

## Guidelines for term papers, B.A.-theses, and M.A./M.Ed.-theses

### What is the aim of your term paper/thesis?

A term paper/thesis is a coherent presentation of your research on a certain topic. As such, it is a means to evaluate your grasp on the seminar's content/a particular self-chosen area of English studies as well as the critical thinking, English language, and academic writing skills that you are supposed to develop during your studies. Your paper should *not* be a mere compilation of statements, arguments, quotations, or summaries of other people's ideas or unconnected facts and ideas.

Term papers and theses always explain in their introduction what they achieve. Integral to this is your thesis statement. A thesis statement *in our field* usually offers a theoretically/methodologically founded claim about the function of selected elements in a text. It is formulated as a declarative sentence, not as a question. A thesis statement should not just state what you will analyse (i.e., which topic), but also say *how* you will do it, and what you wish to show. It, along with the surrounding contextualization in your introduction, should also explain *why* your topic is interesting and relevant. Rather than treating your thesis statement as a hypothesis, treat it as an argument that you make at the beginning of your term paper and then support with your analysis.

### Structure

1. Cover page (needs a really good title!)	not included in the word count
2. Table of contents*	not included in the word count
<b>3. Introduction (needs a good title!)</b>	<b>c. 10-15% of the word count</b>
<b>4. Theory/methodology chapter (good title, too!)</b>	<b>c. 15-20%</b>
<b>5. Analysis (also needs a good title!)</b>	<b>c. 50-60%</b>
<b>6. Conclusion (title matters!)</b>	<b>c. 10-15%</b>
7. Works Cited	not included in the word count
8. Declaration of Academic Integrity	not included in the word count

\*When devising your structure, make sure that a chapter 1.1 always has a chapter 1.2, etc. Avoid hyper-structuring (e.g. having a chapter 5.2.1.4) and avoid very short subchapters. Some rather short subchapters might actually be more effective as a longer paragraph, because if you constantly start new chapters this interrupts the reading flow and often indicates a lack of cohesion.

### Finding a topic

An important part of your work is finding your own topic. Think small rather than big: Look at one specific aspect rather than at an entire text, several characters, etc. Make sure to consider the length of the assignment and be realistic about the scope of your topic. Generally, it is better to choose a narrower topic and go into greater detail than it is to choose a larger topic that you won't fully be able to cover. Before deciding on a topic, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the topic relate to the overall topic of the seminar?
- Is the topic suitable for the scope of this paper?
- What exactly am I trying to argue or find out?
- Can I find sufficient scholarly literature?
- Which skills (methodology, theory, approach) are required for the analysis?

## **Titles**

Your term paper/thesis title should be concise and informative. It should not be formulated as a question. When formulating a title, consider the following points:

- Which 2-3 keywords are most important for your topic and should be mentioned in the title?
- Does it make sense to include the name of the author and/or the primary text in the title? This is often a good idea, but can be left out if your title is too long or if you are working with multiple texts and authors.
- Two-part titles are often a successful formula which allow you to name the general topic or a specific aspect of a text in the first part and then mention the primary text for analysis in the second part. Example - Mapping Black European Literature: Mobility and Cartography in Johnny Pitts' *Afropean*.
- Is there a short quotation from the text that you could use as the first part of a two-part title? Example - "Our Europe": Transnational Identity and (Un)belonging in Olumide Popoola's *Also by Mail*.

## **Paragraphs**

Structure your writing into *complete* paragraphs that contain a topic sentence as well as a summarising/transition sentence at the end. They should neither be shorter than five sentences, nor longer than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page. Each paragraph should introduce a complete thought into the paper and both link to the previous and to the next paragraphs. As a rule, only start a new paragraph when you are introducing a new argument or new point. If your paragraph becomes too long, consider how you might break it up into two subpoints. *If a paragraph is just one or two sentences long, this either belongs to the paragraph above or below, or it is simply underdeveloped and needs elaborating.* Commonly, paragraphs are structured as follows:

- Topic sentence(s): a statement indicating the paragraph's main point
- Evidence/supporting sentences: quotations, explanations, references, analysis, critical observations
- Concluding sentence: summing up your point and possibly linking it to the next paragraph

## **Secondary literature**

You are not expected to use a specific number of secondary sources, but rather to choose sufficient, relevant sources to support your reading and analysis of the primary text(s). Make sure you critically engage with the secondary literature you choose by not just paraphrasing and

quoting, but also adding your own interpretation of the information and its relation to your argument. We recommend that you draw on the secondary literature we used in class!

