



Guidelines for Writing Research Papers at the Chair of Comparative Politics

This document is widely based on „Hinweise zum Erstellen von wissenschaftlichen Hausarbeiten“, written by Prof. Dr. Katharina Holzinger, University of Konstanz, Chair of International Politics and Conflict Research.

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1. Objective of a Research Paper

By writing a paper you are supposed to show that you are able to work on a scientific issue on your own, while using relevant academic literature.

“On your own” does not mean that you can not consult with your lecturer, but you will not be provided with a concept or an outline. Consultation is only supposed to help you find a topic and a concept (and maybe assist you with your outline). For a final paper you will probably need more frequent consultation sessions.

2. The Leading Question

1.1. Why Should You Ask a Question?

There is no research paper without a question. The quality of your paper will depend heavily on the question since everything you write is going to be concerned with answering it.

Your question is supposed to narrow down the issue. This means that it should exclude many aspects from your topic and focus your attention. It is better to concentrate on a small issue since papers tend to get longer than expected anyways. The more research you do about a topic, the more aspects will come to your mind.

Your lead question has to be precisely phrased. The more accurate it is, the easier it will be for you to answer it. That is why you have to narrow down your subject area. It is also important to use clear and understandable phrases in your question.

The lead question determines your paper's objective. If your question is clear enough, your next steps and your outline will be obvious. That is why a well phrased, precise question is going to save you a lot of work.

1.2. How do I Decide on a Question?

Sadly, there is no single way of finding your question that will always work. Still, finding a question can be learned over time. Especially during your basic studies but also later on, it helps to consult about your question with your lecturer.

However, generally a good question is based on a theory. It will not help to focus on a topic as: “Party X” or “The policy area X”. Instead, it makes sense to derive your question from a theory or hypothesis. For example: “Why is party X so successful and party Y is not? Which theoretical reasons are there? How can these reasons be tested and verified empirically?”

1.3. Additional Tips for Finding a Question

Review the topics that were discussed in class. Which questions stayed unanswered or proved to be controversial? Which aspects were particularly striking? Does a theory not apply where it was expected to? What were you the most interested in? Which topic could you imagine spending a lot of time on?

Get an overview of the available literature concerned with your topic. Are there enough sources? What can you find in the Social Science Citation Index, Google Scholar, OPAC and current journals?

Go to the library. Get to know the state of research. Are there unanswered or controversial questions? How are these questions treated and is there a point in writing your paper about them? Are there different theories to draw from? Which aspects of a topic are not considered (enough) in modern science? Are there research gaps you could write about? Is there a question derivable from the current state of research?

Do a brain-storming. Is there a current debate about your topic or are there political controversies about it? Which players/institutions/interest groups are relevant to the problem? On which players or countries could you focus your examination? How could you use the comparative method?

Narrow down your topic and divide it into subcategories. Decide on which aspects to focus and which to blind out. How and where can you place your emphasis? A wise division between aspects will be positively recognized if it is well justified (in your introduction) and reasonable. Always make clear that the division into sections and your omission of certain aspects is an intentional process, based on your reasoning and not on based on chance.

3. The Outline

3.1. How to Write an Outline

Writing an outline is not your first step. Obviously, without having a proper question, you will not be able to write your outline since the sequence of your steps arises from your question.

Often times – even with an outline - it is hard to arrange your material in a way that provides you with a clear sequence avoiding repetition and jumping between aspects.

Before you start to write your paper you should at least have a rough structure in mind. You can still do fine-tuning when you are within the writing process. You can also write a whole outline before you start on the actual paper, however, you will find yourself making adjustments every now and then. Either way, it is important to stay flexible during your writing process.

Your outline will serve as a frame for your paper. When trying to find a structure, you should collect all aspects important to answering your question. Remember that not everything linked to the topic will be necessary for this. Also, not every aspect can be included in your paper due

to the limited amount of space you are provided with. This is why it is important to focus on a central theme. You have to ask yourself which aspects are absolutely necessary. Do not include interesting, but useless aspects in your paper.

