

Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper **in Literary and Cultural Studies**

(Version: October 2025)

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Finding a Topic

- Review your course materials and notes: Which aspects were of special interest to you?
- Which course contents (literary texts, film/TV series, music, videos, etc.) have you found particularly interesting? Could you imagine re-reading and working in more detail on it/them for a sustained period of time?
- Then re-engage with the primary materials to be discussed, concentrating especially on your topic and your focus
- Make notes while you read: make sure to put down the source and relevant page(s)
- Roughly outline your thoughts on the topic with reference to the text, organise and begin to structure your ideas

Important: Always talk to your supervisor about your topic idea before submitting your paper. Approach them well before the deadline.

Formulating a Research Question and Thesis Statement

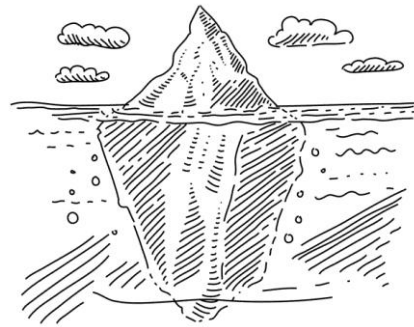
- **Topic** of your term paper: the 'label' you can put on your paper, usually general and broad in nature
- Finding a topic is, however, only the **first step** in the process
- Your task is to narrow down your topic by developing a **research question**: this question is what your paper will answer
- Your research question should be clear, concise, and **complex**: it should not be a simple yes/no question but require analysis and be open to discussion
- On the basis of this research question you develop your **thesis statement**: the central idea of your paper, your central argument – and your **response** to the research question
- A thesis
 1. is not a question (also not an indirect question)
 2. but a response to the question and an interpretation of it
 3. makes a claim that others might dispute
 4. one or two sentences that clearly state your core argument
 5. needs to be succinct and precise
- Creating a strong and persuasive thesis statement takes time: it is the result of a longer process of working on your paper; thesis, arguments and structure may require adjustment along the way!

Important: **Research question** and **thesis statement** must be part of the **introduction**!

Research and Academic Discourse

- **Why** do we do research into secondary literature?
 - no text stands on its own: before writing your own text, you will have read plenty of other texts, which were themselves written with even more texts in mind, and so on

- iceberg model: every text as summit of an iceberg, with lots of background reading/previous texts remaining implicit



- your own essay/paper is a contribution to this discourse: you must integrate your text into this discourse by
 - a) reading what others have had to say before you
 - b) referring to the most relevant work
 - c) saying in what way your own work builds on/differs from/disagrees with previous work
- Research:
 - Look for critical material on your primary materials (avoid taking all information from one source only; different critics are likely to come up with different points of view – think of yourself as the discussion leader)
 - If there is a lot of critical material, make a selection of what seems relevant; you cannot be all-inclusive (stick to recent publications)
 - Stick to recent publications. Choose reliable sources of high academic quality.
 - Relate your own research to the results of your investigations in the critical material
- Make sure to indicate any sources used (see below), whether they are given in **direct** (indicated by “quotation marks”) or **indirect** (paraphrase of someone else’s argument in your own words) quotation
 - If you fail to do so, this is **plagiarism** (stealing ideas or passages from other texts without acknowledging the source): plagiarism is fraud and a serious academic offence; you will fail the course (→ *Studienrechtliche Bestimmungen* §11.2).
 - See note on academic discourse above: plagiarism is unnecessary as you are not expected to know everything about the text discussed and its author yourself; on the contrary, having looked up other critics’ arguments on a certain topic /text shows that you are already working as an academic

Structuring and Writing Your Paper

- Formal requirements:
 - length:
 - *Proseminar*: 3,000 to 3,500 words
 - *Seminar*: 5,000 to 6,000 words
 - 1.5 line spacing
 - sufficient margins on all sides (2.5cm)
 - Times New Roman, size 12

- Your paper should consist of the following parts:
 1. **Title Page** (see example given below)
 2. **Table of Contents** including page numbers (see example given below)
 3. **Introduction:** here you give your topic/central idea, introduce your research question, and state your thesis statement, which is the argumentative core of your paper
 4. **Main part (structured into subchapters):** your analysis of the topic
 5. **Conclusion:** here you sum up the main points/findings of your paper; give answers to the question(s) raised in your thesis statement/introduction
 6. **Works Cited**
- Structure of your main body:
 - structure should reflect your argumentation
 - headings should summarise your argument: avoid one-word headings; avoid sentences/questions
 - avoid over- and under-subdividing your paper: neither one sub-chapter for one paragraph only nor a chapter running on for 12 pages
 - your structure is likely to change during the writing process!

