

# How to write and evaluate term papers

\*adapted from Microsociology

## Formal criteria

- Does your paper have a title page (incl. author, title, submission date)?
- Does it have a table of contents?
- Does it have a list of references? Is it complete, i.e. does it include references to all in-text citations (and only to these)?
- Is it roughly 3.000 words long (plus minus 10%)?
- Are citations formally correct and complete?
  - coherent and according to one citation style (e.g. APA, Harvard: <http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm>)
  - Examples:
    - Paraphrasing: Author (Year, page number(s)) argues that...
    - Literal citation: This view is shared by other authors as well: „exact citation“ (Author, year, page number(s))
  - **Plagiarism is sanctioned with 5,0 (=fail)**. Please also refer to further information on plagiarism on the institute website.

# Topic and research question

- Does the paper refer to the topic of the seminar?
- Is there a clear research question
  - Is it made explicit?
  - Does it correspond to the topic of the term paper?
  - Is it a sensible question, i.e. precise, focussed, scholarly relevant, and is it possible to answer it in the framework of a term paper and with the chosen method and/or data?
- Does it include the definitions of the main concepts?
- Is your own contribution clearly recognizable?
  - i.e. are you not only summarizing existing texts
  - Does the question go beyond the topics that have been dealt with in the seminar?
  - Is the paper purely descriptive (asking “what” questions) or also analytical (asking and answering “why” questions)?
  - Is there an original/innovative idea with respect to theory or methods?
  - Does it include a critical perspective on the theories used?

# Outline of the argument

- Do you explain and justify how you go about to answer the research question at the beginning of the paper?
- Does the structure of the paper make sense in view of the research question, or would there be better ways to deal with it?
  - Is the aim of each section clearly defined, and does it contribute to answering the research question?
  - Is the section structure coherent, i.e. are the sections logically connected and is there a clear and explicit theme running through the paper?

## Paper structure:

Introduction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to the topic</li> <li>- Development of a relevant and clear research question</li> <li>- Definition of main concepts</li> <li>- Discussion of the paper structure</li> </ul>
Main part:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of the argument in subsections with subtitles for each subsection</li> </ul>
Conclusion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summary of findings</li> <li>- Limitations of this research</li> <li>- Implications/ policy recommendations</li> <li>- Outlook</li> </ul>

# Answering your research question I

- Do you present clear reasoning underpinning your arguments?
  - Do your arguments link to the research question?
  - Are they deductive (i.e. following from what was previously said), concise (i.e. no unnecessary digressions) and logically consistent (without contradictions)?
  - Is every claim you make supported by evidence, theories, or arguments?
- Is your argument based on the state of the art in scholarly literature?
  - Have you conducted a systematic literature review?
  - Do you refer to relevant scholarly literature that refers to the topic?
  - Do you use a sufficient amount of contributions (minimum 10 academic peer reviewed articles or book chapters)?
  - Do you report and interpret the references correctly?
  - Rather than just summarizing existing literature, do you point out how the literature is relevant to your paper, how your paper builds on it, what the paper contribute to it is, or how the paper criticizes it?

## Answering your research question II

- Do you critically reflect on your arguments? Do you mention potential criticism regarding limitations/weaknesses of your own argument?
- Does the style comply with standards of academic research, i.e.
  - Is your argumentation grammatically and linguistically correct?
  - Is the spelling correct?
  - Is your writing style simple, clear and precise?
  - Is the writing style adequate, i.e. free of polemics and normative judgment?
- Do you answer the research question in the conclusion?