British Cultural Studies
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Some advice on writing a *Thesenpapier*[1]

In preparation of your oral exams you are required to see your examiner in advance and agree upon a number of exam topics. Your examiner will ask you to hand in a *Thesenpapier* prior to your exam. In the following, we will shortly explain what the purpose of such a *Thesenpapier* is and what it looks like.

Although you are required to hand in the *Thesenpapier* to your examiner, it is actually meant to help you in your exam. Imagine you agreed with your examiner on a topic for your exam such as 'The Emergence of the British Welfare State'. This topic, although a good topic by itself, is vast and the exam can go in any direction with your examiner raising questions you are not at all prepared for. At this point, your *Thesenpapier* comes into play.

The *Thesenpapier* cuts the topic into smaller units and sets focus points. Of course, the examiner is not required to stick to your *Thesenpapier* (so you should know way more than is actually written down on the *Thesenpapier*). But the better the *Thesenpapier*, the more likely it is that the examiner discusses points you want to talk about. For this reason, a *Thesenpapier* is more than a breaking down of the broader topic into smaller ones. What you need to do is to come up with points which enable a discussion.

You should be aware that any examiner will leave your *Thesenpapier* at a certain point and test your overall knowledge and in particular your abilities to critically reflect. Thus you should be able to speak about every term and concept that you bring up in your *Thesenpapier* and see your topic in context. To use the example from above again: When speaking about the British welfare state you should, no matter whether it is on the *Thesenpapier* or not, have an idea of what welfare means and why and when the British welfare state was formed.

Of course, your *Thesenpapier* needs to be based on scholarly research and it should go without saying that you add a short bibliography to your *Thesenpapier*.

To give you an impression of what such a *Thesenpaper* looks like, you will find two examples further down below. These are all real life examples from exams that actually took place a while ago. Thus there may be a number of small mistakes in there, and none of them represents the 'perfect' *Thesenpapier*. Nevertheless, they should give you a good impression of what a *Thesenpapier* is and that there are different ways of compiling one.

Note: There are also a lot of guides on the internet as well as guides on academic writing etc. in the library.

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[1] As there is no proper English translation, we will use the German term in the following.

Example 1 (used for state examination Lehramt)

Thesenpapier British Cultural Studies

1. The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism

1. Particularly after WW I, the economic upswing of Germany was often considered one of the main reasons for the rise of the Anglo-German antagonism. However, economic relations between the two countries were much more diverse than such a simple view suggests, and it was much more the public interpretation of the economic relations which fostered the antagonism than economic relations itself.

2. One of the main causes for the rising political tensions between Britain and Germany was the naval race which was itself a result of the Tirpitz-Plan and Britain's insistence on the 'Two Power Standard'.

3. With the resignation of Bismarck in 1890, Germany entered a new course in foreign policy, i.e. 'Weltpolitik'. This new course led to an isolation of Germany and a rapprochement of England, Russia and France as well as a clash between German and British interests.

4. Although the difficult personal relations between William II and his British relatives are often overestimated as far as politics is concerned, they did have a great impact on Anglo-German perceptions.

5. Antagonistic perceptions of Germany were to a great extent shaped by the new mass media, which not only invoked the idea of Germany waging war but also caused what came to be known as the 'Spy Fever'.

6. In addition to the general mistrust of Germany as it was created by the British mass media, several single events like the Kruger Dispatch, the Daily Telegraph interview or the Hun-speech had a harmful effect on public opinion.

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2. English Higher Education from 1960 until today

1. During the 1950s it had become more and more visible that a change in higher education was necessary. An answer to the problems in higher education was given by the Robbins Report.

2. Following the Robbins Report, the system of higher education underwent massive changes. However, it is disputable to what extent these changes were in alliance with the original ideas of Robbins.

3. The time from the Robbins Report until the Higher and Further Education Act 1992 can be seen as a continuous strengthening of government control in higher education, no matter which political party was in power.

4. Particularly in the first *Black Paper* of 1968, one can see an old, if not already outdated, idea of the university being held up against the 'devastating' forces of expansionism, the challenge of the university idea by the student unrest of the 1960s, and the government's call for 'profitable' courses.

5. The Thatcher years can be divided into two periods: 1. cuts in funding in higher education and 2. the beginning of the transformation of funding. The principles underlying the transformation of funding were the strengthening of government control, as it was manifested in the Education Reform Act 1988, and the introduction of market principles into the funding of universities.

6. With the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, Polytechnics were granted universities status. Thus the Acts of 1988 and 1992 can be seen as eradicating the formal differences in higher education. However, the politics of Thatcher (and the following conservative government) also initiated a development which counters this process of eliminating differences and increasing government control by promoting specialization and the autonomy from government funding.

7. While the *Black Papers* still argued for the defence of cultural standards, the notion of combining higher education with the idea of culture has more and more vanished since the days of the Robbins Report and cannot be found in recent documents of the HEFCE.

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Example 2 (used for oral exam B.A.)

