



OTTO VON GUERICKE
UNIVERSITÄT
MAGDEBURG

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Notes for writing seminar papers or Bachelor/Master theses at the Chair of Public Economics

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1. General Principles

- Make sure to clarify which key questions you want to answer in your work and which auxiliary questions might be supportive.
- In general, a scientific research paper is divided into an introductory section, a main section and a concluding section. In the introduction, the core and auxiliary questions (knowledge goals) of the work are described and this section gives an outlook on the main part. The basic literature is already mentioned here. The main part develops the argument, describes the methods, and presents results related to the research question. The concluding section summarizes the findings.
- Pay attention to form and content when writing the work, as both aspects are considered when the thesis is graded. The content has priority, but the formal criteria must also be satisfied.
- Make sure that the thread of your argumentation is always recognizable for the reader. In each section, it must be clear to what extent it contributes to answering your research question. Focus on the essentials of your topic and avoid "what could also be interesting" remarks.
- Only write what you have understood completely. Any lack of knowledge and understanding will become evident at the time of presentation, at the latest.
- Be sure to work out the economic intuition. The basic idea of your work must be clear even without complex formulas. The reader must be put into the situation that he can follow the development of your thought without having to read the respective original articles on his own. Particular emphasis should be put on the description of the economic intuition. For this you can rely on a formal model. It is important to ensure that all calculation steps are comprehensible. Derivations that are more complex must be placed in an appendix. Please note that mathematics is not an end in itself, but instead has to serve as a tool to rigorously derive an economic argument.
- Graphs and tables can support your argumentation in a meaningful way. However, they are not self-explaining and hence make sure that you adequately explain all elements of the graphs and tables in the text or in a legend. Only information that is relevant to your research question should appear in tables and graphs. Photocopies or scans of graphs and

tables from books or articles are in most cases not sufficient. If possible, you should design the graphs yourself using Excel or another suitable software.

- If the possibility exists, theoretical models should be supported by empirical findings.
- Do not forget to point out the policy implications of your arguments.
- Save the results of your work regularly, in particular the text itself (and make backups!). Technical problems cannot be accepted as a reason for extending the preparation time.

2. Time Management

- When writing a seminar paper or a Bachelor/Master-Thesis, a very frequent mistake is false time management. Often, the time that is required for literature review and especially for the actual writing process is greatly underestimated. To write a scientific paper takes much more time than writing a school essay or a letter. Also note that the final editing requires a large expenditure of time.
- The actual amount of time that is needed for research, writing, etc. depends strongly on the talents of the student. Discuss your time schedule with your supervisor as soon as possible. When writing seminar papers, the outline should be discussed with the supervisor after one week, at the latest.

3. Literature Search

- First, search for basic literature (e.g., review articles). Your supervisor will assist you if you need help. Afterwards, proceed in a two-pronged manner: on the one hand use articles and books that are quoted in the basic literature. On the other hand, starting from basic literature new aspects in reference to your research topic might arise, which might offer helpful keywords which you can use to find more related work in library databases or internet search engines (e.g. EconLit, JSTOR, Google Scholar).
- You should definitely take advantage of the library catalogs (e.g. OPAC) and of databases (e.g. DBIS) which are offered by the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg.
- Internet search engines, such as Google, can be helpful in finding relevant general information. However, they are not suitable for finding specialized, academic texts.
- Make sure to provide primary sources when making references. References to secondary sources (which contain references to primary sources) should only be used in exceptional cases. Internet sources, e.g. Wikipedia, can be useful to obtain a brief overview on a new topic. However, they should not be used as a scientific references. Any information obtained from such sources has to be supported by primary sources.

4. Style

- Formulate your text with care. Use correct spelling and punctuation.

- Your work must be written in a clear and understandable style. The reader must be able to follow the development of your thoughts without the need to consult the relevant sources.
- Part of an objectively formulated text is that certain linguistic figures (especially euphemisms, hyperboles and neologisms) are avoided.
- Avoid colloquialisms and platitudes. Terms such as "possibly", "maybe" and "somehow" suggest uncertainty and should be used as seldom as possible. Likewise, pretentious phrases should be avoided.

