

Academic Paper and BA & MA Thesis Guidelines

How to Get Started

1. Requirements

- Formatting
 - Font Times New Roman
 - Spacing 1.5
 - Font size 12
 - Margins Top 2,5cm
Left 2,5cm
Right 2,5cm
Bottom 2cm
- Please provide a signed “Versicherung an Eides statt”
- Please submit your paper as a **pdf-file** to your first and second advisor after you have officially submitted.

2. Before Writing the Paper

- Come to the office hours of your respective advisor to talk about general ideas for your paper.
- **Formulate a thesis!**
- Develop a rough outline of your paper with chapters and possible sub-chapters.
- Read and think about your primary material.
- Research, read, and think about your main concepts and scholarship. Use our university library search engines, bibliographic databases, and other tools, to find fitting scholarship for your thesis. Discuss secondary sources properly; they should not be expected to offer any kind of “ultimate” or “absolute” truth. Instead, evaluate them critically and properly assess the intellectual and historical contexts in which they stand. You may want to indicate in how far the argument of a critic was made in a context that differs in significant ways from the contexts in which you are using his or her argument. Or you may argue that an argument is shaped by its intellectual setting or that a critic is right or wrong about a point – or should have defined terms differently.
- Attend the BA & MA thesis colloquium to discuss your ideas and the progress of your project. You will also benefit from the questions, experiences, and projects your fellow students share at the colloquium.
- **Come to the office of your respective advisors to talk about the thesis and the outline of your paper. In Corona times, seek to talk to your advisor via big blue button, phone, or other formats of distant conversation.**

3. Writing the Paper

- Plan your writing. Consider in advance the time you will (approximately) need for doing your research and writing the paper.

- Use the MLA guidelines for documentation and reference in your paper. Mark all quotes in the appropriate and coherent manner. Compile a complete Works Cited including all your primary material and scholarship.
- Do use footnotes, even if you use parenthetical references. Footnotes are the place in which you can point outward, provide the historical, political, social, media context of the material under consideration, add the necessary substance to your argument, and indicate that you are aware of alternative ways of reading the material under consideration.
- After you have written your paper, have someone else read your paper and have them comment on it. Additionally, print out your paper and read aloud to identify grammatical mistakes or (potentially) unclear formulations. Check each paragraph for content (ideally you are able to identify one argumentative point / one specific topic per paragraph) and see whether the arrangement of paragraphs / content makes sense.
- Put your paper away for one or two weeks. Afterwards, re-read your text to identify inconsistencies (structure, implausible arguments, or incomprehensible formulations).

How to Write your Thesis

The following suggestions have been taken from

“The English Critical Essay” (1997)
by Linda Hutcheon and Nancy Kang

Whenever necessary, we have updated information and explicated and elaborated on the argument of Hutcheon and Kang, or edited for clarification.

The English critical essay is a coherent and logically developed presentation of a thesis, a position taken on a topic. This point of view must be supported with textual evidence and careful argument which aim to convince the reader of the importance and validity of that thesis. A research paper espouses a particular interpretation of texts, issues, or events in order to uncover what might not be obvious or establish connections that might help your reader see old material in a new light. Your introduction – your first paragraph – expresses an opinion that requires explanation, one with which it must be possible to disagree. You can't write “I am going to explore women's lives in 19th-century England,” but you might write, “The cult of domesticity ensured that women never experienced anger or denied doing so when they did.” This kind of statement is known as a thesis and appears in your introduction. What follows is a concise and practical aid to students.

1. Steps in Writing an Essay

- 1.1. Investigate the selected TOPIC, taking careful, accurate notes.
- 1.2. When you use scholarship, remember that you must have grasped (and be able to express) the overall argument of the work before extracting any one point from it. You are expected to understand and evaluate, not merely copy.
- 1.3. Find a THESIS. In order to narrow down and define your particular subject, assemble your material and review it until you are familiar enough with it to form a judgement or take a position on the TOPIC selected. You should be able to formulate this THESIS in a single sentence or two. Ask yourself: what exactly is the point I want the reader to understand? Your thesis should announce what you will argue in your BA/MA paper. A statement like “In the speeches of John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards there are many similarities but also some differences,” for example, is vague. A better thesis would be: “While John Winthrop's speeches use religious doctrines in order to justify a democratic social model, Jonathan Edwards employs Scripture primarily in order to reprimand his listeners and to insist on the necessity of strict religious codes of behavior. Where one concentrates on the common good, the other focuses on individual salvation.”
- 1.4. Organize your information in light of your THESIS.
 - 1.4.1. Gather all material that supports your argument. If there is not enough proof to be convincing, abandon that thesis and begin again.
 - 1.4.2. Divide this material into the separate points of the argument and arrange these in order of increasing strength, ending with your best point.

