

Guidelines

on how to do research

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Principles

All forms of scientific work during your studies help you acquire knowledge and develop competences. Scientific work *is* a learning process. It is not the goal of a paper or term paper to generate perfect content. Rather, you are engaged in a process of continuous improvement, competence development and horizon broadening. Accordingly, our goal is for students to *grow* with each application of the scientific tools discussed here. The learning process is never complete for anyone, and no content is ever perfect - we should dispense with the notion that such a thing is even possible or worth striving for.

In addition to our conception of the course as a continuous learning process with no expectation of perfect results, *two other principles* are important to the Political Science Seminar. *First*, for each specific format of scientific work, the content and the learning objective are decisive. Depending on what one wants to work on in terms of content, the specific requirements must be adapted so that they serve the learning goal.

The *second principle* is more fundamental. Lecturers have the freedom to formulate their own guidelines for different formats. They are also the ones who define the learning objective of a scientific paper. Thus, they can deviate from the following guidelines if it seems appropriate to them. Our guidelines are not then automatically binding. This is also why we do not formulate general guidelines for papers and essays. The criteria for this vary greatly between different lecturers.

This results in the following use of these guidelines: We ask you to follow the guidance in this document, only if lecturers explicitly refer to them or do not formulate their own guidelines. In addition, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Lucerne (Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät – KSF) also has its own guidelines for scientific work. In case of doubt, you should clarify with the lecturers which guidelines apply.

With these guidelines, we hope to provide students and lecturers with useful, generally applicable tools in addition to formal criteria and input on seminar papers. We wish you an exciting growth and learning process and look forward to accompanying you!

Tools

The following tools are designed to help overcome various challenges. We begin with *research and reading techniques* and then move on to *language and style*. We invite you to critically examine and develop your habits in research, reading, and writing.

Dealing with Scientific Literature

When dealing with scientific literature, you should read and recite it carefully and treat the research achievements with respect. What exactly is the author saying and why? How much effort was put into the research? Why did the publication make it through the review process and why is the publication being cited and discussed by other researchers? Criticism of scientific literature should always be well-founded and should only criticize a paper or monograph when you can answer these questions.

Literature Research Techniques

Scientific work is not possible without comprehensive literature research. The point is to read into the current discourse on the chosen topic. Since this discourse takes place in both books and journals, it is always necessary to search for both types of media in order to be able to assess the state of research on a particular topic. The following tendency applies: books tend to represent the more established discussions, journal articles tend to represent the more current ones.

Both types of media can be found via the search portal *swisscovery* RZS ZHB/Uni/PH. The subject search for journal articles also runs via licensed databases, but more advanced research skills are required here. At the beginning of their studies, all Political Science students are required to attend the ZHB's 6-hour introductory course on information literacy ("Information Literacy for Political Science Students and PPE Majors"). Courses offered regularly by the ZHB during the semester on a variety of topics related to research and literature management provide opportunities to refresh and expand these skills.

A good **starting point for** searching for political science literature is the [political science subject search page of the ZHB](#).

For **research**, we primarily recommend the following **six search portals**:

- [swisscovery RZS ZHB/Uni/PH](https://rzs-uniph.swisscovery.org) (rzs-uniph.swisscovery.org) is the central search portal of the ZHB Luzern for university members. Searchable are all types of media (print books and ebooks, articles in electronic journals, articles in e-newspapers) that are held at the ZHB or licensed by the ZHB. Unsuccessful searches for media not available on site can be entered into the nationwide network [swisscovery](#), where scan orders and interlibrary loans for print books can be initiated. Log in with your SWITCH Edu-ID to borrow media locally or via interlibrary loan, and use the VPN for remote access to licensed e-resources.
- [Google Scholar](#): Suitable for searches for different types of media (books, articles, grey literature) as well as citations and is good for getting an overview of published literature. Full-text access is available for freely accessible literature and, if on campus or with VPN enabled, for e-resources licensed by the ZHB. One of the advantages of google scholar is that the bibliographical information of many texts can be found; one of the disadvantages is the non-transparent ranking of the references.
- [Political Science Complete](#) – an EBSCO database – provides access to full-text articles from all core journals in the discipline and is the most comprehensive political science database. EBSCO databases also offer an app for mobile devices.
- [Oxford Bibliographies Online \(OBO\) Political Science](#) and [International Relations](#): Annotated bibliographies summarizing the current state of research on numerous topics in political theory, comparative politics, policy analysis, and international relations, written by renowned specialists and continuously updated with new entries. All bibliographies link to the holdings of the ZHB; in many cases, electronic articles or ebooks can be accessed directly. The OBOs are equally useful for students, researchers and teachers.
- [Oxford Research Encyclopedias \(ORE\) Politics](#) and [International Studies](#): Database for highly valued research with synoptic representations of current research topics in political science and international relations. Responsible in part by renowned researchers and continuously supplemented with new contributions, the résumés contain bibliographies with the most important literature on the state of research in each case.
- [Annual Review of Political Science](#) and [Annual Review of Sociology](#): Here you will find further overview articles that provide a good introduction to many topics.

