



# Guidelines for Term Papers and Final Theses (BA/MA)

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## 1. Formal Process

Checking formal requirements according to examination regulations

To start writing your final thesis, you must have a certain number of credit points or meet other requirements. Please check the current examination regulations of your degree program to see whether you have already fulfilled these requirements and consult the academic office, if necessary.

### Topic selection and contact

If you are interested in writing a term paper or final thesis at our professorship, there are basically two options:

- You can apply for a predefined topic (please refer to "[Abschlussarbeiten](#)" on our website).
- You can submit your own topic proposals or discuss your ideas with us. To ensure we can supervise you effectively, your proposals should be guided by our research topics or the topic areas listed on our website.

Once you have decided to select your own topic, please contact us (approximately 1-2 months before starting). To assess whether your ideas fit our professorship and allow us to optimize our supervising options, please answer the following questions (around half a page of text):

- Which topic or topic area would you like to work on?
- To what extent are you already familiar with the topic/topic area?
- Why do you want to deal with this topic/topic area?
- What is your intended timeframe for working on it?

We can basically only accept a number of candidates that allows us to provide optimal supervision.

### Preparing an exposé

In the next step, you will prepare an exposé that serves to structure and plan your work process. The exposé will not completely determine your thesis, but will provide a starting point that allows for adjustments in most aspects (except for the topic or title).

The exposé should be about two pages long and include the following sections or information:

- Title of the thesis, starting and submission date
- Description of the topic and the scientific question to be answered
- Explaining the scientific and/or practical relevance of the question and the research context
- Description of the methodological approach (and the data basis in case of empirical papers), i.e., explaining of how the scientific question will be answered (surveys, literature research, databases...)
- Brief presentation of the current state of research
- Outline of the planned paper or preliminary table of contents

Apart from the text portion, the exposé should also include a preliminary outline and a preliminary bibliography. Please already include some references in your exposé.

Please pay attention to correct citation, complete references, and adherence to formal requirements in the exposé!

**Advice:** Be realistic in choosing your methodology. Extensive empirical surveys may be interesting but are often very time-consuming and difficult to estimate as to results.

The following guiding questions ("**W-Questions**") will help you prepare your exposé:

- *What* is the topic or problem being addressed? (→**presentation of the problem**)
- *Why* is this an interesting and relevant topic? (**practical or scientific relevance**)
- *What* is the goal or the question that will be answered? (→ **research question/objective**)
- *Which* areas will NOT be addressed by you? (e.g., for reasons of time, resources, or space)? (**limitation**)
- *Who* do you address with your paper? (managers and action recommendations, social theorists, basic researchers)
- *How* do you want to proceed or what are the empirical data/methods you will use? (→**methodology**)
- *How* is the thesis structured?
- (possibly: *What* will be the main results from your work?)

**Please note:** Most of these questions overlap with the content of the introduction of the thesis and can be reused there.

### **Registration, timeframe, and submission**

Once your exposé has been accepted, your thesis can be approved for registration with the academic office. Please use the registration forms that are relevant for your degree program.

Following registration, the deadline for submission starts immediately. The length of the period allowed for preparing the thesis depends on the degree program and type of work. Please read the examination regulations applicable to your degree program.

In general, the following applies:

- BA programs: timeframe of 12 weeks (length: approximately 30-40 pages of text)
- International MA programs: timeframe of 3-6 months (length: 40-60 pages of text)
- Other MA programs: timeframe of 4 months (length: 50-70 pages of text)

Please submit your thesis exclusively via your personalized\* Uni-HH email address in PDF format to [studienbuero-sozoek.wiso@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:studienbuero-sozoek.wiso@uni-hamburg.de) for data protection reasons. Submissions from private email addresses cannot be accepted. Submitting via email will meet the deadline. By submitting your thesis, you confirm the final submission. This version will be forwarded to your examiners for evaluation. No further versions or drafts can be submitted. The form and deadline must be strictly adhered to! A late submission will result in a failing grade! In case of illness, an extension can be requested from the academic office.

## **2. Formal Requirements**

### **Language**

All term papers and final theses can be written in either German or English.

