachelor's thesis, and 40 pages of main text for a master's thesis.

### **Common thread:**

It is important to have a common thread, i.e., a central theme and line of thought throughout your entire work. This includes the title and table of contents, and the relevance of each sentence and each section for solving the problem should always be clear to the reader. You should create and describe links between the various results and discuss the contribution of each result to answering the underlying research question in order to maintain the common thread. If a sentence, paragraph or section deviates from the line of thought and is not relevant, you should not include it.

### **Conclusive, reasoned argumentation:**

Always argue based on results and sources. Keep the argument formal and precise. Avoid vague expressions such as "the term paper proves ..." or "I feel that ..." Also avoid imprecise statements such as "Under certain assumptions, we get the following result ..." (which assumptions?) or "We mostly find ..." (When exactly, when not?) or "Men and women earn different amounts." (Who earns more?) or "It is generally known that ..." (who claims to know it?).

Of course, you must document any facts, claims and opinions that you have borrowed from the literature. Nevertheless, avoid stringing together sources that, taken out of context, do not contribute to a clearly structured argument.

### **Description of figures, tables and equations:**

If you include illustrations, tables and/or equations in the text, explain them to the reader and describe the results in the text. In case of doubt, use a key. Any symbols must be defined (for example, M for the the stock of money).

### **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations must be defined in words, when they are first introduced, e.g., European Union (EU).

### **Linking sections and chapters:**

Make clear how sections and chapters in your work are linked together. Some introductory and guiding sentences help both you and the reader not to lose track of the line of reasoning.

### **Use of paragraphs:**

Always divide chapters or sections into meaningful paragraphs. A paragraph that spans an entire page is too long. In the end, the reader cannot recognize what the main point is. On the other hand, paragraphs should not consist of only one sentence.

Employ only one style of paragraphs, and always avoid using different paragraph formats. For example, you may include an extra line before the paragraph (as in this document), or indent the first line of each new paragraph, or include greater spacing before a new paragraph.

**Orthographic correctness and expression:**

Avoid spelling and grammatical mistakes and use clear, understandable expressions. Avoid long and complicated sentences.

Use the active voice to the extent possible. Use the passive voice sparingly and only when it cannot be avoided.

- Example 1: "*It is repeatedly claimed that foreigners take welfare benefits unjustifiably.*" The passive voice in the main sentence is flawed, because it does not clarify who is making the claim. A better expression of this thought is: "*Relevant media and/or politicians from populist parties are often critical about foreigners ...*"
- Example 2: "*Berlin is known for its excellent museums.*" Here use of the passive voice is appropriate, because it is not practical to enumerate the many people, who know the excellence of Berlin's museums.

Be sure to read your thesis carefully several times before submission, or have it proofread to avoid mistakes and lack of clarity.

**Additional requirements for empirical work:**

If you are doing empirical work, you must consider some additional requirements. You have to document your procedure in such a way that replication of the data collection and the results are possible.

That means, in particular, for the *written work*:

- The section discussing your empirical method additionally includes:
  - 1) Documentation of the data collection (test set-up, interview, etc.) or the data sets used (origin, peculiarities ...);
  - 2) Documentation of the methods used for the analysis of the data (in the result section) incl. references, as well as an indication of the software employed; and
  - 3) Explanation of any questionnaires that were created.
- The results section must also contain descriptive statistics of the data
- The appendix of the thesis contains, as applicable:
  - 1) A list of the variables used, including a short description, and
  - 2) In the case you collected your own data, a complete sample (print template or screen shots) of the questionnaire.

In addition, you need to include the following *digital content*:

- The raw dataset(s), unless they are not freely available datasets (SOEP, EVS, etc.). If this is the case, you need to make a special agreement with your supervisor.
- Documentation of how the data were processed and evaluated. Your supervisor needs to be able to check the validity of the results without much effort. Include (1) documentation of the adjustments made to the data set and (2) documentation of the methods used.
- Example of an *analysis of freely available macroeconomic data with Stata*: The digital attachment includes: (1) the macroeconomic data set (e.g., Penn

World Table) and (2) a Stata Do file, including comments, that the supervisor can execute after adjusting the file path and that contains ALL preparatory work (data import, data preparation, etc.) and the entire analysis.

## 5 Literature research, citation and bibliography

In a seminar paper, bachelor's thesis, or master's thesis, you generally use, discuss and reflect upon the thoughts of other authors, link these with one another, and base your own statements on results from scientific sources. You have to include a reference to the original source in the text for *every* argument or line of thought that originates from another author (see Chapter 4 “Conclusive, reasoned argumentation”). If you do not comply with your obligation to identify correctly all content derived from other work as citations, your work will inevitably be classified as plagiarism and thus as an attempt to deceive.

### Literature review:

If your supervisor recommends introductory literature, then you should only consider it as a starting point. It is your task to do an extensive search of the scientific literature to gain an overview of the entire literature and the current state of research on the topic. Select your sources carefully and evaluate whether they are worthy of citation. In general, your sources should consist of (i) articles from peer-reviewed scientific journals, (ii) articles from collected volumes, (iii) monographs, and (iv) working papers. Bear in mind that working papers are sometimes preliminary versions and may include new, unestablished methods and models. Check whether the working paper has already been published, and cite the published version, if available. Make sure to evaluate the quality of a working paper, for example, by looking at other scientific contributions of the authors. In addition, it might be necessary to quote legal texts and regulations, which are often only available on the internet.

