



# Guidelines for Seminar Papers and Bachelor, Master, and PhD Theses

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## 1. Introduction

Academic writing is a key element of university education. It signals an ability to overcome complex problems and tasks, by means of a conceptual, analytical approach. These guidelines provide mandatory, formal requirements, as well as content-related advice. You probably will find it easier to apply the standardized, formal guidelines, so this guide starts by briefly focusing on these mandatory aspects, before providing detailed guidelines related to enhancing and improving your content. For issues not covered in this guide, please ask your supervisor.

We also appreciate any feedback you may have concerning this document, and we wish you great success in your academic writing.

## 2. Formal Guidelines

### 2.1. Application and topics

- Seminar papers: The allocation of topics takes place within the course.
- Bachelor and Master theses
  - In general, Bachelor theses are conceptual and Master theses are empirical. Theses can be written in German or English.
  - We write out topics for each semester for which you can apply. In this way, we ensure that 1) you work only on topics on which we can support you with competent advice and 2) your topic is realistically feasible. In exceptional cases, e.g. if you would like to write a master's thesis in cooperation with a firm, the topic fits our research focus and is feasible, you can also send us an additional proposal, but without guarantee that we can supervise it. When proposing an own topic idea, which must fit to our research focus, please be sure to consider all typical questions of an introduction (see 3.2.1) and the latest state of scientific research (literature). Only if you can present this convincingly, it is possible to consider your own topic. However, a custom topic remains an exception, but don't worry, we have enough feasible topics for you.
  - The application deadlines are:
    - **December 31st for the summer semester**
    - **June 30st for the winter semester**
    - Your application should include the following contents: Topic requests with your individual prioritization (ranking), overview of your previous academic performance, and a short curriculum vitae. Please bundle this into a single PDF file labeled with your last name only and submit it to: [marketing@wifa.uni-leipzig.de](mailto:marketing@wifa.uni-leipzig.de)
  - After successful application, consultation with your supervisor, and confirmation of supervision, you must register the topic with the Admissions Office by the **end of**



**February for the summer semester** and by the **end of August for the winter semester** at the latest so that you can complete your studies this semester.

## 2.2. How to Submit

- Seminar papers
  - Please submit a PDF and a DOCX version of your seminar paper via Moodle.
  - If you did an empirical study, please submit the data via e-mail (up to 20 MB) or any cloud drive (e.g., Nextcloud-Speicherwolke, HiDrive, Dropbox, or WeTransfer) by submitting an URL to your supervisor.
  - Also submit a printed version of the signed declaration (only this page as letter by mail) to our department (Mailing address: Grimmaische Str. 12, 04109 Leipzig). Your seminar paper should only be submitted digitally.
- Bachelor and Master theses
  - For admission and submission, first check the faculty-wide regulations published by the examination office: <https://www.wifa.uni-leipzig.de/studium/studienbuero.html> Please inform your supervisor if you notice any discrepancies in the formalities compared to this document.
  - As soon as you have officially submitted your thesis two printed versions and a PDF file on a CD] to the examination office (Studienbüro), please send 1) a PDF file of your thesis and 2) an anonymized version (for a plagiarism check) in a DOCX file via e-mail to your supervisor (2 files in total).
  - Digital add-ons (please use a cloud drive)
    - Sources that are not available in PDF files through the university network must be included as a PDF file. For sources with many pages (e.g., books), only the relevant pages need to be included.
    - All data, such as SPSS files, syntaxes, and transcripts of interviews, also must be included. Empirical data must be documented in a transparent way (e.g., clear labels for variables, syntax for data transformations).
- Processing time
  - Seminar papers: Varies by individual
  - Bachelor theses: 23 weeks
  - Master theses: 23 weeks
  - PhD theses: Varies by individual

## 2.3. Page Layout

- Length
  - Number of pages
    - Seminar papers: 10 pages
    - Bachelor theses: 30 pages
    - Master theses: 60 pages
    - PhD theses: Varies by individual
  - We make **no exceptions** for additional pages and only consider these numbers of pages in the review process for reasons of fairness (additional pages will be ignored)!
  - Only the main text, from the first word in the introduction to the last word of the conclusion, with imbedded figures and tables, is included in the page count. Other



elements (e.g., cover page, table of contents, index of tables, index of figures, list of abbreviations, abstract, reference list, appendices) are not included in this count.