Title Page and Table of Contents

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|--|--|-----------------|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|--|---|-------------------------------|---|---|----|----------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|---------------|----|----------------|----|
| <p style="text-align: center;">A Natural State of the Mind? The Concept of Androgyny in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PS: Conceptions of Art and the Artist in English Literature: A Panoramic View</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mag. Andrea Strolz</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Alexandra Avram</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0815639</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WS 2010/11</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Table of Contents</p> <table> <tr> <td>1. Introduction</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Providing a Definition</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. The Conditioning of the Women's Mind</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Money, Experience and the Mind</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 4.1. Money Makes the Mind Go Round</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 4.2. A World of Experience</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Taking Hold of the Androgynous Mind</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 5.1. Distractions of the Mind</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 5.2. Politics as an Obstacle for the Androgynous Mind</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td> 5.3. Critical Voices</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Virginia Woolf's Concept of Art</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7. Conclusion</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8. Works Cited</td> <td>13</td> </tr> </table> | 1. Introduction | 3 | 2. Providing a Definition | 4 | 3. The Conditioning of the Women's Mind | 6 | 4. Money, Experience and the Mind | 7 | 4.1. Money Makes the Mind Go Round | 7 | 4.2. A World of Experience | 8 | 5. Taking Hold of the Androgynous Mind | 9 | 5.1. Distractions of the Mind | 9 | 5.2. Politics as an Obstacle for the Androgynous Mind | 10 | 5.3. Critical Voices | 10 | 6. Virginia Woolf's Concept of Art | 11 | 7. Conclusion | 12 | 8. Works Cited | 13 |
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Introduction

- The introduction should introduce your topic and clearly state your **research question and thesis statement** (1-2 sentences)
- The introduction should provide a "map" of the structure and content/focus of the paper
- The introduction should address the following questions: "**What**" is the paper about? "**How**" do I approach the topic? "**When**" in the course of the paper are you dealing with which

issues?

- Part of the “how” is giving an overview over the architecture of your paper. There is no need to list general points such as “In the conclusion I will sum up the main points of my paper” (that is what conclusions usually do); instead, give a sense of WHY and HOW your structure is a good way of addressing the questions you want to explore.
- The introduction is the “prime real estate” of your paper – make sure that it sparks interest in your topic and goes to the heart of your project without any long detours.

| Writing the Introduction | |
|--|---|
| DOs | DON'Ts |
| present relevant background or contextual material | |
| explain the focus of the paper and your specific purpose | avoid giving irrelevant information that does not relate to your central idea |
| introduce your research question and thesis statement | avoid giving overly general information |
| define terms or concepts when necessary | avoid giving endless information on the author |
| reveal your plan of organisation | avoid giving summaries of the plot |

Main Part

- Every subsequent paragraph or section should be a step in the argument that develops one particular aspect of your overall topic that supports your thesis statement
- Transitions from one paragraph to the next help to ensure the required coherence of the paper

Paragraph Structure

- A paragraph is a group of sentences about a single topic/idea/argument, which normally consists of around five to seven sentences
- An ideal paragraph contains:
 - **a topic sentence:** introduces the main idea of the paragraph
 - **supporting sentences:** provides explanation (developing, supporting and explaining the main idea), examples (giving [textual] evidence for the main idea, quoting from primary and/or secondary texts), analysis (how is the point of this paragraph relevant to your overall argument?)
 - **a concluding sentence:** summarises the main point and restates the topic sentence OR presents the conclusion of the paragraph’s argument OR provides a transition to the next paragraph
- Indent every paragraph (unless at the beginning of a new chapter)

Conclusion

- At the end of the essay, a conclusion should summarise the most important results of your discussion of the topic

- Do not be afraid to tell the reader once again what the main points of your argument were
- The reader likes to be reminded of the central issues of your paper to make sure that the main points have been grasped correctly and to help remember them
- Your conclusion should answer the question(s) raised in your thesis statement/introduction

Writing the Conclusion

- If the argument or central idea of your paper is complex, you may need to summarise the argument for your reader
- Add your points up, explain their significance
- Move from a detailed to a general level of consideration that returns the topic to the context provided by the introduction
- Perhaps suggest what about this topic needs further research
- Do not start new threads of the analysis in your conclusion but use it to wrap up your paper!

- The best way to check if your introduction and conclusion are efficient is to read only these two parts of your paper
- If your introduction and conclusion address all central questions (concerning your thematic focus, methodology and structure) as well as provide a summary of the major results, then they fulfil their functions (i.e. these two sections should put in a nutshell the information about content, methodology, and results)

Language and Style

- Aim for an appropriate, academic register
- Avoid informal expressions and flowery language
- Avoid subjective evaluations (“the book is very good”; “the author is very successful”; “I really like the text”; etc.)
- Proofread your paper before submitting it and check punctuation, spelling, and grammar

Referencing

Writing an academic research paper not only means structuring your ideas, developing them, and relating them to your overall topic, it also implies that one has to follow certain conventions regarding the documentation of sources. In the field of English and American literary studies, the preferred documentation style is usually the MLA (Modern Language Association) style. We have summed up some of the central rules below – please follow them in your term paper, and refer to the *Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (2016), 9th edition, for further information. The handbook is available at the library.