Reading Techniques

Research work also includes the right reading technique. In order to cope with the volumes of literature during your studies, you must not only be able to read quickly, but also systematically. To do this, learn to use an examining, analytical, or comparative technique, depending on the text. We suggest the following chapter to help you implement these techniques. The other chapters of the book are also useful for how to do research more generally:

Turabian, K. L. (2007). *A Manual for Writers of Research Paper, Theses, and Dissertations*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Chapter 4: Engaging Sources.

For reading research articles, we recommend [this resource](#).

Literature Management Systems

Reference Management Systems (RMS) are important tools for students conducting literature research as part of their academic work. These systems help you organize and keep track of the sources you consult, making it easy to cite them correctly and automatically create bibliographies. By using a literature management system, you can save time and reduce the risk of errors in your citations. These systems can also help you find relevant sources by allowing you to search databases, save articles, and annotate their notes. In addition, such programs can encourage collaboration with fellow students and supervisors because you can use them to share references and notes. Therefore, the use of literature management systems can improve the quality of research and simplify the writing process. We recommend using [Zotero](#) because it is a versatile and free open source RMS. Another system that can be used for free up to a certain extent is [Citavi](#).

Language and Style

Principles

- **Simple language.** If you can express something in a simpler way, you should do so.
- **Short and concise sentences.** Usually no longer than 20 words per sentence. No nested sentences (reduce subordinate clauses and interjections).
- Use **active language.** Whoever is acting should also be the subject of the sentence. So not: “In this paper, the relationship between subjective status perception and right-wing populism is examined” (passive), but rather: “In this paper, I examine the relationship between subjective status perception and right-wing populism” (active).
- Always think carefully about **which noun a verb or adjective refers to** and whether your sentence makes sense in that form. Who is the actor in a sentence? Don’t say: “the argument says.” Arguments cannot speak, only the authors of arguments can.
- Use **figures of speech**, but make sure they make sense. Example: “Stemming a flood of emails”.
- The **language must flow.** Text flow is created by connecting sentences, for example.
- Try to use [gender-inclusive language](#).

Clarity

- **Define unclear terms/technical terms** (e.g. grievance, cleavage, populism, person, negative liberty, deliberative democracy) the first time you use them and use those definitions or the term consistently afterward.
- **No Stipulation.** Do not make any assertion that you do not subsequently substantiate normatively or empirically.
- You should always write as if your reader has no special expertise in this field of research. You should **write in such a way that a reader who does not know the material can follow your line of argument.**
- **Use your own words.** No more than one (short) quote per page. In no case a constant paraphrasing.
- **Leave out** any argument that you or others do not understand even after reading it aloud several times.
- Ask yourself the following questions for each (!) sentence and paragraph:
 - *What is the function of this sentence or paragraph? Make it clear to the reader what the function of the paragraph is (it is not enough that you think you know what the function is).*
 - *Do I need this sentence or paragraph to answer my research question or develop my thesis or test my hypothesis?*
 - *How does this sentence/paragraph relate to the previous and following sentence/paragraph?*
 - *Is what I have written here understandable?*
 - *Do I give convincing reasons for this claim/statement?*
- When describing the texts/studies of other authors, please **only describe what is directly relevant to your research question or thesis.** In each paragraph, think about exactly what the thesis/question/goal of your work is and what you (don’t) need for it.

On all matters of style, we recommend the following classics:

- Strunk Jr, W. and White, E. B. (2007). *The elements of style*. New York: Penguin.
- Williams, J. M. (2007). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Citations

We recommend that you use **Harvard style citation**. It is also possible to use another citation style as long as you apply this citation style consistently within a format. However, we recommend citing directly in the text rather than in footnotes, as is common in the humanities. In the following, we explain the basic rules for this.