- All important material should appear in the main text. Appendices mainly should be limited to background information, such as screenshots of a survey (in empirical Master theses) or extended versions of tables, which is not essential to communicating the main ideas of the text. However, appendices may not be treated like “scrap heaps” for anything that takes up a lot of space in the paper/thesis. It is meant solely to share supplementary or more detailed information. Each appendix must pertain to at least one section of the paper/thesis and thus must be referenced explicitly at least once in the text.
- Fonts and line spacing
  - Font: Times New Roman
  - Font size: 12 point for main text
  - Line spacing: 1.5 lines in the main text
  - Margin: left, right, top all 2.5 cm, bottom 2.0 cm, A4 (default setting)
  - Character spacing: normal
  - Text alignment: justification
- All other page layout settings are available in the template document. We strongly recommend using this template, which already is properly formatted and thus will save you valuable time. If you do not want to use this template, you must apply all the formatting settings from it. A page break before a new chapter is not necessary.

## 2.4. Figures and Tables

Well-constructed figures and tables provide the best structural guidance for both writers and readers. Once an idea or relationship has been illustrated in a figure or table, the text describing it can follow naturally. You may find that some figures and tables are of use mainly to you, as you prepare the text, such that they do not need to be part of the final manuscript. However, the submitted version should include appropriate figures and tables to facilitate comprehension. Their sources should be listed at the bottom, in a distinct note. For figures and tables that you have created, use the phrase “Source: Own illustration.” If you have modified figures/tables from another source, indicate that status too, such as “Source: Own illustration, adapted from Mustermann (2018).”

## 2.5. Citations

The use of the intellectual property of others, as a literal quotation or a paraphrased idea, must be identified explicitly and consistently. Every citation must be verifiable. Correct citations are a sign of scientific accuracy and academic honesty. If you are unsure, it is always better to cite too much than too little. Sources should be indicated in two places: as a short version in the main text (“citation”) and in their full length in the reference list after the main text (“reference”) (see Section 2.5.). When inserting a citation, the surname(s) of the author(s) and year of publication should be included in brackets, which constitutes an in-text referencing system (Mustermann 2018). Page numbers are not required for indirect citations. In general, the source related to a particular sentence should be identified at the end, in brackets before the full stop, because this location helps increase readability. If an entire paragraph derives from a single source, this source can be identified at the end of the paragraph.

Quotations are literal and direct; they should be used sparingly. They are justified only if the original presentation of some idea or issue is particularly compelling or precise. Overuse of quotations can give



readers the impression that you have merely strung together other authors' ideas, without further analysis. Only specific passages worthy of emphasis should be quoted, not common knowledge. Furthermore, lengthy quotations are appropriate only for demonstrating the precise phrasing. All quotations must be set within quotation marks and reproduced with absolute accuracy, even if the original spelling or punctuation is incorrect or outdated. For direct quotations, provide the page number on which they appeared in the source. If you exclude some words from the quote, you must identify the change with three full stops, as [...]. The same rule applies if a quotation begins or ends in the middle of a sentence. Quotations within quotations are to be marked with single quotation marks (e.g., "The author called the text 'insightful'").

Citing secondary sources that you have not accessed is not acceptable. You may cite them only if you have actually read them yourself. Thoughts taken from any kind of work, whether literally or in paraphrased form, must be identified as such. Correct citation is a sign of scientific honesty; incorrect citation creates the risk of plagiarism. Every quotation must be checked to ensure it conveys the original, intended meaning, even when taken out of context.

Citations should include the surnames of all authors if there are one to three authors. If there are four or more authors, citations should use the first author's surname and then "et al." If you cite more than one publication, the publications should be sorted alphabetically. Example: (Mustermann et al. 2018; Smith, Bradford, and Jones 2018). To cite more than one publication by the same author or author team in the same year, add a, b, c, d... after the year. Example: (Mustermann 2018a; Mustermann 2018b).

## 2.6. Reference Lists

In the reference list, all sources mentioned in the paper/thesis (and only those) must be listed. Texts that you may have read but not used directly should not be included. The Reference Style Guide of the American Marketing Association (AMA) should be applied consistently. In the reference list, list publications by the same author in chronological order. Be sure to write out all authors' names for every entry. Do not use a line to indicate a repeated author or author team (e.g., \_\_\_\_\_), because doing so hinders the automatic sorting function.

To ease your reference management, we recommend using a system such as Mendeley (<https://www.mendeley.com/>), which includes the official *Journal of Marketing* (AMA) reference style (alternatives are for example Citavi and EndNote). A reference management system can save you valuable time, because it automatically formats the reference list correctly. However, for those who prefer to create the lists by hand, here are some basic rules of the AMA reference style. Please see the template document and articles published in *Journal of Marketing* for examples.

