



GUIDELINES: HOW TO WRITE AN ACADEMIC PAPER Abbreviated Version

There are some rules, regulations, and conventions that you should be familiar with before you start to write a term paper. They will be briefly introduced in the following.

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1. Readership, Authorship, and the Writing Process

Before you write your term paper, it might be helpful to clarify who your readers are, and what your role as an author is, accordingly. Please note that different disciplines and instructors might have slightly different expectations here. When in doubt, consult your instructor's class syllabus and ask them during office hours.

Revisit materials from your introductory modules and consult the [longer version of these guidelines](#) for guidance on developing a research topic, objective, thesis, and argument.

The central library (Universitätsbibliothek) hosts a writing lab (Schreibwerkstatt), where consultants offer workshops, short lectures, e-learning resources, and individual writing consultations for free. See <https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/ub/studying/courses/writing-workshop> for details.

Consult our librarians for trainings, information, and individual advice on how to find and evaluate sources: <https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/ub/finding-resources/information>.

2. Formal Outline of Your Paper

2.1. Title Page

upper section:	university, department, semester, title of course, instructor's name
middle section:	title of the paper
lower section:	author's name, course of studies, module, number of ECTS points, semesters studied, address, email / telephone, student ID / registration number, date of submission, word count

2.2. Table of Contents (Example)

1. Introduction	01
2. [Main Part I] (including chapter numbers and page numbers)	02
2.1 [Historical Contextualization]	03
2.2 [Theoretical Basis for Argument]	05
3. [Main Part II]	07
3.1 [Analysis & Interpretation I]	08
3.2 [Analysis & Interpretation II]	13
4. Conclusion	17
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- Titles in [brackets] indicate a sample placeholder for an actual heading. You will have to find informative chapter titles appropriate to your topic and argument.
- Many word processing programs provide templates for tables of contents which update and format chapter and page numbers automatically (e.g., instructions for [MS Word](#) and [Libre Office](#)).

2.3. Layout

- margins: 2.5 cm left, 3 cm right, 2.5 cm top and bottom
- spacing: 1.5 for main text, single for indented quotations (i.e., quotation exceeding four lines)
- justification: full justification (“Blocksatz”)
- font: a classic, simple, non-Serif font, e.g., Calibri, Arial (use the same font for the whole text)
- size: 11 or 12 for main text depending on font, 10 for indented quotations longer than four lines

2.4. Writing Tips, Or Things to Avoid

➤ Paragraphing

Every paragraph should constitute a logical unity of meaning which contains a part of your overall line of argumentation and should be placed according to the structure you have outlined in your introduction. **No one-sentence paragraphs! The general rule is: one thought, one paragraph.**

➤ Coherence and Relevance

Do not list disconnected details that may be interesting observations but are not related to the coherent structure of your paper. If at all, these can be added in footnotes.

➤ Reader Guidance and Clarity

Think about transitions from one paragraph to the next. Ideally, one paragraph refers to the preceding paragraph. Be transparent about your process and tell your reader throughout the paper what you are doing and why, what you plan to do next and why, and what you have found out or argued so far.

➤ Clear and Coherent Structure of Argument: Subchapters and Subheadings

Your choice of subchapters and (very sparingly employed) subheadings needs to follow the logic of your research objective, approach, and argument. While the main part should have a meaningful heading (NOT simply “Main Part”), not every paragraph needs its own subheading! In practice, it should be possible to read a term paper even without the inclusion of subheadings, i.e., as a homogenous entity featuring smooth transitions

that link one thought with the other. Headings and subheadings do **not** replace transitions between the paragraphs. **Also note: If you have a first point, you need to make a second one, e.g., if you have chapter 3.1., you need chapter 3.2.**

➤ **Summaries of Texts which Comprise a Whole Chapter**

In some cases, it might be necessary and useful to briefly introduce your reader to your topic in its relation to the context of the story/plot. However, it is sufficient to summarize the plot of a text in a few words. A better way of indicating the text's story/plot is to make it part of your line of argumentation. The reader of your paper is familiar with the contents of the work on which you write your paper. Summarize the plot **only** if this is indispensable to your line of argumentation.

➤ **Bio-Bibliographical Information**

Include information on the author's life and his or her works only if this information is relevant for strengthening / substantiating your thesis. Refrain from providing extensive records and facts and figures on the author's life only to then leave this bulk of information without comment or without transferring your findings to the actual focus of your paper (compare the problematic usage of summaries as pointed out above).

