

Guide to Writing a Term Paper and a Final Thesis (Bachelor/Master/M. Ed.)

In a final thesis, you are expected to demonstrate your ability to use the methodological tools of literary and cultural studies, to independently analyze primary texts and to connect your material to a broader historical and/or theoretical framework.

The research process begins with identifying a suitable topic, problem, or research field, from which you develop a viable research question and formulate a thesis.

Preliminary consultation: Please come to my office hours with at least a rudimentary idea for your topic. Rarely do I discourage students from the research topic they chose. In 95% of the case you are allowed to work on what you set out to do. A basic knowledge of the secondary literature is necessary to streamline the design of your thesis. Therefore, please research and prepare a list of primary and secondary texts.

Scope:

- **BA theses:** approximately 30-40 pages (2.0 spacing)
- **MA theses:** approximately 60-80 pages (2.0 spacing)
- **Term papers:** length depends on the number of ECTS credits (see syllabus); between 15-25 pages (2.0 spacing)

1. Developing the Research Question and Thesis

The **research question** defines the overall argument of your paper.

The title identifies the **primary sources** of the work – that is, the objects or phenomena being analyzed.

Your research question will usually evolve throughout the process – this is a sign of progress in your research. A good research question cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." It must relate directly to your research topic and the objects of your analysis. It is important that the question can be answered within the work.

The **thesis** is your answer to the research question. It must be **contestable** and cannot be a self-evident statement. Your hypothesis determines the line of argument and shapes the structure of the paper. Developing a meaningful research question and a contestable thesis is central to the **grading** of your work.

A **hypothesis** is an assumption or claim – not an opinion – but an informed and defensible proposition. It relates directly to your chosen topic and indicates the direction of your argument. While the content of your paper cannot be summarized in one sentence or paragraph, the hypothesis should not focus on a minor detail but should be of central significance.

1.2 Content: Key Concepts and Secondary Literature

To work meaningfully on a research area, you must identify the key terms associated with your research question. These terms guide both your research and emerge from the secondary literature. A **mindmap** allows you to visually map out the key concepts of your thesis. This creates an initial hierarchy of terms.

When creating a mindmap, ask yourself a) Which terms are central to my topic? and b) How do the terms relate to one another?

A key challenge in academic writing is clearly separating **your own thoughts** from those of others. Use not only **quotations** but also **paraphrases** to mark other people's ideas.

It is essential that you **engage critically** with these ideas – even when quoting directly. You should **develop** others' ideas with your own reflections.

You must address not only research that supports your argument but present the **central arguments** from relevant academic literature. **Avoid** only citing your sources in parentheses; instead, **summarize and discuss** their arguments to demonstrate your critical thinking skills. **Direct quotations** from secondary literature are welcome but must be properly introduced and integrated. This will impact your grade.

1.3 Research and Bibliography

Conduct research using the university library's catalog and relevant academic journals. In the early stages, focus on monographs and full-text articles from journals. Targeted reading will help you determine whether a source is relevant to your topic.

Your bibliography indirectly indicates which **research approaches** you are engaging with. The selection of secondary texts should reflect these approaches. Make sure to apply the MLA guidelines when formatting.

Possible theoretical approaches include Cultural Studies, Narratology, Feminist Theory, or Film Analysis, amongst others.

1.4 Outline

The development of your outline should be guided primarily by your **thesis**. **Formally**, the outline should list subchapters according to **MLA style**. Aside from the **Introduction** and **Conclusion**, two main chapters are too few, while seven are too many. Chapters should be relatively balanced in length.

A logically structured chapter layout contributes significantly to the **coherence** of your paper – and therefore, to a **better grade**.

2. The Writing Process

2.1 Structure and Paragraphs

When writing your first page, consider how you want to **introduce your topic**. With every paragraph you write, ask yourself what it contributes to your **overall argument**.

Reminder: In English, the **first line of each paragraph** is indented (according to **MLA style**). Also note: A **single sentence** is not a paragraph.

2.2 Content and Form

Remember that primary texts are **artifacts** and should be analyzed in terms of their **artistic and formal features**. A paper that only deals with **content** and not with the **mode of representation** is incomplete. You are expected to perform **close readings**, using the appropriate terminology from literary and film studies. See my website for the [Prose Handout](#) and [Film Handout](#).

So, examine **not just the “what,” but also the “how”** of representation. **Support your analysis and your thesis with evidence from the primary text** – either through quotations or, in the case of film, screenshots.

2.3 Conclusion

In your **conclusion**, return to the **research question** posed at the beginning. Your **thesis** should be clearly answered in the conclusion.

2.4 Citation Style

Please use the most recent edition of the **MLA Style Sheet** (Modern Language Association) for formatting and creating your **bibliography** and thesis.

2.5 Submission and Declaration of Academic Integrity

Do not forget to **print out and sign** the [Pledge of Academic Integrity](#), and attach it to your paper. This is **mandatory**. The **deadline** for submitting your term paper can be found in the syllabus.

2.6 Grading and Feedback

You can view your grade **online** in the first week of the following semester.

Please sign up for my **office hours** via my website (calendly.com/sieglinde-lemke/15min) to discuss the **commented version** of your paper and to receive feedback for improving future work.

The **assessment** / grade of your final thesis will be sent directly to the examination office (GeKo). You can view it there at any time or request a copy by emailing my secretary: sekretariat.lemke@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de

Please note that this process takes time. Once we enter your grade into the system via HisinOne, it can take up to several weeks until GeKo has processed the information. Only then will you be able to see it on your transcript of record.

Links to Handouts (PDF):

- [Prose Handout](#)
- [Film Handout](#)
- [Thesis Statement](#)
- [Style Sheet](#)
- [Pledge of Academic Integrity](#)