1.4.3. Deal with opposite points of view. Disposing – in a fair and logical manner – of counterarguments in the body of your essay actually strengthens your own THESIS.

1.5. Prepare a detailed outline or PLAN before writing the FIRST DRAFT. As you do so, check that there are:

- no contradictions in your argument
- no gaps in your reasoning
- no irrelevant points included
- no relevant point not supported by evidence
- no unacknowledged assumptions (about the text, the method, the reader)

1.6. Write a FIRST DRAFT based on the STRUCTURE outlined in section 2. Then consult the CHECKLIST (3) before rewriting.

1.7. Proofread before submitting, using the CHECKLIST below. Try to finish the essay a few days before it is due. This will allow you time to read it a final time (with some critical distance) and make any revisions.

2. The Structure of a BA/MA Thesis

2.1. Title

Your title should reflect the THESIS or central argument of your essay. Avoid repeating the TOPIC as assigned (or selected).

2.2. Opening Paragraph

Begin with a Statement about the general TOPIC and proceed to your particular THESIS and approach to it. This structure will orient your reader. Avoid giving a summary of what is to follow. Summaries are best left to conclusions. Avoid writing about your essay; write only about your subject. (In other words, avoid such statements as: "In this section I shall discuss x." Simply discuss x.)

2.3. Body

The body of your paper is by far the longest part. It constitutes about 80% of your text; the introduction and conclusion constitute about 10% each. It should be divided into carefully connected paragraphs, each consisting of about four to eight sentences. Avoid overly long or short paragraphs. Each paragraph should contain one major point and must be related logically and grammatically to the preceding and following ones. Use connecting words (such as: however, therefore, in addition, nevertheless, and so on) to ensure smooth and clear transitions between points and paragraphs. Make sure that the argument progresses in a manner that is both coherent and convincing. Never apologize. Avoid statements as such "in my opinion," since the entire essay is assumed to be your learned stance on a given topic – that is, a well-informed and argumentatively grounded opinion / a position taken based upon and supported by material from the texts.

2.4. Conclusion

Since the argument has built up to your strongest point, your conclusion should begin with what your argument proved – your THESIS. A brief and reworded summary of your main

points could follow for emphasis, but a plodding repetition should be avoided. End with an “opening outwards” to the general implications of your findings, remembering that the reader should be left with a feeling of your balanced and well documented and solidly sustained conviction, not your doubt or hesitation.

3. Checklist for Rewriting (and Proofreading)

Always proofread from a printout, not a computer screen.

3.1. Check paragraphing for length, transitional links, and internal coherence.

3.2. Check word choice and review your style. Is each word really the one you want? Use a dictionary; never use a thesaurus or dictionary of synonyms.

3.3. Check grammar. Running a grammar checker can offer you choices for revising but will not catch all your errors. Be aware that muddled sentences usually indicated that the argument here is not quite there yet (and oftentimes these sentences, once that they have been straightened out with care, contain the best and the strongest part of the argument). The most common problems to watch out for are:

- sentence fragments (incomplete sentences)
- run-on sentences or use of a comma where a period or semicolon is required between statements
- punctuation (within and at the end of sentences; after quotations)
- possessives (remember the apostrophe)
- agreement of verb and subject (make both either singular or plural)
- unclear antecedent reference of pronouns (watch for: it, they, which)
- use of prepositions (which verb or noun requires which preposition)
- punctuation, particularly the use of comma
- faulty parallelism in paired constructions

3.4. Check spelling and typing for possible errors. Use a dictionary if you have any doubts. Run a spelling checker but understand that it will not catch all errors.

4. Documentation

4.1. General

All sources – primary texts and secondary reference material – must be acknowledged. Not to do so is to risk plagiarism and its serious consequences. Keep accurate notes when doing research so that you can easily separate your ideas from those of others. Summaries and paraphrases, as well as direct quotations, must be acknowledged as such.

4.2. Titles

Italicize titles of books, periodicals (newspapers, magazines, journals), long works (plays, long poems in book form), films, television shows, audio media (radio programs, compact discs, etc.), musical pieces, and visual arts.

Titles of short stories, articles, individual poems, book chapters, single episodes from radio or television, songs, and lectures, however, should only be enclosed in quotation marks.

4.3. Quotation

Quotations within your paper from any source must be introduced in such a way that both the logic and the grammar of your introducing sentence remain clear. Enclose any changes to the quotation made by you in square brackets. For example, indicate omissions from the quotation with three ellipsis points: “quoteforget [...] quote” (author page number).

Use single quotation marks (‘xxx’) only for a quotation within a quotation.

Keep question marks or exclamations points in the quote but end your sentence with a period after the reference. For example: “quoteforgetquoteforget?” (author page number).

Quotations of less than four lines should be incorporated as part of the text and placed within quotation marks. Verse quotations of up to three lines may also be placed in the text within quotation marks, with the line divisions marked by a slash (l) and followed by the reference in parentheses.

