



**TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
DRESDEN**

Guidelines for Term Papers and Final Theses

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Preface

Dear students,

These guidelines are intended to assist you in preparing term papers and final theses for the Professorship of Organization. Before starting your work, please read these guidelines carefully. They will provide you information and advice on the kinds of papers you will be asked to write throughout your studies, our expectations of excellent papers/thesis, and a style guide for formatting your paper/thesis. If you have further questions or feedback about this guideline, please do not hesitate to contact us in our office hours or via email to professur-blagoev@tu-dresden.de.

Good luck and happy writing!

Prof. Dr. Blagoy Blagoev

(On behalf of the Professorship's team)

Introduction

The primary purpose of any term paper or thesis is to train students in the process of academic research and writing. This training happens under the supervision of an experienced faculty member. Still, it is the student's responsibility to work on their paper or thesis independently, developing their own ideas and arguments about a given topic.

Writing a term paper or thesis is both challenging and beneficial at the same time. It demands a lot of time, effort, and focus. Yet, the experience of writing a paper or thesis can also be the most essential and rewarding part of one's academic education. If everything goes well, you will be proud of the final result: a piece of research that is *your own*! The final manuscript should express your very own thoughts on and proposed solutions to a research problem, and sometimes could even be the start of a promising academic career.

The purpose of this document is to support you in conducting your own research as a foundation for your paper or thesis. The document will provide you with guidelines on how to find a topic, conduct a literature review, write your paper or thesis, craft your contribution, and much more. It also covers formal requirements, such as citation styles and formatting. Please note that this guide focuses on the process of *creating* a paper or thesis. For submitting and registering the paper, the rules of the examination office (Prüfungsamt) apply (notice e.g. specific rules and procedure for theses in English). It is your responsibility to make sure that you obey the examination rules (Prüfungsordnung) for your course of study. In case of doubt, bring up any issues ahead of time to your supervisor or the staff of the examination office.

A primer on research problems and questions

No matter what type of paper you are writing, it is imperative that you begin your paper with a well-specified *research problem*. The research problem that you seek to address should become clear on the very first pages of your manuscript. To communicate the research problem, you should develop a clear research question (by problematizing extant research) and make sure that you also answer *that* question (and not a different one). *Never lose sight of your research question*. Provide clear definitions of important terms in your research question and stick to them throughout the paper. Make sure to review every single paragraph of your paper concerning its connection to your research question. This connection should be transparent and recognizable for the reader *at all times*.

Term papers

Term papers are the most common form of academic papers, and you will write quite a few of them during your studies. Typically, the term paper will be linked to the topic of a seminar, and you will develop your research idea over the course of the semester and use the lecture-free period for writing up the paper. At our professorship, students might be expected to write two types of term papers: seminar papers and essays.

Seminar papers

In a seminar paper, the student is expected to address a clearly defined research problem by reviewing and engaging with relevant academic literature, and occasionally also by conducting empirical research. In the paper, you either work on a research problem set by your lecturer or identify and formulate a problem in the literature and offer the reader a well-grounded resolution. Based on the background literature and the class material, you have to find an interesting *research question* that you would like to explore further in your seminar paper. The

research question has to be clearly stated, motivated, justified as relevant, and ideally should also be interesting and impactful. This will require you to conduct an in-depth literature review on your paper topic.

Typically, a seminar paper contains around three pages (1,400 words) per ECTS credit (e.g., a seminar paper in a 5 ECTS course will contain approximately 15 pages). The exact requirements will be outlined in the respective kick-off session of the seminar.

Essays

Whereas a seminar paper is structured around a research question, essays are organized around a (set of) proposition(s). Essays do not seek to build arguments based on a comprehensive review of the literature. Instead, an essay typically aims at developing and justifying a well-substantiated argument through reasoning and evidence. The purpose is to test a proposition or an idea in reference to academic sources and logical reasoning. An essay is a more personal genre of academic writing. Your own voice should be visible in the writing: Do not shy away from using the "I" and taking a (critical) stance! At 1,500 to 2000 words, a typical essay is also shorter than a seminar paper. When writing an essay, your first effort should be to formulate and justify the problem you will seek to address. Next, develop a provisional core proposition by thinking, reading, and drafting. Then sketch out the structure of your argument: What points do you need to make to convince your reader of your idea? There are many ways in which any particular argument may be structured. Still, an essay's line of argumentation – how it begins, develops, and ends – should be designed to present your proposition clearly and convincingly. Keep in mind: The order in which you discovered the parts of your argument is seldom the most effective order for presenting it to the reader.

