THESIS GUIDE

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Please note that this document should serve as a general term paper guide and guide for B.A. and M.A. theses. This means that should some information be included which contradicts what was said in class, you should always stick to what was discussed. If in doubt, contact your supervisor.

WRITING A TERM PAPER

Overview

1. Find a topic.
2. Review the literature.
3. Narrow down your topic.
4. Formulate research questions.
5. Develop an outline.
6. Write your term paper.
7. Revise and proofread your paper.

1. FIND A TOPIC

If you need help finding a topic or want to clarify whether it is still within the remit of the seminar and your study course: Please talk to your thesis supervisor!

For final thesis, it is **not recommended** that you analyse **more than 2-3 primary texts**. The texts should fall within the remit of Anglophone Literary or Cultural Studies, depending on the context of the course you are writing the thesis in and your supervisor's research foci.

Guiding questions which might help you to decide on a topic:

Which session / primary text / discussion / critical theory did you find particularly interesting?

Can you think of any aspects in relation to this text / session / discussion that you would like to explore more? Were there any unanswered questions? Was there anything that you found fascinating or even irritating?

Once you have answered these questions, you should be able to write down 1-3 potential topics. These will still be broad but give you enough direction for a review of the critical literature.

2. REVIEW THE LITERATURE

If your supervisor has provided additional reading, this might be a good place to start looking for literature on the topic. In addition, it proves beneficial to consult services provided by the university, such as the library search function, JSTOR, or other databases. We also recommend you reach out to your 'Fachbibliothek' if you are stuck and looking for specific sources.

3. NARROW DOWN YOUR TOPIC

After reviewing the secondary literature you identified, think about how you can refine your topic. For guidance, try to answer the following questions:

- Do your texts identify gaps or leave unanswered questions?
- Do they mention an aspect but do not fully explore it?
- Is there anything not covered by them that you find is worthwhile?

4. FORMULATE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on your research questions, you will be able to develop an outline. What are the different steps / arguments / subtopics that will help you reach conclusions about what you want to find out? This is like a roadmap of your term paper. At this stage, it does not have to be definitive but it will give you a structure to work with and provide a basis on which we can talk about your plans for the term paper.

The title of your paper is not your research questions!

The title of your paper should not be a question but a reflection of your topic.

A good example: More than 221B Baker Street: The role of London in the first episode of the BBC series *Sherlock,* "Study in Pink"

A bad example: What is London's role in the first episode of the BBC series *Sherlock*?

5. DEVELOP AN OUTLINE

6. WRITE YOUR TERM PAPER

7. REVISE AND PROOFREAD YOUR PAPER

Make sure to proofread and spellcheck your thesis before you hand it in.

WRITING A STRONG THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis statement has to be concise and clear and **should not be longer** than **one or two sentences**. Please note that the aim of your research question is to guide you through your research but does not need to be stated again in your paper. Instead, use your thesis statement as the central guiding argument that answers your research question right at the start of the paper.

The thesis statement:

- must be **arguable** (not a simple statement of fact, not something incontestable and obvious)
  → Bad example: "Sonnet 18 is an English love sonnet by William Shakespeare, consisting of 14 lines with an abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme."
- must **state an argument** (not merely present a summary of the text)

→ Bad example: "In Sonnet 18, the speaker compares the addressee to a beautiful summer's day and discusses ways in which this 'summer' can be kept from 'fading'."

- must be **specific** (not too general); note that the level of specificity should correspond to the length and scope of your paper (i.e. 1000 word essay ≠ PhD thesis)
  → Bad example: "Sonnet 18 is about the speaker's great love for the addressee and about fear of death."
- must **suggest structure/method** (how exactly are you going to argue?), it maps out what the reader can expect for the rest of the essay and serves as a blueprint sketching out the organisation for the rest of the essay
  → Bad example: "It is clear that Sonnet 18 is about the power of poetry, as is evident in many textual passages."
- must be **supportable by textual evidence** (not simply be random)
  → Bad example: "Sonnet 18 is a poem about immortal vampires."

Examples for good thesis statements:

"However, I will argue that even more than the beauty of the addressee, the poem celebrates the powers of the poet, as it is his work, that is, the poem itself, that immortalizes the young man's beauty by making it its subject. While the young man himself will die and, at best, live on only indirectly in his children and their descendants, the sonnet will endure, and, thus, his beauty will be preserved inside of it forever."

"I will show that in addition to praising the beauty of the addressee, the poem strongly foregrounds the perception and evaluation of beauty by a human beholder through its complex pattern of comparative and evaluative words and phrases, suggesting that beauty is created through contrast and conscious representation."

