

Guidelines for Submitting Papers and Theses in English Linguistics and TEFL

Important preliminaries:

Module papers should be written **with supervisors you know** and we recommend you write them **on the topic of a course you attended with them**.

Module papers and BA theses must be submitted at least **4 weeks before you need their grades**, **MA theses** must be submitted at least **6 weeks before you need their grades**. Since you will have to contact your supervisor and attend required consultations even earlier, you should make sure to plan ahead accordingly. The enrolment deadlines for Master's programs (Nov 10, and May 10, respectively) are especially relevant in this regard.

Note also: The following guidelines are **general** guidelines. Your supervisor may have additional requirements or more specific guidelines for module papers and theses, and you should ask him/her about this in your first consultation.

1. GENERAL REMARKS¹

1.1 WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF WRITING PAPERS AT THE UNIVERSITY?

Writing papers serves both to exercise and hone your academic skills. You write papers and theses to display your ability to acquire relevant knowledge on a particular topic, to address a specific problem by using appropriate methods, and to systematically present the results of your own work. Furthermore, you should demonstrate your ability to critically reflect on your topic, develop original ideas and express yourself in a coherent manner that is suited to the genre. Therefore, you should take the time to read the entire guidelines, regardless of whether you are preparing your final theses or "just" a short essay.

1.2 WHAT TYPES OF PAPERS EXIST?

There are basically **three types of papers** you may encounter, or will have to write, in the course of your studies: **Short essays**, **module papers**, and a **final thesis** (BA or MA).

In TEFL seminars, you may also be required to write a **portfolio or teaching proposal**. Please note that these are regarded as academic papers as well and are therefore also subject to the academic standards outlined here.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following guidelines apply to all types of papers.

1.3 TOPIC

1.3.1 Finding a Suitable Topic

Given that you will have to invest quite a bit of work into your paper, we recommend that you select a topic that you are personally interested in. You are normally free to choose a topic on your own and/or to propose and discuss first ideas with your advisor. We are happy to help you get to the next stage, but you need to have a basic idea of what you want to do in your paper.

In terms of content, academic papers generally fall into two broad types:

- a) An **analysis of empirical data** with respect to a particular topic/phenomenon
- b) A **synthesis and critical review of the literature** on a particular subject

These two types of papers usually also differ in terms of their internal **structure** (see section 2.3 below).

¹ Adapted from a similar text by Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (n.d.).

Linguistics: In general, we prefer papers that combine specific theoretical aspects with an empirical analysis of real language data (type a)).

On the BA level, students may, however, also write module papers that consist of a critical review or an analysis that is based on a literature survey (type b)). Such papers must nevertheless address a specific problem or discuss a relevant question (e.g., theoretical or methodological problems within a specific field of linguistics, implications that specific differences between two languages or linguistic systems could have for language learners, etc.). So it is not sufficient for papers of the second type to merely compile a literature survey and list the findings or opinions of different authors. It is absolutely **essential** that you use what you read to **address and critically discuss** a particular problem/question in the field. While doing so, you should be careful to avoid overgeneralizations, overly strong postulations, and/or merely stating your own opinion on the matter.

However, if you already know that you intend to write your BA thesis in linguistics, we strongly recommend that you already start to develop your analytic skills in your module/term papers by conducting your own empirical analysis of real language data.

MA students are generally expected to conduct an empirical analysis in their term papers, as well as in their final theses.

TEFL: In general, papers and theses have to address a specific problem in the field of TEFL. So it is **not sufficient** to merely compile a **literature survey** and list the findings or opinions of different authors. It is absolutely essential that you use what you read to address and critically discuss a particular problem/question.

1.3.2 Clearing your Topic with your Advisor

1.3.2.1 Linguistics

Short essays (for course credits): Not required unless you want to write about a topic that was not covered in the course.

Module papers and BA/MA theses: You have to confer with your advisor before getting started and before officially registering for your module paper/final thesis.

Particularly relevant for **BA and MA theses:** The topic should be broad enough to allow for a critical discussion of opposing views and findings that apply on a more general level. Bear in mind, though, that you have to complete your paper within the predetermined space and time frame (see your *Studienordnung* and the *BA-MA-(LA)-O*). If you are uncertain about the scope of your topic, you should check back with your first supervisor.

1.3.2.2 TEFL:

Teaching proposals are usually submitted as part of a seminar or internship. Requirements will be announced by the respective lecturer/advisor.

