

Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers

Introduction

Writing academic papers is a central component of university study. As part of the Social Anthropology program, students are required to write several proseminar and seminar papers. The goal of these papers is to provide practice in the conception and writing of academic texts. Each paper addresses a specific and clearly defined topic based on a clearly formulated research question.

This document provides students with practical guidance for writing academic papers and helps them meet the applicable academic standards. At the same time, it makes the formal requirements clear and transparent. Both adherence to academic criteria—such as the strength of argumentation, conceptual precision, and critical engagement with sources—and compliance with formal requirements are taken into account in the evaluation of written work.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The ability to develop independent, critical, and at times unconventional ideas is a key objective of this program. Writing is a way of learning to think. For this reason, we strongly advise against using generative AI tools when writing academic papers. In the writing process, ideas are examined, rephrased, and refined. Those who outsource this process miss out on a crucial experience of writing as a tool for thinking. The same applies to reading. Texts should be approached independently and carefully. Anyone who nevertheless uses such tools must clearly indicate this in accordance with the guidelines “Citing AI tools”¹ as failure to do so will be considered academic misconduct.

Non-generative tools, such as spelling and translation software, are exempt from this disclosure requirement. However, they should also be used with caution. Specific requirements for disclosure are determined by the respective lecturers and supervisors.

¹ [Guidelines «Citing AI tools»](#)

Formal Requirements

Length

A proseminar paper comprises 4,000–5,000 words, while a seminar paper comprises 8,000–9,000 words. The appendix (including the bibliography, figures, tables, etc.) is not included in the word count.

Formatting

- Page margins: 2.5 cm; line spacing: double
- Pages are numbered at the bottom using Arabic numerals
- A standard font should be used (e.g., Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri). In the main text, font size should be 12 pt (Calibri, Times New Roman) or 11 pt (Arial), depending on the font
- Justified alignment is recommended (including footnotes)
- Page numbering begins after the table of contents.

Footnotes

Footnotes are useful when additional information provides a meaningful complement to the main text but would otherwise disrupt the flow of argumentation or reading. However, footnotes should be used sparingly.

Each footnote should form a complete sentence and end with a period. As a general rule, bibliographic references do not belong in footnotes, except for cases where they serve as suggestions for further reading or require a more elaborate discussion. Footnotes are separated from the main text by a hyphen, numbered consecutively, and indicated by superscript Arabic numerals without parentheses.

Language

The paper may be written in German, English, or French, in consultation with the lecturers.

Regardless of the chosen language, the paper must be written in accordance with current spelling, grammar, and stylistic conventions.

Consistent use of gender-inclusive language is expected².

² [Gender Sensitive and Inclusive Language Guide, University of Basel](#)

Structure of the Paper

A scientific paper should have a clearly identifiable line of argument that can be followed coherently from the title through to the discussion. The structure varies depending on the topic and scope of the work. Therefore, there is no single structure that applies to all academic papers. The following outline serves as an example.

Title Page

The title page must include the following information:

University, subject, course, name of the lecturer, title of the paper, number of semesters, name of the author, student ID number, and email address, submission date.

Students are free to design the title page as they wish.

Table of Contents

The table of contents precedes the main text and outlines the structure and the line of argumentation of the paper. It lists all chapters and subchapters with their corresponding page numbers.

Subdivisions should be used only when there are at least two sections at the same hierarchical level (e.g., 2.1 and 2.2) and when each subsection is substantial enough to warrant separate treatment, typically comprising at least half a page. Chapter headings should accurately reflect the content of the respective sections and enable readers to navigate the paper efficiently.

The table of contents itself is not numbered. Its structure should follow the underlying research question of the paper. Consequently, developing a clear outline at an early stage helps ensure that the paper remains coherent, focused, and logically structured throughout.

Introduction

The introduction provides an overview of the topic and situates the paper within its broader context. It should begin with a general introduction to the subject area, for example through a current development, a striking quote, a brief ethnographic vignette, or an anecdote that illustrates the research question to be addressed later. The focus is then narrowed and specified: the theoretical or empirical problem, the objectives of the paper, and the central research question should be clearly identified and formulated, whether as a research question, a set of hypotheses, or both. The introduction should also explain why the topic is relevant and indicate how the paper contributes to the current state of research.

Finally, the introduction should provide a brief overview of the structure of the paper, giving readers a clear sense of its organization and the approach that will be followed in the main body.

