



GUIDELINES FOR WRITERS OF SEMINAR PAPERS (PROSEMINAR / HAUPTSEMINAR)¹

I. Objectives

A seminar paper written in a “**Proseminar**” is supposed to demonstrate your ability to discuss a topic relevant to literary and/or cultural studies. You are supposed to be able to

- meet the deadline set for your paper,
- analyse a set number of primary text,
- use appropriate scholarly terminology and methods,
- take into account relevant secondary literature.

A seminar paper written in a “**Hauptseminar**” is – in addition to the aspects mentioned above – supposed to demonstrate your ability to

- discuss the (very) latest secondary literature,
- apply the high standard of scholarly reflection and methodological competence appropriate for advanced students.

PLEASE, MAKE SURE you submit your topic to your instructor for approval BEFORE you start working on it.

II. Topic, content and style of a research paper

Topic:

Please note that you have to choose a topic yourself, but make sure you submit it to your instructor for approval BEFORE you start working on your paper.

Pick a topic that is of interest to you. There is nothing as difficult as trying to write a good paper on a topic you only chose because it seemed to be “easy”, but which you are not interested in. If you have severe problems structuring your paper, contact your supervisor during her/his office hours as soon as possible.

Content:

The content of your paper is to be determined by the heuristic value of the topic you choose. Always focus on the key aspects of your topic. Avoid all unnecessary quotations. As you will not be able to include all aspects of your research in your paper, you have to select your arguments and your sources carefully according to your heuristic interest. Structure your paper according to this selection.

Style:

A seminar paper should be written in academic prose aiming at terminological exactness, critical clarity and readability.

III. Contents:

A seminar paper includes a(n)

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
The Table of Contents provides an overview of the paper’s structure; the page numbering that appears here must be consistent with the actual page numbers of your paper.
- Introduction
The introduction outlines the topic and the thesis of your paper, explaining the paper’s heuristic value. In addition, the introduction is the place to explain your criteria for choosing primary texts/material, point out prominent scholarly research (only strictly related to your topic, of course), etc. The introduction **should not simply paraphrase** the table of contents.
- Main part (Please, find a title for this chapter! Do not just call it “main part”.)

¹ These guidelines are based on Joseph Gibaldi, *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009).

This chapter – typically subdivided into several subchapters – discusses the thesis of your paper which you have outlined in the introduction, closely analysing the primary texts which your paper deals with. Quote and critically discuss adequate passages taken from the primary texts in order to address problems/aspects/issues relating to your topic. Base your argumentation on your reading of the primary texts, taking into account relevant secondary literature. Do not forget to **document your sources** (cf. the MLA style sheet).

- **Conclusion**
The conclusion briefly summarises the results of your discussion. The conclusion is also the place to raise scholarly questions related to your topic which have not yet been answered.
- **Bibliography / List of Works Cited**
The bibliography / list of works cited includes all primary and secondary sources you either quote from or refer to in your paper. Order the entries according to the alphabet. Make sure you document your sources according to the **MLA style. Use this and ONLY this style throughout your paper.** For a brief outline of the different source types see below; for a detailed outline cf. John Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009) [IB: LX 110 600 (7.A.)].

IV. The format of your research paper (Gibaldi 132-141):²

The mechanics of writing are as important as the organisation and development of your argumentation. Your paper

- has to be written in an appropriate academic style,
- must not have any formal or factual mistakes,
- must not have any spelling mistakes.

1. Length

- a) Proseminar: 10-12 pages (excl. table of contents and bibliography)
- b) Haupt-/ Oberseminar: 12-15 pages (excl. table of contents and bibliography)—LS1 and LAB
15-20 pages (excl. table of contents and bibliography)—LS1+2 and MA

2. Typeface and type size

Always choose a **standard, easily readable typeface** such as **Times New Roman** or **Arial**. Print on **one side** of the paper.

- a) Main body of text: **12 pt Times New Roman** or **11 pt Arial**
- b) Footnotes: **11 pt Times New Roman** or **10 Arial**

3. Margins

Leave margins of **4 cm on the left side, 2.5 cm on all other sides**.
Indent the **first word of a paragraph** five spaces.

4. Spacing:

- a) Main body of text: 1.5-spaced
- b) Footnotes: single-spaced

5. Justification:

Centre justification: Justify the lines of your paper on both the left AND the right-hand side (= “Blocksatz”).

Activate your word processor’s automatic hyphenation feature.

² Please note that some of the following guidelines (e.g. regarding margins, spacing, justification) do not correspond to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

6. Page numbers:

Number all pages consecutively throughout your paper except for the title page and the table of contents. This is to say that pagination should begin with the text proper.

7. Title page:

The official title page can be found on the website of the “Prüfungssekretariat der philosophischen Fakultäten”: Look for the “Deckblatt Hausarbeit”, which can be found under “Formulare und Downloads.”

8. Footnotes:

Use explanatory footnotes only, there is no need to give bibliographical information. Use a smaller font and single-space (see above).

For example:

¹ For strong points of view on different aspects of the issue, see Public Agenda Foundation 1-10 and Sakala 151-88.

9. Quotations (Gibaldi 92-104):

Learning how to quote correctly is eminently important for students of literary and cultural studies. Make sure you become familiar with the different ways of quoting from and referring to different sorts of texts.

Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt, and keep all quotations as brief as possible. The accuracy of quotations is extremely important.

Indicate the sources of your quotes and references by the means of parenthetical documentation (cf. MLA style sheet). If you cite a **DVD**, always add the **time code** indicating the scene you are referring to in parenthetical references.

Prose:

If a prose quotation runs no more than four lines and requires no special emphasis, put it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text. The parenthetical reference is made at the end of the quotation, and the sentence period is placed **after the reference**.

For example:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” says the narrator of Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* of the eighteenth century (35).

or

For the narrator of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, the eighteenth century was both “the best of times” and “the worst of times” (35).

If a prose quotation runs more than four lines, set it off from the text by indenting ten spaces from the left margin and use line spacing 1.5 without adding quotation marks (MLA standard: 2.0). Set it off from the preceding line. **A parenthetical reference to a prose quotation set off from the text follows the last line of the quotation.** For example:

At the conclusion of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and the other boys realize the horror of their actions:

The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island: great, shuddering spasms of the whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. (186)

Other Alteration of Sources:

(sic) = Latin: “thus”, “so”: to assure readers that the quotation is accurate even though the spelling or logic seems wrong. For example:

Shaw admitted, “Nothing can extinguish my interest in Shakespear” (sic).

If adding an emphasis – typically by italicizing the words in question – indicate the emphasis in the parenthetical reference following the quotation. For example:

Lincoln specifically advocated a government “*for the people*” (emphasis added).

Comments or explanations that go inside the quotation must appear with square brackets, not parenthesis:

In the first act he soliloquizes, “Why she would hang on him [Hamlet’s father] / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on. . . .”

10. Reference to titles (Gibaldi 86-92):

In titles and subtitles, **capitalize** the first word, the last word, and all principal words. Do not capitalize articles, prepositions, coordinating conjunctions and the *to* in infinitives when they fall in the middle of a title.

Complete novels, plays and collections of poems or short stories, individual poems which were originally published in the form of a single book should be **in italics** (or underlined, but never use both conventions). For example:

The Awakening (novel)

The Importance of Being Earnest (play)

The Waste Land (poem published as a book)

Wall Street Journal (newspaper)

Time (magazine)

PMLA (journal)

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Web site)

It’s a Wonderful Life (film)

Individual shorter texts published within larger works or unpublished material should be presented **in quotation marks** (i.e. a poem, a short story, an essay). For example:

“Literary History and Sociology” (journal article)

“Sources of Energy in the Next Decade” (magazine article)

“Etruscan” (encyclopedia entry)

“The Fiction of Langston Hughes” (essay in a book)

“The Lottery” (story)

“Kubla Khan” (poem)

“Mood Indigo” (song)

George Orwell’s essay “Politics and the English Language” was reprinted in the collection *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*.

a) Titles within Titles:

Italicize a title normally indicated by italics when it appears within a title enclosed in quotation marks. For example:

“*Romeo and Juliet* and Renaissance Politics” (an article about a play)

“Language and Childbirth in *The Awakening*” (an article about a novel)

Enclose in single quotation marks a title normally indicated by quotation marks when it appears within another title requiring quotation marks. For example:

“Lines after Reading ‘Sailing to Byzantium’” (a poem about a poem)

“The Uncanny Theology of ‘A Good Man is Hard to Find’” (an article about a short story)

Use quotation marks around a title normally indicated by quotation marks when it appears within an italicized title. For example:

“*The Lottery*” and *Other Stories* (a book of stories)

New Perspectives on “The Eve of St. Agnes” (a book about a poem)

If titles normally identified with italics are part of another title in italics, the title within the title is neither in italics nor in quotation marks. For example:

From The Lodger to The Lady Vanishes: Hitchcock’s Classic British Thrillers (a book about films)

b) Some Exceptions:

Sacred Writings and divisions of a text appear without italics or quotation marks. For example:

Bible

King James Version

Preface

Introduction

V. Useful research tools

Thorough knowledge of the research tools at your disposal is absolutely essential for writing academic papers. This is to say that you have to know how to use the departmental library and the SULB (Saarländische Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek). Make sure you are familiar with the OPAC and the card index (“Zettelkatalog”) in the departmental library and know how to use the SULB’s document delivery service (“Fernleihe”). Please, note that texts purchased by the departmental library before the year 2000 are not completely listed in the OPAC yet. Therefore, you always want to consult both the OPAC and the card index in the departmental library.

Make sure you know how to use the various databases you can access through the SULB website. One of the most important databases is the **MLA Bibliography**. Using this database will help you to find the secondary literature necessary for your academic research. The catalogues of the British Library, the Library of Congress, the British National Library and the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (KVK) are also important bibliographic tools that will help you to find secondary literature.

In addition, you should become familiar with the increasing number of electronic libraries and internet discussion boards. Do not, however, neglect the bibliographies that are published in print such as the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (NCBEL).

VI. Last steps

Before handing in your paper have it proof-read by a competent person in order to rid it of typos and mistakes regarding spelling, grammar and style. If you cannot find somebody to proof-read your paper for you, make sure you carefully proof-read it yourself.