# Guidelines for term papers (‚Seminararbeiten‘)

## 1. Preliminary remarks

A written paper within the tradition of the empirical-analytical sociology should offer an intensive discussion of a clearly defined research question. Please start with a specific question, which you can realistically deal with within the framework of a seminar. Discuss your question with the lecturer before you start writing the paper. The question should be formulated in a clear and precise way and ideally contained in one (!) sentence.

Necessary elements of an excellent term paper are a precise (research) question, a precise and clear argumentation and a precise style and exposition. Furthermore, we expect you to present a scientific analysis free of value judgements (i.e., avoid statements like “XY is bad”, “The state / government should …”, “I personally feel that …”).

There are two types of term papers one can write (depending on the content of the particular class): a literature review and an empirical paper.

The main goal of the **literature review** is to provide a structured discussion of a specific topic based on the published scientific literature (articles in newspapers and magazines or non-scientific Internet sources should be used only in exceptional cases).

An **empirical paper,** in addition to the discussion of the literature, also contains an empirical part, where the research question is studied using your own independent data analysis.

A term paper should not exceed 30,000 symbols including blanks (title page, content and literature not included), i.e., it should be about 12 pages long (if one does not count figures and tables).

## 2. Structure of a term paper

A typical term paper should have the following structure:

### 1. Introduction

The introduction should awake reader’s interest from page one on. Already the first sentences should make it clear which specific question do you intend to deal with in your paper and why this question is interesting from the sociological point of view. Typical elements of an introduction are:

- A kick-off section, which should attract reader’s attention (e.g., the introductory question, a striking observation, a quote etc.).
- Development of a clear specific question.
- Discussion of the relevance of the topic (i.e., its relevance from the scientific, empirical, methodological, social or political standpoints, not your personal motivation or the participation in a particular class).
- A short summary of the content (one sentence to each section), which should demonstrate how you will proceed in responding to the research question the paper asks.

## 2. Theoretical overview

To start with, you need to give an overview of the theoretical approaches, which are helpful to respond to the question of the paper. For this purpose, you need to do the following:

- Give a short definition of the central concepts (following the theoretical approaches used to back your research).
- Describe the key statements of each theory. You need to focus at your research question and therefore discuss how particular theory responds to this question. It is not enough that you state that a variable X should affect variable Y; you should also explain why it is the case (i.e., to develop the theoretical mechanism). Pay attention to the completeness of the argument and avoid logical flaws and contradictions.
- A theory is not merely a set of definitions of key concepts (even if there is no unanimity in the literature as to how these concepts should be defined)! It should contain statements about (possible) causal links between the variables and offer explanations for these links.
- Discuss the differences between theories. Present different (controversial) arguments. If the theories offer different answers to your question, discuss the reasons for these differences, e.g., possibly associated with different assumptions underlying the theories. Are the theories sufficiently rich in terms of information, consistent and plausible?
- Clearly separate through appropriate formulations the presentation of the theories from other sources (e.g., "the paper XY shows that …") from your assessment of these theories (e.g., "while discussing the arguments of XY, I need to remark that…").

## 3. State of the art of the research

In the next step, you should give a systematic review of the existing research on your research question.

- Present individual studies in a systematic and interlinked way and do not merely narrate them one by one. E.g., discuss different theoretical assumptions and show which studies attempted to test these assumptions. In this case, a paper, which tests several different sets of assumptions, will be mentioned several times when it is appropriate in the text.
- Interpret the results of the studies from the point of view of your question. Refrain from reporting results, which are not directly related to the topic of your paper and to your question.
- Offer an evaluation of the studies you discuss from the methodological point of view. Do you find the methodological approach of the studies reasonable? Are the conclusions of the studies sufficiently convincing from the point of view of the empirical results? The findings of more convincing studies should be given higher weight in your analysis than the findings of the studies with obvious mistakes and problems. Do not blindly trust any written text: be critical while reviewing the literature!
- If there are contradictory findings in the literature, point it out explicitly in your paper. How can you explain the existing contradictions?
- We do not expect a term paper to offer a complete literature review, but we do expect you to look at several papers and to motivate your selection.