Imagine reading the following sentence in a scientific publication:

“Women born in the postwar period made the ‘dead point’ (Goldberg 1979, p. 287) reached by male identity unmistakable; even to the men themselves.”¹

You can now **quote** from it **verbatim** as follows:

“The women born in the postwar period [after World War II] made the ‘dead point’ (Goldberg 1979, p. 287), [...], unmistakable; even for the men themselves.” (Preuss-Lausitz 1991, p. 100)

- Omissions: [...]
- Additions: [after World War II.]
- Quoting from third party author: Male identity reached a “dead point” (Goldberg 1979, cited in: Preuss-Lausitz 1991, p. 100).

If the same source is cited several times in succession, the names and the year of publication are abbreviated with *ibid.* (*ibid.*, p. 100) If the work was written by several authors, only the first author is named in the text and supplemented with “et al.” (Müller et al. 2010, p. 23).

You can also **quote** from it **indirectly by prefixing cf.** (confer):

The women’s movement caused men to experience an identification crisis, since their understanding of masculinity had been shaken by the emancipation of women (cf. Preuss-Lausitz 1991, p. 100).

¹ This example was taken from the following German book and translated into English: Preuss-Lausitz, U., ed. (1991). *Kriegskinder, Konsumkinder, Krisenkinder. Zur Sozialisationsgeschichte seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Basel: Beltz.

According to Harvard style, the following rules apply to **citations from various types of publications**:

1. from monographs

In the bibliography:

Benhabib, S. (2004). *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In the text: (Benhabib 2004, p. 171)

2. from anthologies and manuals

In the bibliography:

Bauböck, R. (2008). 'Normative political theory and empirical research'. In: Della Porta, D. and Keating, N., eds., *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences. A pluralist perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 40-60.

In text: (Bauböck 2008, p. 42)

3. from magazines

In the bibliography:

Rigstad, Mark (2011). 'Republicanism and geopolitical domination'. *Journal of Political Power*, 4(2), pp. 279-300.

In text: (Rigstad 2011, p. 281).

4. from internet sources

In the bibliography:

Public Eye (2014). Big Spenders Swiss trading companies, African oil and the risks of opacity. URL: <https://www.publiceye.ch/en/media-corner/press-releases/detail/big-spenders-swiss-trading-companies-african-oil-and-the-risks-of-opacity> (last accessed: 29.03.2023).

In text: (Public Eye 2014)

The year is the last update of the web page. If this is not apparent, use "n.d." (no date) instead.

Useful links

- [About the Harvard style](#)
- [Different citation styles](#)

Research Question

The research question is central. Every scientific paper should start with it. A rough topic alone is insufficient - instead, you must develop a research question that is workable within the given format. If a topic interests you, first find relevant literature on it and read up. You should only formulate a relevant research question against this background of the existing academic state of research.

Usually, first attempts at developing a research question are not focused enough and thus cannot be answered convincingly or completely within a realistic framework. So make sure that your research question is *narrowed down* and *specific enough* that it can *realistically* be *addressed and answered in the given format*. It is not yet possible to address larger questions in an essay or in a presentation. But it is important to focus on less in a seminar paper and in a thesis as well.

Thus, the **following criteria** apply to **the research question**:

- It arises from an unsolved problem or puzzle, a contradiction, or a question mentioned or insufficiently addressed in the research literature.
- It is either theoretically and/or empirically relevant to scientific discourse and/or practically relevant.
- It is precisely formulated.
- It is singular - multiple questions are not purposeful.
- It is a question and not a statement or assertion of fact.
- It can be answered within the specified time frame and the designated number of words.

In the following, we will turn to different types of questions in the context of the different formats for seminar papers.

Seminar Papers: General Guidelines

What Can I Do in a Seminar Paper?

We recommend that you view your studies as a developmental process. The seminar papers play a key role in this process. The culmination point is ultimately the final thesis. Keep this end goal in mind from the beginning, so that you approach your development process consciously and, if necessary, also align your seminar papers with the goal of the final thesis. The goal for each paper should be that you learn something you can build on. While the seminar papers should stand on their own, you should also view them as an opportunity to build competencies and skills.

In the Bachelor's program, it makes sense to limit yourself to secondary literature, especially in your first seminar papers. Develop a research question and then answer it using the secondary literature you have read yourself. You can also prepare a systematic literature review for a question. Maybe this will help you in a subsequent paper or in the final thesis.