- **Journal articles**
  - Authors' names
    - 1 author: Surname 1, Forename 1
    - 2 authors: Surname 1, Forename 1 and Forename 2 Surname 2
    - 3 authors: Surname 1, Forename 1, Forename 2 Surname 2, and Forename 3 Surname 3
    - 4 authors: Surname 1, Forename 1, Forename 2 Surname 2, Forename 3 Surname 3, and Forename 4 Surname 4 (5 and more authors follow the same logic)



- After the authors' names, insert the following: (year), "Article Title," *Journal Title*, Volume (Issue), Page range.
- Example: Mustermann, Max (2018), "Digital Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 81 (4), 456–78.
- **Books**
  - Authored books
    - After the authors' names, insert the following: (year), *Book Title*. Location of the publisher: Name of the publisher.
    - Example: Mustermann, Max (2018), *Marketing of Services*. New York: Springer.
  - Collections of essays
    - After the authors' names, insert the following: (year), "Title of the Essay," in *Book Title*, Names of editors, eds. Location of the publisher: Name of the publisher, page range.
    - Example: Sherry, John L., Kristen Lucas, Bradley S. Greenberg, and Ken Lachlan (2006), "Video Game Uses and Gratifications as Predictors of Use and Game Preference," in *Playing Video Games*, Peter Vorderer and Jennings Bryant, eds. New York: Taylor & Francis, 213-24.
- **Websites**
  - After the authors' names (which may be an organization), insert the following: (year), "Article Title," Name of the organization/publication if known, (date if available) [URL].
    - Example with author name and date: Kelly, Tadhg (2013), "What Games Are: The Reviewers Are Wrong About OUYA," *TechCrunch*, (April 6), [<http://techcrunch.com/2013/04/06/what-games-are-the-reviewers-are-wrong-about-ouya/>].
    - Example without author name and date: IMDb (2015), "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance–Quotes," [<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056217/quotes>].
- **Unpublished work**
  - Unpublished sources must be identified as such in the reference section. Terms such as "report" or "working paper" should not be capitalized. Information on the publisher (e.g., company, organization, university) also should be included.
  - Example: Coughlin, Maureen (1980), "Fear of Success: Reaction to Advertising Stimuli and Intention to Purchase," *doctoral dissertation*, Department of Marketing, City University of New York.

#### Page number rules for the reference list

- Less than 100 → use all digits. Examples: 1–99, 27–34, 90–91
- Numbers that begin with a multiple of 100–109 (or 200–209, 300–309, etc.) → use all digits. Examples: 100–167, 104–164, 200–204, 409–416
- Second number is 110 through 199 (in multiples of 100) → use **only two digits or more** if necessary. Examples 123–67, 313–19, 456–78, but 813–909

## 3. Content Guidelines

### 3.1. General Advice

- Your supervisor will provide you with specific **advice and constructive feedback**. Meetings with your supervisor (physically or digitally with (video-)telephony) are intended to provide

support; he or she cannot judge your work until it is finished or approve any contributions during the supervision period. For example, the evaluation of the structure of your manuscript depends on whether it makes sense in the final, submitted version. It is your responsibility to make the final decision about how to craft your paper/thesis.

- Regularly back up your data and drafts, such as by using cloud storage services.
- **Write down your ideas** as they occur to you, but in a separate file. Otherwise, you might waste time trying to rediscover old ideas, and some ideas may be lost forever.
- All seminar papers and theses will be examined thoroughly for **plagiarism**. You must formulate everything in your own words.
- **Timing**
  - Writing an academic paper is a challenging task that requires more than just expert knowledge. Rather, the long-term character and vast complexity of this task demand that students take a procedural approach (see Section 3.2.).
  - Set up a timetable, with the help of your supervisor. Keep in mind that the last days before the submission deadline are usually very stressful. To reduce this stress, you will want to achieve good **time management**. It is particularly important to create a schedule that takes the final deadline into account, at an early writing stage. Do not postpone starting the actual writing process too long. Often, ambiguities do not emerge until you start recording your thoughts on paper. However, you also should not start writing just for the sake of writing, without any clear idea of where you are headed. The time needed to take care of technical issues, such as formatting, creating figures and tables, editing, and copying also should not be underestimated.

### 3.2. The Process of Crafting a Paper/Thesis

The seven steps illustrated in Figure 1 are intended to provide a helpful guideline for academic writing tasks. It is also possible to first have a rough idea of what you want to write and start with the data analysis.

