

A Guide for Writing Research Papers

I. General Comments

In a research paper you present the results of your own investigations on a selected topic. Based on your thoughts and the facts and ideas you have gathered from a variety of sources, your research paper is a creation that is uniquely yours. If you submit a research paper as a *Seminararbeit* or a *Hauptseminararbeit*, the paper has to be written in English. If you aim for a degree in the master's program "linguistics", you are allowed to write your paper in English or in German.

A *Seminararbeit* has to include at least 15 pages of text. A *Hauptseminararbeit* should consist of no less than 20 pages of text.

Research papers are usually written in a rather impersonal style. This means that the use of pronouns such as *I*, *we*, *my*, and *our* is avoided!

II. The Structure of a Research Paper

You are expected to compose your research paper according to academic standards. Your paper must have a meaningful title, an introduction, a main section, and a conclusion. The exact structure of your paper will, of course, depend on your topic. Below you can find an example representing one possible structure of a research paper.

Example: The structure of a paper presenting empirical data

1. **Title page** (*Titelblatt*)
2. **Contents** (*Inhaltsverzeichnis*)
3. **abbreviations** (*Abkürzungsverzeichnis*), **list of figures** (*Abbildungsverzeichnis*), and **list of tables** (*Tabellenverzeichnis*)
If your paper includes abbreviations, figures, and tables your Contents section should be followed by pages on which you explain the meanings of the abbreviations you use and on which you tell the reader where to find the different figures and tables.
4. **Introduction** (*Einleitung*)
Briefly describe what your paper is about. Explain why your research is important. Give a short review of previous research (provide a review of literature that is relevant to the content of your paper). State your main hypotheses. Of course, an introduction may consist of different sections or parts.
5. **Method** (*Methode*)
Briefly describe your subjects and how you collected and analyzed your data.
Method sections usually consist of different parts:
 - a) **Subjects/Participants** (*Testpersonen/Probanden*)
Briefly describe whom you tested.
 - b) **Procedure** (*Datenerhebung*)
Briefly describe how you collected your data.
 - c) **Data Analysis** (*Datenanalyse/Datenauswertung*)
Briefly describe how you analysed your data.
6. **Results** (*Ergebnisse*)
Describe the results of your analyses. You should not present too many details. You should rather try to summarize your major findings. Use figures and tables to illustrate the results of your analyses.
7. **Discussion and Conclusions** (*Diskussion und Schlußfolgerungen*)
Discuss and interpret your major findings by referring to the research reviews in the Introduction. Which conclusions can be drawn from your results? Which questions should be addressed by future research?
8. **References** (*Literaturverzeichnis*)
"References cited in text must appear in the reference list; conversely, each entry in the reference list must be cited in text" (APA, 2001, p. 215)
9. **Appendix** (*Anhang*)
The appendix usually contains additional information and detailed sets of data.

III. Plagiarism

All ideas borrowed or sources used that are not your own must be documented and properly acknowledged. If you fail to do so, this will be regarded as plagiarism, which is an academic offense.

If you follow the format recommended by the APA, use the author-date format to cite references in your text. For example: As Wesche (2002) points out, ...; a recent study by Wesche (2002) shows ...

Example: How to cite references in text:

Innovative post-secondary foreign language programs in several North American colleges and universities provide students with the experience of hearing and reading original texts in the foreign language and in perfecting their academic or professional skills for work in international contexts (Krueger & Ryan, 1993; Wesche, 1993b; Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Anderson et al. (1993) have made a distinction between the goals of humanities-based foreign language applications which involve social studies and literature content from more utilitarian English-for-academic purposes courses.

Note: Depending on the format you follow, you may also be required to cite your sources in footnotes or endnotes. Every source cited in your text – and only those sources cited in your text – are referenced in the reference list.

IV. Formatting requirements

1. General Comments

There are many approaches to research and many ways to document findings. When you write a paper you can follow the suggestions of several different style guides. It is important to follow consistently and accurately a recommended format that is clear and concise and that has been approved by your instructor. Researchers who work in the Humanities often follow the recommendations of the Modern Language Association ("MLA style") or the American Psychological Association ("APA style"). If your instructor requires another format, you can ask that instructor how such a format will be different from the recommendations of the MLA, APA or other style guides and make the appropriate adjustments.

2. Useful Websites and Books

Several websites offer a lot of information about the techniques of academic work and provide you with examples in MLA style, APA style, etc.

The following websites are very useful:

<https://www.scribbr.com/mla/formatting/> (a research guide for papers based on Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation)

<https://apastyle.apa.org/> (an excellent summary of rules for using APA style)

Of course, research techniques are also described in many books. See, for example:

Bänsch, A. (2002). *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten: Seminar- und Diplomarbeiten*. München: Oldenbourg.

Bünting, K.-D., Bitterlich, A. & Pospiech, U. (2000). *Schreiben im Studium: Mit Erfolg: Ein Leitfaden*. Studium Kompakt. Berlin: Cornelsen Scriptor.

Purser, E. (2004). *Studienbegleiter: Academic Writing*. Studium Kompakt. Berlin: Cornelsen Scriptor.

