

Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg
Faculty of Economics and Management
Chair of Public Economics

Guidelines for Writing Seminar and Final Theses at the Chair of Public Economics

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1 Reading process

1.1 Literature review

The literature review forms a central foundation for academic assessments such as presentations, seminar and thesis projects. Its aim is to obtain a systematic overview of the current state of research, identify relevant perspectives, and situate one's own topic within the academic field.

At the beginning, it is advisable to search for suitable introductory literature, such as review articles or fundamental monographs. In some cases, introductory literature is provided in the seminar. Further guidance is usually given to students by their supervisor. After reading this introductory literature, the further approach can follow two parallel paths: on the one hand, the references cited in the introductory literature can be used to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic. On the other hand, key subtopics and concepts can be derived from this literature and used as search terms for further research in library databases as well as literature databses.

This so-called **snowball method** describes an approach in which additional relevant sources are continuously identified based on a small number of key texts. This can be done by working backwards chronologically, identifying earlier relevant contributions through the reference lists of the sources already found. It is also possible to proceed in the opposite direction. Some literature databases (e.g. Scopus, Google Scholar) index later publications that cite earlier works. In this way, the body of literature gradually expands and becomes increasingly specific to the topic.

1.2 Skimming – Reading academic texts

When reading academic literature, it is not necessary to read every text from beginning to end in full. Instead, one selective approach has proven effective, in which the abstract, introduction, and conclusion are read first in order to assess the relevance and argumentative structure of a text (skimming). Only if a work is clearly relevant is it then subjected to an in-depth, analytical reading.

General search engines such as Google or Bing can help to find up-to-date information; however, they are of limited suitability for identifying academic literature.

1.3 Possible Sources for Scientific Literature Search

- EconLit
- Scopus
- Google Scholar
- EconBiz (ZBW)
- DBIS

Access to the databases of the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg is available via the university network or externally through VPN.

Make sure to support your arguments with references to primary sources. References to secondary sources (which in turn cite the original primary sources) are only permitted in exceptional cases. Internet sources such as Wikipedia may be used to obtain an initial overview of a topic; however, they are not suitable as academic sources. Any information obtained from such sources must be substantiated with primary literature.

2 Writing

2.1 Planning the Work Process

A particularly common mistake when writing academic papers is inadequate time management. In many cases, the time required for literature research, and especially for the actual writing process, is significantly underestimated. An academic paper takes considerably longer to write than a school essay or a letter. The final editing stage also requires a substantial amount of time.

The specific allocation of time should be planned individually, depending on one's strengths in areas such as research and writing. For seminar papers, it is expected that the outline will be discussed with the supervisor no later than one week after starting the project.

The work process should be planned after the research question has been defined.

2.2 General Guidelines

Economic intuition

Make sure to clearly develop the economic intuition. The core idea of your paper must be understandable even without complex formulas. The paper should be written in a way that allows the reader to follow the line of reasoning without having to read the original articles themselves. Particular emphasis is placed on the presentation of economic intuition. For theoretical approaches, formal models may be used. In doing so, it must be ensured that all calculation steps are transparent and comprehensible. More extensive derivations should be placed in an appendix. It should be noted that mathematics is not an end in itself, but serves as a tool to clarify economic reasoning. Whenever possible, theoretical models should be supported by empirical evidence. Do not forget to highlight the economic policy implications of your arguments.

Use of AI tools

Please follow the "Guide for the Use of 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI) in an Examination Context", available on the website of the Faculty of Economics and Management, Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg examination office, when using AI tools. The use of AI for literature research and proofreading is permitted without mandatory disclosure. However, verbatim use must be clearly indicated in seminar and thesis papers. In

addition, a declaration of independent work is required in which the use of AI tools is explicitly stated.

2.3 Style

Formulate your text carefully at all times. Pay attention to correct spelling and punctuation.

A formally written academic paper should be restrained in its use of stylistic devices that are not appropriate for a clear and objective scientific style (in particular euphemisms, hyperbole, and metaphors).

Avoid colloquial expressions and clichés. Terms such as “possibly,” “maybe,” and “somehow” suggest uncertainty and should therefore be used as sparingly as possible. Likewise, overly presumptuous formulations are also inappropriate.

2.4 Formal Requirements for the Paper

2.4.1 Length

As a rule, the expected length of written assignments is announced in the respective seminar. If no other specifications are provided, please follow the guidelines below:

- Seminar papers: approx. 12 pages
- Bachelor’s theses: approx. 30 pages
- Master’s theses: approx. 60 pages

The page counts exclude the title page, bibliography, and, if applicable, the table of contents. Page numbering starts at page 1 with the introduction. Appendices containing additional information that is not essential for understanding the main body of the paper are also not included in the page count.