Advanced and master's students can, of course, venture into projects that answer more independent research questions based on their own theoretical or empirical analyses. Even with your own analyses, the rule is that you should start modestly. A neat measurement of a concept (or a resulting variable) with a descriptive analysis of a few cases, for example, is quite sufficient for a first empirical paper.

“Pro”, “Haupt” and “Master” Seminar Papers

General guidelines for empirical seminar papers in the different seminar types are formulated below. A proseminar paper is usually shorter and deals with a less comprehensive or less challenging research question. The length of proseminar papers is in the range of about 4,500 words, for Hauptseminar papers about 6,000 words, and for Masterseminar papers about 8,000 words are required. These figures refer to the main text, excluding the title page, abstract, table of contents, and appendix. The number of words in the main text must be stated at the end. However, you should also adhere to the possibly differing specifications of different lecturers.

Inspiration

On [this website](#), we have compiled for you some outstanding seminar papers and final theses which have been submitted to us. We hope that these examples will inspire you.

Formalia

- Font, font size and line spacing can be chosen freely, but the document must be consistently formatted
- Consecutive page numbering
- Cover sheet: name of university, title of thesis, name, address, matriculation number author, title of seminar, name of supervisor, date of submission, semester
- Submission: Printed or as PDF file via mail attachment, on time!
- The deadline and form of submission will be discussed with the supervisor.

Structure

Structure of a scientific paper

A scientific paper is structured as follows:

- Cover page
- Abstract (not necessary for proseminar papers)
 - Is placed at the beginning of the paper, after the cover page, and deals with the most important results of the paper (max. half a page).
- Table of contents
 - The outline should not exceed the fourth level.
 - If a 2.1 is made, at least a 2.2 must also follow.
 - If applicable, a list of figures (three or more graphs), list of tables, list of abbreviations (only if many abbreviations are used).
- Introduction
- Main part
- Conclusion

The **introduction** consists of a:

- a. *Problematization*: Here you capture your readers attention (the “hook”) by showing why the problem/topic you are working on is interesting and relevant. This can be a social conflict or challenge, but also a gap in the existing scientific literature.
- b. *Research question*: The problem statement is followed by the research question and the central thesis or theoretical argument of the paper, which answers the research question. For this, please refer to the section on “Research Question” at the beginning of this document and to the respective sections on “Research Question” in the following parts on “Empirical Seminar Papers” and “Political Theory Seminar Papers”.
- c. *Key findings*: In summary, tell your readers what you will show in the paper based on what materials. These statements are closely intertwined with your central thesis or argument.
- d. *Structure of the paper*: How do you intend to address the research question or derive the central thesis? Be as concrete and precise as possible. Specify very concretely the individual steps of your derivation or your procedure, gladly also with numbering: First, I will, then I will, secondly, show that Y. This enables me to, thirdly, show that Z.

In the **main part**, what is announced in the introduction is carried out. The actual research performance is reserved exclusively for the main body. Be sure to work with **subheadings**. Depending on the type of term paper, there should be at least 3 to 5 chapters with clear subheadings and usually subchapters, called sections in the following. The chapters/sections then in turn consist of individual paragraphs. The structure of a main section (independent of topic and method) is as follows:

Chapter

Each chapter needs an introduction and conclusion that show the reader how this chapter connects to the last and next chapter and to the overall argument.

Section

A section is a subchapter and thus has the same function and structure as a chapter. Each section should have a heading. Sections can be used to increase clarity, but do not have to be used for short term papers.

Paragraph

A paragraph is a collection of sentences that fleshes out *a single thought or point*. When that thought is completed, a new paragraph is needed. The last or first sentence of a paragraph should transition from one thought to the next, that is, make clear how the two thoughts are connected.

Sentence

Each sentence makes a statement that develops the idea of the paragraph.

The **conclusion** contains a summary of your argument and how you got there in the main body in a few paragraphs. The conclusion should not contain new arguments, open up new problems, or discuss new literature. However, the conclusion may include an “outlook” about what further questions and research opportunities, not discussed here, may arise following the work.

Useful link

Learn [more about structuring paragraphs systematically here](#).

