

Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers at the Department of Communication Studies Salzburg

(Version: 05 Dec 2019 – updated 09 Oct 2023)

General principles:

For all written assignments (introductory papers, seminar papers, bachelor's theses, master's theses) the contents must be presented accurately, comprehensively and, wherever possible, concisely. The agreed page or character count must be observed.

As a rule of thumb, individual papers should have the following minimum length:

- **Introductory papers (Proseminararbeiten):** at least 15 pages (approx. 39,000 characters incl. spaces) – excluding cover sheet and lists.
- **Seminar papers:** at least 20 pages (approx. 52,000 characters incl. spaces) – excluding cover sheet and lists.
- **Bachelor's theses:** 35–45 pages (approx. 91,000–117,000 characters incl. spaces) – excluding cover sheet and lists.
- **Master's theses:** 70–90 pages (approx. 182,000–234,000 characters without spaces) – excluding cover sheet and lists.

If a paper is written by more than one person, add roughly 50 % to the length for each additional author.

Example – bachelor's thesis:

- 35–45 pages or 91,000–117,000 characters incl. spaces (without cover sheet and lists). Pages are printed single-sided in Times New Roman 12 pt or Arial 11 pt.
- Main text in 1.5 line spacing.
- A single sentence does not constitute a paragraph. A paragraph forms a semantic unit and usually consists of several sentences. A chapter consists of several paragraphs.
- Margins: left 3–3.5 cm; right 2.5–3 cm; top/bottom 2.5–3 cm.
- Text should be left-aligned or justified without gaps – check line breaks! All pages including appendices are numbered consecutively; the table of contents is not paginated.
- Follow the department's citation guidelines and the ethical norms of academic work.

Every paper comprises:

- Cover sheet
- Table of contents and, where relevant, list of tables/figures
- Introduction
- For empirical studies: 1. Theory section, 2. Empirical section
- For literature reviews: Main section (state of research, critical discussion)
- Results
- Summary and conclusions
- Reference list
- Appendix

1. Cover sheet

University and department, course title, type of paper (e.g. seminar paper), semester, supervisor, title of the paper, date of submission, first name, surname, matriculation number, e-mail and postal address of the author.

If the title is not set by the supervisor you should formulate it briefly and precisely; a subtitle may be added. The title must deliver what it promises – pointed formulations are allowed, but must capture the core topic.

A sophisticated graphic design is optional; what is mandatory is a clear layout containing all required information. Do not place the university logo on the cover sheet.

2. Table of contents / list of figures

The outline – and hence the table of contents – follows the above “skeleton”, but the individual headings do not have to be identical (the introduction need not literally be called “Introduction”). The table of contents states the page number for every heading.

The outline must be coherent and logically structured. Decimal numbering (1, 1.1, 1.1.1 ...) is recommended. Generally avoid more than four levels (e.g. 1.1.1.1).

Where a chapter contains sub-chapters there must be at least two (not only 3 then 3.1, but at least 3.1 and 3.2). Sub-chapters should not be too short.

Headings of sub-chapters must make clear that they address a more specific aspect than the parent chapter.

Figures and tables are listed – separately for each category – in a list of figures/tables. Every figure is numbered and titled; this caption also appears in the list alongside the page number.

3. Introduction

The introduction provides the reader with a thematic entry. It sets out topic, research interest and problem definition and delineates them from adjacent fields/questions. It briefly outlines the study design and methods.

Its purpose is to stake out the framework and offer a concise overview of the prerequisites and central research question. The scholarly relevance should be evident; personal motivation need not be discussed. Initial, coarse definitions of terms and any difficulties (e.g. literature access) may be mentioned.

A foreword with acknowledgements is ****not**** required.

What does not belong here: The introduction is not a summary; results are not presented in advance, and detailed discussion of issues does not take place here.

4. Theory section

This section frames the study: Which communication-science approaches and theories underpin the work? Present them briefly and explain why they are useful reference points for your topic.

Both empirical and literature-based papers must establish theoretical connections appropriately.

****What does not belong here:**** A theory is not to be confused with the research instruments such as content analysis. Only if the method itself is the object of study or is not established in the field would it be discussed in detail.

5. Method section (empirical papers)

Describe your methodological procedure in detail: type, design and execution of the empirical study.

For quantitative, hypothesis-testing studies: present hypotheses and their operationalisation derived from theory; hypotheses must be empirically falsifiable.

For qualitative studies: usually no hypotheses are formulated in advance; nevertheless outline the assumptions guiding the study. In hypothesis-generating approaches (e.g. Grounded Theory) hypothesis building may be part of the results.

Always state sample composition, period of investigation and an overview of the category system. Questionnaires, codebooks, interview guides, etc. belong in the appendix.

6. Main part (empirical papers)

Present the results oriented toward research questions and, where applicable, hypotheses. Start with general findings before moving to detail ("from general to specific"). Select only relevant results.

Quantitative results are supported by figures/tables; qualitative findings by quotations. Visuals and quotes support the text – they do not replace it.

For every hypothesis indicate whether it was confirmed or refuted.

7. Main part (literature reviews)

The purpose is the systematic evaluation and critical discussion of existing knowledge with regard to your research question – less description, more critical analysis and interpretation. Avoid merely paraphrasing what you have read.

Use sufficient primary literature and engage with it directly; secondary literature is of secondary interest. Evidence of own contribution is shown by critical comparison and classification of diverse sources.

8. Summary / conclusions

Summarise the results and relate them to the main research question: was the objective achieved?

Pick up the thread from the introduction and integrate the chapters into an overall context. Do not simply repeat the results but interpret and contextualise them. For empirical papers critically reflect your study, especially limitations, and provide an outlook.

9. Reference list

The reference list contains all sources consulted. It is a single list, not separate lists for books, articles, etc.

Order titles alphabetically by authors' surnames; multiple works by one author are ordered chronologically.

For further details see the leaflet "How to Cite in Academic Papers".

10. Appendix

The appendix is structured, paginated and listed in the table of contents. Example:

- 10. Conclusions p. 24
- 11. References p. 27
- 12. Appendix p. 31

Appendix 1: Category system p. 31

Appendix 2: Codebook p. 35

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Include everything necessary to document your data collection (e.g. questionnaire, category system, codebook). Less is more – but ensure sufficient documentation.

11. Final checklist before submission

- Have all spelling and typing errors been corrected?
- Is the citation style consistent?
- Are internal references correct (e.g. “see Fig. 3”, “see p. 15”)?
- Is every cited source included in the reference list?
- Do headings and page numbers match the table of contents? Does every chapter actually contain text?
- Are all tables/figures inserted, correctly captioned and listed?
- After printing: was no page omitted, swapped or inserted twice?
- You must submit: one bound or stapled hard copy, one digital version, and the signed statutory declaration.