"19th Century English Cultural History"/"Popular Victorian Culture"

Vorlesungsthemen:

1. Developments in Literature, Morality and the Marketplace

 "The many forms of printed communication produced during the nineteenth century[…]have long provided historians with valuable entry points into a wide range of subject area in modern British history. These include histories as seemingly disparate as those of class, transport, religious belief, fiscal policy, government and political organization, […] family life and leisure. Historians, however, have argued that […] the products of the printing press need also to be regarded as participants in, rather than simply observer of, the transformation of Victorian society." (Jones, 368)

1.1 Rapid Expansion of the Press and Printed Matter
- expansion made possible by:
    - availability of new composing and steam-printing technology
    - development of improved methods of distribution
    - population growth/ urbanization
    - growing prosperity of industrial+ commercial sector of the economy
    - expansion of national + colonial markets for British manufactured goods
    - removal of fiscal constraints in second half of the century

1.2 The Audience/ Access to Printed Texts/ Creation of a Public Sphere
- literature no longer restricted to intellectual circles and the upper classes:
    - growth of literacy
    - cheaper access to texts
- results in differentiation of the market
- publications provided forum for discussion and formation of opinion -> rise of a public sphere

1.3 The Expansion under Debate
- introducing a new order of information -> popular print altered the boundaries of social knowledge
- political fear that, if the common man reads, order would be threatened (led to a number of legal restrictions in the 1830s and 1840s to undermine radical papers) -> demand that working class people should only be taught reading skills in order to read the Bible
- conservatives were afraid that standards would decline

2. Education
"Few images better evoke the character of nineteenth century education than that of contest or struggle. […] For the greater part of the century, schooling was a relatively costly commodity that had to be purchased in a diverse and often weakly regulated market-place […]." (Gardner, 352).

2.1 Public Schools
- directed at middle and upper classes
- restricted to boys
- charged fees for attendance-> profitable enterprises
- broad range (traditional, reform, new)
- at the time, most of them were boarding schools
- majority established by a Christian denomination, mainly the Church of England-> stress on
  "Muscular Christianity" (emphasis on sports) with "Christian Gentleman" as result

2.2 Monitorial System/ Ragged Schools

- gradual recognition of necessity of teaching basic knowledge not just to some privileged few but to majority of population
- many workers` schools were of poor quality, very small and there was a lack of suitable teachers
- monitorial system as solution (from 1805):
  - hundreds of children under the gaze of one single trained teacher
  - subdivision into numerous graduated groupings, each under the immediate tutelage of a senior people, a monitor
  - the monitors schooled their charges according to principles + practices inculcated at a daily preliminary meeting of teacher and monitors
- establishment of ragged schools (from 1840s):
  - charitable schools dedicated to the free education of destitute children
  - developed in working class districts of the rapidly expanding industrial towns
  - emphasis on reading, writing, arithmetic, and study of the Bible (the curriculum expanded into industrial and commercial subjects in many schools)

2.3 The State and Education in the 19th Century

- from the early years of the 19th century, the question of schooling was a substantial political concern
- the need for both the enhancement and the systematization of educational provision was recognized on all sides
- radical minority urged the adoption of a system of state-run compulsory schooling on the continental model -> state did not want to push traditional providers of schooling, the churches, aside
- job of the state throughout the 19th century:
  - supply from the centre only those systemic elements which were not, or could not, be supplied by the voluntary effort of the churches
  - task was to support, to subsidize, but also to guide, to investigate, to set national standards, and to `fill the gaps´
    - -> 1833 Factory Act, 1868 Public Schools Act, Forster`s Education Act 1870, Education Act 1880

2.4 Developments in Higher Education: Science vs. Tradition

- demands of the Industrial Revolution led to the foundation of new universities:
  - University of London
  - civic/ red-brick universities
- the foundation of the new universities falls into line with the "Two Cultures"-debate of the time
- traditional university culture in the 19th century is represented and dominated by Oxford and Cambridge (education of the national elite, strong focus on classics, Fellows Celibate, subscription to 39 Articles, no sciences)
- Oxford/ Tractarian Movement:
  - argued for the reinstatement of lost Christian traditions
  - John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey = most important representatives
  - Newman`s idea of a university (liberal education (7 free arts), against practical training and sciences at centre, ideal: education at Oxbridge)

Seminarthema:

Class Issues: Depicting and Describing Class at the Great Exhibition 1851
"The significance of the Great Exhibition as a turning point in class relations is a major component part of the dominant historical representation of the event. [...]Although some modern scholars have questioned the onset of an "age of equipoise" in the early 1850s, the notion that a profound caesura in class relations occurred in the summer of 1851 still attracts considerable support."
(Gurney, 115/ 116)

1. Importance of Class
- questions of class are fundamental to 19th century British history
- as a term of social description it rapidly gained purchase in the first half of the 19th century (cf. use of term in the works of K. Marx and F. Engels)
- class was a pervasive part of contemporaries` world view
- for much of the century class was not only the single most important form of social categorisation, but also the bedrock of understandings of social and political change

2. Class Relations- F. Engels *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845)
- the picture of the English society in mid-19th century Engels provides in his study on Manchester is that of one deeply divided along the lines of social class
- most prominent examples of class conflict in the first half of the century: Chartist Movement, Corn Law

3. Describing/ Depicting Class at the Great Exhibition (1851)
- the relationship between the different social classes (especially the working class) and the Great Exhibition was widely discussed at the time
- many liberal intellectuals hoped that the Great Exhibition, as an ambitious model of "rational recreation", would fulfil a wider educative function and exert a civilising influence on the majority
- however, not everyone was thoroughly optimistic at the sight of a "mingling of the classes" at the Great Exhibition, there were also a lot of reservations
- hopes and reservations are both included in the description and depiction of the different classes at the Great Exhibition in different publications
- depiction/ description of the middle/ upper class:
        - in conservative press portrayed as the ideal, well-behaved visitors
        - in popular press portrayed as obedient to authority, arrogant and superficial
- depiction/ description of the working-class:
        - in some caricatures portrayed as chaotic, drunk and misbehaving- but these are rather
          referring to middle class reservations than the real behaviour of the working class at the
          Great Exhibition
        - in popular press mostly portrayed as the more "appropriate" visitors, curious to expand
          their knowledge
- description/ depiction of the relationship between the classes at the exhibition:
        - most famously portrayed in the cartoon "The Pound and the Shilling"
        - prospect of class harmony and mutual acceptance
        - as well as an attitude of "wishful thinking" and suspicion

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