Useful online resource on the MLA style guide:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html

Bibliography/Works Cited

An academic paper must contain a bibliography, i.e. a list of all the sources that have been used. It is placed at the end of the paper. The items listed are ordered alphabetically by the author's last name. The relevant bibliographical facts about a book are taken not from its cover, but from its title page (inside the book) and, if necessary, from the small print on its half-title page (the reverse side of the title page). The following information is required in the following order:

- **Author's last and first name;** if a source has three or more authors or editors, only the first appears with the addition "et al." ("and others"); if the author's name is not given, begin the entry with the work's title; authors do not have to be individuals but can be associations, such as "United Nations"
- **Title and subtitle of the source;** a title is placed in quotation marks if the source is part of a larger work (e.g. in the case of an essay, story or poem) and *italicised* if the source is self-contained and independent (e.g. books, films or collections); capitalise all words in titles except articles (*a, an, the*), prepositions (*as, against, between* etc.), coordinating conjunctions (*and, or, but, for, yet* etc.) and the *to* in infinitives; always capitalise the first and the last word
- **(Title of container);** if the source is included in a larger container, such as a collection or journal, the *italicised* title of the container follows next
- **(Other contributors, if named in addition to author);** editors or translators are usually recorded in documentation if they are credited in the source
- **(Version);** if it is indicated that the source has been released in more than one form, identify the version in your entry, e.g. "revised ed.", "2nd ed."
- **(Number);** include volume and issue number of journals (e.g. "vol. 128, no. 1"); if a book has been issued in multiple volumes, refer to volume number
- **Publisher;** the publisher that produced the source or made it available to the public; if two or more organisations are named that seem equally responsible, cite each of them, separating them with a forward slash (/); for academic presses, replace "University Press" with "UP" (or "U of Chicago P"); omit business words like "Company" or "Ltd."
- **Publication Date;** usually, the year alone is given for books or films (look for the date of publication on the title or copyright page and select the most recent one, i.e. the date of the edition you used), and a full date is given for newspaper articles or entries on websites
- **(Location);** for texts included in containers such as collections or journals, cite page numbers (preceded by "pp."); the location of an online work is indicated by its URL

Please note: Since the 8th edition of the MLA style guide, it is no longer necessary to indicate the place of publication (see here for major changes in the current 9th edition:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_changes_9th_edition.html)

Basic Forms for Print Sources

Book by a Single Author

Jacobs, Alan. *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*. Oxford UP, 2011.

Two or More Works by the Same Author

List books by the same author alphabetically:

Palmer, William J. *Dickens and New Historicism*. St. Martin's Press, 1997.

---. *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Southern Illinois UP, 1993.

Book by Two or More Authors

Dorris, Michael, and Louise Erdrich. *The Crown of Columbus*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.

Burdick, Anne, et al. *Digital_Humanities*. MIT P, 2012.

Anthology or Collection

Holland, Merlin, and Rupert Hart-Davis, editors. *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. Henry Holt, 2000.

Work in an Anthology

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*, edited by Ben Rafoth, Heinemann, 2000, pp. 24-34.

Article in a Magazine or Newspaper

Poniewozik, James. "TV Makes a Too-Close Call." *Time*, 20 Nov. 2000, pp. 70-71.

Article in a Journal

Duvall, John N. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*." *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1994, pp. 127-153.

Translation

Pfister, Manfred. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Translated by John Halliday, Cambridge UP, 1988.

Basic Forms for Electronic Sources

When citing a website, you should try to identify an author, the title of the page and a date of publication. The title of the page is not to be confused with its URL; it can usually be found somewhere at the top of individual web pages. Include the URL and the date when you last accessed the source at the end of the entry.

A Web Project as a Whole

Eaves, Morris, et al., editors. *The William Blake Archive*. 1996-2014, www.blakearchive.org/blake/.

A Scholarly Journal

Chan, Evans. "Postmodernism and Hong Kong Cinema." *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 10, no. 3, May 2000. *Project Muse*, doi:10.1353/pmc.2000.0021.

(When possible, citing a DOI [digital object identifier] is preferable to citing a URL.)

A Periodical Publication in an Online Database

Goldman, Anne. "Questions of Transport: Reading Primo Levi Reading Dante." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2010, pp. 69-88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41403188/.

Magazine or Newspaper Article Published Online

Deresiewicz, William. "The Death of the Artist – and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur." *The Atlantic*, 28 Dec. 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/01/the-death-of-the-artist-and-the-birth-of-the-creative-entrepreneur/383497/>.