**Figure 1: Illustration of the Process**



#### 3.2.1. Introduce

##### *Specify your topic*

A common mistake is to include irrelevant aspects in a paper/thesis. Clearly specifying your topic helps establish a structure for the content and separate relevant from irrelevant details, which in turn can guide subsequent searches for information. If your topic is formulated in a general manner, a more detailed specification can follow, as long as it makes sense and is justified. Your supervisor can help you with this step. Consider that papers/theses that try to cover an entire subject area, in all its nuances, often lack the depth necessary for the work to be legitimately academic. A meaningful and well-reasoned specification of the topic is an indication of the author's expertise.

##### *Convince the reader of the importance of your topic*

The introduction to any written work should familiarize the reader with the research topic, reveal its relevance and challenges, and clearly formulate the research objectives. If you formulate your



introduction first, before writing anything else, it helps ensure that the reader will understand your paper/thesis but also enables you to stay focused, from the very beginning, on your specified topic.

The introduction should begin with a pointedly stated **problem definition**. To define the problem, explain what you plan to contribute to solve it and present the study **objectives** as precisely and operationally as possible. Your aim should be contained within a single sentence. Defining the main objective is essential, because the coherence and relevance of each subsequent element of the paper/thesis are judged accordingly, and these assessments are the key criteria for judging any academic work. Authors who do not know what they want to achieve should not be surprised if they don't achieve anything (or, more accurately, if they achieve something undesired, like a bad grade).

By explaining why a problem is **not trivial** or obvious, you also can highlight why your topic is interesting. To demonstrate the **relevance** and importance of your topic, you might use descriptive market data, newspaper clippings, and managerial challenges. The introductions of articles published in *Journal of Marketing* offer excellent examples.

Definitions of terms and facts that are fundamental to understanding the text usually belong at the beginning of the paper/thesis, not the end. Thus, it is important to define, briefly and precisely, **the ultimate dependent variable and any other important variables in the introduction**. You must use this definition and term/label consistently throughout the rest of the text (i.e., avoid various synonyms, which can be confusing). Use generally established definitions insofar as they exist. Definitions help clarify the study arguments, so do not wait too long to define your terms. They may not be used without being explained first. There rarely is a reason to list or discuss the many different definitions used in prior literature. Instead, identify important gaps, inconsistencies, or controversies related to your research objective.

Finally, provide a concise statement of your paper's/thesis's purpose(s), procedure, and contributions to existing literature. The description of the procedure should briefly explain the fundamental steps of the analysis and each section's significance, according to the logical structure of the text.

#### *Components of every introduction*

In summary, your introduction should answer the following questions:

- What is the problem (definition)?
- Why is it important (relevance/who cares and why)?
- Why is it not trivial (complexity/challenges)?
- What does extant literature say about this problem, and where is this literature stream deficient (only for empirical studies, 1–2 paragraphs)?
- What is the aim of your paper/thesis (one sentence)?
- How will you address the problem (objective/intended contribution)?

### 3.2.2. Literature Review

#### *Review papers*

Especially for bachelor theses, a comprehensive literature review is usually the core task. Research integration and synthesis is an important step in the scientific process. Such own literature reviews are critical evaluations of material that has already been published.

Specific goals of review papers are:

- Resolve definitional ambiguities and outline the scope of topic



- Provide a synthesized, state-of-the-art overview
- Identify inconsistencies in prior results and potential explanations (e.g., moderators, mediators, measures, approaches)
- Develop conceptual frameworks to reconcile and extend past research
- Describe research insights, gaps, and future research directions

For many more hints on how to write good literature reviews, see Palmatier, Houston, and Hulland (2018) and Snyder (2019).

#### *Finding relevant studies*

Not only for review thesis, but also for empirical thesis, the selection of relevant literature generally determines the quality of your arguments—and consequently your grade. Citing prior research allows you to take additional and more complex considerations into account. Assuming that you already have determined the structure of your paper/thesis at an early stage, it becomes much easier to conduct target-oriented literature investigations. Otherwise, you may find yourself distracted by topics that, though interesting, relate only marginally to your focal topic. Furthermore, having a clear structure in mind makes it easier to keep track of which sections of your paper/thesis require further literature support and which are already sufficiently covered. It is helpful to first brainstorm some related keywords, then conduct a deeper literature review using the following approaches:

- Keyword search in Google scholar: <http://scholar.google.com/>
- Keyword search in Business Source Premier by EBSCO: <https://bit.ly/2EjUxG>
- Examination of the most recent issues of pertinent journals, by browsing titles (papers sometimes use different keywords but still would be relevant to the same research question)
- Check cross-references (start by reading the most recent articles; classic texts will become quickly apparent, because they are cited so often)
- Authors' own websites (authors you have identified through the previous steps sometimes list other relevant publications and working papers)
- For general topics, conduct an examination of recent books, systematic review papers, and meta-analyses (if available)

#### *Quality assessments*

Quality is paramount and much more important than quantity in marketing research. The quality of your literature review depends not on how many sources you cite but rather on whether these sources are clearly relevant to your topic. It is essential to read important sources in their original version. For adjacent topic areas, you may limit your reading to standard literature (e.g., recent textbooks). Important sources must be read thoroughly and closely. Especially when empirical studies play an important role, their methodology must be examined closely.