If the topic you are working on appears to require exceeding these page limits, please consult your supervisor in advance

2.4.2 Recommended formatting guidelines

In principle, you are free to design your paper. However, ensure that it is clearly legible and visually well-structured. Avoid decorative design elements; academic texts are typically kept simple.

If you are unsure, please follow the guidelines below:

- 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 type: Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman
- Footnotes: single-spaced, 10 pt font size

You may alternatively write their paper in LaTeX with Overleaf, which eases the process of formatting. Otto von Guericke University of Magdeburg is providing Overleaf premium features for all students, faculty and staff. To create an account, use the institutional login.

2.4.3 Structure of a term paper

Every academic paper is generally structured into an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. The introduction clarifies the central and subsidiary research questions (objectives of the study) and provides an overview of the content and main results of the paper. It also identifies the key literature. The main body develops the argumentation of the paper. The conclusion summarises the results and draws final conclusions.

Ensure throughout your paper that the “red thread” of your argument is always clearly recognisable to the reader, meaning that each section must make clear how it contributes to answering your central research questions. Focus on what is essential to your topic and avoid digressions into what might also be of interest.

The main structural components are as follows:

- Title page
- Table of Contents
- List of figures/tables (if applicable)
- List of abbreviations/symbols (if applicable)
- Introduction
- Main body (divided into several chapters)
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendix (if applicable)
- Selbstständigkeitserklärung

2.4.4 Title page

There are no strict requirements regarding the layout of the title page. However, the following information must be included in all cases: university, faculty, chair, course title, name of the instructor, title of the paper, author, degree program, semester of study, student ID number, email address, and word count of the paper.

If you would like a template for the title page, we will be happy to provide one.

2.4.5 List of figures/tables/abbreviations/symbols

Each table and figure must have its own title and be numbered consecutively. Lists of tables and figures are only required if the total number of tables and figures exceeds ten. Figures taken from other works should only be scanned in exceptional cases. If possible, it is recommended to recreate figures using Excel or suitable graphics software.

A list of abbreviations and a list of symbols are useful for longer papers (e.g. theses) when a large number of abbreviations or symbols are used. In any case, abbreviations and variables must be introduced in the text when they are used for the first time.

Example: “In the following model, the quantity of goods demanded G is a function of advertising expenditure W . The function is denoted as $G(W)$.“

2.5 Submission

For seminars, registration via signature on the participant list or selection of a topic in the e-learning system constitutes a binding registration. Binding participation is a prerequisite for the allocation of a topic. Withdrawal after taking on a topic will, except in cases of valid reasons, be graded 5.0. This rule is exclusively in the interest of fellow students, as each topic is assigned only once.

2.5.1 Form of submission

The seminar paper must be submitted in electronic form (preferably as a PDF) to the chair (usually via the e-learning platform, otherwise by email to the supervisor).

Bachelor's and master's theses must be submitted in accordance with the regulations of the examination office.

2.5.2 Late submission

Late submissions without an accepted excuse may result in grade deductions and, in the worst case, in failing the examination. Please refer to the instructions provided by your instructors. Regulations regarding the repetition of the examination in the case of non-submission or failure are governed by your applicable examination regulations.

Please save your files regularly, especially the text of your paper, and create backup copies. Plan sufficient time buffer for submission. Technical problems will not be accepted as a reason for extending the processing period. In the case of electronic submission via the e-learning platform, please carefully check that your paper has been uploaded correctly.