Rückriem, G., Stary, J. & Franck, N. (1994). *The Technik des wissenschaftlichen Arbeitens: Eine praktische Anleitung*. Paderborn: Schoeningh.

- Standop, E. & Meyer, M. (2008). *Die Form der wissenschaftlichen Arbeit: Ein unverzichtbarer Leitfaden für Studium und Beruf* (18th ed.). Wiebelsheim: Quelle & Meyer.
- Sary, J. & Kretschmer, H. (2000). *Umgang mit wissenschaftlicher Literatur: Eine Arbeitshilfe für das sozial- und geisteswissenschaftliche Studium*. Studium Kompakt. Frankfurt am Main: Cornelsen Scriptor.

3. A Summary of Rules for Using APA Style

APA style is the style of writing used by journals published by the American Psychological Association (APA). The style is documented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed., 2020). The APA format is a widely recognized standard for scientific writing in psychology and education.

Before you write a paper, talk to your instructor to find out whether s/he requires the APA format, the MLA format or any other format. If your instructor requires a format other than the APA format, ask her/him how this format will be different from the recommendations that are made here and make the appropriate adjustments.

3.1 Page Formats

Typeface: The body of the paper should be in a serif typeface of 12 points, such as 12-point Times Roman or 12-point courier, with lettering on figures in sans serif typeface, such as Helvetica or Arial. (Serifs are the "tails" that you can see at the top and bottom of the letters that help readers to follow a line of text.)

Spacing: 1.5 space the text, but *single space* within block quotes and references.

Margins: Margins should be at least 2.5 cm all around.

Justification should be set to "off" or "left margin only" (the right margin should be uneven, a *ragged right* margin).

Note: I prefer texts that are justified (aligned right and left in text area, i.e. texts that are written in *Blocksatz*).

Italics: Italicize species names, new terms and labels (the first time only), words and phrases used as linguistic examples, letters used as statistical symbols, and volume numbers in reference lists.

Paragraphs: The first lines of paragraphs are usually indented 1.25 cm. (Note: I prefer paragraphs without indentations that are separated by 1 extra line space.)

Long quotations: Place quotations of 40 or more words in block form. Indent the entire quotation five to seven spaces or 1.25 cm. Single-space long quotations.

An example of the formatting of a paragraph containing a block quotation follows:

We therefore consider it inappropriate to selectively reduce the variability in early production data by using a method of analysis like the *phonetic inventories/phonological contrasts* method (Ingram 1989). Variation should rather be regarded as a phenomenon whose thorough investigation enables researchers to determine more precisely how children's articulatory, perceptual, organizational and communicative abilities mature and interact. It is these abilities and not just "linguistic competence" that enable children to acquire the sounds of a language. Or, as Henning Wode puts it:

There is a need for more detailed research on the development of the various articulatory mechanisms and how children learn to control them **before we rush to highly abstract phonological explanations**. (Wode, 1999, page 1268; highlighting is mine)

3.2 APA Reference Style

The APA Publication Manual instructs authors to use hanging indents for references, and to use *italics* for titles. The hanging indent is 1.25 cm. Single-space references.

Here are a few examples of the most commonly used formats. Remember to provide complete references, which are ordered alphabetically!

Books:

Baker, C. (2021). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (7th ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Editors in place of authors:

Wright, C., Piske, T. & Young-Scholten, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Mind Matters in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Chapter in edited work:

Kersten, K., Imhoff, C. & Sauer, B. (2002). The acquisition of English verbs in an elementary school immersion program in Germany. In: P. Burmeister, T. Piske & A. Rohde (Eds.), *An integrated view of language development: Papers in honor of Henning Wode*. (pp. 474-497). Trier: WVT - Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.

Journal article:

Flege, J.E., Yeni-Komshian, G. & Liu, H. (1999). Age constraints on second language acquisition. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 41, 78-104.

Stand-alone online article:

Albanese, J. (2001). *How can we reach teenage smokers?* Retrieved September 31, 2001, from <http://msweb.nursingspectrum.com/ce/ce229.htm>

4. Language

4.1 Term Papers

Term papers have to be written in English. However, if you aim for a degree in the master's program "linguistics", you are allowed to write your paper in English or in German.

4.2 Zulassungsarbeiten

It is possible to write *Zulassungsarbeiten* in German. If you decide to write your *Zulassungsarbeit* in German, you have to include an English summary consisting of at least 5 pages at the end of your thesis. Please insert this summary immediately after your Discussion and Conclusions section.

A *Zulassungsarbeit* should consist of no less than 60 pages of text and should not exceed 80 pages.

4.3 Master's Theses

If you aim for a degree in the master's program "English studies", you have to write your master's thesis in English. If you aim for a degree in the programs "linguistics" or "Master of Education", you are allowed to write your thesis in English or in German.

A *master's thesis* should consist of about 80 pages of text.

5. Affidavit (*Wahrheitsgemäße Erklärung*)

You always have to attach a signed affidavit to the end of your paper or thesis. Since the affidavit is not part of the paper/thesis itself, it is usually not included in the table of contents. By signing the affidavit and attaching it to your paper/thesis, you declare that you made a clear distinction between your own ideas and those of other authors throughout your paper.