

How to Write a Term Paper

General Information

- Term paper *Proseminar*: 6.000 words (ca. 15 pages)
- Term paper *Hauptseminar* (B.A.): 7.500–8.500 words (ca. 18–20 pages)
- Term paper *Masterseminar*: 9.000–10.000 words (ca. 20–25 pages)
- Bachelor's thesis: 14.000–15.000 words (ca. 35–40 pages)
- Master's thesis (M.A.): 32.000 words (ca. 80 pages)
- Master's thesis (M.Ed.): 24.000 words (ca. 60 pages)

- Please upload a PDF of your term paper to ILIAS (folder: “Term Papers”).
- The topic is entirely up to you, but it should be related to the texts we discussed in class. Make sure that your focus is narrow enough to be discussed in depth on the comparatively small number of pages.
- Before you start writing your term paper, confer with the lecturer about your topic and thesis. The lecturer will not accept your term paper without having seen and commented on your outline.
- You should use **at least 6 secondary sources** (monographs, articles, book chapters, etc.). This is the absolute minimum; a greater number of sources is highly recommended. All of your sources should be scholarly.

Getting Started: Research Question and Thesis Statement

- Formulate a research question, that is, frame your ideas about the primary text(s) in terms of a question
- Develop a thesis statement based on your research question (this thesis can be adjusted and slightly altered later on)

- The thesis statement is the heart of your term paper. It needs to be stated in your introduction and rounded off in your conclusion. The main part of the term paper develops your thesis; argues your case; proves or disproves your point(s).
- What makes for a good thesis statement?
 - Clear & concise
 - Narrow focus
 - Creative & independent (do not merely repeat what scholars have already argued)
 - Ideally stated within a single sentence (→ expresses one idea)
 - Specific & nuanced (no broad claims; no sweeping, generalizing statements)
 - Argumentative & debatable (it is possible to argue for or against it)
 - Argument, not a fact
 - “The *Wife of Bath’s Tale* features elements of Arthurian romance” is a fact, not an argument

Literature Research

To bolster your argument, place it within different opinions, or make it stand out from other views, you need to have some idea of how scholars have approached the topic of your research before you. This will help you to use their arguments in such a way that you can demonstrate both your knowledge of their views and your competent handling of them.

- As stated above, use at least six scholarly, peer-reviewed sources (e.g. monographs, edited volumes, journal articles)
- Additionally, and only when appropriate, you may also use newspaper articles from *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*, or similar newspapers and magazines (these sources cannot replace one of the 6 obligatory scholarly sources)
- You can find secondary literature relevant to your topic via various databases. You can access these databases via DBIS (*Datenbank Infosystem*) of the UB: https://dbis.ur.de//dbliste.php?bib_id=ubfre&colors=31&ocolors=40&lett=f&gebiete=12
- The MLA International Bibliography, Jstor, and possibly the International Medieval Bibliography are good starting points for your research.
- The online catalogue of the UB (“Katalog plus”) helps you to locate books available at the University of Freiburg: <https://katalog.ub.uni-freiburg.de/opac/>

Layout, Structure, and Citation

Layout

- Use Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5 line spacing
- Adjust the margins of your document as follows: top/bottom: 2 cm; left: 2 cm; right: 4 cm (for corrections)
- Justify your text
- The pages are numbered with Arabic numerals. Page numbers only start with the Introduction (page 1).
- The title page should contain the following details: a) the title of the paper (in the middle of the page, in bold print, 14pt); b) the semester, lecturer, and title of the class for which the paper was written; c) the student's name, matriculation number, address, and e-mail address
- New paragraphs should be indented

Structure

- Title page
- Table of Contents
- Introduction (page 1)
- Main body (sections 2 / 3 /4; possibly subsections)
- Conclusion
- Works Cited
- Pledge of Academic Integrity

Make sure you structure your paper sensibly (none of the sections should be too long or too short). As a general rule, anything that is shorter than two pages does not qualify as a proper section. The only exception to this rule is the introduction, which should be shorter than two pages.

Introduction:

- State the topic of your term paper and the primary text(s) you are going to focus on
- State your thesis statement

- Briefly outline your method / theoretical approach (if there is one underlying your thesis)
- Optional: Explain relevance → Why these texts? Why this topic?
- Optional: situate your paper within scholarship (are you building upon a scholar's argument? Are you arguing against something a scholar has argued?)
- Briefly (!) outline your structure (foci of the various sections)

Main Body:

- Consists of a number of sections (and possibly subsections)
- Each section should focus on one aspect of your topic
- Might feature one chapter outlining the theoretical framework or historical context (optional)
- Each section should have ...
 - an introductory paragraph, stating the topic of the section; the argument you are making in this section (→ all of which needs to relate to your overall topic & thesis statement)
 - a number of paragraphs which support your argument (including close readings; insights gained from secondary literature; etc.)
 - concluding paragraph (summarizes argument & findings)

Conclusion:

- Summary of your argument & findings
- Should not add new information
- Reflect on the implications of your argument and its significance / relevance
- Reflect on possible problems you encountered
- Further research – could your research be expanded?

Citation & Documenting Sources

- We recommend MLA 9th edition, which involves author-page style in-text citation (i.e. the source is indicated in the text; author's name and page number are given in shortened form in parentheses) and a Works Cited list (i.e. a list of all the sources used to write the paper)
- You can also use a different citation style of your choice (e.g. MLA 7th or 8th edition; Chicago), but consistency is key!