"Sonnet 18 juxtaposes the power of death over nature with the poet's alternative power of 'life'. The conviction of the speaker in the ability of his art to preserve youth and beauty against natural decay is expressed in his confident celebration of the addressee's loveliness."

See also the Hardward College Writing Center Resources:
https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/sites/g/files/omnuum451/files/2026-04/Thesis.pdf

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

For the official formal requirements for **final theses**, please consult the following website and your specific curriculum(!): https://anglistik.uni-graz.at/de/studienservice/abschlussarbeiten/

LENGTH

- For the length of your **term paper**, please contact your supervisor/lecturer.
- B.A. thesis: 13.000 – 15.000 words, in English
- B.A. thesis for (new) teaching curriculum: 7.500 words excl. Works Cited, in English
- M.A. thesis: 20.000 – 25.000 words, in English

- M.A. thesis Joined Degree: 25.000 – 35.000 words, in English (including a 1000 words summary)

FORM

- Times New Roman or Arial
- 12pt, 1.5 spacing throughout (incl. works cited list)
- margins (top, bottom, left, right): 2.54 cm
- indent new paragraphs (except for the first one of a new chapter) – no extra line/space between the paragraphs
- justified text
- page numbers in footer, right corner: your introduction starts on p. 1
- if you want to include any images, screen shots, figures etc., please add them as an appendix
- if you use text-generating AI programs, include the details in the AI declaration

STRUCTURE OF YOUR PAPER

TITLE PAGE

Your *Title page* includes the title of the paper (creates interest), your name, matriculation number, contact details, course of study, the date of submission, the title of the course and the name of your examiner.

Please use the official institute document to format your title page for your **final thesis**. You can download it here: https://anglistik.uni-graz.at/de/studienservice/abschlussarbeiten/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The *Table of Contents* provides an overview over your chapters and includes page numbers. All chapter headings are capitalised. Please do not go overboard with subchapter levels (max. 2 subchapter levels: 1.1).

INTRODUCTION

The *Introduction* introduces your topic (following up on your title) and justifies the chosen text(s) as well as the critical approach. It further gives an outlook of the structure of your paper and foreshadows your argument.

The *Introduction* ends with your **thesis statement** and a general outline of your argument (do not 'hide' your conclusion at the end of the paper but reveal the main points in the *Introduction*).

MAIN BODY

The *Main Body* of your paper outlines the relevant theory and presents the analysis by giving examples (i.e., citations from the primary text(s)).

Theory/Background

Your *Main Body* starts with your theory/background section which introduces your theoretical framework and/or the relevant historical context.

Analysis & Interpretation

This part is divided into paragraphs with topic sentences (think: thesis statements for your paragraphs). It is important that each paragraph focuses on one argument relating to your thesis and provides examples from both primary and secondary sources (support your arguments!). Please note that a paragraph is always longer than a sentence. Try to connect/link your paragraphs by referring back to the previous one and pointing towards the next.

CONCLUSION

The *Conclusion* summarizes the findings of your analysis and your argument by referring back to your *Introduction* and reemphasizes your main claims. It may also broaden the horizon by alluding to further research needed or aspects that have been excluded but does not provide new arguments.

As a guideline, the word count of your *Introduction* and *Conclusion* should each be 10-15% of your paper. Hence, it is not sufficient if they consist only of one paragraph!

WORKS CITED

At the end of your paper, you will need to cite all primary and secondary sources which you used (please list both primary and secondary sources as one list, alphabetically).

APPENDIX

Should you need to add additional documents to your thesis, you can do so in your appendix. In this part, you will also need to include a **signed plagiarism disclaimer and AI declaration**. For this, you are advised to use the term paper template.

STYLE & CITATION

Your style and register should be academic but to the point. Do not try to be overly literary in your analysis and use correct terminology only. Your goal is to make your arguments as clear as possible. To make your term paper easy to follow, use **signposting** to lead your readers (e.g., use connectives like nevertheless, therefore, despite…). Do not use contractions (such as “he’s”

or “isn’t”) and use the present tense to talk about fictional events (use the perfect tense only when talking about events that occurred at an earlier point in time during the narrative). Avoid colloquialisms and wordy or empty phrases (“to a certain extent”), the same applies to subjective adjectives (“disgusting”, “brilliant” etc.). Please use gender-neutral language in your paper and general communication (see also: Gender-neutral language - Office of the Working Group for Equal Opportunities (uni-graz.at)).

