

Guideline for writing seminar papers and theses

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Introductory notes

- This guideline shall help you to set up your own research question, outline and paper for a seminar course or thesis at the Chair of Applied Microeconomics.
- If it is your first time writing an academic paper we additionally recommend to go to the library and study a handbook for academic writing!

1. Literature search
2. What is a research question?
3. Structure of the paper
 - 3.1 Content related
 - 3.2 Technical summary
4. Plagiarism
5. Citation Rules
6. Tools

Literature Search

The literature search is essential for you to succeed!

- In a seminar you are not expected to perform an empirical analysis or to extend existing theoretical models.
- Therefore the literature search and review will be most important.
- Focus your attention on recent / important papers published in scientific economic journals!
- You can expand your body of relevant literature by
 - examining the bibliography of a paper at hand (*“Which literature was interesting for the authors of the article you are reading?”*)
 - using the “cited-by” function f.i. at scholar.google.de. (*“Which authors found the article interesting you are reading?”*)

Literature Search

Sources of Literature

- University Library / Elektronischer Zeitschriftenbestand (EZB): (<http://ezb.uni-regensburg.de/ezeit/fl.phtml?bibid=EUUV>)
- EconLit
- Google Scholar (scholar.google.de).
- Pay attention to using academic sources only!
- Typical academic sources are:
 - Journal articles (e.g. *American Economic Review*, *Journal of International Economics*, ...)
 - Working papers
 - (Textbooks, concerning methods only)
- **Wikipedia and other online encyclopedia (“Gabler’s Wirtschaftslexikon”, etc) are no valid academic sources.**

Literature Search

Sources of Literature

- **Try to use printed sources only!**
- You will find many of your referred papers online. This does not mean, that these sources are not printed.
- Find out when and in which journal (or report in case of *WTO*, *ILO*, *UNCTAD*, etc.) they were published and refer to this publication instead of quoting the web address.
- Several publications are available online-only (f.i. ad-hoc messages of market-listed enterprises).
- In this case you have to quote the web address and the date of your last access.

Online sources

- **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.de>)
- **Ideas Repec** (<http://ideas.repec.org/>)
- **EBSCO / EconLit**

Literature administration programs

These programs help you to organize your literature and can write the Bibliography for you.

What you need, e.g.:

- **Citavi** (<http://citavi.com/de/>)
- **Zotero** (<http://www.zotero.org/>)

What you get (instantly!)

- ***Your course paper bibliography!***
- Ease of citing and referencing
- Ease of administration of literature (notes, tags, ...)

What is a research question?

The initial objective is to formulate a research question!

- A research question is not simply the title of your seminar topic.
- Usually a profound literature search is needed before a research question can be formulated.
- Afterwards you should be able to identify a specific issue that is not sufficiently examined in the literature.
- The research question may be narrowed down extremely.

What is a research question?

Some Steps on the Way to a Research Question

1. Understand the topic!

- What are the definitions of the terms used in the topic title?
- Which links exist between these terms?
- In which ways can the topic be interpreted?

Example: Foreign Ownership and Access to Capital Markets

What is a research question?

Some Steps on the Way to a Research Question

2. Collect questions!

What would be interesting to investigate within the topic-defined area?

- Formulate several questions that come to your mind.
- Think about who would benefit from an answer to these questions (f.i. government, management etc.).
- Decide which of these questions would generate most valuable implications.

Example: How does foreign ownership affect a firm's access to capital markets?

What is a research question?

Some Steps on the Way to a Research Question

3. Collect and review literature that deals with your chosen question!
 - Do not read every paper that seems to fit thoroughly.
 - Try to get an overview of the literature published on this topic instead.
 - Try to use the most recent publications!

What is a research question?

Some Steps on the Way to a Research Question

4. Narrow down your research question!

- Try to focus on a specific problem of interest.
- Try to find questions that can be answered by a synthesis of the existing literature.

Example: In which extent do U.S.- owned subsidiary firms in Taiwan profit from the extremely relaxed monetary policy of the Federal Reserve System?

What is a research question?

Different Types of Research Questions

1. Description of an observed situation.

- Typically involves defining and classifying of known issues.
- An example is a literature overview.
- **This is not the aim of this seminar. You are expected to go beyond a mere description of known facts!**

What is a research question?