Empirical Seminar Papers

Six Types of Empirical Seminar Papers

There are basically two categories of empirical term papers. The first category includes papers that **answer an empirical research question based on empirical results from relevant secondary literature**. Thus, the focus here is on relevant empirical studies without conducting any empirical analysis itself. The second category includes papers that **answer an empirical research question based on an independent empirical analysis**.

Although possible, you are generally not expected to do your own empirical analysis in a term paper, or even to reach the level of a published research article in a journal. Thus, most seminar papers fall into the first category of work based on secondary literature. However, be aware that independent analysis is expected for theses. This is another reason why it is helpful to choose the focus of your seminar papers so that you can build on them in your final paper. In papers based on secondary literature, for example, you can identify research gaps that can then be addressed.

In order to write a paper in the second category - an independent analysis - it is worth being aware of the many possibilities of empirical research in political science. We suggest here that we can classify empirical research along two dimensions. The first dimension distinguishes between three basic goals: *Description versus theory testing versus theory building*. Description means that the primary goal is to compare a concept or resulting variables systematically across units of inquiry and/or over time. Theory testing means that it is about testing hypotheses. However, it often implies that these hypotheses are first systematically derived or developed (deductive procedure). Theory-building, on the other hand, means that work is done without hypotheses and that the goal is to generate theoretical concepts or arguments from empirical evidence (inductive approach). The second dimension distinguishes between *quantitative and qualitative methods* used to achieve these goals. Here it is important to emphasize that qualitative methods can fall into two subcategories. On the one hand, there are more positivist methods. These are more theory testing. On the other hand, there are more interpretive methods (e.g., critical theory) that are more theory-building.

We thus distinguish the six following types of empirical seminar papers. However, we omit the possibility of theory-building/inductive quantitative papers because it hardly occurs. Instead, we place the type from the first category - seminar papers based on secondary literature - in front of the five remaining types:

1. Secondary literature based work
2. Descriptive quantitative analyses
3. Descriptive qualitative analyses
4. Theory testing quantitative analyses
5. Theory testing qualitative analyses
6. Theory-building qualitative analyses

Research Design

For any form of empirical seminar paper, it is necessary to develop a research design that defines the type of paper and, depending on the type, clarifies the research question and other details. This allows supervisors to ensure that the research question is workable within the scope of the thesis. A research design that has been accepted by the supervisor then forms the basic framework for the seminar paper; however, some flexibility is often needed because not all problems can be anticipated in the design. The same is true for thesis research designs.

Scope

Depending on the type and size of the paper 2-5 pages.

Content

General first points

- Subject of investigation and how you plan to limit its scope
- Research question and its relevance (theoretical, empirical, practical)

Key points for work based on secondary literature

- Initial presentation of some arguments, hypotheses and results that emerged from the initial literature review.
- Possible: First sketch for a possible answer to the question
- Please note: An initial literature search is also necessary to find an overarching research question for this type of paper in the first place!

Key points for descriptive quantitative analyses

- Possible: Formulation of hypotheses that answer the research question.
 - Example of a descriptive research question: "How has the inclusiveness of naturalization policies evolved in Western democracies over recent decades?"
 - Example of a descriptive hypothesis: "Naturalization became more inclusive on average."
- Theoretical derivation of relevant concepts and dimensions of comparison: What is compared, how, and in relation to what?
- Make the concepts measurable: Specify concepts and translate them into *quantitative* indicators and thus *operationalize* them *as variables*.
 - Example: specify and measure the concept and variable "inclusiveness of naturalization policies" and then calculate the average in Western democracies and compare over time.

Key points for descriptive qualitative analyses

- Possible: derivation of qualitative ideal types, which structure the comparison
- Theoretical derivation of relevant concepts and dimensions of comparison: What is compared, how, and in relation to what?
- Make the concepts measurable: Specifying concepts and translating them into *qualitative* indicators
 - Here, concrete cases can be compared with ideal types or qualitative changes in cases over time can be compared.

Key points for theory-testing quantitative analyses

- Derivation of theoretical arguments to answer the question.
- Derived from: Hypotheses = answer(s) to the research question.
 - In causal analyses, the phenomenon to be explained (the dependent variable) is related to selected explanatory factors (independent variables)
- Make the concepts in the hypothesis measurable: Specify concepts and translate them into *quantitative* indicators and thus *operationalize* them as *variables*.