In order to find secondary literature, do your own research. Draw on the seminar materials; use the MLA-database (access via ULB website > “Datenbanken”) and the like; consult the library. Google Scholar, jstor, or Project Muse sometimes have texts that you can't find via the ULB catalogue or on MLA. Some of those texts will only be accessible through the University's wifi or via VPN. Sites like Sparknotes, Wikipedia, Encyclopaedia Britannica or private websites are not acceptable, scholarly sources. Once you access a suitable article/chapter/paper/book to use as a secondary source in your work, make sure to take a detailed look at the bibliography of said source as well, for further research (i.e. the “snowball method”).

All sources you use to support your argumentation in your paper need to be cited and documented *according to the MLA guidelines* in order to avoid plagiarism. Please note that this citation style may differ from the one you use in other subjects or in linguistics! The authoritative resource is the MLA Handbook, 9th edition, which can be found in the department library. Other resources like the [Purdue University Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) are also trustworthy. You are also encouraged to use reference managers, such as Citavi or Zotero, which have been introduced in your BA Academic Skills course (for those who completed their BA in Münster). For more information, see the [ULB website](#) as well as the links below under “Additional resources”.

### **Methodology/forms of textual analysis**

Textual analysis is a skill you are expected to demonstrate in your term paper/thesis. This should go beyond the plot level and be tailored to the particular medium you are working with (i.e. drama, novel, short story, poem, film, comic, graphic novel, etc.). For example, films should be treated as films, meaning you should pay close attention to editing, camera, music, mise-en-scène, and other means of composition. Inserting appropriate and meaningful stills into the text helps visualise your analysis. *Only for theses*: It is *highly* advisable that you have worked with the type of text, which you tackle in your thesis, before: If you've never written a paper on poetry, it may be *very hard* to write a good thesis on poetry, and the same is true for film, drama, etc.

Consider that there are different methodologies for textual and cultural analysis, including, but not limited to: analysing structure, analysing narrative and/or narratological strategies, reading a text in relation to its context, critiquing an ideological position, and thematic analysis. For M.A.-level students, consider that there are methodologies beyond textual analysis, including those from neighbouring disciplines, that may be useful for your term paper/thesis and can be selected in consultation with your instructor. For term papers, please consider which types of textual analysis you have practised during your English studies and in the relevant seminar when considering which methodology to use. For theses, please discuss your methodology with your supervisor when developing your project.

## How to use quotations

Do not expect quotations to speak for themselves. Your job in a term paper/thesis is to explain, evaluate, and relate the sources to each other and to your argument. As a rule of thumb, use at least as much space as you took to present somebody else's point of view to make use of it for your own argument. In terms of both style and effect, you should not end a paragraph, let alone an entire chapter, on a quote. By ending on a quote, you prioritise somebody else's words and view over your own, so make sure that – if you want to have a quote in your last sentence – you add at least a half-sentence for context or explanation. Quotations never speak for themselves.

## Formalities & stylistic notes

- Numbering - please use page numbering, beginning with 1 after the table of contents
- Font - Times New Roman or Calibri (size 12), or Arial (size 11)
- Spacing - 1.5 line spacing, justified ("Blocksatz")
- Set the margins to 2,5 cm (1") left, top, and bottom, and 3,5 cm (1,4") right
- Your layout should clearly indicate the start of new paragraphs, either by inserting an empty line, or by indenting the first line of a new paragraph (e.g. with a tab stop).
- Word count - Please stick to the required word count as specified in your module description (+/-10%). Quotations are included in the word count, the cover page, table of contents, Works Cited section, and the declaration of academic integrity are not.
- Please use gender-neutral language where appropriate (e.g. when speaking about a larger, unspecified group of people), and please refrain from reproducing binary gender categories: use 'they' rather than 's/he'; use 'their' rather than 'his/her', etc.
- Most importantly when it comes to formatting: be consistent!

## ChatGPT and other AI resources

The term paper you submit must be *entirely your own work* and its argument and analysis must reflect your own original thinking. When you draw upon the work of others, be they authors or AI, you must acknowledge this. ChatGPT, UniGPT, and other AI resources are tools that can be used in academic and creative ways. You may use ChatGPT or comparable programs to: do preliminary research, help develop a structure, develop/finalise/optimize the works cited page, finalise the work in the sense of proofreading/stylistic improvement *as long as you acknowledge this* in the anti-plagiarism statement you submit with your paper. You may not use AI resources to generate your text in the first place. Please, however, keep in mind that information you obtain from ChatGPT may be false or plagiarised and should be verified by additional research. You can find information [here](#) about when and how you need to cite AI tools in MLA style.

## Additional resources

- [Sample term paper](#) formatted in MLA
- Jennifer Schultz, "[What you need to know before using reference management software](#)"
- [Citavi video tutorial](#) (in English)