2.5. Some General Remarks

- Whatever you write about, a critical re-evaluation as well as accurate documentation of your sources are essential to an academic paper. Your paper should be based on a consistent line of argumentation that constitutes your own approach. You need to document your sources to avoid plagiarism!
- Your argumentation needs to be based on textual evidence. Whatever you argue, support your arguments with examples from the text and secondary literature. This avoids superficial interpretations and trains you to read a text closely and critically.
- Not only quotes from sources/authors that you have consulted during your research need to be documented but also those whose ideas you have modified by either paraphrasing them or integrating them in your research. Please also see the section on Plagiarism for further information on how to avoid intellectual and academic theft. By the way: The term plagiarism derives from the Latin word *plagiarus* and means "kidnapper." Just as the term suggests, it is an academic crime.

3. Documentation of Sources

The careful documentation of sources is crucial to good scholarly writing. Whenever you draw on the work of another person or institution, you must document your source by indicating what you borrowed—whether fact, opinions, or quotation—and where you borrowed it from. Whether you quote from another text directly, paraphrase it, or take from it an idea which you express entirely in your own words, you must properly document that source.

Plagiarism is a severe crime in academia. You plagiarize when you use someone else's formulations directly but also when you display someone else's ideas, trains of thoughts, or line of argumentation as your own without acknowledging the sources. Also paraphrasing,

summarizing, and recycling an old paper can count as plagiarism. In cases of plagiarism, the examination board (Prüfungsausschuss) may find your work to be deceptive and mark it accordingly in your transcript of records (Täuschung). If you plagiarize, you severely damage your academic reputation. Please note that instructors often spot-check papers for plagiarism or research suspicious passages online, so do not expect to have plagiarism go unnoticed.

The following websites offers a self-test with which you can test your knowledge of various types of direct and indirect plagiarism: <http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/quiz/index.html> and <https://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-success/tutoring-services/services-resources/writing-support/the-plagiarism-self-test/>.

The last page of your paper must be a signed statement by which you guarantee that you have not used any unacknowledged sources (see chapter 6).

3.1. Citing within the Text

All sources you use need to be documented according to MLA standards. A handy guide to the most recent MLA rules, provided by Purdue University, can be found online: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html. These most recent rules should be applied unless otherwise stated.

Please note that MLA requires in-text-citation. Parenthetical references are directly linked to your list of works cited or bibliography.¹ The author's last name and a page reference are usually sufficient to identify the source. In the following example, the reference (Townsend 10) indicates that the quotation comes from page 10 of a work by Townsend. Your readers can then find complete publication information for the source in your list of works cited/bibliography.

Example: Medieval Europe was a place both of "raids, pillages, slavery, and extortion" and of "travelling merchants, monetary exchange, towns if not cities, and active markets in grain" (Townsend 10).

Check the MLA rules for details on how to show your own adaptations to quotations (e.g., lower-case instead of upper-case characters, added/omitted emphasis, etc.).

Placing of Parenthetical References

A parenthetical reference in your text must clearly point to a precise location in a specific source listed in your works cited/bibliography, but at the same time you should keep the reference as brief as possible. If, for example, you include an author's name in a sentence, you need not repeat the name in the parenthetical page citation that follows. Place the parenthetical reference where a pause would naturally occur (preferably at the end of a sentence), as near as possible to the material documented.

¹ The difference between "Works Cited" and "Bibliography" will be explained in 3.2.

3.2. Bibliography or Works Cited

The list of Works Cited should be sorted alphabetically and contain an entry for each of the works cited in your paper. You may also want to include works which were consulted in the preparation of the paper but not actually cited in your text. In the first case you will use the heading *Works Cited*; in the latter case you will use the heading *Bibliography*, but note that you cannot use both headings at the same time. Please always indent the second and all subsequent lines of entries from the left margin.

Generally, the rules for citing electronic sources are similar to the ones pertaining to printed material. Follow MLA standards, aim for consistency and easy traceability, and ask your instructor when in doubt.

For detailed information on how to compile a bibliography according to MLA standards, use the online guide provided by Purdue University (see chapter 3.1) or visit the MLA Style Center: <https://style.mla.org/works-cited/works-cited-a-quick-guide>.

3.3. Finding and Evaluating (Online) Sources

Our library catalogs and the bibliographies or readings provided by your instructors can point you towards reliable sources. However, many of you will search for sources online (beyond the university) and encounter a lot of material that discusses your topic of research but does not meet academic standards, e.g., by presenting opinion rather than evidence-based analysis, by being published without sufficient quality control of academic journals and presses, or by being outdated. The quality of your paper largely depends on your sources. It is crucial that you learn to identify and work with high-quality academic literature.

Please see Purdue University's OWL on how to evaluate sources: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/evaluating_sources_of_information/index.html.

See also our library's brief lectures, e-learning material, workshops, and consultation services on how to find and evaluate sources (see section 1 above).