5. Citation

- The use of intellectual property is to be indicated by a precise reference in the text. References should be as short as possible. The citation should only provide name, year of publication and if necessary the page of the source used. For example: Sinn (1987, p.56) or the Federal Ministry of Finance (1997).
- Direct quotations should be used rarely as these often do not fit into the style of the text. Where this is nevertheless considered to be necessary, the direct quote has to be put into quotation marks. Minor omissions in the quoted passage have to be marked by two points (one word) or three points (two or more words). Attention must be drawn on subsequently added or omitted accentuation in the footnote (e.g., emphasis added by the author).
- If somebody else's thoughts are used for one's paper, it has to be indicated even if they are not quoted word-by-word as long as their content is used (indirect quote). The short reference version in the text would be like this (see Paqué 2010) or (see Paqué 2010, p. 56).
- If several sources are cited, this might be better placed in a footnote. Should additional sources to a primary source be quoted, this can also happen in a footnote, which starts with "See also ...". If a longer paragraph or even an entire section is based on a literature source, this must be clarified at the beginning of the adoption of the idea in the text, e.g. "The following exposition is based on the analysis by Nash (1950)".
- If there are opposite views to the cited source, than this can be mentioned in a footnote. These publications might be cited by the following entrance phrase "Other opinions are expressed by ...".
- If quotes from secondary sources are used (this should be the exception!), the actual source is to be cited with the remark "Cited by ...".
- If an author has published more than one publication in one year and these are cited, for identification in the text and in the bibliography a small Latin letter is attached to the publication year, e.g. Knabe (2009a), Knabe (2009b).
- You should also take care of an accurate citation when presenting data. If several data from different sources are used for one single table or graph, the appropriate source for each data series must be indicated. If own calculations are made, it must be described from which data base these calculations were made.
- Legal sources are cited in the following manner (direct/indirect):
„Die Volljährigkeit tritt mit der Vollendung des 18. Lebensjahres ein.“ (§ 2 BGB)

„Der Allgemeine Rat der Welthandelsorganisation vertritt die Ministerkonferenz zwischen deren Sitzungen (see Article IV, Paragraph 2, WTO-Ü).“

6. Bibliography and legal sources

- a) Books and articles in books should be referenced as follows:

Train, Kenneth (2003): *Discrete Choice Models with Simulation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heckman, James (1983): „Heterogeneity and State Dependence“, in: S. Rosen (Ed.), *Studies in Labor Market*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (for NBER). p. 91-140.

- b) Journal articles are referenced as follows:

Knabe, Andreas and Steffen Rätzel (2010): „Income, happiness, and the disutility of labour“, *Economics Letters* 107, S. 77-79.

- c) Unpublished works, e.g. discussion papers, are referenced as follows:

Knabe, Andreas und Marcus Dittrich (2010): *Wage and Employment Effects of Non-Binding Minimum Wages*, CESifo Working Paper No. 3149, CESifo München.

- d) Internet sources are cited like print media, just that the respective URL appears at the end:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013): *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat01.htm>, accessed on 14/09/2019.

Although it might be difficult to detect an exact title or author on some websites, you should try to meet the specified style (author, year, title, URL, date of access) as close as possible.

- All authors cited in the text must be indicated in the bibliography in alphabetical order. Multiple articles or books of an author have to be ordered chronological, e.g.:
Knabe, Andreas (2008): „A Note on the Displacement Effects of Marginal Wage Subsidies“, *Academia Economic Papers* 36, S. 1-23.
Knabe, Andreas (2009a): „Marginal Wage Subsidies: A Rent-Extracting Instrument for Employment Creation“, *Journal of Economic Studies* 36, S. 393-410.
Knabe, Andreas (2009b): „Implementing Endogenous Inside Options in Nash Wage Bargaining Models“, *Mathematical Social Sciences* 57, S. 161-176.
- In case of more than three authors, only the first author is to be indicated, e.g.: Kahnemann, Daniel, et al. (2006): “Would You Be Happier If You Were Richer? A Focusing Illusion”, *Science* 312(5782), p. 1908-1910.
- When quoting from standards, a legal source directory is added to the bibliography. The place of finding the standard is indicated. Example: *BGB*, Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag: Munich, 56th ed., 2005.
WTO-Ü, in: R. Schwartzmann, *Völker- und Europarecht*, C.F. Müller: Heidelberg, 3rd ed., 2006, p. 303-314.