Main Body

The main body contains the substantive engagement with the chosen research topic. It constitutes both the intellectual and the quantitative core of the paper and serves to develop

arguments in a systematic and logically coherent manner with respect to the research question. The individual chapters should be closely connected to one another, so that their respective contributions to answering the central research question are clearly apparent. Together, they should form a coherent and persuasive line of argument.

All sources, materials, and theoretical references used must be disclosed transparently. Quotations and statements taken from other sources must be properly referenced in the text and fully documented in the bibliography so that they can be clearly verified.

Conclusion

The conclusion provides a concise summary of the main arguments and findings of the paper and answers the research question formulated in the introduction. It situates the results within the broader scholarly context and critically reflects on the findings in relation to existing research. In addition, it offers a critical reflection on the methodological approach and the underlying theoretical assumptions of the study.

It should also include a brief outlook on open questions, future research opportunities, or potential practical applications. The conclusion thus closes the argumentative loop to the introduction and brings the paper to a coherent and well-rounded close.

Bibliography

The bibliography is assigned its own chapter number. It is not divided by topic or type of publication but is generally arranged in alphabetical order. It must include all works cited in the paper—and only those that are actually referenced in the text.

Proseminar papers typically include approximately 10–15 titles, while seminar papers usually comprise around 15–20 titles.

Appendix

The appendix contains supplementary materials that are relevant for understanding the paper but cannot be included in the main text due to their length or scope. These may include, for example, questionnaires, interview guides, transcribed interviews, tables, statistics, maps, illustrations, charts, or longer text excerpts.

All sections of the appendix must be numbered consecutively (e.g., Appendix 1, Appendix 2, etc.) and provided with captions or figure legends so that they can be clearly referenced within the main text.

Declaration of Academic Integrity

Each paper must include a signed declaration of academic integrity confirming that no plagiarism has been committed.

The form is available at the following link:

<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/dokumente-merkblaetter/>

Citing in Academic Writing

A citation style determines how quotations and references are handled in academic writing. There are various styles, such as Chicago, APA, or Harvard. The chosen citation style—including all formatting details such as punctuation and the placement of commas and full stops—must be applied consistently and systematically throughout the entire paper.

For longer papers, it is advisable to use a reference management tool (e.g. Zotero). These tools make it easier to organize sources and automatically generate the bibliography in the chosen citation style.

Citation according to the Chicago Manual of Style

- Direct citations must be indicated using double quotation marks („” or « »).
Example: “Perhaps, after all, the question is not what anthropology is but what particular efforts deemed ‘anthropological’ do and have done in specific contexts” (Meiu, Stasik and Mateus 2025, 5).
- In the case of indirect citations (paraphrases), no quotation marks are used. However, it must remain clearly identifiable that the ideas being presented are derived from another source.
Example: By examining human cultures and societies, anthropology helps explain how visual expressions, including art, symbols, and media, both represent and shape cultural life (Sobolieva 2025, 169).
- Short direct quotations of up to three lines are integrated into the main text. Longer quotations (from four lines onward) are set off from the main text for improved readability by using single line spacing, a smaller font size, and slight indentation.
- Terms or passages that are already marked with quotation marks in the original source (quotation within a quotation) are indicated using single quotation mark.
Example: «Therefore, if the new materialisms were summarized by a central precept, it would most likely be ‘decentering the human’» (Jallo 2025, 127).
- When citing a source indirectly (second-hand citation), which should be done only with great caution, this must be indicated using the phrase “cited in”.
Example: «Ein einheitlicher Zitierstil ist wichtig» (Müller 2019, 40, zitiert nach Neuer 2020, 60).
- In direct quotations, all modifications (omissions, additions, or emphasis) must be clearly indicated using square brackets.
Example: Heute, wo «das Eigene oft naturalisiert und als einzig richtige Möglichkeit des Seins ideologisiert [wird], ist ethnologisches Wissen über kulturelle Vielfalt besonders wichtig» (Pauli et al. 2017, 8).
- Errors or inconsistencies in quotations must be reproduced as they appear in the original and marked with “[sic]”.
Example: «Es ist hier nicht der Ort, die Rolle, die Maus [sic] für die Entwicklung des soziologischen Denkens in Frankreich spielte, kritisch zu würdigen» (Evans-Pritchard 1984, 8).

- For works with more than three authors or editors, only the first name is cited in the text, followed by “et al.”.
Example: (Meiu et al. 2024).
- Multiple citations are separated by semicolons.
Example: (Dankwa 2021, 39-45; Stasik 2025, 67-71).
- If a citation refers to more than one page, the exact page numbers must be indicated.
Example: (Engeler 2019, 72-83).
- As with print media, information about the author and publication date is included in the main text for online sources. The full details, including the URL, are listed in the bibliography.