### **Structure**

Your academic paper should be structured as follows:

- Title page containing the following information:
  - name of university, faculty, and professorship
  - name of supervising tutor

- title
- type of paper (bachelor's/master's thesis or term paper)
- in case of term papers: name of course
- name and student ID, degree program
- submission deadline
- Table of contents and, if applicable, list of abbreviations, figures, and tables
- Text part
  - introduction
  - main part
  - conclusion
- Bibliography
- Declaration of academic honesty
- Appendix (if applicable)

### Layout

A template can be downloaded from our website (see [“Template zum Download”](#) under “Lehre→ Abschlussarbeiten”). Please observe these guidelines. **Basically, for the text part you should use a 12-point font size and 1.5 line spacing (justified or flush-left text). All pages must have a margin of 1 inch (2.5 cm) and a page number.**

## 3. Literature and Citation Style

### Choosing appropriate literature

Not all sources are suitable for being cited in an academic paper. Ideally, you should rely on scientific publications in the relevant field, such as monographs and anthologies, as well as particularly articles from international academic journals or relevant professional magazines (e.g., manager magazin, Handelsblatt, The Economist).

The internet can be helpful at the beginning of your research to gain a first brief overview. However, to write a good academic paper, visiting a specialized library or using electronic resources (e.g., catalogs, databases, electronic journals library) is essential. We advise students to take advantage of online tutorials, guided tours, and training sessions that are often offered by libraries. They have experience with literature searches!

Regarding the number of sources, a general rule of thumb is to have at least one source per page on average (e.g., for a 30-page paper, you should reference at least 30 different sources).

### Citation style and bibliography

All ideas taken from other individuals must be clearly marked as such. Failing to do so constitutes intellectual property theft. If the work contains plagiarism, it will be graded as “insufficient”.

Please cite according to the “[Chicago Manual of Style](#)”, the “Harvard Style”, or the “APA” style (see the example below).<sup>1</sup> All quotations should be at least commented on, if not explained in more detail. Please try to cite from original sources and not from textbooks that cite results from other authors.

All sources used must be listed in a bibliography (in alphabetical order, or chronologically by publication year in case of multiple publications by the same author). In this context, clear consistency and completeness are more important than choosing the absolutely correct style.

A typical bibliography according to the “Chicago Manual of Style” looks as follows:

### **Bibliography:**

- Franz Lehner, Michael Scholz, und Stephan Wildner. 2009. *Wissensmanagement : Grundlagen, Methoden und technische Unterstützung*. 3. Aufl. München: Hanser.
- Hansen, Morten T., Nitin Nohria, und Thomas Tierney. 1999. „What’s your strategy for managing knowledge?“ *Harvard Business Review* 77 (2): 106–16.
- Lehner, Franz. 2006. *Wissensmanagement : Grundlagen, Methoden und technische Unterstützung*. Herausgegeben von Michael Scholz. München: Hanser.
- Nonaka, Ikujiro. 1994. „A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation“. *Organization Science* 5 (1): 14–37.
- Selten, Reinhard. 2001. „What is bounded rationality?“ In *Bounded rationality: The adaptive toolbox*, herausgegeben von Gerd Gigerenzer und Reinhard Selten, 13–36. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wang, Sheng, und Raymond A. Noe. 2010. „Knowledge sharing: A review and directions for future research“. *Human Resource Management Review* 20 (2): 115–31.
- Willke, Helmut. 2004. *Einführung in das systemische Wissensmanagement*. 1. Aufl. Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme.

The use of reference management software such as zotero.org (free of charge), Citavi (license by University of Hamburg), or Mendely facilitate a uniform formatting of references. If you do not want to use dedicated software, web-based services like ZoteroBib (<https://zbib.org/>) will help you ensure a uniform format.

## **4. Content of the Work**

### **Language Style**

The language style should be clear, concise, and objective. You should consistently ensure a neutral and gender-sensitive tone and avoid colloquial language and clichés. Please pay attention to correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar!

### **Internal Structure and Coherence**

Please ensure an internal structuring of the text, meaning that topics should be presented coherently and jumps in the argumentation avoided as much as possible. Furthermore, a “common thread” should always be recognizable throughout the entire work!

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<sup>1</sup> The reference management software Zotero offers the integrated quotation styles “Chicago (Author-Date)” or “Elsevier Harvard” that can be used. The typical German use of footnotes is possible; in this context, Zotero offers the quotation style of the journal “International Organization” as the closest option. When using Citavi, both the “basic style” and the “APA” style are possible.

## ***Introduction***

The introduction should clarify to the reader what the paper is about and why it is relevant. The objectives should be clearly stated and it should also be explained how they will be achieved (methodology). In the last paragraph, a brief description of the structure of the work should be provided.

The introduction consists of the following parts explained hereafter, which can but do not have to be divided into their own sections. Please also consider the W-Questions, most of which will be answered in the introduction.