Please use **MLA 9th edition** to cite your sources. Please make sure to properly integrate all of your citations into your text (no “hit and run” citations where you simply add a quote without further explanation). Your reader (me) might not be able to follow your thought process, which means you have to be explicit about the relevance of the quote. **Longer quotations** (longer than 3 full lines of text) need to be **indented without quotation marks** (font size 10, single spaced). Please make sure that all primary works mentioned in your text are written in *italics* (exceptions are poems and short stories). Your Works Cited list needs to be formatted according to the MLA 9th edition style guide, the same goes for your in-text citations. For a complete and up-to-date citation guide please refer to:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html

For help with capitalization in your citations, you can refer to: https://capitalizemytitle.com/.

Keep footnotes to an absolute minimum! You may cite from secondary texts in English and German in the original, for all other languages please include a translation in English in brackets.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as using text or parts of text (verbatim or paraphrased) from sources (books, journals, the internet etc.) and not clearly marking these in accordance with the citation rules, and thus presenting them as one’s own intellectual achievement. Therefore, all adopted parts of text, even if they are only single sentences, parts of sentences or concise formulations, have to be highlighted and directly followed by the citation source. Providing a citation source only at the end of a paragraph that also contains both your own ideas and those from other sources is insufficient, as is only listing the reference in the bibliography. Translations of foreign-language sources, either verbatim or paraphrased, must also be identified according to the above rules.

AI POLICY

Generative AI may be used for **specific, limited** tasks. You may use it for finding literature, brainstorming or text revision such as spell checking and stylistic-grammatical improvement of self-written texts, but not for the generation of entire text sections.

Please indicate if you use generative AI for your work in the academic integrity statement in the **term paper template**, which contains information on the AI used and its use.

Please note that work generated predominantly or exclusively by the permitted AI tools is **not permitted** and that you as a student bear full responsibility for the accuracy and correctness of your content, the academic integrity of your work, and the lawfulness of all material included in your thesis. When using generative AI, you must also ensure that your submissions do **not infringe the rights of third parties**, especially:

- **Copyright** (e.g., by copying texts or images without proper attribution or permission),
- **Personal rights** (e.g., by revealing personal information without consent),
- **Data protection regulations** (e.g., uploading personal data, confidential data, or unpublished material into AI tools)

Please note that the following shortcomings will lead to an automatic **deduction of points** for your grade:

- Sources/authors mentioned in the text are **missing** from the Works Cited list
- Entries in the Works Cited list are **not actually used** or cited in the text
- **Incorrect or incomplete bibliographic details** (e.g., wrong author, title, year, page numbers)
- **Hallucinated citations** (e.g., references to non-existent texts; DOIs, page numbers or journals that do not exist or do not match the cited work)
- **Hallucinated quotes** (quotations that cannot be found in the cited source)
- **Misattributed quotes** (correct quote, wrong author/source)
- **Paraphrasing text too closely** to the original without quotation marks, even if a reference is provided (this also counts as plagiarism!)

HELPFUL TIPS

Remember: Writing means revising! Make a schedule for writing your term paper that allows you enough time to revise your draft at least once, ideally twice. You can also find a writing buddy to exchange ideas and get feedback.

Your supervisors will not read a draft of your term paper and provide feedback. However, if any questions arise during the writing process, do feel free to get in touch via email or schedule an office hour.

DO NOT include **full plot summaries** in your papers. You are writing for an 'informed' reader and can assume knowledge of the primary text. But do give context for your analyses or short summaries of certain scenes when necessary.

DO NOT include **subchapters** that only consist of **one paragraph**.

Read widely while researching your thesis. Do not limit yourself too early on in the process.

Think critically about the secondary and primary texts you are working with, develop your own point of view.

Include your own opinion and thoughts from the class discussions for term papers!

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Below is a list of resources that may help you answer some questions and provide additional guidance on the practices of academic research and writing.

Please check out the Angebote & Workshops für Studierende - Schreibzentrum (uni-graz.at) for writing support offers.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab offers resources and step-by-step guidance through blog posts, e.g., on writing thesis statements.

Aczel, Richard. 2006. *How to Write an Essay*. Barcelona: Klett.

- Step by step guidance on essay/term paper writing, basic techniques, specifically designed for students of Anglophone literatures (uploaded to Moodle)

"How to find and read a journal article, chapter or book."

- Guidance on finding and reading academic literature

"How to write a Thesis Statement."

Lamott, Anne. 1994. *Shitty First Drafts.*

- about writing as a process of revising and how to go about it (uploaded to Moodle)

"Reading Skills for Higher Education" (2022)

- Guidance for your reading of primary and secondary literature as basis for the term paper

Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. 2016. "We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know." *LA Review of Books*, 13 September 2016.

- Guidance on reading and making sense of theoretical literature, including questions you may ask and how to take effective notes