

# **Guidelines for the formal design of seminar, bachelor or master theses at the Institute of Economics**

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## **Acknowledgments:**

This document contains general information on the formal requirements for seminar papers and theses. Supplementary and/or deviating specifications may be provided in the respective courses. In case of doubt, the latter requirements apply.

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## **Preliminary Note**

Writing seminar papers and theses is a central part of your university studies. Writing a good seminar paper or thesis is primarily a question of content. Depending on the topic and the type of paper or thesis (literature review, own empirical investigation, etc.), there are different requirements and evaluation criteria regarding the content. You should clarify these with your supervisor before starting to write.

In addition, a seminar paper or thesis must also adhere to the formal requirements of scholarly writing. Important formal requirements for economics papers and theses at the University of Kassel are summarized in this document. Professors or lecturers supervising the paper or thesis may issue their own guidelines. These should be given priority in case of doubt.

## **1 Specifications Regarding Structure and Design**

### **1.1 Components**

Seminar papers and theses consist of the following parts:

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- List of abbreviations and symbols (if required)
- List of tables (if required)
- List of figures (if required)
- Text
- Bibliography
- Appendix (if required)
- Affidavit (Eidesstattliche Erklärung)

Whether a particular index or appendix is "required" depends on the circumstances of the particular paper and, if in doubt, should be discussed with the instructor supervising your work.

## 1.2 Information on the Title Page

For seminar papers: Name of the university and the department, name of the course, name of the instructor, semester the course is taken (e.g. summer semester 2024), type of assignment (term paper, project work...), title, name, matriculation number, address, e-mail address, course of study, semester, date of submission. The title page must not have a page number!

For Bachelor's and Master's theses, there are specifications for the title page issued by the examination office. You will receive a sample title page/cover sheet when you register your thesis.

## 1.3 Format Specifications

- Page size: The paper must be printed in A4 paper size.
- Margins: To facilitate the correction of your work, you must leave sufficient space on the page for annotations. Unless the instructor specifies otherwise, the top and bottom margins should each be 2.5 cm. The margin on the left side should be 3.5 cm; the margin on the right side should be 1.5 cm.
- Line spacing: The body of the text should have a text spacing of 1.5 lines. Headings and footnotes should be single-spaced.
- Text alignment: Headings should be left-justified (exception: title page). Body text and footnotes should be justified.
- Page numbers: All pages of the paper must be numbered, either in the header or footer. The title page must not have a page number. Indexes before the introduction (e.g., table of contents) should have Roman page numbers. Arabic numbers should be used from the introduction onwards, i.e. the first page of the introduction is page 1 of the paper or thesis.
- Equations: Long mathematical equations must appear in separate lines. All symbols used must be defined.
- Figures, tables, etc.: Figures, tables, etc. must have a title and a reference (including page number) (see 2.4 below). Figures and tables are numbered separately. For tables, the title is placed at the top, for figures at the bottom.
- Footnotes: Footnotes must be numbered consecutively.

## **1.4 Page Count**

- The number of pages for seminar papers and theses is determined by the instructor. Font type and size are generally specified as well. Alternatively, the length of a paper or thesis may also be specified in the form of a word count.
- The length of term papers varies from seminar to seminar. Follow the rules provided in the seminar.
- Figures and tables included in the text do not enter into the calculation of the page count, nor do title page, indexes (e.g., table of contents and bibliography), appendix, and affidavit (Eidesstattliche Erklärung).
- A maximum tolerance of  $\pm 10\%$  compared to the specified word or page count is acceptable. Larger deviations must be discussed with the supervisor in advance.

## **1.5 Structure and Table of Contents**

The text of a paper or thesis consists of the introduction, the main part and the conclusion. The main body is further subdivided into chapters, sections and, if necessary, subsections (for bachelor's and master's theses) or sections and subsections (for seminar papers). As a rule, (sub-) sections should not be shorter than one page. In most cases, a third level of structuring is useful only for bachelor's and master's theses; for seminar papers, two levels are usually sufficient. Make sure that each level of structuring has at least two (sub-) sections (i.e. if you have a section 1.1, then there must also be a section 1.2).

Entries in the table of contents must exactly match the headings used in the paper or thesis. Page references in the table of contents must be correct.