Wikipedia and Google are not citable sources! Avoid citing from textbooks (especially from undergraduate studies - the concepts in these books are considered basic knowledge). Advanced textbooks may be cited, however, when, for example, reference is made to the use of non-standard methods.

Do not expand the number of sources unnecessarily, e.g., by citing the same lines of thought from several different sources. All sources that you use and cite should make their own relevant contribution to dealing with the underlying questions of your thesis or seminar paper. Follow this rule, even if your supervisor requires a minimum number of cited sources.

Some sources, especially working papers but also published articles, are freely accessible online. However, much literature is only available to subscribers and not freely accessible. Use the university library (<http://www.ub.uni-kiel.de>), the faculty library (<http://bibliothek.wiwi.uni-kiel.de/>), or the Leibniz Information Centre for Economics (ZBW) (<http://www.zbw.eu>) to get access to the literature. The ZBW, located in Kiel, is the largest library of its kind in the world, and there is hardly any economics literature that you cannot access through the ZBW. Do not limit your selection to sources that you can access without using the resources named above.

Some useful links for the literature search:

- Leibniz Information Centre for Economics:  
<http://www.zbw.eu/de/recherchieren> and <http://www.econbiz.de>
- University Library of the CAU Kiel:  
<http://www.ub.uni-kiel.de>
- Scientific articles from journals:  
<http://www.econlit.org>, <http://scholar.google.de> and <http://www.jstor.org>
- High quality working paper series from research networks:  
<https://www.nber.org>, <https://cepr.org/content/discussion-papers> and  
<https://www.cesifo.org/en/wp>
- Other Working Papers:  
<http://econpapers.repec.org>
- Publisher of scientific literature:  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com> and <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>
- Statistics and data:  
OECD, iLibrary, Eurostat, World Bank Data, World Bank Governance Indicators, Swedish National Data Service (SND), ICPSR (International Social Science Data)

### **Citation in the text:**

Cite in the text and not in footnotes. Name the author(s), publication year and page number of the source. For details, you can refer to the guidelines of citation styles such as APA, DGP or Harvard, to which you can find plenty of information and examples online. It is important that you follow a single, consistent style. For a short list of hints and examples on citation, see <https://www.econbiz.de/eb/en/research-skills>. You should usually summarize arguments, conclusions and findings by other authors in your own words instead of quoting directly. You can include references in the sentence:

Example:

Brand and Härig (2015, p. 5) write that ...

or after a sentence or section

Example:

This instrument has an effect on the price (Brand & Härig, 2015, p. 5).

If you include direct quotes, you have to include them verbatim as in the original source (including highlighting, errors, etc.) and mark them with quotation marks. If you change the quote, for example, by omitting a word, you have to indicate it. This also applies to translations of literature in foreign languages. You should always check whether a literal quote is necessary and constructive, or whether an indirect reproduction and summary of the findings is sufficient.

Example:

In this context, Ethier (1983, p.5) states: “The principle of comparative advantage is one of the great ideas of economics ... The basic idea ... is attributed primarily to David Ricardo.”

### **References:**

In the bibliography, you list all the sources that you use and, therefore, cite in the text (sources that you have read but not cited should not be listed). Sort the entries

in the bibliography, listed according to a consistent style, alphabetically by last name. Again, you can refer to the specifications of the APA, DGP or Harvard styles.

Example:

Adolfson, M., 2007. Incomplete Exchange Rate Pass-Through and Simple Monetary Policy Rules. *Journal of International Money and Finance*; 26; 468-494.

Blanchard, O. und Kahn, C., 1980. The Solution of Linear Difference Models under Rational Expectations. *Econometrica*; 48; 1305-1311.

Cunha, F., und Heckman, J. (2007). The Technology of Skill Formation. NBER Working Paper No. 12840. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.

European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. (without date). *European Maritime Day* [Website]. Last visited on 18.08.2017 at <https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/maritimeday/>

Olson, M., 1965. *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pokropp, F., 1977. Aggregation, in: W. Albers u.a. (Hrsg.), *Handwörterbuch der Wirtschaftswissenschaft*, Bd. 1, Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer/Mohr-Siebeck/Vandenhoeck, S. 61-66.

## 6 Checklist

Before submitting your work, consult the following checklist, which is not exhaustive, to see whether you have met the basic requirements of a well-crafted seminar paper, bachelor thesis or master thesis.

- Does the text still contain spelling or punctuation errors?
- Do you use a fluent and understandable manner of expression?
- Are words, passages or entire pages missing?
- Does the table of contents (and other directories) match the structure of the text and page numbers?
- Is the bibliography complete? (Delete bibliography entries that you do not cite!)
- Are all references to literature, figures and appendix correct? Did you forget any references?
- Is the layout (headings, text formatting, etc.) clear and consistent?
- Did you include all necessary components of a scientific paper?
- Did you correctly number figures, tables, footnotes, equation?