Key points for theory-testing qualitative analyses

- Derivation of theoretical arguments to answer the question.
- Derived from: Hypotheses = answer(s) to the research question.
 - In causal analyses, the phenomenon to be explained (the dependent variable) is related to selected explanatory factors (independent variables)
 - For theory-testing qualitative case studies that go beyond co-variation of two variables, there are additional questions to address:
 - Process analyses: what are the mechanisms underlying the causal process?
 - Congruence analyses: how can theories be compared using two competing hypotheses?
- Make the concepts in the hypothesis measurable: Specifying concepts and translating them into *qualitative* indicators.

Key points for theory-building qualitative analyses

- Hypothesis-, theory-, and/or type-generating procedures for exploring and answering an open-ended research question.
 - Clarify presuppositions: What theoretical and everyday knowledge flows into my work?
 - Clarify the scope and goal of the analysis: What phenomenon do I want to understand by recourse to which presuppositions?
- Comparative analysis of the data material and theoretical consolidation of the empirical findings
- Reconstruction of the complex conditional context of a phenomenon and its theoretical explanation

General concluding points

- Deliberately selected, outlined and justified methodological approach:
 - For secondary literature-based work: How is the literature search systematized?
 - What data or sources are used, why, and how?
 - Which cases are selected and why, and how are they analyzed?
- Planned structure of the work (outline)
- Most important literature and sources collected so far in the form of a bibliography

Structure of Empirical Seminar Papers

For all independent empirical analyses, we propose here an ideal-typical scheme that shows common options for the structure of empirical seminar papers. Depending on the content and the goal, it is necessary to deviate from this scheme accordingly.

For secondary literature-based work, you can either use this scheme analogously: For each part there is an analogous procedure. The theory part systematically summarizes the theoretical arguments and hypotheses, the methods part summarizes the methods, and the results part summarizes the results. Alternatively, you can organize the literature according to other aspects and depending on what fits best to the development of the research question. Such papers are thus much freer in their structure. For inspiration, [here is a review article](#) that summarizes a research area.

- **Cover page**
- **Abstract** (not necessary for proseminar papers)
 - At the beginning of the paper, after the cover page, and deals with the research question, the central arguments and methods, and the main results of the paper (max. half a page).
- **Table of contents**
 - The outline should not exceed the fourth level.
 - If a 2.1 is made, at least a 2.2 must also follow.
 - If applicable, a list of figures (three or more graphs), list of tables, list of abbreviations (only if many abbreviations are used).
- **Introduction**
 - Introduction to the topic, context
 - Show relevance, possibly by means of a current hanger
 - Develop research question
 - Name appropriate theories or theoretical argument as well as the method.
 - Summarize results briefly
 - Give a brief overview of the structure and procedure of the work
- **Main part**
 - Presentation of the theme
 - Review of the state of research and thus introduction to the topic and the concrete question
 - Clarify the epistemological interest of the present work
 - *Theory part if secondary literature based*
 - Systematic summary of the theories in the literature
 - *Theory part if descriptive*
 - Derive relevant concepts and/or ideal types
 - *Theory part if theory testing*
 - Theoretical embedding of the topic
 - Justification of the theory selection
 - Presentation and possible modification of the theory
 - Formulation of general and/or case-specific hypotheses from theory.
 - *Theory part if theory building*
 - Clarification of the presuppositions

- Method and data
 - Explain and justify procedure
 - All steps must be made transparent
 - In the case of quantitative work, this includes in particular information on the population and sample
 - In general, there is a need for complete information on the survey instruments and techniques used and the procedures employed
- *Data analysis if descriptive*
 - Evaluation of the relevant concepts based on the comparison dimensions
 - Answering the question and interpretation
 - Discussion of the results in the light of the literature
- *Data evaluation if theory testing*
 - Hypothesis testing
 - The results are generally presented here according to the order of the hypotheses
 - Answering the question and interpretation
 - Discussion of the results in the light of the literature
- *Data evaluation if theory building*
 - Structured immersion in the empirical material
 - Abstraction performance depending on the theory-building goal (e.g., type formation).
 - Answering the question and interpretation
 - Discussion of the results in the light of the literature
- **Conclusion**
 - Brief summary of the central argumentation
 - Reflection on the validity and interpretation of the introduced theoretical expectations (if theory-testing) or the presuppositions (if theory-building) on the basis of the empirical data situation.
 - Summary of the knowledge gained and own contribution
 - Raising new questions: What questions does the work raise?
- **Bibliography**
 - In the bibliography, all books, journal articles, databases, websites, etc. are listed alphabetically
 - The listing is uniform and systematic
- **Appendix**
 - In the appendix, important documents, the used code of statistical programs, protocols or interview transcripts are attached if necessary

