

Guidelines for writing seminar papers and degree theses

(Version: February 7, 2022)

*Note for degree theses: When the following guidelines conflict with any announcements by the Examinations Office, the latter ones offset the former ones. Whenever in doubt, ask us. **Severe deviations from these guidelines can lower your grade!***

1 Structure and organization

Any empirical paper is recommended to roughly follow the format outlined below.

Introduction: Lay out your motivation. The introduction is not the place to discuss theory, give a literature review or start a discussion. The introduction should be short and precise and make clear to the reader what you are going to do and what your findings are. Try not to use literal citations in the introduction if not absolutely necessary.

Literature review: Discuss previous research that is directly relevant to your paper (not every single paper written on the topic). Explain your contribution in more detail.

Theoretical background: Discuss the basic behavioral, informational and institutional assumptions you are making and how those assumptions may be driving the results. Be explicit about how the empirical model differs from the theoretical model, e.g., if you are unable to estimate certain parameters or if you need to assume a particular functional form.

Data description: Describe the name and source of the data you are using and the period it covers. Discuss limitations of the data such as missing variables, missing observations, survey response, small number of observations, etc. Present (relevant) descriptive statistics of the data. Think about the use of graphs.

Econometric model: You should write out the basic econometric specification at first and explain each of the variables and the parameters of interest proceedingly. Discuss whether you are using basic LS, IV, etc. and why this is appropriate. When using methods that have not been part of the lecture, you should describe and explain the methods. Do not presuppose the reader to be familiar with the techniques and methods you apply.

Results: Present results in a way that develops your argument step-by-step. Perform robustness checks. Interpret the magnitude of your parameter estimates in an economically meaningful way. Graphs are worth a thousand words. Compare your results to what others have found.

Conclusion: Summarize your findings and point out limitations of the results and possible extensions. This is a good place to speculate in a more casual manner about the implications of your results. The conclusion should not contain any new results.

2 Formatting your research paper

You can write in German or English. But keep the language constant and do not switch between languages. Use the one, you feel more comfortable with.

Title Page: Typically, a title page includes: (i) title, subtitle, (ii) name, contact dates (email-address!) and student ID number (iii) assignment type (e.g. Master's Thesis) (iv) institutional affiliation (university, faculty, department, subject, etc.) (v) semester and date of submission.

Lists: If you use abbreviations, tables and graphs, you should include the respective lists at the beginning of your paper. A bibliography as well as the table of contents are necessary parts of your paper and have to be included.

Margins and text formatting: We recommend to use the following margins and parameters:

Font and text size: „Times New Roman“ (size 12) „Arial“ (size 11) or comparable; use only one font for the whole text and do not switch fonts, use bold and italics sparse and purposefully. In tables, figures, footnotes and reference lists, you can use a smaller text size and single line spacing

Line spacing: 1.5; Typographic alignment: justified

Margins: left=4cm, right=3cm, top=2.5cm, bottom=2.5cm (*same as document at hand*)

Tables and Illustrations: Number tables, graphs, formulas etc. and refer to those numbers in the text and the respective lists. Figure texts or table texts should offer enough information to make the table or figure understandable on its own. Utilize the appropriate built-in functions in the software to export tables and graphs (ideally as vector graphics). Remember to mark the source of your figure or table.

Headings: The number of heading levels should correspond to the length of your paper. For a longer paper (for example a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation) three heading levels is usually sufficient (ex: 1.1.1), while four is a maximum (ex: 1.1.1.1). Be sure to use subdivisions correctly, i.e. if there is a heading 1.1.1 then you need to have another one 1.1.2.

Citations: Use the APA quotation style.

Page numbering: As a rule, page numbers are generally placed at the bottom of the page.

Page count/ number of pages: Time is scarce. You want your paper to be as short as possible and as long as necessary. To accomplish this, an appropriate research topic and question is necessary. Keep the following guidelines on page count in mind when searching for a subject for your paper:

Bachelor seminar paper: 10 to 15 pure text pages, i.e. excluding tables, graphs, appendices and lists

Master seminar paper: 15 to 25 pure text pages, i.e. excluding tables, graphs, appendices and lists

Bachelor thesis: generally 25–35 but maximal 50 pure text pages, i.e. excluding tables, graphs, appendices and lists

Master thesis: generally 50–70 but maximal 100 pure text pages, i.e. excluding tables, graphs, appendices and lists

3 Computer programs & compulsory submission of data and code

If you are using another software than Stata or R, you should contact us and ask for our approval.

When submitting digitally, make sure to include the program code and your dataset in the respective email. Include the original data and all program files you used for data preparation and empirical analysis; include log files as well. Make sure to write your code in such a manner that third parties can understand them in reasonable time, i.e. use comments, variable labels etc.

On submission of a printed version you have to include a CD that includes the aforementioned things. **Do not use USB Sticks or any other storage medium. You are obliged to use a CD.** Please insert the disc into a sleeve and paste the sleeve into the printed version of your seminar paper or thesis. In case of a thesis,

including this disc is especially important and failure to do so may impact on your grade as we rely on your code on data in understanding and retracing your work.

4 Submission

Submit your work before the deadline. You have to submit electronically via email. Apart from theses, a printed version is not necessary but welcome. We reserve the right to check all submitted papers for plagiarism.

5 Economical Writing by Deirdre McCloskey

1. **Write simple, direct sentences whenever possible.** Absolutely no one is impressed by a sentence they cannot understand. The quality of your economic logic is what counts, not big words or complicated sentences.
2. **Rewrite and edit your first draft—and your second one, too.** Easy writing makes difficult reading. Revise your words if you want others to read them.
3. **If its possible to cut out a word (or sentence), cut it out.** Cut material no matter how brilliant you consider it, if it does not advance the topic of your paper.
4. **Make sure that every sentence has the three required parts: subject, verb, and object.** When possible, place the main idea (emphasis) of each sentence at its end.
5. **Avoid excessive introduction and summary, over-elaboration, or re-statement of well-known ideas.** Once you have stated in direct terms what you intend to do in your paper, do it. Many of the things that people write do not move the discussion along to its ultimate objective, but merely take up space.
6. **Use active verbs rather than passive ones to add life to your writing.** Delete the word “is” whenever possible and rewrite the sentence using an active verb.
7. **Be concrete—give examples rather than discussing things in vague terms.** Discuss the supply and demand for gasoline, rather than the supply and demand for good X.
8. **Do not use a lot of different words to express the same idea just for the sake of variety.** It is far better to repeat a word than to use synonyms and confuse your reader. Repetition of important terms adds cohesion to your writing.

9. **Minimize use of doublets.** Doublets are two words that mean essentially the same thing, used alongside each other in a sentence. Using the same *ideas or phrases* when a *single of solitary* one would do is a *certain and sure-fire* way of writing an *unreadable and confusing* report. Pick the best word and use it; do not say everything twice.
10. **Avoid excessive use of This, That, These and Those.** In most cases “the” will do nicely. Instead of saying “this,” try repeating the word it represents instead.