- Purdue University website offers a summarized version of MLA 9th ed.: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html
- MLA handbooks of the various editions can be found in our library. They are more comprehensive and might be helpful if you come across a special case.
- Quotations that do not exceed three lines are included in the running text and put between double quotation marks (“...”). The use of a source must be documented immediately (not only if it is quoted from directly but also if it is paraphrased). Listing it in the Works Cited list or referring to it somewhere else in the paper is not enough. Since the Works Cited list contains a complete list of used sources, the author's last name and the page number generally suffice to document a source in the main text of the paper.

Examples: In-Text Citation – Author-Page Style

Taken from Purdue website:

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

- Direct quote; author’s name mentioned in sentence:
Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (263).
- Direct quote; author’s name not named in sentence:
Romantic poetry is characterized by the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 263).
- Paraphrasing; author’s name mentioned in text:
Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (263).

- If a source is being used several times in a row, the author’s name need not be repeated every single time. Basic rule: it must be obvious to the reader from which source a particular piece of information has been taken.
- If you are citing several works by one author, you need an identifier in the parentheses, so the reader knows which work you are referring to (MLA recommends adding a shortened version of the title after the author’s name)
- Quotations that go beyond three lines can be formatted as block quotations: indented (the entire quote, not just the first line); no quotation marks required

- When citing primary texts, always use a scholarly and reliable edition – the latest standard edition, if possible. In the case of the Bible, Shakespeare’s plays and similarly well-known texts, which exist in many different editions, it might be more helpful to the reader if the page numbers are replaced with a different type of reference. In quoting from plays that are divided into acts and scenes, indicate the act, scene and line(s): e.g. *Much Ado About Nothing* 1.2.24-26; in the case of long poems, give stanza and verse numbers.
- Longer quotations of verse (more than three lines) are also indented and presented without quotation marks. Shorter verse quotations may be integrated into the text, with the end of a verse being marked by a stroke:
“Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate.”
The end of a stanza is signalled by a double stroke (//).
- All quotations must, in every detail of orthography and punctuation, be identical with the source. If the text from which you take your quotation contains a mistake, you keep the mistake in your quotation and mark it as follows:
According to this scholar, *David Copperfield* is a “novel of deveopment [sic]”
- Single quotation marks (‘ . . .’) indicate quotations within quotations as well as translations or definitions of words and phrases discussed in the paper:
In Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, the word cousin means ‘relative.’
- Sometimes it is necessary to add something to a quotation, e.g. to explain a pronoun that would otherwise be unintelligible. Like the above-mentioned [sic], such an addition must be placed in square brackets:
“He [Gabriel Conroy] watched sleepily the silver flakes.”
- To indicate ellipses (i.e. you are quoting from a source, but you are leaving out part of the original) use: [...]
- If you wish to highlight a word in a quotation by means of italics, you need to add the following explanatory comment in parentheses: (my emphasis).

Works Cited

- An academic paper must contain a Works Cited list, i.e. a list of all the sources that have been used.
- The items listed are ordered alphabetically by the author’s or editor’s last name.

- If an entry covers more than one line, indent the second and subsequent lines (hanging indentation).
- The format of the individual entries follows the MLA 9th edition.
- The relevant bibliographical facts about a book are not taken from its cover, but from its title page (inside the book) and, if necessary, from the small print on its half-title page (the reverse side of the title page).

Plagiarism

If you use somebody else's words or ideas without acknowledging it, you are guilty of plagiarism. An overview of types of plagiarism is provided by the University of Gießen: <https://www.uni-giessen.de/de/studium/lehre/plagiate/plagiatsformen>.

Plagiarism is a severe offence, and it will be sanctioned accordingly.

The "Pledge of Academic Integrity" must be signed and submitted together with the term paper. If possible, please do not submit them separately, but as a single PDF file.

You can find the document on the homepage of the English Department:
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/current-students/academic-practice/PledgeofAcademicIntegrity.pdf

Miscellaneous

- Do not forget to capitalize titles. Here is a link to a useful tool, which helps you to capitalize titles according to MLA format: <https://capitalizemytitle.com/>
- Use italics for books (monographs; edited volumes; novels; plays); journals
- Use quotation marks for poems; chapter titles; short stories; articles
- If you found the source online, always provide the DOI or URL and the access date
- Use American OR British spelling; punctuation; etc.
- Do not use contractions (e.g. don't; isn't; etc.)

- When mentioning an author or critic for the first time, give the full name; afterwards you can refer to them by their last name
- Try to avoid the “intentional fallacy” (do not speculate about the author’s intentions)
- Do not summarize the plot of the text you are discussing

Check List: Before You Submit

Before you submit your term paper, go through the following list and double-check if you have paid sufficient attention to all of these aspects. They will form the basis for the assessment.

1) Structure

Is the argument coherent and clear? Is the term paper sensibly organised and the organisation clearly signalled?

2) Reference: range, depth, and quality of literature research

Is there evidence that a reasonable number of sources have been consulted? Are key pieces of literature on the topic covering various points of view included? Are they adequately and effectively referenced? Are they represented accurately?

3) Analysis

Are the relevant issues identified? Are they discussed systematically and in detail, and put into context? Is the proper terminology being used? Are there close readings of the primary literature? Is there evidence of critical reflection? Is there evidence of original thinking?

4) Relevance

Does the term paper focus consistently on the research question(s)? Is there repetitive or extraneous material which could be cut?

5) Presentation

Is the term paper presented appropriately, e.g. adequately proof-read, in an appropriate academic register, demonstrating good practice in presenting bibliographical information?