

## Guidelines for Term Papers and BA/ MA Theses

### 1. General Information

Term papers aim to answer a scientific research question of well-founded relevance. The most important criteria for a term paper are the coherent *description, discussion and examination of a falsifiable statement*. This is done against the background of scientific theory and empirical analysis. It is important that a main line of argumentation is identifiable.

### 2. Topic of a Term Paper or Thesis

Provided that the topic is not predetermined, the following aspects should be considered when choosing a topic:

- The research question must be interesting, i.e. scientifically and/ or politically relevant! It is particularly opportune to target a verifiable research gap.
- You need to be able to answer your research question inside of a given time and structural frame and with the available data.
- The research question must be as precise as possible: Generally, a good indicator is the formulation of the question in a single sentence!
- The empirical object of research must be delineated clearly.
- The research question should lie in the area of International Relations. For example, you

are very welcome to choose a question from the policy fields of environmental, development or security policy.

### 3. Structure of a Term Paper or Thesis

The structure of a paper makes the systematic order of the train of thought visible to the reader. Hence, the paper should be organized according to the logical aspects of clarity and convenience. This means that the structure should be clear and purposeful and follow a clear line of argumentation. A convincing structure of a term paper or BA/ MA thesis could look as follows:

#### I. Introduction

The introduction serves to define the object of the paper, to demonstrate its relevance and to discuss the approach that will be used. **What** will be analyzed, **why** and **how**?

- Research question and goal (including justification of the topic for scientific and/ or political reasons): „What is it that I am writing about and why?“
- Indicate thesis and expected results
- Present approach (theoretical and methodological basis and data)
- Announce structure

#### II. Background (possible)

- Short introduction into the empirical background of the paper (relevant political, economic, historical developments etc.), which are necessary for the

reader to understand and classify the analysis

#### III. State of the Art

- Presentation of state of the art and relevant literature
- Identification of the **research gap** relevant to your own work

#### IV. Theoretical Framework

- Creation of your own theoretical access (development of existing approaches; if they are adopted in their present form, virgin soil must be claimed in the empirical part of the paper; this is particularly salient for BA/ MA theses)
- Formulation of hypotheses

#### V. Methodological Approach

- Criterion for choice: Usefulness for the research question at hand and applicability (dependent on available data), e.g. statistical analysis, Game Theory analysis or network analysis
- Statement of motivation for choice of the method (discussion of weaknesses and strengths), operationalization of variables
- State of reasons for choice of case(s)
- Description of available data and sources
- **The development of a stringent and plausible research design is an in-**

## **dispensable prerequisite for a successful empirical analysis!**

### VI. Empirical analysis

The empirical analysis is the verification of the hypothesis developed on the basis of the theoretical framework and the methodological research design. A typical mistake in the empirical part is a descriptive instead of analytical approach.

- Knowledge of the case in question
- Strict application of the theory

### VII. Implications

- Interpretation of the results of the empirical analysis against the background of your research question
- Consideration of political and scientific implications
- Critical reflection on limitations and weaknesses of your own analysis

### VIII. Conclusion

- Summary: Research question, state of the art, results and implications, outlook on possible research questions in the future

## **4. Formalities**

### 4.1. Language and Argumentation

To make the paper irreproachable with regards to both language and content, a precise style, coherent argumentation and guidance for the reader are important. The focus is on making logical connections visible. To do this, the linking of chapters and sections with adequate transitions is advisable. Short summaries should be incorporated between chapters of longer papers, e.g. BA/ MA theses.

### 4.2. Quotation

The adherence to the rules of quotation and bibliography is one of the basic requirements of a scientific work! Ideas and arguments which have not been developed by you **must** be identified through citations! This way, authors document which sources and secondary literature they drew on for the construction of their own text. An omission of this information infringes upon the principles of scientific work and upon copyright. **If, during the grading of a paper, it becomes obvious that someone else's thoughts have not been identified as such, the paper will be graded as "failed".** There are different styles of citation, e.g. Harvard or Chicago style. It is particularly important that one style is used consistently throughout the paper. Footnotes will be used only if they contain essential comments or information which would impede the reading process too much if considered in the main text.

The paper can be written in English or German. In both cases, it should be proofread, ideally by a native speaker, in order to ensure the correct style.

### 4.3. Formal Elements

Title page: Title of course, name of teacher with academic degrees, term, title of the paper; name, address, phone number, e-mail address and matriculation number of the author, number of terms studied, date.

Table of contents: The table of contents contains all chapters, subchapters, lists of abbreviations and references and attachments which appear in the paper. The title of each section should reflect its content briefly and precisely.

List of references: The list of references must contain all quoted sources completely and in a consistent manner in alphabetical order according to the last name of the author.

Attachments: additional graphs and tables; questionnaires; patterns of codification etc.

Statement of the author: On a separate page, the author must state that the paper was written independently and with the help of only the permitted resources. This statement has to be confirmed through a handwritten signature.

Length of the paper: (including figures, pictures, references etc., at line spacing of 1,5, Times New Roman size 12 pt and normal margin settings): „Standardkurs“ 12-15 pages, „Bachelorseminar“/ „Hauptseminar“ 15-20 pages.

## **5. Term Paper vs. BA/ MA Thesis**

In general, the rules for a written term paper apply also for the preparation of a BA or MA thesis. It is the aim of a BA or MA thesis to solve a problem of political science with the help of a political science method inside of a given time frame. The results must be presented in a manner appropriate to the topic and against the theoretical background of the state of the art in political science. The topic is dealt with more elaborately and the author has to show that he can apply political science methodology and theory appropriately. Additionally, he should make an independent contribution to the existing research! This can be done in the theoretical and/ or empirical area. Accordingly, the BA/ MA thesis does not differ from the term paper structurally, but in its scope, standard and length.

## 6. Recommended Literature

There are a variety of books on the basic norms of scientific work. Examples are:

Brady, Henry und David Collier. 2004. Rethinking Social Inquiry. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane und Sidney Verba. 1994. Designing Social Inquiry. Princeton: University of Princeton Press.

## 7. Criteria of Evaluation of Term Papers and BA/ MA Theses

1. Research question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance</li> <li>• Feasibility</li> <li>• Preciseness</li> </ul>
2. Structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity</li> <li>• Utility</li> <li>• Existence of a clear line of argumentation</li> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Summary</li> </ul>
3. Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance of the chosen theoretical approaches</li> <li>• Correctness of descriptive sections</li> <li>• Choice of relevant literature</li> <li>• Critical reflection</li> <li>• Development of hypotheses</li> </ul>
4. Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utility</li> <li>• Operationalisation</li> <li>• Choice of data</li> <li>• Critical reflection</li> <li>• (Choice of relevant literature if applica-</li> </ul>

ble)
5. Empirical analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of case(s)</li> <li>• Knowledge of the case</li> <li>• Reference to relevant literature</li> <li>• Quality of application of theory</li> <li>• Critical reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Internal validity</li> <li>ii. External validity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6. Presentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language and grammar</li> <li>• Layout</li> <li>• Illustrations, tables</li> </ul>
7. Formal requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citations and sources</li> <li>• Bibliography (correctness and completeness)</li> <li>• Statement of the author</li> </ul>