Different Types of Research Questions

2. Relationship between observed phenomena.

- Typically involves the investigation of the relationship between two or more variables.
- The result can be the finding of a correlation or a trend between the examined variables.
- An example would be the finding that stock and obligation prices are (usually) negatively correlated.

What is a research question?

Different Types of Research Questions

3. Causality.

- Typically involves the attempt to discover a causal relationship between two or more observed phenomena.
- The result could be the finding that Lehman Brother's default was caused by speculation with mortgage backed securities.
- Often no causal relationship can be proved. A correlation between the examined variables will then be the result.

What is a research question?

Different Types of Research Questions

4. Explanation / Methodology

- During your literature search you probably will find contradictory results to the same topics. This will often be caused by different approaches, the authors used. In this case you should examine:
 - What are the assumptions used?
 - What are the models used?
 - Why did the authors use them to tackle the certain issue?
 - Are there other possible approaches?

What is a research question?

A research question is not the simple description of a known issue!

- The observation of economic issues should lead to questions like:
- In which way are the observed phenomena related? (Relationship)
- What is the cause of an observed phenomenon? (Causality)
- What will be the (economic and/or political) effect of an observed measure? (Forecasting)
- How can known models be used to explain the observed development? (Explanation / Methodology)

How to structure a seminar paper or thesis?

Ingredients of a (scientific) course paper

- Titlepage
- (Abstract)
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures (with name and page number)
- List of Tables (with name and page number)
- List of Abbreviations
- Text (1. Introduction, 2. Main part, 3. Concluding remarks)
- References
- Appendix¹
- Statement of authorship

¹Main text and appendix: together not more than 15 pages.

Table of Contents / Outline (*Example*)

Institutional change in England: The contribution of transatlantic trade to transition of economic and political power in the Early Modern Age

1. Introduction

2. Literature review

3. Theoretical background

3.1 Theories of long run economic growth

3.2 An analysis framework for growth through institutional change

4. Institutional change in England in the 17th century

4.1 Composition and transition of English international trade

4.2 Institutionalisation and politicization of different merchant groups

5. Concluding remarks

References

Appendix²

²The parts in red colour are appropriate for every paper or thesis. Black colour chapters (The main body) will differ with respect to your research question.

Introduction

- Motivation of the **topic** (space for “*at least one number*”...)
- Statement of the research objective / **research question**
- Short statement of the **methods** or **theories** used to meet this objective
- (The plan / **structure** of the remaining paper)
- -> *Do not start writing with writing the introduction!*

Main body I

- **Literature review** -> embed your work in the current state of research
- **(Definitions** -> to avoid ambiguity)

Main body II

Depending on the research question, but most probable:

- **Theoretical background** -> explain models you rely on
- **Methodology** (methods used) -> e.g. empirical strategy
- **Inference** -> based on scientific argument
- **Results** -> interpret and compare
- Refer to the **research question** - was it possible to answer it? If not, why?
- **Discussion** -> lead to synthesis

Concluding remarks / closing remarks

- Slightly more than a **summary**
- Refer to the research question
- Implications for **future research**
- *Do not introduce new strings of reasoning!*

References

- **Consistency!!!**
- Make sure to **list only cited references**, and to **cite only listed references**
- Arrange in **alphabetical order**
- **Avoid ambiguity**: e.g. Bernard, A.B. (2010**a**): ... and Bernard, A.B. (2010**b**)
- Hint: Use an electronic **literature administration programme** like Zotero or Citavi!

Technical notes and summary:

- Font size is 12 pt, font type is *Times New Roman*, 1.5 line spacing, margins are 4 cm right, 2 cm left, 3 cm bottom and 2.5 cm top, pages must be numbered with Arabic numerals!
- Title page contains title of the paper, author's full name and matriculation number, handover date, name of the supervisor and name of the chair!
- Table of contents lists individual chapters!
- List of figures and tables lists name and page number of figures and tables.
- List of abbreviations
- Main text of seminar paper is by no means more than 15 pages. For Bachelor an Master thesis 25-35 pages are appropriate.
- Appendix with tables and figures if they were not yet provided in the main text. Please insert everything either in the main text or in attachments. The appendix and the main text together must not exceed 15 pages.
- Bibliography: Do not make spelling mistakes in bibliography and check if all the sources are mentioned with their indexes in the text and vice versa. The bibliography should be arranged in alphabetical order.