The following elements are typically part of the introduction: presentation of the problem/relevance of the topic, research question, objectives, methodology, and structure of the work.

## ***Main Part***

In the main part, the problem should initially be theoretically delimited and elaborated to clarify the theoretical-conceptual framework. Relevant empirical findings should also be addressed.

If you have decided to develop your own empirical study or analysis, another important part is the detailed presentation of your project and of the analysis of empirical data.

The discussion of your theoretical analysis, and possibly also the interpretation of your empirical analysis, concludes the main part and leads over to the conclusion.

## ***Conclusion***

In the conclusion, you will precisely summarize your findings and point out shortcomings of your work, if any.

## ***Tables and Figures***

Please use illustrations and tables in adequate proportion to the text part, considering their informative content.

All figures and tables should be labeled in the caption (also designating the source, if applicable) and included in the table or figure list. All tables and figures should also be referenced and explained at least once in the main text.

## **5. Evaluation**

The evaluation usually takes place within six weeks following submission of the paper. The following criteria are in general applied:

### Formalities

#### Literature

- The sources are appropriate in terms of quality
- The sources are appropriate in terms of quantity
- Correct citation style
- Completeness and consistency of the bibliography

#### Layout and Language

- Language and expression are autonomous, comprehensible, clear, and correct
- Spelling and punctuation are always correct
- Adherence to formal requirements (font, margins, illustrations...)
- Table of contents and other records are clear and consistent

#### Content

#### Structure of the Work

- Logical structure and organization
- Correct weighting of sections
- Clear thematic focus throughout the work

#### Generally

- Methodology chosen and justified in accordance with the problem presented
- The work is characterized by high-quality argumentation
- There is always a connection to the topic
- There are no redundancies

#### Introduction

- Presentation of problem, relevance of the work
- Objectives/precisely formulated research question
- Description of the methodology

#### Empirical Data (if relevant)

- Methodology is transparent and clearly described
- Analysis and interpretation of the data is comprehensible
- Theory and empirical data are interrelated
- The investigation meets relevant quality criteria

#### Theory, Argumentation, Personal Contribution, Coherence

- The personal contribution is appropriate to the type of work
- The research question is adequately addressed and answered
- The results of the work demonstrate high quality
- The author critically engages with the content

#### BONUS POINTS: Special Achievement

- The work is characterized by extraordinary diligence
- The work is characterized by extraordinary originality

## 6. Data Protection

If your work is based on surveys, interviews, or other person-based data sources, your co-authors must consent to the use of their personal data. This can be done, for example, through a brief statement in an online survey that may refer to a more detailed explanation. A sample data consent statement is provided by the Data Protection Officer of University of Hamburg (<https://www.isdsm.uni-hamburg.de/dokumente.html>).

## 7. Declaration of Academic Honesty & Declaration of AI tools

The declaration of academic honesty and a declaration on the use of AI tools must be attached to your work as the last page and signed by hand. The use of AI tools for minor, non-creative activities, e.g. as an aid to spelling correction, is generally permitted and must be labelled accordingly. However, the complete generation of continuous text body is not permitted. In uncertain cases, please speak to your supervisor. Irrespective of the use of any AI tools, you as the author are fully responsible for all content of your work and its accuracy, particularly the cited references.

A current version of the declaration to be used can be found on the website of the Office of Student Affairs under the keyword "declaration of authorship for final theses": <https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/en/studienbuero-sozialoekonomie/service/10-service-studierende/50-abschlussarbeit.html>

## **8. Restriction Notes**

If you write a thesis in cooperation with a company and use confidential material in your work, you **MAY** include a restriction note to prevent publication. The text of the restriction note could read as follows:

This master's thesis titled "XXX" contains internal confidential data from the company YYY. It may only be made accessible to the examiners and, if applicable, the chairperson of the examination board of the department. A publication or reproduction of this master's thesis, or its dissemination – in whole or in part –, as well as preparing copies or transcripts of the thesis – also in digital form –, are basically prohibited. Exceptions require the prior written approval from the company YYY.

## **9. Additional Information on Academic Work**

Eco, U. (2005): *Wie man eine wissenschaftliche Abschlussarbeit schreibt. Doktor-, Diplom- und Magisterarbeit in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften.* 11. Auflage. Heidelberg: Müller-Verlag.

iversity.org is a platform for online courses that currently offers a free MOOC ("Massive Open Online Course") on the topic of "Scientific Thinking, Working, and Writing", which provides an insight into the fundamentals of academic work.