Longer quotations should be separated from the text and indented (1cm left, 1cm right; 11point font size; 1,15 spacing) but with no quotation marks unless they exist in the original. Indicate the author and page number(s) of the quoted material in parentheses after the punctuation of the last quoted line.

4.4. In-Text Citation

Use parenthetical citations in the text of the essay to credit sources. In general, place parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the material quoted. Include the author’s last name, a space, and the page number of the citation, like this: (Baker 50). Never use abbreviations like “pg.” or “pp.”

There is no punctuation inside the parentheses unless more than one work by the same author is cited. In this case, never provide the year of publication but use a comma and a shortened form of the title: (Baker, *Blues* 50).

If your quote extends over a single page, provide complete page numbers: (Baker 50-51).

4.5. Paraphrasing

When you are paraphrasing, the same conventions apply. Place parentheses at the end of the sentence (or paragraph) containing the material paraphrased but add the word “see” to indicate you are paraphrasing. Include the author’s last name, a space, and the page number of the citation, like this: (see Baker 50). Never use abbreviations like “pg.” or “pp.”

There is no punctuation inside the parentheses unless more than one work by the same author is cited. In this case, never provide the year of publication but use a comma and a shortened form of the title: (see Baker, *Blues* 50).

If you are paraphrasing more than one page, provide complete page numbers: (see Baker 50-51).

4.6. Citation Style

If at the point of citation the author’s name is clear to your reader, you need only cite the page number – that is, (50) instead of (Baker 50).

When the author is not mentioned in the introducing sentence, provide their name in the reference. For example: Nature poetry attempts to capture both physical landscapes and “maps of a state of mind” (Atwood 49).

When the author is mentioned in the introducing sentence, you do not need to provide their name in the reference. For example: According to Margaret Atwood, nature poetry allows readers to access “maps of a state of mind” (49).

When you are quoting from the same source subsequently, provide complete reference information every time you quote, i.e. (author page number). Do not omit the name of the author or page numbers and do not use “ibid.”

4.7. Works Cited

The list of Works Cited should appear on a separate page at the end of your essay. List all sources you quoted from while preparing the paper (this can include texts you have not directly quoted from or paraphrased but which helped you in think about your topic). The title Works Cited (without quotation marks) should be centered. Entries are placed in alphabetical order according to the author’s last name. Avoid numbering entries. Start each entry at the left margin and indent any subsequent lines.

In the following you will find some of the most common sources for your Works Cited. This list is not complete, and you will have to check the current MLA guidelines in the 8th edition of the MLA Handbook (2016). Alternatively, you may also use the overview provided by the Purdue Online Writing Lab using the following link:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html

- Basic Book Format, Single Author:
Faludi, Susan. *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America*. Picador, 2007.
- A Book by Two or More Authors:
Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.
- A Work Compiled by an Editor:
Caruth, Cathy, editor. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- A Work in an Anthology, Reference, or Collection
Sierp, Aline. “Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU’s Politics of Memory since 1945.” *Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, edited by Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 103-118.
- An Article in a Scholarly Journal
Magnet, Shoshana. “Playing at Colonization: Interpreting Imaginary Landscapes in the Video Game *Tropico*.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2006, pp. 142-162.
- Citing an Entire Web Site
The Purdue OWL Family of Sites. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2008, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl. Accessed 23 Apr. 2020.
- An Article in a Web Magazine
Carson, Don. “Environmental Storytelling: Creating Immersive 3D Worlds Using Lessons Learned from the Theme Park Industry.” *Gamasutra*, 1 March 2000,

www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/131594/environmental_storytelling_.php.
Accessed 31 March 2020.

- Films or Movies
Ocean's Eleven. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, performances by George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, and Julia Roberts, Warner Brothers, 2001.
- Entire Television Shows
Waller-Bridge, Phoebe. *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures, 2019.
- Individual TV Episodes
“Episode 1.1.” *Fleabag*, written by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, directed by Harry Bradbeer and Tim Kirkby, Two Brothers Pictures, 2016.
- Dissertations
Fox, Anne-Liese Juge. “Restoring Performance: Personal Story, Place, and Memory in Post-Katrina New Orleans.” Diss. Louisiana State University, 2013. http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/967/. Accessed 31 March 2020.

Hutcheon, Linda and Nancy King. “The English Critical Essay.” *University of Toronto*, www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/language/essay1.htm. Accessed 23 October 2019.

A Checklist for Planning, Writing and Submitting your BA & MA Thesis

Formal Aspects

a. Preparation of and Research for your Paper

Keep your deadline in mind.

Devise a timetable to plan your work.

Research your material early, document findings painstakingly.