## **1.6 Abbreviations**

Any abbreviations used in the paper or thesis that go beyond standard abbreviations (such as e.g., etc.) must be defined before they are first used in the text (example: "The marginal rate of substitution (MRS) is ...."). Use abbreviations sparingly; it is usually not a good idea to abbreviate key concepts in your work. For bachelor's and master's theses, a list of abbreviations is usually required; for seminar papers, only if you use a large number of abbreviations.

## **2 Citations and References**

### **2.1 Citations as a Core Element of Good Scientific Practice**

All contents of your paper or thesis that you quote verbatim or paraphrase from other sources must be marked as such using a proper reference. Using thoughts, parts of sentences, or even whole sentences from other authors without referring to the original source is a severe violation of the rules of good scientific practice known as plagiarism. Plagiarism in papers or thesis will be treated as attempted fraud even retroactively if discovered later. Translations from foreign languages must also be treated as quotations or paraphrases. Also, do not use Internet sources without referencing. Examiners use dedicated software to detect plagiarism.

### **2.2 Frequency of citations**

The density of citations depends on the content of your work and may differ across sections. It also depends on the audience you address. For seminar papers and theses, you should assume that your readers have at least a bachelor's degree in economics. Accordingly, you do not need to substantiate basic textbook content with a source.

### **2.3 Style of references**

The most important requirement for references is that your reader can find the source. Readers must be enabled to check whether the content of the source is reproduced correctly and – if necessary - to read the source themselves in order to obtain more in-depth information. To this end, certain referencing rules have become established in science. These differ across disciplines. In economics, it is customary to cite directly in the text using the so-called "Harvard style". This follows the pattern: author, year of publication, p(age number). Two examples:

"Proper scientific citation can and must be learned" (Frank, 2022, p. 8).

Frank (2022, p. 8) points out that proper citation is a matter of learning.

The basic pattern is adapted to the requirements of the particular reference. The following rules apply:

- Your style of referencing must be consistent throughout your paper or thesis.
- If there are two authors of a paper, use "and" or "&", e.g. (Frank & Leimeister, 2020).
- If a paper has three or more authors, only the first name is mentioned. All other authors are

identified by "et al."<sup>1</sup>, e.g. (Söllner et al., 2021). (Attention: "et al." is only used in the text; all names must be mentioned in the bibliography).

- When using several works authored by the same authors and in the same year, it is necessary to distinguish them by adding letters a, b, c, etc. to the year, e.g. (Ohly & Voßkamp, 2019a) and (Ohly & Voßkamp, 2019b).
- When citing a passage that spans multiple pages in the source, you must provide the full range of pages, e.g., (Spieth, 2017, pp. 8-10).
- When citing multiple works by the same author as evidence for a statement, give the year numbers chronologically, e.g., (Seuring, 2007, 2013, 2017).
- When citing multiple works by different authors as evidence for a statement, list the authors in chronological or alphabetical order, e.g., (Veit, 2013; Michaelis, 2017) or (Michaelis, 2017; Veit, 2013).
- If you do not reproduce a statement verbatim but paraphrase it (i.e., express it in your own words), page references are usually omitted, e.g., (Buenstorf, 2019). However, two exceptions should be noted here. First, a page number is required if you are referring to a specific statement from the cited work, particularly if that statement is not representative of the entire work. Second, for seminar papers and theses, examiners may insist that page numbers be given for paraphrases as well, in order to facilitate verification of the source.

## 2.4 References for Tables and Figures

Tables and figures are useful for illustrating certain contents. Sources of all tables and figures used in your paper or thesis must be clearly identifiable. The page number of the source must also be provided.

- If you have developed the content and presentation of a table or figure yourself, indicate this with "Source: own representation".
- If you have taken the content of your table or figure from other authors, but you have designed the table or figure yourself, please indicate this with "Source: Own representation based on...", e.g. (Source: Own representation based on Ziegler, 2022, p. 5).
- If your table or figure is based on your own calculations, but you have taken the underlying data from other authors, indicate this by "Source: Own calculations based on...", e.g. (Source: Own calculations based on Wetzal et al., 2021).
- If you have taken a table or figure directly from the literature (e.g. by scanning it, cutting it

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<sup>1</sup> "et al." is a short form of the Latin "et alii/et aliae" and means "and others" in German.

from a PDF document, etc.), then indicate the source (with page number), e.g. (Source: Dannenberg and Gold, 2020, p. 34). Attention: Before taking a table or figure directly from the literature, always verify that this is acceptable for your instructor/examiner.

