



Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

GUIDELINES FOR SEMINAR PAPERS AND BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S THESES

Professorship of Economics, esp. Digital Economics

Prof. Dr. Marianne Saam¹

E-Mail: marianne.saam@uni-hamburg.de

Version 27-10-2025

Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences

Department of Socioeconomics

¹ I thank Mark Spektor for helpful comments and Heike Henningsen for proofreading and translating into English. DeepL Pro was used for supporting the translation. Changes compared to the version from 01-04-2025 are noted.



Table of contents

1	General recommendations for writing the paper	3
2	Scope, language and submission of the paper.....	3
3	Requirements for content of theses	3
4	Citation rules.....	4
5	Rules for using AI tools	5
6	Literature search.....	7
7	Supervision, feedback and evaluation.....	7
8	What if I have problems?	7

1 General recommendations for writing the paper

The guidelines and recommendations from the EconBiz-Guide by ZBW in the most current version are available here <https://zbw.how-to-guides> (accessed on 24-03-2025). Please also note the information provided in a specific course on the assignment of topics and the required paper structure, as well as the information provided during individual appointments concerning your bachelor's or master's thesis.

The present guidelines are reviewed and, if necessary, updated on 1 April and 1 October of each year. Please use the current version.

2 Scope, language and submission of the paper

If you write a term paper in one of our courses, requirements for the papers will be published on OLAT. For a bachelor's or master's thesis you find the requirements in the official regulations for your degree program. You are expected to be familiar with this information. This includes the required length of the paper or thesis and where, how and when to submit it.

Your work can be written in German or English, as far as permitted by the examination regulations. We recommend gender-inclusive language. There are different practices for using it. You can find some recommendations here:

<https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/gleichstellung/gender/geschlechtergerechte-sprache.html>

(accessed on 24/03/2025).

The minimum or maximum number of pages does not include the following: title page, indexes, abstract, bibliography, and appendices. Appendices may only be used for agreed purposes. Tables and graphics belong in the main text.

We estimate that a DIN A4 page contains approximately 2,500 characters (including spaces). If you print the pages very narrowly or very broadly (e.g. with many empty lines) to meet the number of pages, there will be a deduction of points in grading. We recommend a font size of 12 (Times New Roman) or 11 (Arial) and 1.5 line spacing. Other formats are allowed as long as the number of characters of approx. 2,500 per page is not greatly exceeded or fallen below. Please feel free to indicate the number of characters on the cover page or in the table of contents.

We recommend the cover page templates provided by the University of Hamburg. In addition, examination regulations for the cover page may apply:

<https://www.kus.uni-hamburg.de/themen/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/corporate-design/vorlagen/deckblaetter-abschlussarbeiten.html> (accessed on 24-03-2025, in German).

For individual work as well as group work, please include your name only on the cover page, in the outline, or in the appendix. If you want to indicate who wrote what in the main text, use an abbreviation or numbering. This is because we are not allowed to enter your personal data into the plagiarism detection software.

3 Requirements for content of theses

Bachelor's theses at the professorship answer a research question based on selected papers from the scientific literature. Your independent work therefore does not consist of own scientific research. Rather, it consists of placing a question in a broader context and presenting, comparing and critically appraising the methodology and results of selected research papers on the topic. We expect you to

read and analyze in detail with the statistical or econometric research papers that we have previously agreed with you and to devote about 50 to 75 per cent of the bachelor's thesis to their presentation. Basic knowledge of statistics and econometrics is helpful for this.

We recommend that you first list the research papers in tabular form, comparing the precise research question, data, methods and results. The table can then serve as the basis for a presentation in a coherent text form.

For a master's thesis, you can either independently reproduce a published study using statistical or econometric methods with the original data, or you may directly conduct a replication with other data. Alternatively, you can conduct a statistical meta-analysis of a larger number of published studies. The availability of data must be clarified before registering the thesis. Knowledge of how to use R, Stata or other suitable software is required.

In individual cases, the bachelor's or master's thesis may also address a new empirical research question or work with theoretical literature from economics.

Information on the professorship's areas of interest and the current availability of places can be found on the website. As Marianne Saam has her main duties at ZBW, the professorship has only a reduced teaching load and can only supervise a small number of theses.

4 Citation rules

The citation rules of the ZBW guidelines in the current version https://www.econbiz.de/eb/fileadmin/user_upload/research_skills/Handout_Citations_and_reference_list.pdf (accessed on 01-04-2025) and the following additional rules apply. We recommend the APA citation style. Other common scientific citation styles are accepted, but we do not provide advice on their use.