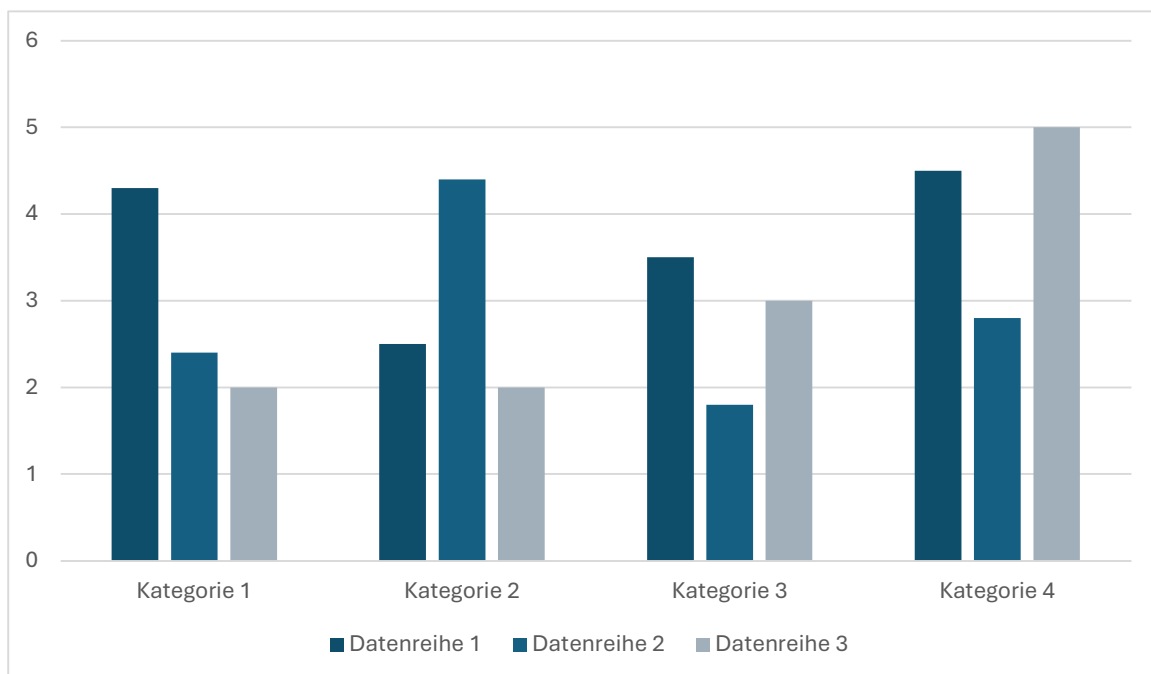
3 Figures and Tables

Figures and tables can usefully support your argumentation. However, they are not self-explanatory. Make sure that all elements of figures and tables are sufficiently explained in the main text or in a caption. Figures should only include information that is relevant to your work. Tables should present only the relevant numerical data.

Figures and tables copied directly from books and articles generally do not meet the standards expected, particularly in final theses. If the underlying data are available, it is recommended to create figures independently using Excel or suitable graphing software.

Graphs

Figure 1 [Title of the diagram]



Source: [Reference (Surname, year)]

(If applicable) Notes: supplementary information on the figure (e.g., significance levels)

Tables

Table 1 [Title of the table]

Lorem	ipsum	dolor sit	amet
Aenean	12	910	17,18
commodo	56	1314	20,21

ligula	34	1112	19,20
eget dolor	78	1516	22,23
Aenean	56	1314	20,21

Source: [Reference (Surname, year)]

(If applicable) Notes: supplementary information on the table (e.g. explanation of symbols, methodological notes)

Formulas

The following equation (1) is the formal definition of the Lorenz curve L for the income distribution $Y = (y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n)$ in the case of n individuals:

$$L_Y\left(\frac{j}{n}\right) = \frac{1}{n\mu} \sum_{i=1}^j y_i \quad \text{for } j = 0, \dots, n, \quad (1)$$

where $\mu = \sum_{i=1}^n y_i$ denotes the average income. The Lorenz curve at the point $\frac{j}{n}$ indicates the share of total income held by the j poorest individuals.

Notes:

Each symbol is introduced once and subsequently used without further explanation. Ensure that commonly used symbols are employed in formulas wherever possible and that they are used consistently throughout the entire paper (including formatting).

For inserting formulas and symbols, please use the equation editor. In Microsoft Word, select the “Insert” menu and then choose the “Equation” or “Symbol” option.

4 Notes on Citation

Citations are primarily based on **APA** or **Harvard** style. The citation format and the references in the bibliography differ depending on the type of document (e.g. journal article, book, report, etc.). The chosen citation style must remain consistent, as must the descriptions of tables and figures. Citations include **the author's surname, year of publication**, and, if possible, **the page number**. For works with more than two authors, **“et al.”** is added after the first name.

Example of in-text citation in parentheses: (Surname, year, S. XX)

Example of narrative citation: Surname et al. (year, S. XX)

4.1 Abbreviations for citation

Abbreviations in citations serve to increase efficiency and consistency in academic writing by avoiding repetition and enabling clear and precise referencing.

Common abbreviations in academic writing:

- *et al.* – *et alia* (and others; for multiple authors)
- *e.g.* – *exempli gratia* (for example)
- *i.e.* – *id est* (that is / in other words)
- *etc.* – *et cetera* (and so on)
- *cf.* – *confer* (compare; often for indirect reference)
- *p.* / *pp.* – page / pages
- *n.d.* – no date (when publication year is missing)

4.2 Footnotes

Wenn Sie die APA oder Harvard-Zitierweise nutzen, zitieren Sie im Haupttext, nicht in Fußnoten. Fußnoten sind kurze Anmerkungen am Ende der Seite, die zusätzliche Informationen zu einem bestimmten Punkt im Text liefern können. Ihre Hauptfunktion besteht darin, Lesern weiterführende Erklärungen, zusätzliche Quellen oder spezifische Details zu bieten, ohne den Fluss des Haupttextes zu unterbrechen.

