

Writing assignments in political science

– Guideline –

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1 Introduction

Written assignments are the result of successful seminar participation and working on one of the topics discussed in the seminar in more detail. Writing a seminar paper fulfils several functions. First, students sharpen their ability to present an argument in a logical, well-structured paper. Second, they learn to carry out research independently in order to back up their argument and relate it to existing academic research. By writing term papers, students learn how to handle different sources. Third, writing and research contributes to becoming familiar with the process of academic writing. Hence, students gather key qualifications that enable them to better cope with future challenges, whether in- or outside academia. In the following, common questions regarding seminar papers are addressed.

2 The content of a seminar paper

Seminar papers are academic papers. Hence, the author works on a research question and tests a hypothesis with a particular research method. Generally, a seminar paper has three parts: the introduction, the main body, the concluding part. The main body is divided in several chapters.

2.1 The research question

Every seminar paper is based on a research question. Students commonly start with rather broad research questions, which should become more precise in the research process. Thus, please make sure to come to your lecturer's office hour to discuss your research question. Be certain to come to the office hour prepared: the clearer the research question and the more work you have put on it, the more productive the discussion with the lecturer may be. If you continue to face problems with the research question, do not hesitate to contact him/her again.

2.2 The introduction

The introduction is the first chapter. Here you introduce your research question, the research method, the structure of your assignment, and the sources you are going to use. Clarify your interest in the question and set your research question into context, e.g. with regard to existing literature, current politics, or the historical context. Make sure that in one or two sentences you clearly specify the argument of the paper and the specific steps that you will undertake in the main body of the paper to make that argument persuasive.

2.3 The main body

In the main body, existing research is drawn on to unfold the argument. Please make sure that you select sources with regard to their quality, i.e. relevance for your research question. Whether you paraphrase or cite directly, make sure that you indicate the exact source you are citing. However, do not use too many direct quotations.

Make sure that you follow a common thread while working on your assignment. Do not get lost in aspects that are not crucial to your argument. Always ask yourself: Is this relevant for my own research question? Close every chapter with a short assessment on how and why it is important for your research question.

Every paragraph needs to contain one thought that is relevant for the argument you present. The first sentence of a paragraph summarizes the main thought which is going to be presented in the paragraph. It is elaborated in the paragraph. Once a new thought starts, begin a new paragraph.

2.4 The conclusion

In the conclusion, the results are summarized, conclusions from these results are drawn, and their significance is assessed. Do not simply provide a short summary on your main chapters. Instead, replace your results in the academic and historical context which you already mentioned in the introduction. Do not hesitate to voice your own conclusions and to point out aspects which could be addressed in future research.

3 How to make sure the formalities of your assignment are correct

Formal correctness is one of the criteria for the assessment of the assignment. A seminar paper always is build in the same fashion: cover sheet, table of contents, introduction, main body, conclusion, bibliography, abstract, appendix, declaration of authorship. Relevant for formal correctness are: spelling, grammar, citation style, and the title of your assignment. Grave mistakes on these formalities might cause you to fail the assignment. The provided tips in the following are of a rather general nature. Thus, please make sure to ask your lecturer if you are unsure about certain aspects of it.

3.1 The cover sheet

On the following page, please find an example of a cover sheet. It includes all the information the cover sheet of a seminar paper needs to have:

Universität Greifswald
Institut für Politik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

Mikromodul: Moderne politische Theorie
Dozentin: Prof. Dr. Cordula Kuleßa

Thema der Hausarbeit:
**Vergleich der Liberalismuskonzeptionen von Isaiah Berlin und
Charles Taylor**

Sommersemester 2017
Bachelor of Arts
Teilstudiengang Politikwissenschaft
2. Fachsemester
Matrikel-Nr.: 131058

Max Musterzweg
Hänsel und Gretel-Weg14
17489 Greifswald
Tel.: 03834/445010
Email: musterzweg@uni-greifswald.de

Anzahl der Wörter: 3567

3.2 Table of Contents

Following the cover page, you present your table of contents. The table of contents allows the reader a quick overview of your assignment. It provides a first guide on whether you addressed the topic appropriately. Take time to assess whether you have allocated a sufficient amount of written space to each aspect of your argument in the paper.