Evaluation criteria

We will evaluate your term papers based on the following criteria:

- Engagement in theoretical argumentation and justification
- Clarity, concreteness, and relevance of your research question or proposition
- Substantiation by an appropriate amount of literature
- Critical and reflective engagement with the literature
- Appropriate structure and line of argumentation, clarity of exposition
- Consistent formatting and reference style

To discuss your ideas for a seminar papers and essays, please come to the office hours of your supervisor. You can find further information about our office hours on our website.

Further information on literature search or formatting is included in the sections "Useful information on writing academic papers" and "Formal considerations".

Final theses

Writing a final thesis (a manuscript in which you address a particular problem in your chosen field) should demonstrate that you have learned the skills of research, writing, thinking, and argument developed at university. A thesis is somewhat similar to a seminar paper, but broader and bolder in its scope and ambition. In addition, a thesis is typically based on some form of empirical research or more systematic literature review. Moreover, a thesis (especially on the Master's and Diploma levels) should ideally make an original contribution to its target literature.

Bachelor's theses

The bachelor's thesis is the final piece of academic work that, assuming you meet all other requirements in your examination regulations and do not fail, rewards you with your first academic degree. This is a great achievement and should be documented in your thesis. It proves that you are able to solve a research problem on your own, correctly applying appropriate methods, and present the results in a way that suits academic standards. You may use all the knowledge that you have acquired during your studies and present own ideas and arguments. During your writing time, you will be guided by experienced academic staff and can make use of the office hours in case you need further assistance. However, you are in charge of your thesis, and it is your responsibility to work on the assigned topic proactively. Appointments with your supervisor should be used for discussing ideas and issues based on your input, they are not a Q&A session where the advisor dictates your paper.

Master's and diploma theses

When you begin work on your master's or diploma thesis, you have already written quite a few papers. Therefore, you are already experienced in the field of academic writing and now, as the final piece of your studies, you will conduct a deep, profound analysis of a specific topic. This is both a great chance as well as a lot of work. From finding the idea, crafting your first outline, doing an empirical analysis, to finally holding the result in your hands (and, after the thesis has been graded, receiving your master's or diploma degree!) it is a long process, usually with ups and downs. However, when looking back, most students are quite happy with what they achieved and some of them even decide to stay in academia.

Regardless of your career plans, your project starts with finding a topic. You will be engaged in a multiple-month full-time project, so choose your topic wisely! Again, you will be guided by experienced academic staff who is there for you if you need assistance. In contrast to your bachelor's thesis, you will most likely see your supervisor more frequently, especially if you conduct empirical research. Even though this guide is intended for any academic paper, the master's or diploma thesis is probably the kind of project it is most useful for. In the following sections, there are many important pieces of support in any phase of your project. Take the time to go through this guide, read the relevant literature and, in case you have problems or questions, contact your supervisor to work out a solution.

Throughout the entire process, do not forget that you are in charge of your thesis and it is your responsibility to proactively work on the assigned topic. You determine how much (or little) effort you put in this work and you will be the one who will receive the consequences in terms of grading, good or bad. You are writing the thesis for yourself, to finish your studies, please keep that in mind. If you give your best and are highly involved in your thesis project, the result is typically rewarding for both you and your supervisor who ideally is a mentor and sparring partner for your ideas, rather than a co-author.

Application procedure

We welcome applications for conceptual and qualitative-empirical final theses. If you decide to apply to our professorship, please send (1) the filled-out [kick-off page](#) and (2) a current overview of your grades by email to professur-blagoev@tu-dresden.de.

The following application deadlines apply:

- **September 30th** for theses to be written in the **winter term**.
- **March 15th** for theses to be written in the **summer term**.

To ensure a fair and transparent process, we will supervise students with the best grades in courses and seminars in organization and management studies. We prioritize topics that relate to our expertise and interest areas to ensure optimal supervision.

After screening all applications, we will contact all applicants to whom we can offer supervision promptly (usually within one week of the application deadline) by email.

When you receive a confirmation, the next step is to get in touch with your supervisor, arrange an appointment, and then write an exposé. Your exposé should outline the relevance of your topic, the target literature, the research problem, methods, and your intended contribution(s). You can find further information on how to write your exposé [here](#). The exposé will help you specify your ideas and offers you an important opportunity to receive feedback from your supervisor. During the entire research and writing process, your supervisor will, of course, be at your side shall you have any questions or problems.