Today, the primary challenge to a good literature review is selecting, instead of finding, relevant literature. A broad spectrum of publications exists on almost every marketing topic, and they are readily available through digital channels. However, these publications differ greatly in their quality and therefore in their trustworthiness. A crucial question must be: Which statements and evidence from previous literature can be considered credible and therefore taken into account?

Accordingly, literature reviews should concentrate mainly on publications in academic journals. All articles submitted to such journals pass through an anonymous evaluation process, and every article is judged by experts. Only articles that meet specific, high standards are published. However, the quality of the evaluation process varies significantly across journals. **Rankings**, such as the VHB-





JOURQUAL ranking, which rates marketing journals as A+, A, B, C, D, or E, indicate the academic quality of a journal. If an article is published in an A+ or A journal, you can be sure that it has undergone a very strict evaluation process, and errors are therefore rare. If instead a journal is rated E, it applies little or no review process. Websites and wikis should not be cited; their reliability is often even lower than that of E journals. Even for objective information or industry-relevant data (e.g., smartphone sales in 2018), you should not accept sources uncritically but rather should validate them (e.g., by cross-checking with other sources).

For management science and marketing journals, we recommend the ranking by JOURQUAL:

<https://vhbonline.org/vhb4you/vhb-jourqual/vhb-jourqual-3/gesamtliste>

and for Marketing only: [https://vhbonline.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/JQ3\\_MARK.pdf](https://vhbonline.org/fileadmin/user_upload/JQ3_MARK.pdf)

For journals not listed in JOURQUAL, you can also consider

- a) SJR ranking, <http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>
- b) Anne-Wil Harzing's meta-ranking (click on "Journal Quality List by title" and scroll down the PDF file for several pages): <http://www.harzing.com/jql.htm>

At this point, let it also be said that working through every source with the same intensity is inefficient. It is important to differentiate skimming from intensive text analysis. Doing so will save you time and allow you to concentrate on the literature that is most relevant to your specific topic.

#### *Organizing the literature selection*

Having collected the relevant literature, it becomes essential to analyze it with a problem-oriented approach, to provide a coherent synthesis of extant research on the topic. Such **critical reflection** demands that you do not simply accept the written words as truth but instead critically review the validity of each argument. Sources should not be cited unless they have been carefully evaluated first. Then you can include publications by describing how they relate to your research question. Avoid a listing of vaguely related prior findings. Instead, identify gaps in previous research, especially if you seek to address an unresolved problem. The following paragraphs describe further criteria for analyzing academic papers.

If you plan to conduct an **overview** of various models, methods, or empirical studies, it often makes sense to categorize and classify them first. Avoid listing study after study or model after model in an endless series. The classification should provide a complete overview of all available methods, models, or studies. If only selected examples are presented, at least mention other existing models or methods, to clarify the reasons for your selection.

When you uncover a large number of empirical studies, there rarely is a need to describe a few selected studies extensively, particularly if you fail to justify the selection. An overview of the results of a variety of studies is often more interesting. It is important to illustrate how these results match or contradict. Furthermore, be **precise** when presenting opinions contained in prior literature. For example, asserting that the results of another author's research "gives reason for hope" is of no value, until you explain how you reached this conclusion and specify its implication. In the case of contradictions, identify reasons and explain it; among other things, you might consider the impact of the research designs of these conflicting studies.



The aim is not a general critique of different designs. Instead, an analysis of the individual differences across study methodologies is pertinent, along with an evaluation of whether they can explain the divergence. It is a good idea to develop the evaluation criteria first, then use only those criteria. In addition, a table often provides an excellent way to summarize the different models, methods, or studies. The dimensions of such a table should be meaningful and reflect the aim of your study.

You can generally evaluate a scientific paper through the following steps:

- **Central results:** Information usually found in the abstract and introduction. If you have not already done so, now is the time to decide how intensely you will review the different sections of the source document (skimming or intensive reading).
- **Significance of the statements:** Hypotheses, experiences recounted by practitioners, theoretical considerations, and plausible knowledge should be separated from empirical results. To what context (place/time) do the statements refer? To what extent are they realistic? Are the empirical results theoretically grounded or surprisingly revealed correlations? Are they valid in terms of conceptual and methodological rigor?
- **Applied method:** How did the authors achieve their results (e.g., quantitative or qualitative analyses of field, experimental, or survey data, about which samples)?
- **Limitations:** If the results contradict the hypotheses, how do the authors explain them? How did they avoid pertinent research problems? Can the authors' concept as a whole be called into question, due to unresolved problems? Have other authors dealt with problems left explicitly or implicitly unresolved, and have they suggested possible solutions?