This is an Example for a Good Structure:

- 1) Introduction (what is your main thesis and why is it important?)
- 2) Finding and stating your thesis (which theoretical arguments support your thesis and what do you derive it from?)
- 3) Method and design (how will you examine whether your thesis is correct or not?)
- 4) Analysis (execute what you have planned above and analyze whether your thesis is correct or not. It is important to do your own research on the topic. Do not just summarize what others have said before. Instead, think about how you could test your thesis. Please notice, that it is not important to prove it. It is better to properly falsify a thesis than to support it with poor arguments and weak data.
- 5) Summary and conclusion

You will probably have to revise your first outline several times. During this process, focus areas are likely to shift, arguments will be restructured and maybe some segments will turn out to be unnecessary. So, even though the final research paper may vary strongly from the original outline, the latter is still important for sorting out ideas and for planning your work.

3.2. The Form of the Outline

In political science the decimal numeration is commonly used. Mixed systems combining capital and lower case letters, as well as Roman, or Arabic numerals are not recommended. The typical outline using the decimal system will roughly look like this:

1. Title of the first section (first level)
 - 1.1. Title of the first sub-section (second level)
 - 1.2. Title of the second sub-section
 - 1.2.1. Title of the first sub-sub-section (third level)
 - 1.2.2. Title of the second sub-sub-section
 - 1.3. Title of the third sub-section
2. Title of the second section

Please note that you are not allowed to give only one sub-section. If you need a sub-section, you always have to have at least two of them (e.g. if you have section 1.1. you need a section 1.2.).

In normal papers you will probably only need two levels. If it is helpful to your structure, you can, however, use more levels. When you are all done, you may want to think about removing overly precise titles. It can be helpful for you to work with a very fine outline but for your reader this could be confusing. Kept it as simple as possible.

4. The Introduction

4.1. Why is an Introduction Important?

An Introduction is not the same thing as a preamble and must not be mistaken for one. A preamble contains acknowledgments whereas an introduction gives the reader an overview of the following paper. The introduction has to show the reader the central theme, it has to tell him what the paper is going to be about, which methods are applied, what data it is based on and what the outline will look like. The introduction is a necessary component to a scientific paper and should not be treated lightly (the same holds for the conclusion).

A draft of the introduction can help you to write a direct and efficient paper since it forces you to think precisely about what your working process is going to look like. This may also prevent you from getting overly frustrated later on.

You will probably have to change some details of your introduction throughout the working process. Also, it is not uncommon that – after having started your writing process - you will change your main question, your specific topic or your outline. Then, off course, you will have to modify your introduction accordingly. This should be seen as progress and not as a set-back.

The length of an introduction has to be appropriate to the length of the whole paper. A typical introduction in your basic and advanced studies should not be longer than one or two pages.

4.2. How to Write an Introduction

Introduce the Reader to Your Topic:

Quotes or current developments are a good way to capture the reader's attention and introduce him/her to your topic at the same time. However, you could also uncover a research gap, a contradiction in contemporary literature or whatever seems adequate to start your paper with. Please do not write about personal experiences (only very famous scientists can do this and if they do so, it is usually in a preamble).

Verbalize and Explain your Question to the Reader:

The problem your paper will be dealing with has to be precisely phrased and shown to not have been fully solved already. Try not to talk too much about general aspects of the topic and focus on the aspects specifically relevant to your problem. Introducing the reader to your question is the most important part of the introduction. The reader has to be briefly informed about the paper's objective, why he should read it and what insights he will gain.

Deduce and Justify Your Question:

The reader will want to know on which considerations your question is based. That is why you should write about the following aspects: Why are you dealing with this particular topic? Why does this topic deserve special attention? In which context is your topic relevant? How has the topic been dealt with by other authors? What exactly is your objective? Which normative standards do you apply?

You could, for example, justify your problem by proving it to be of social relevance (e.g. “this is an important topic and we need more insights to understand it...”). You could also deduce your question from the current state of research (e.g. “there are research gaps that need to be filled...”).