Deliverables by the student	Phase	Deliverables by the supervisor(s)
Brainstorm ideas and search for initial literature on your preferred topic	Pre-application	Support in discussing the fit of your idea and accessing initial references on your topic
Initial pitch of thesis idea to the desired supervisor via email: Kick-off page and grade list	Application (see deadlines)	Confirmation about willingness to supervise
Development of an exposé	Exposé	Feedback based on the exposé (e.g., on how to make thesis idea more specific/feasible)
Revision of the exposé based on feedback, choice of second supervisor, official registration of thesis	Registration	Final confirmation regarding topic choice and title, signature for official registration
Independent work on thesis	Independent work	Availability for questions in office hours
Finalization and submission of thesis	Submission	1 st and 2 nd supervisors both write their assessments (takes up to 6 weeks)

Evaluation criteria

Beyond the evaluation criteria for term papers (see above), we will draw on the following additional criteria when evaluating your thesis:

- Interestingness, innovativeness, and novelty
- Systematic/analytical treatment of empirical findings or review insights
- Theoretical and/or empirical contributions
- Appropriate discussion of theoretical and practical implications

Useful information on writing academic papers

Finding an interesting topic

We expect you to come up with your own research topic. Please talk to your supervisor during office hours about the scope, focus, and aim of your paper or thesis.

Since you will spend a lot of time with the topic you choose, finding an interesting topic is crucial for the success of your project. There are some strategies you can try out to find an appropriate topic:

- “Search inside yourself:” What do you find interesting?
- Start with an empirical problem/puzzle/mystery that you are curious about
- Get an overview (e.g., by reading review articles) of current debates in the literature
- Identify tensions, contradictions, or paradoxes in the literature (e.g., contradictory theories or findings)
- Read the “outlook to future research” section in academic papers

Formulating a research question

Oftentimes finding an interesting topic is closely related to or followed by formulating a research question. As the research question is the essential element your paper/thesis is structured around, you should make sure that it is formulated appropriately. To find a research question you have to engage with the existing literature on your preferred topic. Read the literature on your topic and identify gaps, contradictions, tensions, or paradoxes. Thereby you should be able to generate potentially interesting research questions. After formulating preliminary questions, you should engage with the literature again to check whether these are already answered by existing research. If your questions are already answered by previous authors, you should, again, look for gaps, contradictions, etc. in the literature. In case, your question(s) are not incorporated in the academic debates by now, you should reflect upon their feasibility. Eliminate those questions that cannot be translated into a research project. After you have found an appropriate research question, you can proceed with planning your project in order to find an answer to it.

A good research question should be:

- Answerable
- If you generate more than one research question, make sure that they are connected.
- Substantially relevant

You can find further literature on choosing a topic and formulating your research question [here](#).

Conducting a literature review

Regardless of what kind of paper you are writing, you will need to get on top of the academic literature on your topic at some stage. To find literature relevant to your topic, you can use different search engines. [Google Scholar](#) is perhaps the most known platform, but please be aware that you might receive many unfiltered results. Academic search engines such as [Web of Knowledge](#) or [EBSCO Host](#) can be set up to include only papers from peer-reviewed journals and offer several filters to refine your search. You can also check specific journal websites to look for literature published only in those journals.

After finding references that fit your topic, you will need to read the respective publications. Do not try to read every single publication from cover to cover. Instead, try to follow the following advice for engagement with academic literature:

- Before reading, ask yourself: Why do you want to read this specific publication? What do you hope to learn from it? Always approach literature with a specific question in mind.
- Then, get an overview of the publication’s central contribution and content, structure, and the underlying theoretical paradigms and assumptions. If it is a book, the Introduction chapter would usually provide a good overview of the contents of each of the following book chapters. If it is a journal article, the Abstract, as well as the Introduction and Discussion sections, usually offer you a good overview of the general gist of the paper.
- At this stage, you might occasionally discover that a paper is not that relevant for your topic after all. Then you might simply move to the next one. Still, do not forget to take notes of what you have just read. It might turn out that the paper appears relevant later on!
- If you still consider the paper relevant to your work, you might want to deeply engage with it. Try to distill the relevant insights for your project by orienting towards your own research question and interest.
- Be critical. Try to identify open questions, conceptual confusion, contradictions, and relations to other papers or authors.
- You might find it helpful to use some sort of Excel spreadsheet or another note-taking system to organize the insights gained from your literature review.