4. Useful Sources

4.1. Academic Writing

William Strunk, Jr: *The Elements of Style* (standard American textbook)

- <http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>

Dartmouth Institute for Writing and Rhetoric:

- <https://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>

Advice on Academic Writing (University of Toronto):

- <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/>

Writer's Handbook (Writing Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison):

- <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/>

Purdue Online Writing Lab

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Print Sources

- Kruse, Otto. *Keine Angst vor dem leeren Blatt: Ohne Schreibblockaden durchs Studium*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2012. Print.
- Gardener, Janet E. *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2009. Print.

MLA Style Center

- <https://style.mla.org/works-cited/works-cited-a-quick-guide>

Plagiarism

- <http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/quiz/index.html>
- <https://www.wcu.edu/the-plagiarism-self-test/>

4.2. Databases

The university library offers a list of databases that can be accessed remotely. We recommend the MLA International Bibliography as a starting point. No matter where you find your sources, please make sure to check whether they can be considered reliable according to academic standards.

Access via U of Marburg Library website (Digitale Bibliothek → Datenbanken → Anglistik/Amerikanistik):

- <http://www.uni-marburg.de/bis>

Oxford Reference Online

- http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html?book=t56

MLA database

- <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search?vid=2&hid=4&sid=3813353f-f8d1-4e23-95f4-e4f702666413%40sessionmgr14>

JSTOR

- [link to JSTOR](#)

Literary Reference Center

- <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search?vid=1&hid=119&sid=bbb5d8e8-a763-4c70-9afe-acbda8a2a448%40sessionmgr110>

Cambridge Collections Online

- http://cco.cambridge.org/uid=10484/private_home

4.3. Miscellaneous

American Literature

- <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng372/sources.htm>

Basics of English Studies

- <http://www2.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/intranet/englishbasics/Home01.htm>

English and American Literature

- Baker, Nancy L., and Nancy Huling. *A Research Guide for Undergraduate Students. English and American Literature*. 6th ed., The Modern Language Association, 2006.
- Meyer, Michael. *English and American Literatures*. 4th rev. ed., Francke, 2011, <https://hds.hebis.de/ubmr/Record/HEB368957233>

E-text sources

- www.bartleby.com
- www.bibliomania.com

The Literary Link (useful materials, tips, and links, as well as suggestions for teachers)

- <http://www.theliterarylink.com>

Literary Terminology

- <http://www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm>

Literary Studies

- Pugh, Tison, and Margaret Johnson. *Literary Studies: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2013.

Narratology

- Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Jahn, Manfred. *Narratology 2.3: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative*. English Department, U Cologne, 2021, <http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.pdf>
- Hühn, Peter, et al. *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, U Hamburg, 10 Oct. 2016, <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/>

Poetry

- <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/display/>
- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/resources>

Postcolonial Web

- <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/>

Romanticism

- <http://www.rc.umd.edu/>

Victorian Web

- <http://www.victorianweb.org/>

5. Statement of Authorship (Plagiarism Statement)

Please copy/paste either the German or English version of this statement and add the text to your paper as your final page. Note that you have to sign the statement. Without your signature, it is not legally binding.

Versicherung

Ich versichere hiermit an Eides statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst, ganz oder in Teilen noch nicht als Prüfungsleistung vorgelegt und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

Sämtliche Stellen der Arbeit, die benutzten Werken im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen sind, habe ich durch Quellenangaben kenntlich gemacht.

Dies gilt auch für Zeichnungen, Skizzen, bildliche Darstellungen und dergleichen sowie für Quellen aus dem Internet.

Bei Zuwiderhandlung gilt das Seminar (PS, SE etc.) als nicht bestanden – keine Scheinvergabe.

Ich bin mir bewusst, dass es sich bei Plagiarismus um schweres akademisches Fehlverhalten handelt, das im Wiederholungsfall weiter sanktioniert werden kann.

Marburg, den.....

.....

Datum

Unterschrift

- If you are not a native speaker of German and do not feel comfortable signing the German statement, please use the following English version of the Statement of Authorship / Plagiarism Statement.

Plagiarism Statement

Hereby I confirm that I formulated and wrote the present work myself, and that I have not used any sources other than those indicated. I further confirm that I have not handed in this work, not even in parts, at any academic institution for credit before.

All parts of this work that I took from other sources, be it verbatim or paraphrased, and all ideas and methods I used from other sources are indicated. This applies to all sources, including print, sound, electronic, and video sources, as well as images of all kinds.

I am aware that plagiarism is an academic crime that will result in failing the class in which plagiarism is committed. If repeated, plagiarism can have further consequences.

Marburg,

.....

Date

Signature