If you use APA or Harvard citation style, citations should be included in the main text, not in footnotes. Footnotes are brief notes at the bottom of the page that can provide

additional information on a specific point in the text. Their main purpose is to offer further explanations, supplementary sources, or specific details without interrupting the flow of the main text.

- In American citation style, footnotes are generally used sparingly, often to extend an argument or provide examples, for instance: “This issue was discussed in more detail by Nash (1950).”
- If a citation is included within a footnote, it follows the standard citation rules (short citation format as used in the main text).

5 References

All works cited in the text must be listed in the references section in alphabetical order, with the author's first-name initial(s) placed after the surname. Multiple works by the same author should be ordered chronologically from the oldest to the most recent publication. If a work has been written by multiple authors, all authors must be listed in the same order as in the original publication.

Even if some internet sources make it difficult to identify an author or exact title, you should try to follow the prescribed format as closely as possible: author, year, title, URL, date of access. If necessary, the publishing institution may be used instead of an author, or "no author" may be indicated.

5.1 Citation formats for different types of sources

There are various ways to format individual entries in the references list. You are free to use one of the commonly accepted styles. It is essential, however, that all relevant information required to locate the cited work is included and that the citation style is applied consistently throughout.

We recommend the following formats:

Books

Surname, initial(s) (year). *Title of the book*. Publisher.

- Akerlof, G. A., und R. E. Kranton (2010). *Identity Economics: How Our Identities Shape Our Work, Wages, and Well-Being*. Princeton University Press.

Book chapters

Surname, initial(s) (year). Title of the chapter, editors, *Title of the book* (page range), publisher.

- Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective happiness, in D. Kahneman, E. Diener und N. Schwarz (Hrsg.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*. Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 3-25.

Journal articles

Surname, initial(s) (year). Title of the article. *Title of the journal*, volume (issue), page range.

- Nash, J. F. (1950). The bargaining problem. *Econometrica*, 18(2), pp. 155–162.

Unpublished works (e.g. discussion papers)

Surname, initial(s) (year). Title of the paper. Name of the series and page number.
Institution or organisation.

- Neumark, D., und Wascher, W. L. (2007). Minimum wages and employment. IZA Discussion Paper No. 2570. IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

Internet source from an institutional report

Name of organisation (year). *Title of the report*. URL

- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). *Characteristics of minimum wage workers 2017*. <https://www.bls.gov/opubage/2017/home.html>

5.2 Reference Management Software

Reference management software support the entire research and writing process. It enables users to systematically collect, organise, and structure literature by topic or keywords. It also facilitates the management of citations and the automatic generation of in-text citations and reference lists in different citation styles.

Software such as **Citavi** additionally offers functions for text extraction and knowledge organisation, allowing key content to be directly linked to sources, which significantly improves structured writing and the development of arguments.

All students at Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg automatically receive a Citavi license, provided that the university email address is linked to the Citavi account when the program is first launched. Afterwards, new projects can be created either locally or in the cloud.

6 Presenting

In (bachelor) seminars, in addition to submitting the written paper, various other assessment components are required. These include an oral presentation, active participation in discussions, and, if applicable, an essay.

6.1 Oral presentation

The aim of the presentation is to clearly present and explain key relationships and results, as well as to stimulate discussion with the other participants.

The duration (unless otherwise agreed) varies depending on the type of seminar and is divided into presentation time and discussion time:

- Seminar: 20-25 min presentation + 20 min discussion
- Bachelor's seminar: 30-35 min presentation + 30 min discussion

For master's seminars, the following applies:

- Outline presentation: 10 min + 10 min
- Intermediate presentation: 20 min + 20 min
- Final presentation: 30 min + 30 min

6.2 Guidelines on presentation and technical equipment

The presentation should be delivered as freely as possible. Practising the content aloud several times in advance helps with fluent speaking, adherence to time limits, and the clear communication of the structure of the argument.

Media such as Microsoft PowerPoint should support and structure the oral presentation in terms of content. Citations (short references) must always be included on slides, including when presenting statistical data.

A projector, laptop, and presenter are provided by the chair. However, you may also use your own laptop. As a precaution, presentation slides should always be brought on a USB stick, even if you plan to use your own device.

In addition to the presentation file (e.g. PowerPoint), a PDF version must always be created and provided, as compatibility issues may occur.

A digital version of the slides must be submitted after the presentation via the e-learning platform or by email to the supervisor.

The members of the chair wish you every success with your work!

We are happy to support you during the writing process. It is advisable to discuss the further procedure and the structure of your paper with your supervisor immediately after the topic has been assigned.