

Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin

Quality Criteria for Academic Papers

Academic writing requires a variety of technical and interdisciplinary skills.

These should be acquired and refined in the course of the degree program. This list of criteria specifies the most important aspects that characterize a successful academic paper and generally form the basis for its assessment.

However, in terms of the progressive acquisition of skills, the lecturers will also base their assessment on your progress in your studies.

In this respect, the quality criteria formulate an ideal that you should gradually approach. However, careful handling of sources and adherence to formal requirements is required from the beginning of your studies.

As far as the performance requirements for term papers as written examinations are concerned, these quality criteria offer general guidance. However, you should also take into account the specific information provided by your lecturers and discuss your approach with them if in doubt. This applies in particular to the direction of the research question and the focus of the work.

The formal requirements and further practical tips can be found in the guidelines for writing academic term papers.

Depending on the progress of your studies, a term paper should result in a certain amount of independent work. Depending on the task, the focus of this independent work can be defined differently. This means, for example, that the scope of the literature to be worked on or the depth of the analysis varies. Suitable tasks for a term paper are:

- Comprehensive literature research and independent analysis of the literature
- Application of a theory to an object/sources
- Comparison of two ethnographic studies or different theoretical/methodological approaches
- Synthesis of different theories
- In-depth analysis of an approach / ethnography

Make sure that the assignment of the term paper matches your research question or, conversely, that the research question is suitable for the chosen assignment.

Please note that homework is an examination which must be **agreed in advance** with the teacher.

1. Development of the topic / research question

- The thesis has a meaningful title.
- The topic is placed in a larger context, and the choice of topic and its delimitation is justified
- The relevance of the topic and the research question is explained: Emphasize the
- theoretical or practical gain that comes with answering the question/examining the thesis.
- The work is based on a clear question or thesis.
- This serves as the central theme of the thesis; it is dealt with systematically in the course of the thesis.
- The question can be dealt with within the given framework (time and page length).
- At the same time, it is sufficiently complex/controversial and appropriate to the subject.

2. Structure of the paper

- The **structure** of the work follows a logical structure.
- It is suitable for dealing with the question.
- The weighting and order of the (sub)chapters correspond to the objective of the work.
- The **introduction** provides orientation: topic, relevance and classification in a larger context, research question, and approach.
 - In the **final section**, the results/theses/findings are summarized and discussed (possibly followed by an outlook).
 - Introduction and conclusion correspond with each other.

3. Reasoning / Analysis

- The work goes beyond the mere presentation and description of the literature used.
- In an independent examination of the literature/source material, an own position is formulated and comprehensibly justified.
 - To this end, a **coherent line** of reasoning is developed that aims to answer the question.
 - All relevant aspects of the topic are taken into account and, if necessary, reasons are given for the emphasis and omissions.
 - Argumentative relationships are established between different text sections, contents and positions.
 - The **theoretical concepts** selected for the work
 - * are appropriate to the topic/subject matter,
 - * are presented correctly and comprehensibly, and
 - * are meaningfully applied to the student's own research question/subject matter
 - **Key terms** are clarified and defined with regard to the work.
 - Statements/theses are sufficiently substantiated.
 - Presuppositions are sufficiently explicated.
 - Contradictions in or between the terms/models/theories used or between theory and empiricism are recognized and analyzed if necessary.
 - Controversies are presented as such and the respective positions are weighed up against each other.

If the paper contains an empirical component:

- The material helps to illustrate certain aspects of the topic.
- Empirical findings are appropriately described, contextualized and embedded in the scientific discussion.

4. Positioning in academic discourse / dealing with sources

- The literature used is appropriate to the type and scope of the task
- * For term papers: sufficient reference to the course and its literature
 - The selection or reduction of the literature used is justified.
 - Central works/authors are considered, appropriately categorized and reflected upon in terms of source criticism (e.g., historical, geographical, theoretical, methodological, research ethics).
 - Literature from other disciplines is reflected with regard to its social and cultural anthropological relevance.

- The **handling of evidence** is careful: data is substantiated by citing sources; external lines of thought, systematizations or formulations are identified as such.
- The statements of other authors are primarily reproduced in their own words (**indirect quotation**).
- The number and scope of verbatim / **direct quotations** are appropriate; these are integrated into the flow of the text in a meaningful way, both in terms of content and language.
- The **citation style** is comprehensible, consistent and precise.
- The **bibliography** is complete: All sources used are listed - and only these!

5. (Technical) linguistic expression

- The work is written in clear, understandable language.
- The linguistic expression is appropriate for a scientific discussion: Refrain from using colloquial language and (unreflected) judgmental expressions.
- Technical terms are used appropriately.
- (Historical) ethnographic data is categorized linguistically by using the appropriate tense.
- The work demonstrates a reflective approach to terminology.
- Terms are used consistently.
- Spelling and grammar are correct.

6. Formalia

- The details on the cover sheet are complete.
- The scope of the work corresponds to the specifications.
- The layout is clear and the formatting is consistent.
- The table of contents matches the body text and is clearly laid out.
- The bibliography is consistent and accurate.
- The instructions in the [“Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology”](#) were implemented.

Tip: Use online language tests. For English texts, we recommend [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com). For German texts, you can use mentor.duden.de or rechtschreibpruefung24.de, for example.



General advice: First write a rough version of your text and then revise it in two separate steps: in terms of content and language/form. Use the quality criteria as a checklist for the revision!

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