Portfolio: Requirements regarding portfolios will be announced on our website and/or in Moodle each semester. Please note that neither the complete portfolio, nor parts of it will be reviewed prior to submission.

Module papers and BA/MA theses

You have to consult with your advisor before getting started and hand in an abstract with the following information in advance:

- the problem you wish to address,
- the question you intend to answer,
- the goal of the paper,
- a short outline of how you want to deal with the topic and
- a list of references you may or will use.

This abstract serves as a basis for the consultation with your supervisor.

1.4 INTENDED READERSHIP

Your paper should address a readership beyond your advisor. The idea is to write for readers that may not have attended the same class but nonetheless have a basic knowledge of the field. To that end, all terms exceeding that level of knowledge must be clearly defined, any assumptions must be made explicit, and any and all sources must be provided in full.

1.5 FINDING RELEVANT LITERATURE

You can use the literature discussed in a course and/or relevant introductory textbooks as a starting point and use the snowball technique to find more sources.

Proceed with caution when excerpting literature. In order to avoid even accidental plagiarism, right from the start you need to

- use your own words to write down the author's ideas when taking notes from a source,
- mark whole phrases taken from a text as such by quotation marks and provide a complete citation also in your personal notes.

Professional citation tools like Citavi are available to UP students for free and can greatly facilitate the citation process. The *ZIM* also offers various helpful tutorials.

1.6 CONSULTATIONS

Consultations are not necessarily a requirement for short essays to be handed in for course credits, but absolutely mandatory for module papers and final BA/MA theses. Note that some advisors require you to book a slot in their office hours in advance.

1.7 OFFICIAL REGISTRATION

For **module papers**, you need to **register via PULS** (unless stated differently for your study program). Select your advisor as the examiner in the module you're aiming at, and they will normally admit you to the module paper once you conferred about your topic with them (see 1.3.2 above).

BA and MA theses need to be officially **registered** with a form that you can get [online](#) or at the *Prüfungsamt*. Please note their registration deadlines and the minimum time periods that have to elapse between the registration and the submission of your final thesis (*Regelungen zur Mindestbearbeitungszeit von Abschlussarbeiten*).

TEFL

Please note that there are specific registration periods and deadlines for the submission of portfolios and module papers (see the TEFL website). In general, you have to submit your paper in the semester you registered for it.

2. FORMAL ASPECTS

2.1 LENGTH

Please adhere to the parameters for the type of paper you are writing as formulated in your *Studienordnung*. The ultimate length of your **BA** or **MA thesis** may depend on the topic and methods used in your thesis. The amount of empirical and associated work (e.g., transcription) you need to do can also affect the length of your thesis and should thus be discussed with your advisor beforehand.

Please note: If you are working with transcripts, relevant portions you discuss as part of your analysis should be included in the running text of your paper.

2.2 LANGUAGE

As a rule, your paper should be written in English. Your language must adhere to the academic standard and reflect your thoughts in a cogent manner. If you are uncertain about your proficiency, ask your fellow

students or a native speaker for help. **If your level of English is weak, this will negatively affect or impede the comprehensibility of your text, and your grade will inevitably suffer.**

The types of academic papers you are supposed to write are classified as argumentative papers and should be composed in a **formal, distanced and neutral style**.

2.3 STRUCTURE

It is very important that you have a structured argumentative outline for your paper (esp. if it is a longer one). Having a clear structure will not only make it easier for you to write the paper; it will also make your paper more accessible to the reader and allow your examiner to follow line of thoughts. Therefore, you should **develop an outline** before you start writing the paper.

Also **in the literature review section**, it may be a good idea to avoid summarizing one source after another in chronological order (i.e., in the order in which you read them) and to **look for common themes** which can be grouped and discussed together instead.

Every paper begins with a title page and a table of contents. Moreover, every paper should include a list of references, which follows the main body of the paper.

Empirical papers (see section 1.3.1 above) usually begin with an (1) introduction in which you delineate the phenomenon you will analyze and/or the questions you will address. The introduction should also provide a justification of/motivation for your research and a preview of the further structure of your paper. The main part usually consists of (2) an overview of previous research on the topic, ending with (3) current issues and your hypothesis or research question. This is followed by (4) an overview of the methods and data you use(d) in your study, (5) a presentation of the results of your analysis, and (6) a discussion of your findings. The paper is completed by (7) a summary of the results, conclusions and a possible outlook for future research.