## 2.5 Formal Rules for Verbatim Quotations

Verbatim quotations (also called direct quotations) are uncommon in economics and should be used sparingly. They may be useful if you want to emphasize particularly concise statements made by an author. Verbatim quotations are also used when reproducing key passages from interviews on which one's own work is based.

Verbatim quotations must be taken verbatim from the source and placed in quotation marks. If it is necessary to add something to a direct quote, this is done with brackets. (Example: "After the start of the Covid pandemic, there were severe reductions in sales [in the hospitality industry].") For omissions in direct quotations, square brackets are also used, with three dots inserted [...]. Grammatical errors or spelling mistakes are reproduced and highlighted to show that the quotation is precise. (Example: "He wend as far as ... [sic].")<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "sic" is Latin for "so".



## 3 Working with Scholarly Literature

### 3.1 Type of Literature Used

For your seminar paper or thesis, you have to rely on scholarly literature. Scholarly literature is published in academic journals and books (monographs and anthologies). Distinguishing reliable from less reliable literature is one of the skills you should learn during your studies. In general, research results in economics are primarily published in journals. The quality of a journal depends on how selective its review process is. Indications that a journal is reliable are that it is indexed in well-known databases (Science Citation Index, EconLit, etc.) and that the editorial board includes researchers from well-known universities. In economics and parts of business administration, most of the relevant journals are in English.

Since it often takes a long time for an article in economics to go through the peer review process of a journal, most articles are pre-published as so-called discussion papers ("pre-prints"). Discussion papers are not yet peer-reviewed, so their quality is difficult to assess. However, certain discussion paper series, such as those of the NBER or IZA, are of high quality. Important: Before citing a discussion paper in your paper, you must check whether there is an associated journal publication. If this is the case, then you must cite the journal publication, not the discussion paper. Legally downloading the published paper often requires access to the publisher's server via the university network (VPN) in order to bypass the paywall. The same applies to JSTOR, a publication server for older journal articles.

When searching for literature, you will come across other forms of so-called "grey" literature in addition to genuine scientific literature. These include statements by political parties, associations and companies, publications by ministries and authorities, expert opinions, short publications by economic research institutes etc. Unlike discussion papers, these publications are not intended to be published in scientific journals eventually. This "grey" literature may contain information relevant for your paper or thesis. However, you should assess this information critically, because it is often not impartial, but influenced by the interests of the publishing institution. In the case of a brochure from the Federal Statistical Office, you can assume that the information it contains is reliable. With the statement of a party or an industry association, however, substantial skepticism is recommended.

Encyclopedias such as Wikipedia and online newspaper articles (cnn.com etc.) are no scholarly literature and should only be cited in exceptional cases, e.g., when they report on current events

that have not yet been discussed in the scholarly literature. Textbooks should only be cited if the content clearly goes beyond the content of basic studies (e.g. content of advanced methodological textbooks).

### **3.2 Number of References**

The appropriate number of references in your work depends on the topic of your paper or thesis. A frequently stated rule of thumb recommends that there should be one reference per page of your paper or thesis. This rule should be used with extreme caution. For example, if you are writing a literature review, one source per page may be far too few. On the other hand, if you are developing your own theoretical model or conducting your own empirical investigation, you may need fewer references. More important than the sheer number of references is that you actually know all work that you are citing. Never rely on what you read in the literature about other authors' work. You are responsible for incorrect citations in your paper or thesis, even if you picked up the error from others – which happens more often than you might think.

### **3.3 Bibliography**

All cited sources must be listed alphabetically by the name of the (first) author. Only those sources from which you have actually taken content are cited. Other works that you use as "background reading" are not cited. For the exact layout of the bibliography, different publishers and journals apply different styles that follow the same basic rules but differ in details (e.g., period or colon after the year of publication). You may follow any style applied in recognized economics journals. However, there are two key basic requirements for your bibliography. First, you must consistently maintain the pattern you have chosen for the entire bibliography, and second, the sources you use must be cited in a way that allows the reader to find them easily (see 2.3 above).