Exact page references are mandatory for both direct and indirect quotations. Quotations that have been translated literally from another language are also considered direct quotations. Please add '(author's transl.)' in parentheses.

The systematic absence of precise text references with page number or quotation marks will lead to suspicion of plagiarism. All papers are scanned anonymously using the plagiarism detection software Turnitin to check for possible plagiarism.

If a bibliographic reference is inaccurately cited or missing only once, and not in a central location in your work, the grade will only be lowered in the criterion 'linguistic and formal quality of the work' (see section 7). However, if reference entries are missing, incorrect or incomplete in a central location or more than once, the possibility of plagiarism will be investigated. In this case, the professorship no longer decides alone, but must consult the responsible office at the faculty.

Inaccurate information that can lead to suspicion of plagiarism does not include spelling mistakes, omission of an author, etc. Rather, it means that sufficient information for finding the source is missing or that the page number is missing. Of course, you do not have to quote sources with page numbers that do not have any. Journal articles or research reports that are available in both an html version without pages and a pdf version with pages must be cited from the version with page numbers. Legal texts, administrative texts, etc. can be cited using paragraphs instead of page numbers.

We recommend adding page numbers to all preliminary notes on slips of paper, Excel lists, etc., because doing this only afterward is cumbersome and error-prone. Please note that source entries on research portals (EconBiz, Google Scholar, etc.) are often automatically generated and may need to be adapted to the APA style in terms of spelling, punctuation, etc. Occasionally, they also contain errors (mixing up first and last names, etc.).

If you quote several thoughts from a source indirectly, you must cite the source each time with a new page reference. We consider a single thought what you roughly keep in mind after reading and can write down without having to reread it thoroughly. Usually, there are two to three indirect quotations per page of your work. If you summarise many different sources, there may be more. If you present your own thoughts, there may be fewer.

You may state facts without any source that most people with a high school diploma or similar educational qualification could know without looking them up (end of World War II, capital of France, or similar) or that are basic terms in mathematics, statistics, sociology, economics or related disciplines. However, specialised knowledge from previous courses may not be used without a source.

5 Rules for using AI tools

Tools that work with methods of generative artificial intelligence (AI) may be used in compliance with university rules, data protection and copyright protection.

The use of AI tools must be labeled. The majority of a paper must be written or thoroughly revised and rewritten by students themselves. It is your responsibility to only take necessary, correct and meaningful information from the AI tools.

An AI tool is not a permitted source of information that you may cite. It may help you finding citable sources. But if you directly refer to the AI tool as a source of an information requiring a citation, this is considered plagiarism. The reason is that the tool itself has taken the information from some other source (paragraph added on 14-04-2025)

For each coursework, we indicate whether a **simple or extended labeling requirement** applies when using AI tools. Bachelor's and master's theses have extended labeling requirements. The recommendations of the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences for the use of AI are not merely recommendations but binding at the professorship:

<https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/studienbuero-sozialwissenschaften/service/service-fuer-lehrende/service-fuer-lehrende-dateien/recommendations-generative-ai-in-teaching-wiso-2024.pdf>
(accessed on 24-03-2025).

Texts generated by AI tools may be adopted without any editing up to a limit of 20 per cent of the text per page. They must not contain direct quotations from the scientific sources used in your paper. It is your responsibility to check whether automatically generated text includes any such quotation. The 20 per cent limit does not apply to texts that you have written yourself and enter into the AI tool for revision. These revisions are to be listed in the documentation of AI use. Non-compliance with the rules will be treated in the same way as non-compliance with citation rules (see previous section).

Missing citations and labeling when using AI tools will lead to suspicion of plagiarism. The relevant departmental authorities will be consulted.

In addition, we evaluate the following deficiencies more strictly than in times without AI:

- Illogical jumps in the text (e.g. the text alternates between 'I', 'one', 'we')
- Extensive platitudes (reference to opportunities and risks, advantages and disadvantages, a world that is becoming increasingly complex, AI that is changing the world, etc., without saying very precisely what is to be contrasted here, what is becoming more complex, etc.)
- Empirical findings with unclear reference (example: 'Wages have risen' without information as to where and when wages have risen and who has determined this with which data)
- Theoretical claims without justification as to who has made them in which scientific source ('innovation and productivity are in a non-monotonic relationship').
- Frequent use of filler words or phrases that sound academic or professional but are unnecessary for the essential information
- Text passages that imitate an academic style but are factually wrong
- Judging facts as good or bad without giving reasons
- Recommendations about what people should do, in chapters that, judging by their title, are purely investigative (i.e. dealing with what is and why it is so)
- Confusion of concepts that have similar names but mean very different things
- Text passages that cannot be explained in oral parts of the examination

Adherence to further rules, those of data and copyright protection, is not subject to grading. These are legal requirements that must be adhered to independently of examination performance.