Critical reviews and papers based on a literature survey (see 1.3.1 above) usually begin with (1) an introduction to the topic under consideration/the problem or question being addressed and a clear statement of the aims of the paper. The main body consists of (2) the review itself, in which you present the results of your literature survey in a systematic fashion (i.e., group similar perspectives together), explain how each piece contributes or relates to the discussion and use it to make a point with regard to the problem or question that your paper seeks to address. The paper should end with a summary of the most important points and a clear assessment of what your review suggests with respect to the problem/question you addressed in your paper.

However, some topics necessitate straying from the canonical structures just described. Especially **BA/MA theses** must feature an original thesis and a lucid line of reasoning. A **BA** or **MA thesis** would ideally also include ideas and implications regarding further research.

2.4 PLAGIARISM

It is **imperative** that you observe the guidelines regarding plagiarism set out at <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/iaa/study-teaching/plagiarism.html>

Furthermore,

- mark citations the moment you start taking notes (see also section 1.5)
- when using direct quotations, use quotation marks to indicate the extent of the quote and make sure they are completely identical to the original (even if the original contains errors or typos; you can indicate such errors by placing a "[sic!]" after the error)
- any and all changes you make to the direct quote must be clearly indicated as such: "(emphasis in original)" or "(emphasis mine – DBW²)"
- provide complete references to any and all sources you used for the composition of your paper

² Use your own initials.

Always attach a **signed** printout of the department's form for the **declaration of authorship** and **acknowledgement of plagiarism guidelines** to your paper (at the very end). The declaration form can be downloaded from the institute's website (current students\plagiarism).

Your paper will not be graded if you do not include this declaration.

2.5 FORMAT

For all papers, including short essays, please adhere to the following standards:

- **spacing:** 1.5
- **font type & size for the text:** Arial (11pt) or Times New Roman (12pt)
- **text-alignment:** justified (*Blocksatz*)
- **margins:**

left:	3.0 cm
right:	3.0 cm
top:	2.5 cm
bottom:	2.5 cm
- **pages must be numbered consecutively** (title page, table of contents and appendix are excluded from the count; start page numbering on the page of your introduction)
- **use subchapters and label & number them** (preferably no more than three tiers (1.1.1), but never more than four (1.1.1.1)).
- **linguistic meta-language:** references to linguistic material you discuss as examples in the running text of your argument should be *italicized* and the source should be provided, e.g. "Peter then uses the lexeme *hAt* (line 17) to refer to his baseball cap"
- use **appropriate paragraphing to structure** your text
- do **not insert page breaks after sub-sections** (exception: if the first paragraph of the next sub-section consists of less than three lines at the bottom of a page, you should enter a page break)
- **excerpts of transcripts/examples:** number them, provide a title, the source, indent them like a block quote, use Courier New (10pt), single-spacing, mark relevant lines with an arrow (->) (cf. GAT 2, Barth-Weingarten/Couper-Kuhlen 2011; retrievable from: <http://www.gespraechsforschung-ozs.de/heft2011/heft2011.html>)

Please use **footnotes** (at the end of the page) and not endnotes (at the end of your paper). Use footnotes sparingly; they are not intended for referencing citations and literature.

When citing sources and compiling your reference list, make sure you always adhere to our **Guidelines for Citation and Referencing**. Note that these citation guidelines are based on APA, not MLA.

Only refer to literature that you have actually read. Your reference list should only contain titles that you directly quote or paraphrase in your paper. **But any and all titles that you do quote or paraphrase must appear in your reference list.**

If you want to refer to pertinent concepts or ideas that you received verbally, indicate this as follows: "(Hopper personal comment)" or "(Hopper p.c.)".

Deviating from these standards will definitely hurt your grade.

Tables, schemas and the like can be attached in the **appendix** if they are too long to be included in the body of your paper. The appendix does not have page numbers. In the case of multiple appendices, the appendices themselves are numbered (e.g., Appendix 1, Appendix 2, etc.). You should also refer the reader to the respective appendix (if any) at the relevant place in the body of your text.