Ultimately, be sure to **distance** yourself from existing literature (even when writing “just” a seminar paper). A mosaic of literature excerpts, even if restated in your own words, cannot satisfy the requirements of an academic paper/thesis. An academic paper/thesis requires personal input from the author, and there are various ways to achieve this. At the same time, there is no need to reinvent the wheel: Integrating existing insights with your own findings and work is an essential component of academic writing.

At the same time, when presenting your **own opinions**, substantiate them by citing previous research and discussing other authors' insights on the same matters. Do not unconditionally adopt a prevailing opinion without examining the assumptions and methods contained in the study in question. General judgments without explanation should be avoided. Value judgments also must be clearly distinguished from factual assertions.

### 3.2.3. Theory

The conceptual section is central to your paper/thesis; it should not be discounted or kept too short. This section gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your deep understanding of your research topic. Hypotheses, practical experience, theoretical reflections, and plausible knowledge should be distinguished from empirical results. Pay extra attention to the wording of your hypotheses, which is not trivial. Reviewing how papers in leading journals phrase their hypotheses can be helpful. A visualization of the model and its underlying hypotheses can provide structure and clarification.

A conceptual model should provide an overview and include the main variables of your study. A literature review does not necessarily require hypotheses, but if you conduct an empirical study, you need research questions or, preferably, theoretically based hypotheses.



What is a theory? A theory is a systematically related set of statements that explain a phenomenon of interest. It includes some law-like generalizations that are empirically testable. You can find suitable theories in marketing papers, but also in publications in other disciplines (e.g., psychology). It is also possible to develop a new theory—but be cautious, because in many cases, a theory already exists that can be applied to your context. Furthermore, a theory comprises constructs and propositions about their links. Links can be direct or indirect:

- Example for **direct** effects: An increase in X leads to an increase in Y. Or even shorter: X positively affects Y.
- Examples for indirect effects:
  - **Moderator** effects: An increase in X leads to a greater increase in Y when M is higher. Or: M positively moderates the effect of X on Y. Here, M is a moderator because the X–Y linkage changes due to M.
  - **Mediator** effects: An increase in X leads to an increase in Y, which in turn leads to an increase in Z. Or: Y (fully) mediates the effect of X on Z. Therefore, an increase in X is proposed to lead to an increase in Z, and Y is a full mediator if X does not directly link to Z.

Arguments should include the exact constructs stated in the hypotheses. For example, “As M increases, a consumer is more sensitive to X and thus is more responsive to an increase in X, which increases the effect of X on Y.” (Usually, X, Y, Z, and M would be replaced with names of the constructs, to increase readability.)

Generate and formulate hypotheses **precisely**. Every hypothesis requires a clear argument for why it has been formulated. To ensure a clear focus, do not create too many hypotheses but rather detail your arguments for the most interesting ones (at least one paragraph per hypothesis). The wording of hypotheses must be absolutely clear and unambiguous. Especially for predictions of interaction effects, it is advisable to double-check that the defined mechanism is consistent with the theoretical argument and the applied calculation. Also try not to include too many variables in one hypothesis, often two (X and Y) or three (X, Y, Z or M) variables are sufficient. The theoretical discussion should be condensed within the conceptual framework, all hypotheses must be part of the model, and the empirical analysis then is based on the framework. In deriving the framework, figures can be very useful clarification tools, such as when it comes to summarizing the relationships among different constructs.

#### 3.2.4. Analyze the Data

This section applies only to empirical theses. Analyses must be rigorous and careful. Reporting the results in tables can make the text more readable. Transcripts of interviews should be attached, in their original language, as an appendix. They also may be represented in the text (translated if necessary), with a reference to the appendix. The text must explain each step taken in the study, especially with regard to gathering the data sample, the selection of specific constructs for the empirical study (e.g., items in a questionnaire must be assigned to their related constructs), data cleansing actions, and calculation processes. Add brief descriptions of the variables to quantitative calculations and present correlation tables before analyzing their relationships, because such structures help readers judge the data.

Confirm that all your **figures and tables are self-explanatory**. A reader should be able to understand each table and figure, even without reading the main text. A knowledgeable third person also must be able to understand and review all statements.