Contact your lecturer as soon as possible to talk about your thesis statement and your outline.

b. Form of the Paper

Does your format (spacing, font, font size, etc.) meet requirements?
See information sheet for details.

Does your paper have a title page, a table of contents, an introduction, a main text, a conclusion, a bibliography, and a “eidestattliche Erklärung?”

Provide page numbers for your written text.

Use footnotes to provide additional information or if you wish to elaborate additional aspects.

c. Works Cited

Does your Works Cited contain useful and relevant texts?

Does your bibliography include all the primary and secondary material used?

Are all entries formatted according to MLA guidelines?

d. Quoting

Do you properly quote from and refer to your primary and secondary material?

Do you identify your quotes and references properly and in accordance with MLA guidelines?

Content, Organization, and Structure

a. Title

Does your title provide an idea of your paper?

Stir curiosity in your reader and interest for your paper. Do not compose a very long or complicated title.

b. Outline & Structure

Do you develop one idea per paragraph, i. e. do you use paragraph breaks to introduce a new step in your argumentation?

Do you formulate a topic sentence for (most of) your paragraphs?
Do the individual sections of your paper provide a logical structure for your argument?
Is the connection between the different chapters, subchapters, and passages logical and comprehensible?
c. Introduction & Thesis Statement
Stir curiosity in your reader and interest for your paper.
Explain the relevance and the scope of your research interest.
Indicate the structure of your paper by foreshadowing the logical development of your overall argument and explain your outline.
Formulate a thesis statement.

Argumentation, Command of the Material, and Critical Thinking

Do you develop a logical and coherent line of argumentation?
Do your arguments build on each other – do they follow a common thread?
Support your arguments by providing examples.
Do you have command of your primary material and do you engage critically with your it?
Do you develop your individual understanding of your topic or do you merely report different scholarly positions on your subject?
Do you understand and engage critically with your secondary material?
If possible, state and engage critically with perspectives that differ or even contradict your approach.
Does your conclusion provide a summary of your argument, assess your thesis statement, and offer an outlook?

Language, Scholarship, Analysis, and Referencing

a. Spelling, Grammar, and Sentence structure
Choose either American or British English.
Avoid the use of colloquial language.
Do you use proper spelling and grammar?
Are your sentences comprehensible?

Make sure your sentences are not too long.	
Guide your reader through your text by summarizing your arguments, foreshadowing the following steps, and explaining why you are doing what you are doing from time to time.	
b. Use of Proper Academic Terminology	
Do you use the proper terminology when analyzing your material?	
Do you use terminology you encountered during your research?	
Do you introduce and explain concepts and ideas before using them? Do you substantiate your use of the terminology with relevant scholarship?	
c. Use of Secondary Literature & Referencing	
Do you use credible scholarly sources?	
Do you properly identify all the sources that you have used – correctly differentiating between quote, paraphrase, and reference?	
Do you use quotes in their correct context? Do you properly indicate when you are adapting an argument made in a very different context?	
d. Use of Primary Literature	
Do you engage carefully with the primary material, noting its specific form of literary, visual, or media communication, its visual, literary or sonic registers, its alignment of characters, its settings, etc.	
Do you quote from your primary material, explaining how these examples operate and produce meaning?	
Do you use these quotes in their correct context? Do you properly indicate when you are connecting, counterbalancing, comparing primary material located in distinctive contexts?	
Do you historicize or contextualize your material in adequate ways, using scholarship, whenever appropriate?	

Evaluation Criteria for Written Texts in North American Studies

The checklist above retraces the steps you need to take when planning, writing, and proof-reading a scholarly paper. The most important aspects of convincing arguments made in your term papers and BA or MA theses thus include formal aspects, the content, organization, and structure of the argument as well as the analysis and interpretation, the command of primary and secondary material, proper quotation, and the logical organization of your overall thesis.

The table below shows our criteria for the assessment of the four pillars of a convincing argument in North American literary, cultural, and media studies: the scholarly, argumentative, analytical, and linguistic quality of a text.

Grade	Use of Scholarship and Command of Analytical Terms	Structure and Clarity of Thought	Grasp of Primary Material and Scholarship Material	Language
1	Insightful	Convincing Organization of Weaker and Stronger Points	Inquiries into Contradictions and Codetermination of Semantics and Formal Arrangement / Sound	Correct Register, Idiomatic
2	Productive Use	Arrangement in Sequence	Acknowledges Several Layers of Meaning	Some Unpolished Constructions
3	Standard Use	Checklist Approach	Ahistorical, Decontextualized	A Couple of Flaws in Syntax and Word Choice
4	Faulty Use	Contradictions, Gaps	Misprision / Simplification	Errors in Grammar
5	No or too Few Scholarly References and Analytical Terms Used	Lack of Sequence	Does Not Think beyond the Literal Meaning of Words	Syntax, Grammar, Word Choice Flawed