2.6 HANDING IN YOUR PAPER

Unless your advisor stated something else, please hand in a **printed version** of your paper **along with a digital copy** of your paper (Word-Doc and PDF), so we can run it through our plagiarism software. **BA and MA theses** must be handed in as hardcopies at the *Prüfungsamt* with an attached CD-ROM containing the

digital versions as well. And, if applicable, don't forget to attach the sound files of your examples (preferably in WAV-format).

2.7 DEADLINES

If you agree on a deadline with your advisor, make sure you keep it.

In general, **there are no official deadlines for module papers** (but note that special regulations hold for portfolios and module papers in **TEFL**, see section 1.7 above). However, some advisors may set deadlines to manage and organize their workload. Also, if you prefer to have a deadline in order to better organize your own workflow, ask your advisor for a deadline, and they will be happy to set one for your paper.

BA and MA theses: You should discuss your topic as early as possible with your advisor; please approach them well before you plan to register your thesis with the *Prüfungsamt*. The *Prüfungsamt* determines the deadlines for your final theses according to your *Studienordnung*.

Bear in mind that you need to allow some time for all your grades – including your final thesis – to appear in **PULS before you can receive your degree**. Plan accordingly (and, ideally, accommodate a buffer). Also, make sure to inform your advisor about relevant deadlines when you hand in your thesis.

We would also like to **remind you again of the minimum grading periods** that were stated at the very beginning of this document and ask you to respect them in your plans.

2.9 DISCUSSING YOUR PAPER/ GRADES

Once your paper has been graded, your advisor will inform you about your grade. You can also discuss your paper with your advisor during their office hours if you have further questions. (Some advisors may require you to have a feedback talk with them, before they will enter your grade in *PULS*.)

In the case of **BA** or **MA theses**, your supervisor(s) will additionally write a review which typically summarizes the contents and formulates strengths and weaknesses of your thesis. The review and the grades will be sent directly to the *Prüfungsamt*, and you may ask your supervisor for a copy of the review. Remember that most study programs require you to do an oral defense of your MA thesis after the submission and grading of the written thesis.

3. COMMON PROBLEMS, QUICK FIXES, AND FURTHER ADVICE

The following table summarizes a few problems students commonly encounter (esp. when writing one of their first papers) and offers some quick fixes and pre-emptive measures.

Common problem	Quick fix/Pre-emptive measure
I'm running out of time!	Do not register your paper too early. Take your time to develop a realistic time and work schedule (possibly together with your advisor).
I don't know what I should read/where I should start reading!	Try to narrow down the research question or problem that you are trying to deal with in your thesis/paper (sometimes it helps to break down the general question even further, by decomposing it into individual elements). This will yield relevant keywords that will guide your literature search.
I'm sitting in front of so many articles and books, and still I don't know what to write!	Don't get ahead of yourself! Read and think about what you read first. For every text you read, try to extract the most important information from it, and then try to sort the different texts into groups by identifying common threads, arguments, etc. and see how/where they would fit in with the outline of your paper. Only then, you should start writing.
I always get lost in my own writing!	The problem probably is that you're lacking a solid structure for your writing. Try to develop a structured outline for your paper as early as possible. Ideally, this structured outline already shows how the most important ideas belong together; if you're a visual learner, try to visualize connections between different sections for yourself whenever possible (e.g., using a mind-map, a concept-map, or arrows in your outline).
I'm lacking motivation to get back to my writing; I keep procrastinating!	<p>The key to high productivity is enjoying the work one does. This is why it is so important that you choose a topic that you are interested in. Most work gets boring if you don't like what you're doing. Conversely, when you were a little kid, you probably spent lots of time even with the most trivial things, simply because they fascinated you. Your fascination was, and still is, a driving force for, and a key to, understanding and learning new things.</p> <p>It may also help to talk about motivational problems with others and to work in joint writing groups (it's like going to the gym – you hold each other accountable for actually going; it's harder to drop out if somebody else is waiting for you).</p>
I don't think I can do it!	Don't try to solve this issue all by yourself. Substantial self-doubts are better not fought alone. Talk to your supervisor; talk to your fellow students; talk to friends. We're all here to help each other succeed. And always remember this: So many people before you have had doubts, so many people before you have managed to overcome them with the help of others – there's no reason why you shouldn't!

If you still have questions or continue to struggle with writing papers, we highly recommend turning to the *Schreibberatung* at the ZESSKO, who offer useful workshops and individual counseling for students: <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/zessko/selbstlernen/schreibberatung.html>