The specifications presented in the following sections 3.4 and 3.5 follow the so-called APA style, developed by the American Psychological Association. It is widely used internationally.

### 3.4 Examples of References in APA Style

The specifications for the entries in the bibliography differ by the type of publication to be listed.

#### ***Journal article:***

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names. (Year). Title of the article. *Title of the journal*, year (issue), page number.

Example: Andersson, J. J. (2019). Carbon taxes and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: Sweden as a case study. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 11(4), 1-30.

#### ***Articles in anthologies:***

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names (year). Title of the article. In initials all first names surname of the editor(s) (ed.), *title* (possibly edition) (page numbers). Place: publisher.

Example: Phelps, E. S. (1997). Wage subsidy programs: alternative designs. In D. J. Snower & G. de la Dehesa (Eds.), *Unemployment policy: Government options for the labor market* (pp. 206-249). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

#### ***Books (monographs):***

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names (year). *Title* (possibly edition). Place: publisher.

Example: Philippon, T. (2019). *The Great Reversal: How America Gave Up on Free Markets*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

#### ***Discussion Papers:***

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names. Year. *Title*. (Discussion paper series, number of papers).

Example: Fuchs, M. (2022). *Does a CBDC Reinforce Inefficiencies?* (MAGKS Joint Discussion Paper Series in Economics No. 28-2022).

#### ***Internet sources:***

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names (year). *Title*. Retrieved from full URL [DD.MM.YYYY.]

Example: Gramlich, E. M. (2004). *Budget and Trade Deficits: Linked, Both Worrisome in the Long Run, but not Twins*. Retrieved from <http://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/speeches/2004/20040225/default.htm> [AUG. 24, 2022].

Notes: Not all Internet sources have an author's name. If necessary, the name of the publishing institution can replace the author's name (e.g. Federal Agency for Civic Education (2022)...). Also,

not all sources you find online are necessarily Internet sources (e.g. scientific articles in online journals are not Internet sources). Rule of thumb: If there is a PDF of the text, it is not an internet source.

### **3.5 Sources with Multiple Authors**

Unlike the references given in the main text of your papers, bibliographical entries list all authors of the cited work. According to the APA guidelines, the initials of the first names follow the surnames of the authors. The individual authors are separated by a comma, only the last name is preceded by "and" or "&".

Pattern: surname, initials of all first names, surname, initials of all first names, & surname, initials of all first names. (Year). (...)

Example: Michaelis, J., & von Wangenheim, G. (2016). (...)

## 4 Affidavit (Eidesstattliche Erklärung)

On the last page of the paper or thesis, you must certify in writing that you have written your paper - in the case of a group paper, the part of the paper marked accordingly - independently and have not used any sources or auxiliary means other than those indicated in the paper. If you have not received any specific instructions for this declaration from the responsible examination office or from the lecturer, it can read as follows, for example:

"I certify that I have written this seminar paper (or Bachelor's or Master's thesis) independently and have not used any sources or auxiliary means other than those indicated. The text has not yet been submitted in the same or similar form to any examination authority."

Place and date, signature.

In addition, you must also declare in writing that you agree to have your paper or thesis checked for plagiarism (see 2.1 above) using special detection software, for example with the following wording:

"I am aware that my paper/thesis may be checked for text passages and other sources that have been taken over without being marked as such (see, among other things, § 16 Para. 7 of the General Provisions for Subject Examination Regulations for Bachelor's and Master's Degrees at the University of Kassel). I agree that, if necessary, an upload to an external database of the respective software provider will take place and that the paper/thesis will also be saved for this purpose, provided that it is sufficiently anonymized in advance (as a rule, the removal of the cover sheet and the signature page is sufficient for this purpose). I also agree that in the future, conversely, other papers or theses will also be checked for plagiarism from my anonymized paper/thesis."

Place and date, signature.

## 5 Further reading

The guidelines above provide only a rudimentary overview. For more detailed information, see the following books, among others:

- Gillett, A., Hammond, A. & Martala, M. (2009). *Successful Academic Writing*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education.
- Langan, J. & Albright, Z. (2022). *College Writing Skills with Readings ISE*, 11th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Macgilchrist, F. (2014). *Academic writing*. Paderborn: UTB Ferdinand Schöningh.