Writing up the literature review would be the next and final step of the process. A good literature review positions your work in a broader academic conversation on a particular topic or issue. Literature reviews do multiple things:

- They establish what has already (not) been said about that topic in a **synthesized** way
- They **prepare the reader** to assimilate better and understand the concepts of the study
- They sharpen the **research focus** and theoretical angle chosen to look at the phenomenon under study
- They give a **new interpretation** of old material or combine old with new interpretations
- They logically **justify the need for further research** on the topic

Importantly, literature reviews should be written in a concept-centric rather than an author-centric way:

Concept-centric	Author-centric
Concept X ... [author A, author B, ...] Concept Y ... [author A, author C, ...]	Author A ... concept X, concept Y, ... Author B ... concept X, concept W, ...

Journal rankings and quality

Please make sure to consider the quality of the literature you use. Journal [rankings](#) enable you to evaluate the quality of different publications. Below, you can find an alphabetical list of high-quality journals in the field of management and organization:

General management

- Administrative Science Quarterly
- Academy of Management Journal (empirical)
- Academy of Management Review (theoretical)
- Academy of Management Discoveries (phenomenon-driven)
- Academy of Management Annals (reviews/anthology)
- Journal of Management (publishes two review issues each year)
- Journal of Management Studies
- Scandinavian Journal of Management
- Management Science
- Research in Organizational Behavior
- Research in the Sociology of Organizations

Organization studies

- Organization Science
- Organization Studies
- Organization
- Human Relations
- Journal of Management Inquiry
- Organizational Research Methods

Strategy

- Strategic Management Journal
- Strategic Organization
- Long Range Planning

Entrepreneurship and innovation

- Journal of Business Venturing
- Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
- Journal of Product Innovation Management
- Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal
- Research Policy

Management journals in German

- Managementforschung
- Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaftslehre (ZfB)
- Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung (ZfbF)

Writing an exposé (for theses only)

If you have successfully applied for a final thesis at the Professorship of Organization, you should write a short (5-page) exposé as a next step. Your exposé is an excellent opportunity to receive valuable feedback regarding your ideas. To benefit the most from our feedback, make sure to conduct your literature review *before* writing your exposé.

Your exposé should provide answers to the following questions:

- **What do you plan to accomplish?** Be clear and succinct in defining the research problem and what you are proposing to research.
- **Why do you want to do the research?** In addition to detailing your research design (see below), you must conduct a thorough review of the literature and provide convincing evidence that it is a topic worthy of in-depth investigation. Be sure to answer the “So What?” question.
- **How are you going to conduct the research?** Be sure that what you propose is doable. If you’re having difficulty formulating a research problem to propose investigating, go here for strategies in developing a problem to study.

The expose should follow the following structure:

- (1) Introduction
- (2) Literature review/state of the art
- (3) Research design and methods
- (4) Expected results and implications
- (5) Conclusion
- (6) Preliminary outline of the thesis
- (7) References

You should also include a timetable for your project.

Choosing an appropriate research design

The Professorship of Organization supervises qualitative-empirical or conceptual papers and theses.

Conceptual research aims to develop new theory, compare or integrate existing theory, and demonstrate avenues for future research. Notice that although a conceptual paper does not include the collection of primary data to generate new empirical insights, it should make a *contribution* to existing literature. Simply summarizing previous research is not sufficient for writing a conceptual paper. You can find more information on how to write a conceptual paper [here](#).

Qualitative research aims at developing new or elaborating existing theory by means of in-depth engagement with an empirical setting. Qualitative research often begins with an empirical puzzle, e.g., an empirical phenomenon which cannot be explained by or contradicts existing theory. In the course of the research project, empirical material on the phenomenon is collected and analyzed as to resolve the “puzzle”, e.g., by theorizing new, empirically grounded concepts and models or by elaborating existing ones.

If you want to conduct qualitative research, you have to think about appropriate methods of data collection and analysis. Common research methods in qualitative are ethnography, participant observation, qualitative interviewing, language-based approaches (e.g., discourse, narrative, or

conversation analysis), or netnography. Qualitative data analysis usually entails several stages of iterative coding to build conceptual categories from and find patterns in your data. You could use software for qualitative data analysis, such as MaxQDA or atlas.ti.