### 4. Conclusion and outlook

In the final part of the paper you need to sum up your paper and to respond to the question you formulated in the introduction.

- Briefly present the question of the paper (1-2 sentences).
- Summarize the main results and discuss these findings. Importantly, make a clear connection between empirical results and the theoretical argumentation. Which expectations you had based on the theory can be refuted? Which expectations cannot be rejected? Which theoretical approaches are therefore inapplicable for responding to your question and which require further scrutiny?
- Provide a clear response to the question of the paper.
- Point out the caveats and the limitations of your conclusions (e.g., "insufficient data", "contradictory evidence in the existing literature").
- In some cases, you can conclude the paper with "policy recommendations". But in this case, you should pay particular attention to offering a scientific argument free of value judgements. Policy recommendations should explicitly follow from the theoretical and empirical discussion of the paper; avoid recommendations, which are not related to the scientific analyses of the paper.
- Finally, you can offer a brief outlook: how could the research be further developed theoretically? Which subsequent empirical analyses are necessary to obtain a better understanding of your research question?

### 5. References

In this section you need to list all sources you have cited in the text. Do not list any sources you did not cite; do not miss any sources you actually did cite in the study.

## 3. Formal requirements

Page format and text format

- DIN A4 paper
- 1.3 line spacing
- Page margins: 2.5 cm (left and right), 2 cm (top and bottom)
- Font size: 12 pt (text), 10 pt (footnotes), 11 pt (long direct quotes)
- Font: Times New Roman (or any other easily readable style)
- Pages should be numbered throughout the paper.
- You need to submit a coherent text with full sentences (not individual bullet points with keywords). The text should be structured in sections (if necessary, sub-sections) and paragraphs.

Structure of a term paper

- The title page contains: the information on the seminar (title, semester, lecturer), the title of the term paper, your personal information (name, matriculation number, e-mail etc.), the submission date.
- Table of content.
- Main part of the term paper as described above.

- Signed certification of originality of the term paper

Citation

Use the author-year citation style (Harvard citation style). After the quote, put the name of the author and the year when the paper/book was published in brackets. E.g. (Müller 1998).

Make sure you mark the direct quotes appropriately (failure to do that will be considered plagiarizing). Do not overuse the direct quotes!

Indirect quotes should also be marked accordingly, e.g., in the following way: "The following arguments are based on XY (2015)" or "The human capital theory points out … (following the presentation of the human capital theory from XY (2015)". If you do not do that, it will be considered a case of academic misconduct (Täuschungsversuch).

Generally, you are allowed to quote papers or books you read yourselves. Otherwise it will be considered a case of academic misconduct (Täuschungsversuch). Mistakes typically happen under the following circumstances:

- Quotes from original sources: do not quote those, unless you actually read them. I.e., do not use the following: "According to XY (2015), Becker (1956) claims that". The correct way to quote is "According to XY (2015), Becker, in his *Theory of Discrimination*, claims that…".
- Secondary quotes: If you re-use a direct quote from another source, you need to quote it as "Becker, "Theory of Discrimination", as quoted in XY (2015)".

References

The list of sources you quoted in the paper should be sorted based on the name of the first author (and, if necessary, the names or the surnames of other authors). Unlike the main part of the paper, in the references section one typically uses the line spacing of one. There are several ways how you quote sources in the reference list. **Importantly, you need to use one of these approaches in a clear and coherent way!** Here is an example of one possible quotation approach

Books

Auspurg, Katrin and Thomas Hinz (2015) Factorial Survey Experiments. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Edited volumes

Baltagi, Badi H. (ed.) (2015) The Oxford Handbook of Panel Data. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Journal articles

Kratz, Fabian and Josef Brüderl (2013) Returns to Regional Migration: Causal Effect or Selection on Wage Growth? Schmollers Jahrbuch 133: 227-238.

Book chapters

Brüderl, Josef and Volker Ludwig (2015) Fixed-Effects Panel Regression. pp. 327-357 in: H. Best and C. Wolf (eds.) The Sage Handbook of Regression Analysis and Causal Inference. Los Angeles: Sage.