Copyright protection means that you may not freely distribute or use content that does not belong to you. You may enter text written by others only in UHHGPT and only within certain limits. You may only enter your own texts into other AI tools, not text by others. Even with your own texts, we advise to consider critically whether it is in your interest to make your texts available to the tool operator.

In UHHGPT, you may enter up to 15 percent of published academic texts in the context of work done for your university studies (within the scope of the legal limitations of Section 60a of the German Copyright Act for Teaching). If the text (e.g., a journal article) is less than 25 pages long, you may enter it in its entirety. The text must already be published by a publishing house; working papers are not permitted. This permission applies only to academic texts, not to general press publications.

You may enter this guide in UHHGPT if you wish. You may not enter it into other AI tools.

The following applies to **data protection**: When using AI tools, you are generally not allowed to enter any information about individuals or institutions. Please anonymise such designations. In UHHGPT, you may enter information that the individuals or institutions themselves have made public. However, you may not combine different information sources.

The increasing spread of AI tools raises new questions of data protection and copyright protection, not all of which have yet been clarified. We have tried to summarise selected rules pragmatically², but are unable to provide binding legal advice.

² Sources, accessed on 02-03-2025 (in German): <https://www.e-learning.tu-darmstadt.de/elearning/rechtsfragen/urhwissg/index.en.jsp>, <https://elan-ev.de/en/erklaervideo-zu-%C2%A7-60a-urhg-jetzt-mit-englischen-untertiteln/> E-Learning @TU: Copyright Knowledge Society Act §60 (UrhWissG) – E-Learning Arbeitsgruppe (HDA & HRZ) – TU Darmstadt

6 Literature search

In addition to the guide, the ZBW provides a summary of research tips: https://www.econbiz.de/eb/fileadmin/user_upload/research_skills/Handout_Search_and_evaluate_sources.pdf (accessed on 24-03-2025). These also apply to coursework and theses at the professorship. Please be sure to use the core literature recommended by your supervisor. If you are unable to work with it, please report back and explain the hurdles you are facing.

7 Supervision, feedback and evaluation

Supervision in a regular course will be discussed at the beginning. For Bachelor's theses, we usually offer two personal supervision appointments (at the ZBW or on Zoom), for a master's thesis three. It is helpful if you send us something by email beforehand. In the meantime, we will answer short questions by email, but we cannot comment on entire chapters of the thesis. Please allow us 2-3 working days to reply to an email, and please discuss possible vacation times with your supervisor at the beginning of your bachelor's or master's thesis.

If you are unable to keep an agreed appointment, please cancel by email or phone. Otherwise, we reserve the right to offer no further appointments.

The following criteria are used to evaluate the work. There is no fixed weighting of the criteria:

- Clarity and level of difficulty of the research question being addressed
- Breadth and depth of the literature review (where sufficient depth of review of the core literature is important)
- Systematicity and methodological quality of the student's own approach (appropriateness of the method or argumentation structure, correct naming and use of concepts and methods, transparency of the analysis, correct interpretation of the results of the literature read or of the student's own research, logical connection of the various argumentation steps)
- Quality of the conclusions with regard to economic, political, social, or practical challenges
- Linguistic and formal quality of the work.

We provide a grading scheme for all taught courses in which you can see how we assign points for these criteria.

8 What if I have problems?

It is not uncommon to experience various problems while working on a course paper or thesis. Please do not hesitate to discuss them with us if you wish. The university offers support for the writing process and for mental health issues:

<https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/schreibzentrum.html> (accessed on 24-03-2025).

<https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/campuscenter/beratung/beratungsangebote/psychologische-beratung.html> (accessed on 24-03-2025).

Exemptions from deadlines, compensation for disadvantages, or similar measures due to illness or other circumstances beyond your control may only be granted in the ways stated in the official exam

regulations. Professors and teaching assistants may not do this on their own. In the Department of Socioeconomics, the Academic Office Socioeconomics is responsible for dealing with applications for extensions or other measures. We will be happy to advise you if the information on the application process is not transparent to you or if you are unsure about how to proceed in a stressful situation. However, the responsibility for submitting the application on time remains with you.

We are also happy to discuss (usually once) with you how you can make the best possible use of the remaining time and set priorities when you are behind schedule with a paper. Please bear in mind that we are usually unable to offer much help with major problems just a few days before submission.