Generally, we recommend taking courses in qualitative research methods before beginning your thesis (e.g., we offer a bachelor's course on scientific work and a master's course on qualitative methods). To expand and deepen your knowledge, you can find an overview in the book "[Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine komprimierte Einführung](#)" by Jörg Stübing (German) or in the book "[Doing qualitative research](#)" by David Silverman (English). Also, we provide additional materials on conducting qualitative research and particular methods in this [folder](#).

Structuring your thesis

Your work starts with the identified problem, your topic's clear definition, and a short but meaningful overview of the structure. For the main part, a systematical approach should be developed. The order in which information is presented should be logical so that the reader can follow your thinking. A clear and logical line of argumentation must be traceable in the outline and the headings of each chapter and section. The chapters should be linked with a suitable transition.

An academic paper should include the following parts, in the indicated order:

- Front cover (see template)
- Table of contents
- List of figures (if applicable)
- List of tables (if applicable)
- List of abbreviations (if applicable)
- List of appendices (if applicable)
- Main part
- List of references
- Appendices (if relevant)
- Declaration of authorship

Structuring empirical papers

Your main part is typically constituted by an abstract (max. 200 words), an introduction, the theoretical background (review of the relevant literature), a methods section that describes your approach to data collection and analysis, a findings section in which you present the results of your study, a discussion to critically reflect on your findings and their contribution, and a short conclusion that sums up the most relevant points of your thesis.

Structuring conceptual papers

Conceptual papers also start with an abstract and introduction. They also provide an overview of the 'state of the art' by summarizing what is already known about the domain of research and what areas still need to be addressed. Whereas an empirical paper would now move to methods and findings, a conceptual paper uses a theoretical lens to shed a new focus on the existing literature, bridge existing theories or research findings, or provide multi-level insights. A conceptual paper ends with a discussion of implications, an outlook for future research, and a short conclusion.

Formal considerations

How to cite properly

Please refer to the [Academy of Management Style Guide](#) as a citation style for your thesis. With the given link you will find all citation rules, as well as examples for references in the text and in your bibliography.

It is highly recommended to use a citation management software for writing your thesis. This way you will have less trouble with the references and bibliography (especially at the end of your thesis). A useful open-source and free-to-use citations management software is [Zotero](#) (for iOS).

Academic writing style

Applying an academic writing style can be quite challenging when you are not familiar with it. In this [file](#) you can find literature with some tips to improve your writing skills. Also, we recommend looking at the words and phrases of the papers you read to prepare your thesis. There you can often find some inspiration for your own writing.

Gender-neutral language

- Avoid using he as a universal pronoun; likewise, avoid using binary alternatives such as he/she, he or she, (s)he.
- As the editors of the recent editions of the Chicago Manual of Style (2017), and other style guides affirm, the pronoun “they” is appropriate to use in writing when referring to singular antecedents, including when writing for publication.
- Unless the gender of a singular personal antecedent is otherwise specified, use the gender-neutral singular pronouns they, them, their, and theirs.

Formatting

Please orient towards the following formatting guidelines:

- Length (excluding references and appendices): 30 pages for BA thesis and 60 pages for MA thesis (+/- 10%)
- Font: Times New Roman
- Font size: 12pt
- Spacing: 1,5 lines
- Margins: 2,5cm top, bottom, left, and right

You can find a template that contains further information and which you can use to format your thesis [here](#).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the submission or presentation of work, in any form, that is not a student's own, without acknowledgment of the sources. The reader must be able to identify which parts of the text are the student's own thoughts or results, and which parts of the text are from other sources. Whenever you are using information from other sources you need to include a reference within the text. Any direct quotation must be placed in quotation marks. Regardless of the intention,

the failure to indicate the usage of another's work, will constitute plagiarism and result in serious consequences.

Deadlines

Deadlines must be met; otherwise, your work will not be graded. You will find deadlines for registration and submission in your respective Prüfungsordnung.

Time management is quite important for all your work. The final formatting often takes more time than expected. Your planning should include a time buffer at the end of your writing period – a timetable might be helpful in this case.

Submission

Please check your work carefully for spelling mistakes, mandatory requirements, and the right citation format. Non-compliance leads to deduction of points. Plagiarism would constitute a fail. In this case, your paper may be withdrawn retroactively.

You have to submit several copies. Omitting one of the required formats constitutes a fail.

Final theses are to be submitted to the examination office (Prüfungsamt) in physical- as well as in electronic format (PDF and Word-Document). Please see your 'Studien- und Prüfungsordnung' for the exact number of required paper copies.

Kontakt

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 tu-dresden.de

Impressum

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