Useful links

Work planning with [SMART Goals](#)

References

- Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G. and Williams, J. M. (2008): *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kellstedt, P. and Whitten, G. (2018). *The fundamentals of political science research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Political Theory Seminar Papers

Exposé

Before writing a theoretical seminar paper, it is advisable to define a framework for the paper by means of an exposé with the supervisor. On the one hand, this prevents students from choosing questions and basic lines of argumentation that do not fit the format of a scientific seminar paper. Secondly, it gives students an initial, rough framework on which to build the work to be prepared.

Content

- Concrete and clear question and thesis (the thesis is crucial)
- (Probable) course of argumentation
- Indication of at least 6 sources likely to be used

Scope

1-2 pages.

Identification of a Topic

- What was of particular interest to me in the seminar I attended and what would I like to explore in more detail?
- What is my research question and main thesis?
- How and in relation to which theorists/what literature/theoretical debate do I want to develop this? **This question is crucial.** An exposé can only be meaningfully written if this question can be clearly answered. In other words: it is not enough to say that I am interested in the topic of naturalization of migrants or in the headscarf controversy. Rather: I want to compare the positions, say, of Rainer Bauböck and David Miller on naturalization, or defend or criticize the position of Cecil Laborde on the headscarf controversy. The starting point for finding topics in political theory is therefore *always* political theory literature that has interested/inspired me. This can then be drawn upon to address politically relevant questions/problems (*and not the other way around*).

Question and Thesis

- The question, as addressed at the beginning of these Guidelines, should be formulated as clearly as possible and as narrowly as possible. Not “What is the difference between liberalism and republicanism?” (that would be far too broad and undefined), but something like “Is Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between Negative and Positive Liberty convincing?”
- Then a concrete thesis should be developed as an answer to the question. The goal of the paper is to elaborate and defend this thesis. For example, a concrete thesis could be: “Philip Pettit fails to show convincingly that Isaiah Berlin overlooks an important, third form of freedom in his distinction between Negative and Positive Freedom”.
- The thesis guides the structuring of the paper. The paper is structured in such a way that the development and defense of the thesis runs through it like a common thread.
- The question and thesis are presented in the introduction. Afterwards, the student shows exactly which steps he/she will take in the paper to develop and defend the thesis. Be as precise as possible in this. It is best to use bulleted lists: “First, I will show that X, then, second, I will defend this argument by showing Y, etc.”
- The question and thesis depend on what kind of paper is to be written. The next section is devoted to the different types of theory papers.

Two Possible Types of Theoretical Work

It is important to understand that writing a theory paper is a creative and individual process. There is no recipe for good political theory. The following types of possible theory papers are accordingly not exhaustive. There are many more ways to do political theory/social theory and new ones are being added all the time. In the end, a good theory paper always emerges from a close exchange between the students and the lecturers. The following typology should therefore only serve as a first orientation. In the following we distinguish between interpretative work and applied work. However, the distinction and interpretation is by no means clear-cut, but should only serve as a rough orientation. First, because the texts to be interpreted also usually involve an examination of social and political reality. Second, because even applied works always analyze ideas, theories, and concepts. Third, “disclosing critique” (see below) derives theories from (sharpened and purposely overstated) interpretations of social reality (rather than deductively applying them to reality). Students are also free to creatively merge interpretive and applied elements in their work.

Interpretive Political Theory

Interpretative papers analyze theoretical concepts, ideas, and theories without applying them (e.g., to clarify concrete social grievances). Students are generally (and especially in the BA and first semesters) strongly encouraged to write an interpretive paper. These are the most common forms of interpretative papers:

1. **Concept analysis:** What is freedom? What is equality? What is power? What is society? What is democracy? Mostly comparison of different conceptions, e.g. negative vs. positive freedom or deliberative vs. aggregative democracy.
2. **Comparison of theories:** for example, Hobbes’ understanding of the state vs. Locke’s understanding of the state. It is important in a comparison of theories that students refer primarily to the primary literature (i.e., the *original texts* of Hobbes and Locke) and develop a clear interpretive grid that structures the comparison. For the case of comparing Hobbes’ and Locke’s theories of the state, for example, the following categories of analysis (that may also act as chapters, would make sense: Locke’s conception of liberty vs. Hobbes’; Locke’s vs. Hobbes’ understanding of authority; Locke’s vs. Hobbes’ legitimation of authority, etc. This may also consist of a comparison of two different theoretical models fed by different theorists (e.g., aggregative vs. deliberative theory of democracy).
3. **Interpretation of a work/theory:** A (or several) text(s) of a thinker is/are interpreted. The aim is not to criticize or defend the text but to understand the arguments of this thinker as clearly as you possibly can. An appropriate question might be: “Rousseau’s *Social Contract* and Rousseau’s *Discourses on Inequality* – contradiction or unity?” A possible thesis might be: “Rousseau’s trenchant critique of modern society in the *Discourses* cannot be reconciled with his attempt to legitimize the modern state in the *Social Contract*.”

This type of work is particularly beneficial at the beginning of your studies. In the in-depth examination of a thinker, students learn to read texts particularly well, to reproduce arguments and to reflect critically, as well as to consult secondary literature in order to interpret a primary text in different ways. Often, such work involves evaluative comparisons of different interpretations.

It is also possible, but this brings a very complex, empirical element to the theoretical work, to draw on the biographical and lifeworld context of the thinker to analyze his or her work. This approach gained attention especially in the context of the so-called "Cambridge School" around Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, which pays attention to the contextual conditions of a work's origins and its historical embeddedness. See Bevir, M. (2011). 'The Contextual Approach'. In Klosko, G., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. An example is Arneil, B. (1996). 'The wild Indian's venison: Locke's theory of property and English colonialism in America'. *Political Studies*, 44(1), pp. 60-74.

4. **Critical examination of a theory or a thinker:** This approach is essentially comparable to interpretative work, but here the interpreted authors have to be critically evaluated. Crucial here is the principle of *charitable reading* mentioned in the section "Reading and Research Techniques". Good criticism is only possible on the basis of good interpretation. The latter always has priority. Usually, it is helpful to get inspiration for your criticism of the author from secondary literature but you must also develop your own criticism.

Applied Political Theory

We can also use the ideas, concepts, and tools we have picked up in the study of political theory to interpret, describe, and/or critique social and political reality: for example, by exposing and denouncing social pathologies or by coming, through interpretative reconstruction, to a deeper understanding of the normative framework that holds up our own existing social practices and institutions.

Application of Normative Standards

1. Determination of concrete evaluation criteria (e.g. inclusion, equality of opportunity, freedom as non-domination) through the theory-based interpretation of fundamental values (freedom, equality, democracy).
2. Comparison of the current state (reference to empirical studies) with normative standards (see e.g. [IMIX](#)) → **Derivation of a need for reform**

Concrete steps

1. **Determination** of the norm underlying the evaluation (here "democracy") → Justification: general acceptance as universal value
2. **Specifying** the meaning of "democracy"
 - a. Liberal theory: individual rights, formal equality
 - b. Republican theory: status/recognition, intensive participation.
 - c. Communitarian theory: identification, shared values
3. **Concretization** of the specific meanings with regard to the proposals
Example: religious symbols
 - a. Religious freedom in the private sphere; freedom of the public sphere from religion
 - b. Establishment of rules on religious symbols through participation
 - c. Freedom of cultural communities to live or preserve their religious tradition in the public sphere

Disclosing Critique

Caution. Disclosing critique is a sophisticated art. As a rule, students do not succeed in this form of political theory (in general, only few thinkers do). If there is interest in “disclosing critique”, it is usually more useful to interpret and analyze the work of authors who work in a disclosing way.

- Concept-forming and theory-forming description of reality
- Shakes up our usual picture of the world (counter-narrative) through an alien/unknown/contra-hegemonic description of reality.
- Often counter-narratives are “genealogical” narratives that cast doubt on the legitimacy of contemporary social practices and institutions by highlighting the violence and suffering of their genesis.
- Shock through exaggeration/sharpening of reality
- No use of “yardsticks”
- No strict methodological orientation - novels, films or songs are also an effective form of disclosing critique.
- See for an introductory description: Honneth, A. (2007). ‘The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism.’ In *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 49-62,.
- Examples:
 - Rousseau’s “Discourses on Inequality”
 - Foucault’s “Discipline and Punish”
 - Adorno and Horkheimer’s “Dialectic of Enlightenment”