It is highly recommended to **illustrate interaction effects graphically**. In experiments, the independent variables usually have only two manifestations, so that in a typical 2 x 2 research design for example, the resulting four mean values can be easily displayed. For metric independent variables with more characteristics, a floodlight analysis is recommended for illustration.

It is also important to **interpret interaction effects correctly**. For example, if you find significant direct effects (e.g., A and B) and an interaction effect (A x B), the signs of these effects play an important role. A positive interaction effect means that the effect of the focal variable (A) is strengthened by the second variable (B). In contrast, a negative interaction effect means that the effect of the focal variable is weakened by the second variable. The direct effect of the second variable does not matter for the interpretation of the interaction direction. Specifically, this means: If the effects of A and A x B are both positive, an increase in the second variable strengthens the positive effect of the focal variable (i.e., makes it more positive). If A is negative, but A x B positive, an increase in the second variable strengthens the negative effect of the focal variable (i.e., makes it more negative). However, if A is positive and A x B negative, an increase in the second variable weakens the positive effect of the focal variable (i.e., makes it less positive); and if A and A x B are both negative, an increase in the second variable weakens the negative effect of the focal variable (i.e., makes it less negative).

If you collect novel data, be sure to check and revise your method (e.g., questionnaire, experimental manipulations) thoroughly, including through rigorous pretests of the method. After the data have been collected, you will be restricted in your analyses to the available measures, such that insufficient review of the method might mean that you miss an important variable or link.

If the results contradict your hypotheses, address the difference with interpretative explanations in the discussion section, not the results section. The results section should be devoted to the outcomes achieved by testing the hypotheses. It may benefit from including tables (and sometimes figures), with relatively less text. Empirical papers in *Journal of Marketing* offer good examples.

Avoid deducing results from the implications of other authors' models (e.g., "Model A from author B shows that operation X leads to result Y. Consequently, decision makers should behave this or that way"). The validity, or at least the plausibility, of the model assumptions from which such implications are deduced must be analyzed and verified. It also is necessary to determine whether the model applies to the specific problem that your own research is addressing.

### 3.2.5. Organize

When finalizing the structure, pay attention to consistency, potential overlaps, and the clear development of a line of thought. For this latter criterion, consider listing your line of thought in bullet points. To keep the necessary distance from prior literature, you might want to halt your considerations of extant research for a while. During this time, you can critically reflect on what you have read and how your own ideas relate to it. Start with a broad approach in the introduction, then narrow the focus to your specific topic, and finally broaden the view again in the conclusion section (e.g., implications for other industries/contexts). Repeatedly review the structure of your paper/thesis to avoid overlap and to ensure consistency and clarity in your line of thought.

The document template (Template for Papers and Theses Prof. Marchand.docx) offers a typical first-level structure. The way the text is structured is elemental to every paper/thesis; it demonstrates how well the author has understood and addressed the topic. Therefore, the headings of the different sections and their order must reflect a logical setup and provide an overview of the content. Chapter titles should be phrased as informatively as possible. A glance at the structure of your paper/thesis



should reveal its central theme. Moreover, the structure must be formally clear. A single subheading is not permitted within any one section, such that if a subheading 2.1. appears, it must be followed at least by subheading 2.2. Short introductory text passages (e.g., after heading 2 and before subheading 2.1) are permitted but not mandatory.

Subheadings should not repeat the exact wording of their superior headings. The number of structural levels depends on the type and length of the paper/thesis. The hierarchical structure must emphasize the weight of the individual sections. In the table of contents and main text, headings should be formatted to reflect this hierarchical structure. Headings on the same level must offer similar amounts of contextual importance and relate to the same superior problem. Thus, the principal part of the paper/thesis should be subdivided and take up more space than, for example, sections dealing with the basics. In general, any section listed in the table of contents should be at least a half page. Usually, more than four structural levels cause clutter rather than clarity. Before starting a new section, consider whether it will contribute to the initially formulated problem definition.

### 3.2.6. Write with Detail

#### *General writing remarks*

The more precisely and systematically the previous steps have been addressed, the easier it is to write the paper/thesis. Writing quality is often a reflection of the clarity of your thoughts. Overly vague ideas invariably lead to confused writing—or no writing at all. If you are struggling to write, the problem might lie often with the clarity of your thoughts, not your ability to phrase ideas properly.

Write in a way that ensures you cannot be misunderstood. Avoid digressions, which are appropriate only in textbooks. In a paper or thesis, they instead convey the impression that the author has not found a way to position the divergent issue within the focal structure of the paper/thesis. If the issue does not fit, either the structure is inappropriate, or the issue is irrelevant. Also provide concrete examples; abstract terms are more challenging, in that they force readers to visualize their own concrete examples, which also might not conform to your ideas.