Formatting of the Bibliography

The bibliography ensures that all sources used in an academic paper can be clearly identified. Every source cited in the text must appear in the bibliography, and conversely, every source listed there must be cited at least once in the text. Literature that has not been read or evaluated does not belong in the bibliography.

Examples of a bibliography according to the Chicago Manual of Style (18th edition)³:

Book

Last name, first name. Year. *Title*. Publisher.

Meiu, George Paul. 2017. *Ethno-erotic Economies: Sexuality, Money, and Belonging in Kenya*. University of Chicago Press.

Articles in Edited Volumes

Last name, first name. Year. „Title of the article.“ In *Title*, edited by first name last name. Publisher.

Dankwa, Serena O. 2020. „The Imagined Homoconference: ‘Activism’ and the Politics of Indirection.” In *Readings in Sexualities from Africa*, edited by Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks. Indiana University Press.

Articles in Print Journals

Last name, first name. Year. „Title of the article.“ *Title of the journal* volume number (issue number): pages.

Stasik, Michael. 2018. „The Popular Niche Economy of a Ghanaian Bus Station: Departure from Informality.“ *Africa Spectrum* 53 (1): 37–59.

³ More examples can be found here.:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

Articles in Online Journals

Last name, first name. Year. „Title of the article.“ *Title of the journal* volume number (issue number): pages. DOI.

Lindquist, Benjamin. 2023. „The Art of Text-to-Speech.“ *Critical Inquiry* 50 (2): 225-251.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/727651>.

Newspaper Article

Last name, first name. Year. „Title of the article.“ Name of the newspaper, Publication date.
URL.

Carey, Benedict. 2008. „For the Brain, Remembering Is Like Reliving.“ *New York Times*, 4.
September. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/05/science/05brain.html>.

Internet Sources

Last name, first name. Year. „Title of the text or article.“ Website title. Date accessed. DOI/URL.

Heinemeyer, Annika. 2022. „Die 10 wichtigsten Zitierregeln für deine wissenschaftliche Arbeit.“
Scribbr. Accessed on 30.08.2022. <https://www.scribbr.de/richtig-zitieren/zitierregeln/>.

Assessment criteria

Topic and Research Question

The topic of the paper should be clearly defined and meaningfully narrowed down so that the research question can be convincingly addressed within the given scope. In addition, a concise and meaningful title is expected that accurately reflects the content of the paper.

Outline and Structure

The paper must be complete in form and include all required components. It should be clearly and logically structured, with a coherent outline and consistent hierarchy between chapters. Headings should be formulated precisely and accurately reflect the content. In addition, attention should be paid to a balanced proportion of text length, both within chapters and between the main body and the introductory and concluding sections.

Engagement with the Topic

The paper should go beyond a purely descriptive presentation and provide a well-founded socio-anthropological analysis. A clear, academically grounded line of argumentation is expected, drawing on current scholarly literature and critically situating it within the field. Any original research conducted by the student should be embedded within an existing research context.

The sources of information must be clearly documented, cited authors must be properly introduced, and one's own ideas must be clearly distinguished from those of others. The results should follow logically from the argument, be concisely synthesized, and convincingly answer the underlying research question—or, if this is not achieved, transparently explain the reasons why.

Language

The paper should be linguistically precise, clear, and easy to read, with unambiguous formulations. Chapters should be introduced in a meaningful way, and transitions between sections and chapters should be made coherent and easy to follow. Overall, a consistent thread is expected that clearly ties together both the structure and the argumentation.

Formal Requirements

The formal requirements must be met. These include the specified length, consistent and correct use of citations and references, as well as linguistic accuracy in grammar, punctuation, syntax, and tense. When using AI, this must be disclosed transparently and traceably in accordance with the guideline "Citing AI." The layout and title page must also meet the requirements. Furthermore, the paper is expected to be submitted by the deadline⁴.

⁴ [Guidelines «Citing AI tools»](#)

Policy on Assessment and Revision

Proseminar and seminar papers are typically written as part of the respective courses and address a previously agreed-upon topic. The submission deadline is set by the instructors and is binding. Assessment is carried out within six weeks in the form of written feedback based on the above-mentioned evaluation criteria. Upon request, the assessment can be discussed in an additional consultation session.

While proseminar papers are formative in nature and may be revised after submission, seminar and master's theses are evaluative and cannot be revised once submitted.

If a proseminar paper or seminar paper is graded as insufficient, there is a one-time opportunity to write a new paper on a different topic within the same course.