## 4. Grading criteria

The main criteria for the grading of a term paper are

- Logic of the argumentation (clear and coherent argument going throughout the whole text)
- Clarity and precision of the presentation
- Critical and sovereign presentation of the scientific discussion
- Complexity of the development of the topic
- Extent of literature review. Was the literature researched independently?

Typical problems leading to lower grade are:

- Lack of a clear question or insufficient focus on the formulated question
- No critical discussion, really summary of the existing literature
- Inconsistent and unsystematic argumentation
- Unscientific argumentation (e.g., value judgements based on the author's own preferences and worldviews).
- In case of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, we will follow the existing regulations without exception. It means that the paper will be graded as "Failed", and you may also be banned from continuing your studies at the LMU.

## 5. Specific features of empirical papers

If you write an empirical paper, which is based on your own data analysis, one needs to consider several specific features

- Sections 2 (Theoretical overview) and 3 (State of the art of the research) could be shorter
- After you presented the state of the art, you need to derive the hypotheses you are going to test in the empirical part. Make sure that there is sufficient justification for the hypotheses.
- You need to add two additional sections: Data and Methods section and Result section (described below)

**Data and methods**

This section is crucial for making sure that one is fundamentally able to replicate your study. In the empirical research, the ability of other scholars to replicate your results is a major criterion of scientific quality. The more thorough this section is, the easier it is for the readers to follow your results.

- Describe the data you use in your study. Report only the features of the data relevant for understanding your analysis (e.g., methods of data collection, population, sampling procedure, sample size, response rate, period of data collection).
- Provide a very specific description of your data source (it is not enough to refer to the SOEP data; the source of data should be indicated as follows: German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP, 1984-2010), version 26, doi:10.5684/soep.v26). Please follow the requirements of the data sources as to how they should be correctly cited.
- Describe the construction of the sample you use in your analysis. Provide the full set of criteria used for constructing your sample (e.g., age, employment status, missing variables)

and inform the readers as to how many observations you therefore had to exclude from the analysis.

- Describe how the main variables were constructed (operationalization). Present the approach to measuring the data; discuss how you processed the original data. Follow the literature in constructing your variables or provide a clear explanation as to why you deviated from the literature.
- Describe the approaches to data analysis you use (OLS, logit etc.)
- Describe your research design. Describe how one can test your hypotheses using the data you have at your disposal and the methods you decided to apply.
- Descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations or relative shares) could be helpful for the reader, but you should avoid discussing every single detail contained in these tables.

**Results**

Present the main statistical results in a table or preferably graphically. Report only few, but particularly important quantitative indicators.

- Typically, the results section is constructed in the following way: you present the descriptive results concerning the main research question first (e.g., mean comparison). After that, you present the results of the multivariate analysis. Here you can discuss additional findings of your work.
- Present all necessary (!) statistical results. Regression tables should contain the values of the coefficients and the standard errors; you should also report the number of observations and the goodness of the fit.
- Interpret your findings from the point of view of your hypotheses: What is the meaning of the statistical results? Were you able to refute certain hypotheses? Which conclusions can be drawn from the statistical analysis?
- Check the robustness of your results in terms of small changes of the statistical approach you use, the specification you apply or the sample. Check whether the assumptions for estimation approaches you use are valid. Report the results of the respective tests (regression diagnostics), e.g., in footnotes or in a special sub-section.
- The layout of the tables and graphs should follow the standards established in scholarly literature. It is not acceptable to merely re-copy the tables from Stata or SPSS. All tables should be numbered throughout the text (e.g., Table 1) and have a title. You need to round the numbers up to 2-3 digits after decimal point. All axis in the graphs should bear a title. Fundamentally, the readers should be able to understand any figure or table without reading the rest of the text. In many cases, you need to provide additional information as a note to the table (e.g., source of the data, designations of different significance levels etc.).
- Each table or figure should be discussed in text. If there is no discussion of a table or figure in text, refrain from including it in the paper. If the table is discussed only briefly, it should be placed in the appendix.
- While referring to a table or figure, always provide its number (e.g., “Table 1 shows that…”).
- The conclusion of the study should contain a discussion of all empirical problems you failed to solve in the paper (limitations, caveats), as well as to indicate how these problems could have been solved under ideal circumstances.