In the empirical section, highlight evidence that demonstrates the care taken in conducting the study, not just the effort. That is, do not limit the discussion to what you did, but also reveal why you did it and the specific benefits that each tactic produced.

Concluding thoughts should be recorded in the final chapter of a paper/thesis. They are the last thing readers see, so they often exert strong impacts on their impressions of your work. This final chapter, together with the introduction, should act as logical brackets. It should briefly summarize your main findings with regard to your initial objective. However, it is very unsatisfying, at the end of a problem discussion, when the possible solution is presented only briefly and generally (e.g., “My considerations show that a solution to this complex problem involves almost insurmountable difficulties, and all attempts to solve it have failed so far. Simulations may provide new leads”). In such a situation, at least roughly outline and discuss a suggested solution.

Then you can move on to detailing the theoretical and practical implications of the results. The theoretical implications address how your results extend prior research at a broad level; do not repeat all the findings in detail. Discuss consistencies and inconsistencies with prior research. The practical implications indicate what marketing stakeholders should do differently, according to the specific findings you have presented. Also critically acknowledge and elaborate on the limitations of your work. Who would do what differently in the future, based on these limitations?



Formulating this conclusion also gives you another chance to check carefully which parts of your work are really relevant to the research question(s) defined in the introduction. Identifying routes and fields for further research also can be insightful and derived from the aforementioned limitations.

#### *Writing recommendations in a nutshell*

- Make it easy to read your work.
  - Use active voice, with the subject at the beginning and citations at the end of a sentence. (You may use first person, or “I collected data from XY....”)
  - Use short sentences (two-line rule).
  - Use short paragraphs (2-3 per page).
  - Include a topic sentence that states each paragraph’s point explicitly.
  - Avoid acronyms, ambiguous terms, buzzwords, and jargon.
  - Be factual and objective in your writing. Do not make exaggerated claims.
  - Write a research report, not a mystery novel.
  - Make sure the wording of your statements is as precise as possible.
  - Report results in tables to make your text more readable.
- Optimize your writing process.
  - First, think about the main (but specific) ideas you want to include in a section.
  - Then, think about the sequence of these ideas (this sets up the paragraphs).
  - Next, consider each paragraph and its main point.
  - Then, think about how each sentence in the paragraph will build on previous sentences to culminate in that main point.
  - Finally, revise each sentence to make it easier to read (simplify whenever possible).
  - Repeat.
- Focus!
  - Get rid of “interesting” sidebars, tidbits, observations, and assertions.
  - Avoid footnotes and do not digress.
  - Discuss prior literature only as it relates to your research question.
  - Ruthlessly delete words, sentences, and even paragraphs wherever possible. This step often is painful for writers, who have labored over a paragraph, but then discover that it is not relevant when they reconsider it. Make it easy to read your work.

#### 3.2.7. Revise

Throughout the writing and editing process, check your paper/thesis carefully for mistakes (e.g., typos, spelling errors) and systematic inconsistencies. It is particularly important to ensure that all arguments are linked to the central problem definition, so that they function to support the author’s goal. If not, the paper requires further revision (even if it seems too hard). The formal structure of the paper/thesis serves as an early indicator to readers of whether the author worked to develop the content with the required diligence.

It is often a good idea to have a trusted peer read your manuscript, to give you a fresh perspective on whether it is communicating your ideas clearly and easily. In addition, here are some checks that every writer should perform on the nearly final draft of their manuscripts:

- When you have finished writing, check whether you have really stuck consistently to the definitions you provided in the introduction.
- **Evaluate** your conceptual section again. Are all hypotheses clearly written, without ambiguities or tautologies? Is the theoretical rationale provided for each hypothesis



compelling? Are there any additional theoretical arguments that might strengthen the conceptual support for the hypotheses?

- Check that your text is **transparent**. Transparency implies precise explanations of the terms used and complete and stringent arguments. In empirical work, it also requires precise descriptions of the research methods used (e.g., sample details, data collection and evaluation methods). The results of empirical studies are only useful if it is clear how they were generated. Therefore, you are required to hand in digital versions of any additional data used to develop your paper/thesis (e.g., syntax, algorithms).
- Use the tools in your word processing software to run a spell check to avoid embarrassing and unnecessary typographic errors.

Finally, here are some further references about content-related advices, which might be useful. Keep in mind that these articles focus on a specific journal and address academics not students. Therefore, some of these suggestions might not be relevant for your paper/thesis.

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In conclusion, we hope that these guidelines are helpful for you and wish you **all the best on your research projects!**