Narrow Down the Scope of Your Question:

Since a good question is focused on specific aspects of a topic, it follows that some other aspects have to be excluded. This exclusion has to be explained and justified in the introduction. You have to be able to reason why you are focusing on one aspect and not on another. So, you are expected to answer the following questions: Which aspects are you going to focus on? Which aspects will be disregarded? Based on which considerations did you narrow down the scope of your question?

Current State of Research:

A good introduction should always contain remarks about the current state of research. What kind of research has been done so far and are there any controversies? Which branches of research will be touched by your question? What literature will your paper draw from?

Describe and Justify your Approach:

Which examination methods will you use? It has to be clear from which perspective you will approach your problem. Will you take up a common theoretical position and treat your problem in a way that is typical for this topic area? Or, will you take an uncommon approach to your problem, applying an unusual method? Every scientific paper follows certain theoretical assumptions. So, you should briefly explain your theoretical framework and give some remarks about the literature you will be using.

Structure Your Paper:

You have to briefly explain the structure your paper will be following. This does not mean you should write down your whole outline. You are supposed to give the reader an idea of how you are going to argue and in which order you will present your arguments. This makes the paper more accessible since it shows the reader its common thread.

Clarify Central Terms and Concepts:

You should clarify concepts and terms (and how you use them) as far as they are not too straightforward. A good example is “America”: Do you mean the whole continent, only North

America or only the United States? It is important to explain terms like this to your reader so that he understands exactly what you mean by it. However, if your paper is mainly concerned with a certain theory, you may want to explain certain terms and concepts in a later chapter specifically about the theory.

Advice: You can always look at introductions in scientific magazines since they often follow a standard pattern and it is never a bad idea if you follow this pattern as well.

5. The Main Part

5.1. Basics

The main part of a scientific research paper fulfills a central task: the question asked in the introduction has to be answered. Therefore, all relevant facts, arguments, opinions, etc. have to be presented, ordered, assessed and analyzed.

The main part has to meet different requirements depending on your problem. However, there are some aspects that always have to be considered:

Develop a Central Theme:

A scientific paper always needs a central theme that – similar to a common thread – structures the arguments and attributes them with their specific value. Each chapter and each argument is supposed to contribute to the justification of your central theme. At all times it is important that you try not to run off topic.

Consistent Argumentation:

A good text has a consistent internal logic that can be seen in its outline and its structure. It is important that you follow this logic throughout your whole writing process. Ask yourself if your paper contains any contradictions and if so, whether these can be solved. Also, think about whether your conclusions are really supported by the literature you are using.

Discuss Other Positions:

A good paper is expected to give a fair and thorough discussion of other scientific positions. Views and interpretations you do not share have to be at least mentioned and, at best, rejected by presenting valid arguments against them.

Separate Descriptions and Assessments:

Describing a position and assessing it are two different things. You always have to do your best in describing someone else's argumentation precisely, honestly and unaltered before criticizing it.

In Science You have the Duty to Give Reasons:

Everything you claim in a scientific text has to be well justified. The reader has to be principally able to ascertain the evidence supporting your argumentation by personally checking your

sources. This is why you always have to quote ideas and thoughts taken from other authors (see also section 7.1).

5.2. The Concept

Drawing from your outline, it is helpful to conceptualize a rough structure for your paper. For example, you could add notes to the individual topics listing which questions will be answered here. Ask yourself which thoughts, which arguments and which sources you will use in which sections.

It is important to know the rough structure of your paper before you start writing. Make sure that all arguments are well ordered and follow a logical sequence. Do not confuse your reader with mental leaps or gaps in your argumentation. If you are not sure whether a certain thought is necessary at a certain place, it is probably better to put it in a footnote (and if the main text is still well understandable, the thought should probably stay in the footnote or be left out completely).

5.3. The Draft

As hard as it may be, start writing a first version of your paper as soon as possible. This draft will not be the final version of your paper and usually it will require many changes but it also motivates you and helps to prevent a writer's block later on.

Consider that writing is always "work in progress". No paper's concept is finalized before the paper is not written. Most of the times, you will revise, change or even discard arguments you have in mind, when writing them down. You can only see whether an argumentation is valid and strong after you have written it down.