Plagiarism

What is it again?

- Copying a series of words or sentences (or graphs, tables, etc.) without giving reference where they come from
- Using concepts, ideas or facts from different origin without giving reference where they come from
- ***Especially***: Paraphrasing another source (although citing it) and only changing a few words / substitute with synonyms!

Plagiarism

How to avoid it?

- If you cannot summarize an “idea” in your own words and copy it from another source, use quotation marks and refer to the source!³
- If you draw on the findings, opinions or any information from a source, cite and reference the source according to the guidelines!

Plagiarism is easier to detect than one might think, and is a serious threat to passing the course!

³Note: “Anti-plagiarism” through many direct quotations does not improve the quality of your paper!

Statement of authorship

“I guarantee that this seminar paper was written by myself and that I have used no other sources than those mentioned. All sentences or passages quoted or paraphrased in this paper from other people’s work have been specifically acknowledged by clear cross-referencing to author, work and page(s). This holds also for drawings, sketches, graphic images, and for sources from the Internet.”

“Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Seminararbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Die Stellen der Seminararbeit, die anderen Quellen im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen wurden, sind durch Angaben der Herkunft kenntlich gemacht. Dies gilt auch für Zeichnungen, Skizzen, bildliche Darstellungen sowie für Quellen aus dem Internet.”

Printed and personally signed statement of authorship should be separately provided to the chair, at the time when the seminar paper is filed per e-mail.

Quotation rules

- Avoid direct quotations!
 - When using direct quotations you should mention both full name of the source in bibliography and the exact page of the source at the end of the quote.
- Analogous quotations must be as explicit as possible:
 - Good example: ***Geishecker (2008) objects to the inflationary use of footnotes.***
 - Bad example: *The accumulation of parentheses at the end of the sentence is not very nice (see Geishecker, 2008).*
- For tables and graphs you must indicate a reference to the source directly under the table or graph and afterwards give a full source description in the bibliography.

References - Examples

Books:

- author(s), year of publication, title, publisher and place of publication
- Example: **Greene, William H.** 2000. *Econometric Analysis*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall International.

Journal articles:

- author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the journal, journal issue and number, page numbers
- Example: **Gaston, Noel.** 2002. "The effects of globalisation on unions and the nature of collective bargaining," *Journal of Economic Integration*, 17 (2), 377 - 396.

References - Examples

Discussion papers:

- author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the institution, issue and number of the discussion paper
- Example: **Otoo, Maria Ward**. 1997. "The Sources of worker Anxiety: Evidence From the Michigan Survey," Discussion Series 1997-48, Federal Reserve Board Finance and Economics Discussion Series.

Articles in anthologies:

- author(s), year of publication, title of the article, name of the publisher, the anthology title, page number, publisher and place of publication
- Example: **Deardorff, Alan V**. 2000. "Fragmentation Across Cones," in Sven W. Arndt and Henryk Kierzkowski, eds., *Fragmentation and International Trade*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 35 - 51.

References - Examples

Sources from the Internet:

- author, title of publication and the Internet address must be indicated
- Example: **German Marshall Fund**.2007. "Perspectives on Trade and Poverty Reduction,"
<http://www.gmfus.org/economics/tpsurvey/2007TPSurvey-FINAL.pdf>.
- Only primary sources should be used. An exception can be made, for example, in case when the original source is not available. In this situation a secondary source can be used.
- Wikipedia or non-specific websites are not citable primary sources, but the sources mentioned on Wikipedia can be useful.

LaTeX - a very very short introduction

What you need:

- Basic programme: **MiKTeX** (<http://miktex.org>)
- One document processor, e.g.
 - **TeXnicCenter** (<http://www.texniccenter.org/>)
 - **LyX** (<http://www.lyx.org/>)

What you get (after some "on the job" investment):

- Ease of citing and referencing (not only literature!)
- Comfortable mathematics environment
- Outstanding looking seminar papers!

Literature administration programs

What you need, e.g.:

- **Citavi** (<http://citavi.com/de/>)
- **Zotero** (<http://www.zotero.org/>)

What you get (instantly!)

- ***Your course paper bibliography!***
- Ease of citing and referencing (only literature...)
- Ease of administration of literature (notes, tags, ...)