When you have finished the writing process, reread your table of contents carefully. Confirm whether the chapters and subchapters show that you are presenting a clear and structured assignment. Ensure that the different parts fit each other and that the different chapter titles provide meaningful information on the content of the chapter.

3.3 Citations and Footnotes

In political science, two kinds of citation styles are common: footnotes and in-text citation. Confirm with your lecturer which citation style is expected. In the following, only the Harvard in-text citation style is referred to: text text text (Meyer 2017: 5-8). If a text has two authors, separate their last names with a "/" (e.g. Braun/Keman 2003: 95-97). If three or more authors wrote a text, use "et al." (z.B. Schneider et al. 2011: 111). If more than one publication of the same author was published in the same year, add "a, b, c,..." to the citation to ensure misunderstandings are avoided (e.g. Müller 2007c: 13). Make sure that you also indicate "a, b, c,..." in the bibliography.

If you directly quote something, use quotation marks to mark the text you are quoting. If you are leaving out parts of the quote indicate it by using square brackets [...]. If you are adding words to a sentence you are quoting directly, use square brackets, too.

Overall, use direct quotes sparingly!

If you use an exact quote from secondary literature, note that you did not cite the original by stating "cited in...". However, use this sparingly and make sure to cite originals whenever possible.

3.4 Bibliography

- Most importantly, include in the bibliography only sources you used in the text of your paper.
- The bibliography is organized alphabetically and, if you include several publications of the same author, chronologically.
- Books are cited with their title and subtitle, as well as with the place of publication and the publishing house.
- Journal articles are cited with the year of publication and the issue number, but without place of publication.

- The first name of the author is mentioned.
- If you use several publications of the same author in the same year, differentiate between them with a, b, c → Habermas 1986a.
- Indicate if the source has not yet been published (e.g. unpublished Master thesis).
- If you cite a document from the internet, name the URL and the date on which you opened or downloaded the page.

Different kinds of texts are included in the bibliography differently (see below):

Monography

Knill, Christoph, 2006: Staatlichkeit im Wandel. Großbritannien im Spannungsfeld innenpolitischer Reformen und europäischer Integration, Opladen.

Journal article

Beyme, Klaus von, 2003: Do Parties Matter? Der Einfluß der Parteien auf politische Entscheidungen, in: Politische Vierteljahresschrift 34(1), pp. 343-358.

Book chapter in an edited volume

Johnson, Nevil, 2005: Föderalismus und Regionalismus in Europa, in: Fritz Ossenbühl (Hrsg.), Föderalismus und Regionalismus in Europa, Baden-Baden, pp. 307-335.

Newspaper article

Bröchler, Stephan, 2006: Handlungsfähigkeit ist nächstes Ziel, in: Frankfurter Rundschau vom 1. Juni 2006, 17-18.

Document from the internet

EU-Kommission, 2005: Strategien für die Reform der Dienststellen;
<http://europa.eu.int/dgs/Kinnock/reform.html>, last accessed 23. Oktober 2005.

3.5 Abstract

Your assignment needs to have an abstract of around 100 words in (German and) English in which you summarize the key aspects of your assignment. It needs to contain your research question, the key point of your argument, the research method, and your results.

4 Finally...

Before you hand in your assignment, make sure you proof-read and ask someone else to proof-read to reduce the number of mistakes in writing etc. Furthermore, your proof readers can confirm whether all the aspects you addressed are relevant for your research question. You need to add a declaration of authorship to each assignment with the following wording:

„Ich versichere, dass ich die anliegende Arbeit mit dem Thema ... selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen Hilfsmittel als die angegebenen verwendet habe. Die Stellen, die anderen Werken dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinne nach entnommen sind, habe ich in jedem Falle durch Angaben der Quelle, auch der Sekundärliteratur, als Entlehnung kenntlich gemacht.
Datum, Unterschrift“

Do not forget to sign the declaration!

Good luck with your assignment!