Please note that writing takes a lot of time and effort. Everybody will eventually develop his/her own speed and strategy.

5.4. Illustrative Presentation: Graphics, Tables, ...

Always consider using graphics, tables and other illustrative forms of presenting information for your papers. This has the advantage of visualizing important statements or facts. Tables are especially good to clear your text from too many numbers that may be distracting for the reader.

Whatever means of illustrative presentation you use, always make sure that they are self-explanatory. You have to explain every graphic you use (however, this explanation should be unnecessary to understanding the graphic).

Graphics can be placed within the text or in the appendix (especially if they are very big). Directly beneath the graphic you have to declare its origin (using a small font size). If it is your own graphic, it is recommended to write:

Source: Own graphic: Own calculation/data...

If you copied the graphic from another author, you should write:

Source: quoted from [complete bibliographic reference]

Or:

Source: published in [complete bibliographic reference]

If you use tables or charts you have to append an index containing your sources and all relevant information after your table of contents.

5.5. The Final Version

After writing a draft, you should take your time to revise it regarding content, grammar and linguistic style.

A good diction and a nice writing style will impact your paper positively, whereas faulty citations, grammatical mistakes, typos and formal errors decrease the scientific trustworthiness of your work.

Generally, your text should be very reader-friendly meaning that your style should be short and easy to understand. Complex issues have to be precisely worded without ignoring the importance of brevity.

Tips:

- Check your spelling
- Do not write overly complex sentences
- Use active instead of passive form
- Do not use empty phrases or inappropriate comparisons
- Stay objective and avoid being polemic
- Use precise and correct phrases
- Use professional jargon but use technical terms only when necessary (keep it easy to understand for your reader)

“There is no accounting for taste” – this may be true but in a scientific paper there are certain limits to the author’s stylistic freedom. It should always be objective, factual and precisely written. A scientific paper is not very trustworthy if its style is inappropriate.

It is uncommon to write your text from a first-person perspective. Phrases like: “Please note that...” are more subtle and help avoiding it. However, many lecturers will accept it if you use the first-person perspective every now and then.

Please note that it is helpful to have someone counter-check your paper even if it is only to find spelling mistakes or typos. Often times, you do not have the necessary distance to really check your paper after you have been working on it for hours.

6. The Conclusion

The conclusion is supposed to answer the question you raised at the beginning. Since it should have an internal connection to your introduction, it is recommended that you read your introduction again before writing your conclusion.

Generally speaking, you should include the following elements in your conclusion:

- Briefly summarize your findings
- Link your findings to previous scientific outcomes
- Discuss your findings: consider possible implications or consequences of your findings
- Maybe add a critical assessment of your own work: what are your paper`s limits/strengths?
- Future prospects: you could propose new questions or discuss the implications of your findings for future research. You could also criticize previous studies (only if you know the research area well enough). Most of the times it is not a good idea to venture a prognosis about politics or include personal opinions in your conclusion.

7. Quotation

7.1. Why is Proper Quotation Important?

In science you have the duty to give reasons for all of your claims. That is why quotes and citations are essential for all scientific papers.

This has various reasons: Scientists can only communicate properly if they can refer to the same sources and they are principally able to check the sources of other researchers. Also, quotes can be helpful in justifying your position, as well as marking thoughts/statements that are not originally yours. Finally, every author has the right to preserve his intellectual property. It is, therefore, not acceptable to use someone else`s ideas without properly quoting them.

A research paper is a scientific text that you are supposed to write independently, meaning by yourself and without plagiarizing. Plagiarizing means that you copy statements/ideas from other

authors without properly quoting them. This will be viewed as an attempted fraud and your paper will be considered to have failed. Every paper that is handed in will be carefully examined, using the internet and specific software programs so that most attempted frauds will be found.