7. Formal Requirements

- The work should be written in clear and understandable English. Note that the layout and the orthography have an influence on the evaluation. Therefore, always pay attention to correct spelling and punctuation.
- Tables and figures are numbered consecutively. Each page has a page number.
- A list of figures or tables is only necessary when the sum of tables and graphs exceeds six.
- Graphs taken from other articles or books should be scanned only in exceptional cases. Whenever it is possible generate the graphs yourself by using Excel or a graphics program (e.g. CorelDraw).
- A list of abbreviations and symbols is usually helpful, especially if many abbreviations or symbols are used. They are dispensable for shorter essays. Variables are introduced only once in the text. Example:

"In the following model, the demand for product G is a function of investment in advertising W. The function is denoted by G (W)."
- Each table and graph has its own heading.
- Margins, font size and line spacing (only suggestions):
 Margins: left 3 cm, right 2,5 cm, top 2,5 cm, bottom 2,5 cm
 line spacing 1.5, font size 12 pt, font Times New Roman
 footnote: single spaced and font size 10 pt
- Page limits:
 - Seminar paper: about 15 pages
 - Bachelor thesis: about 30 pages
 - Master thesis: about 60 pages
- The page numbers include attachments, but not the outline or the title page. The page number starts counting on page 1 with the introduction. If you think that you need to exceed the page limits stated above, please consult your supervisor.
- Your work should be structured in the following manner:

Cover

Table of content (outline)

if necessary: List of Figures, List of Tables, List of Abbreviations, List of Symbols

Introduction

Main part (with further subdivision)

Conclusion

if necessary: Appendix

Bibliography; if necessary: legal source directory

Statutory declaration
- The wording of the statutory declaration is the following: "I hereby confirm that I have written the seminar paper / Bachelor / Master thesis independently. Other tools and resources than those indicated in the paper / thesis were not used. The work has not been submitted to any other examination authority before. (Place, date and signature) "
- The work should be printed single-sided. In other words: Each printed page has an empty reverse side!

8. Submission

- For seminars: When signing the list of participants, students bindingly register to take part in the seminar. A binding registration is necessary to receive a topic. If a student cancels her participation after having received a topic will receive a grade of 5.0, except for cogent reasons. This is in the interest of fellow students since every topic will only be given out once.
- The seminar paper should be submitted in printed as well as electronic form (preferably PDF). The printed version must be submitted to the chair in case of seminar papers and to the examination office in case of Master/Bachelor theses.
- The cited internet pages must be saved as PDF and submitted alongside the printed version. Other electronically available sources must also be submitted as electronic copies.
- In case of final theses, the written work must be submitted on time in two printed, hard-cover copies. Both printed copies must be accompanied by the aforementioned files on an electronic data carrier (CD, USB-stick or similar). For seminar papers it is sufficient to submit these files in a suitable form (e.g. as a compressed archive) by e-mail.

9. (Final) Presentation

- Duration (unless otherwise stated):
 - Seminar: 20 min (speaking time) + 20 min (discussion)
 - Bachelor: 20 min + 20 min
 - Master:
 - Outline presentation: 10 min + 10 min
 - Interim presentation: 20 min + 20 min
 - Final presentation: 30 min + 30 min
 - Projector, laptop and presenter are provided by the chair.
- The presentation should be held as free as possible.
- Present only what you have fully understood!
- Sources (short references) should be noted on the presentation slides, including when statistics are presented.
- The slides should be brought on a stick on the day of presentation, even if you intend to connect your own laptop. A digital version of the presentation slides must be submitted in advance by e-mail to both the supervisor and the secretariat.
- Always create a PDF-document in addition to the e.g. PowerPoint version, as compatibility problems can always occur.

The team of the Chair of Public Economics wishes you all the best for your work. Of course, your advisor will be there for you when you work on your paper. Do not hesitate to contact

him. It is definitely recommended that you discuss with your advisor what to do right after you received your topic.