7.2. Forms of Quotation

There are two main forms of quotation:

Direct Quotation:

It contains the exact wording of the original text passage and is placed in quotation marks. It has to be identical with the original text, so you also have to copy spelling and punctuation. If you ever want to change a quote, you have to stick to the following rules:

- Skipping words or phrases is signified with three dots. The meaning of the quote must not be altered.
- Explanations within a quotation have to be put into square brackets []. You have to note that this is your explanation by writing in German: [... Anm. D. Verf.] or in English: [... editorial comment]
- If you emphasize words or phrasings that were not emphasized in the original text, you have add the annotation: [Hervorhebung durch d. Verf.] or in English: [emphasis added]
- If you incorporate a quote into your sentence, you bracket endings that are grammatically incorrect [].

Indirect Quotation:

The indirect quote reproduces the idea of an other text passage without copying its exact wording. This is the most common way of quoting other authors and you do not need quotation marks. However, you still have to add the reference.

7.3. How do I Properly Quote?

The fundamental rule is that you have to quote as much as is necessary for the reader to have the possibility to find and read the text passages you used. Therefore, quotations have to be done very precisely.

There are different ways of quoting - the „Harvard-style“ and the classic footnote. Harvard-style uses short notes within a text, that refer to the bibliography. Since the Harvard-style is commonly used in political science, it is recommended that you use this method:

Your reference is placed at the end of the sentence, before the dot, exclamation mark, etc. The reference is surrounded by round brackets () and it contains the following information:

(Name Year: Page)

e.g. (McCubbins 1992: 50)

Special Cases are Treated as Follows:

- There are two authors: (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991: 47)
- There are more than two authors: (McCubbins et. Al 1984: 115)
- You use two or more books by the same author that were released within the same year: (McCubbins 1990a: 20) and (McCubbins 1990b: 20) ...
- You quote a passage covering more than one pages: (McCubbins 1991: 4f.)
- You quote a whole chapter: (McCubbins: 1990: chapter IX)
- Indirect quotes:
 - German: (vgl. McCubbins 1990: 34)
 - English: (cf. McCubbins 1990: 34)
- Quotes where you can not find the original source (avoid this, if possible):
 - German: (zit. nach: McCubbins 2000: 78)
 - English: (quoted from: McCubbins 2000: 78)

7.4. How do I Write a Bibliography?

- A bibliography only contains sources that you really used in your paper. Do not list up every book you read
- The bibliography uses a normal 1.0 line spacing whereas the text itself uses 1.5 line spacing
- Titles are arranged in an alphabetical order of the authors` last names. If there are several titles from the same author you list them according to the date of release. If there are several titles by the same author, published within the same year, you add "a" and "b" ... after the year of release, e.g.: Tezlaff, Rainer (2001a).
- Do not include (academic) titles. Do not spell out the name of the publishing firm if it is typically abbreviated (e.g. UTB). If there are several places of publication, it is sufficient to name one and add "u.a." (German) or "i.a." (English) after it

Examples for Proper References:

- Monographies:
Last name, forename, year: title. sub-title. place of publication: publishing firm.
Example: Luhmann, Niklas, 2002: Die Politik der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Articles in Edited Volumes:
Last name, forename, year: title. sub-title, in: last name, forename, year: title. sub-title.
place of publication: publishing firm.
Example: Albrecht, Jörg, 1990: Klonieren für Anfänger. Gentechnik ist einfacher als viele denken, in: Klingholz, Reiner (Ed.), 1990: Die Welt nach Maß: Gentechnik, Geschichte, Chancen, Risiken. Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Articles in Magazines:

Last name, forename, year: title. sub-title, in: magazine-name year-number (volume-number): pageX-pageY.

Example: Prieser, Karin, 2005: Der populistische Moment, in: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 50 (3): 301-310.

- Newspaper Articles:

Last name, forename, year: title. sub-title, in: magazine-name, volume-number, date, (pageX-pageY).

Example: Richter, Nicolas, 2005: Geschlossen gegen Iran, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, Nr. 26, 1.2.2006, 4.

- Websites (if possible, give a printed out version in the appendix or add a disc with a copy of the website):

Last name, forename, year: document-title, in: web-address <http://www...> (date of access).

There are alternative ways to give references but it is important that you stick to one format the whole time.

If you are not sure about a certain format, it is best to use an American standard as for example the Harvard System (look at our webpage for more details).

The `Politische Vierteljahresschrift` can be used as a standard model as well. The examples above are based on it (you do not have to write the authors` names in italics).

8. Formalities

8.1. The Layout

- Paper: DIN A4, white, printed on one side. Font size: 11 (Arial) or 12 (Times)
- Font: Times New Roman or Arial; justified text
- Line spacing: 1.5
- Margin: left 2.5 cm / right 3 cm
- Page numbers: bottom right or top right

8.2. Volume

Individual lecturers will have different preferences about the volume of your paper so these are just rough guidelines:

- Seminars in the module group "Einführung in die Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft" (introduction to comparative politics): roughly 12-15 text pages

- Advanced seminars: 15-20 text pages
- Bachelor`s thesis: 40-60 text pages
- (Advanced) seminars in master courses: 20-25 text pages
- Master`s thesis: 80-100 text pages

8.3. Title Page

Page Header Information:

- Name of your university and department
- Name of the lecturer
- Name of the seminar
- Current semester and filing date

Page-Center Information:

- Title of the paper
- Sub-title of the paper

End of Page Information:

- Type of research paper
- Your name
- Your address, phone number, e-mail address
- Matriculation number
- Your current semester and major

8.4. Table of Contents

It is recommended that you use the table function offered by WORD. You can mark sub categories by adding an indentation and you can fill the space between the section titles and the page numbers with periods.

Generally, the segmentation of individual sections should not be overly complex (e.g. you should not have three headlines on one page). In a 20-page paper you should not use more than three levels of segmentation.

8.5. Text

Highlight your headlines typographically (also using empty lines). There are different ways of highlighting available to you (italic typesetting, bold print or underlining), however, you should use them carefully and sparingly. It is important that your method of highlighting is consistent throughout the whole paper.

Only use abbreviations if they are commonly known and necessary for simplifying your sentence. You introduce them by writing out the whole expression in parenthesis after your first use of the abbreviation.

You only give the whole name of a person the first time you mention it. After that it is sufficient to simply write the last name or, if you prefer, you can also give an abbreviated version of the first name.

Footnotes:

Footnotes can hold additional information, explanations or remarks that would disturb the flow of the text itself. However, you must not place arguments or information necessary to understand the text in a footnote.

Also, use footnotes sparingly (if you use Harvard style citation). Mark them with Arabic numerals and place the footnote directly after the expression it is related to (no empty spaces). If the footnote is related to a whole sentence, place it after the punctuation mark. A footnote should have a smaller font size than your text, be left-justified and have 1.0 line spacing.

8.6.Declaration

At the end of every paper you have to include a declaration stating the following:

“I hereby declare that I wrote this paper on my own and that all sources used were properly quoted.”

(in German: „Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorstehende Arbeit selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.“)

For final papers you have to copy the text determined by the exam regulations.

8.7.Appendix

If you used quantitative data, the steps of your analysis have to be visible and understandable for your lecturer. You can achieve this by appending a disc containing the data sets you used, as well as the commands you used in the statistics program (e.g. Stata, R or SPSS).

8.8. Further Reading / Sources

Schlichte, Klaus (1999): Einführung in die Arbeitstechniken der Politikwissenschaft. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.

Simonis, Georg / Elbers, Helmut (2003): Studium und Arbeitstechniken der Politikwissenschaft. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.

Plümper, Thomas (2003): Effizient schreiben. Leitfaden zum Verfassen von Qualifizierungsarbeiten und wissenschaftlichen Texten. München: Oldenbourg.

Aleman, Ulrich / Forndran, Erhard (2002): Methodik der Politikwissenschaft: Eine Einführung in Arbeitstechnik und Forschungspraxis. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Poenicke, Klaus (1988): Duden: Wie verfaßt man wissenschaftliche Arbeiten? Ein Leitfaden vom ersten Studiensemester bis zur Promotion. Mannheim u.a.: Dudenverlag.