A Tweet

Biden, Joe. "I've set a course for the U.S. to achieve 100% clean electricity by 2035, and to reach net-zero emissions economy-wide by 2050..." Twitter, 15 Sep. 2021, <https://twitter.com/POTUS/status/1438278944692842503?s=20>.

Instagram

Eilish, Billie [@billieeilish]. "TIME 100." Instagram, 15 Sep. 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CT2PD92pa6e/>.

An E-Book

Gikandi, Simon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge UP, 2000. *ACLS Humanities E-book*, hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.07588.0001.001.

Basic Forms for Audio and Video Recordings

A Film or Television Series

When documenting a work in film or television, you should generally cite the organisation/individual that had the primary overall responsibility for it.

Morris, Chris, director. *Four Lions*. Film4 Productions, 2010.

If your discussion of a work focuses on the contribution of a particular person (e.g. an actor or the screenwriter), begin the entry with his/her name.

Whedon, Joss, creator. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Mutant Enemy, 1997-2003.

If you are not focusing on an individual's contribution, begin with the title and, if relevant, include information about the director and other key participants.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Created by Joss Whedon, performance by Sarah Michelle Gellar, Mutant Enemy, 1997-2003.

If you wish to refer to a particular episode of a series, begin the entry with the episode's title.

"Hush." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, created by Joss Whedon, performance by Sarah Michelle Gellar, season 4, episode 10, Mutant Enemy, 1999.

A Musical Performance

Schubert, Franz. *Piano Trio in E Flat Major D 929*. Performance by Wiener Mozart-Trio, Preiser Records, 2011.

A Song from an Album

Beyoncé. "Pretty Hurts." *Beyoncé*, Parkwood Entertainment, 2013.

Documenting Sources in Your Paper

For documenting the sources, you need to use in-text citation or parenthetical documentation. In this case, either the name of the author and the page reference or the (short) title of the work and page reference are directly cited after the quotation within the text.

Please note: Footnotes should not be used for citational purposes but for giving additional information.

Short, direct quotes of less than four lines are generally integrated in the text and placed in quotation marks (direct quotation). You can also use paraphrases, i.e. indirect quotations. You also need to reference your source (including page number) when paraphrasing.

Longer quotations of more than four lines are set off from the text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch from the left margin, and without adding quotation marks. Maintain 1.5-spacing (NB: you should maintain 1.5-spacing throughout your essay); parenthetical citation after the closing punctuation mark. When quoting verse, maintain original line breaks.

If a sentence or a passage is not quoted as a whole, the omitted parts are indicated by three periods in square brackets [...].

Basic Rules for In-Text Citations

A typical in-text citation is composed of the element that comes first in the entry in the works-cited list and a page number. The author's name may appear in the text itself or before the page numbers in the parenthesis.

According to Naomi Baron, reading is "just half of literacy. The other half is writing" (194).

OR

Reading is "just half of literacy. The other half is writing" (Baron 194).

If you cite from works by more than one author with the same last name, add the author's first initial or full first name.

Reading is "just half of literacy. The other half is writing" (N. Baron 194).

If you cite more than one work by the same author in your list of works cited, include a short form of the source's title.

Reading is "just half of literacy. The other half is writing" (Baron, "Redefining" 194).

When an entry in the works-cited list begins with the title of the work, your in-text citation contains the (abbreviated) title.

Despite an apparent decline in reading during the same period, "the number of people doing creative writing [...] increased substantially between 1982 and 2002" (*Reading* 3).

When a source has no page numbers or any other kind of section/paragraph/chapter number, no number should be given in a parenthetical citation.

"As we read we [...] construct the terrain of a book" (Hollmichel), something that is more difficult when the text reflows on a screen.

For audio and video recordings, cite the relevant time or range of times.

Buffy's promise that "there's not going to be any incidents like at my old school" is obviously disingenuous (*Buffy* 00:03:16-17).

When a single fact or paraphrased idea is attributable to more than one source, list all the sources and separate them with semicolons.

Reading may be the core of literacy (Baron 194; Jacobs 55).

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Before using AI software, you should be aware of fundamental ethical concerns, in particular regarding academic integrity and reliability. AI models carry inherent biases and have a considerable carbon footprint. AI software is not an academic source and does not replace critical engagement with criticism.

The aim of you writing a research paper is to train academic writing, that is, finding your own arguments, developing your own voice, and becoming part of a research community built on transparency, good faith, and the recognition of quality contributions. As future academics and teachers, you have a significant impact on how the fundamentals of our community are passed on to future generations.

Any and all uses of AI software in composing your paper must be transparently indicated in an

appendix. Failing to do so will be considered **plagiarism** and – as such – academic dishonesty. This is going to have consequences pertaining to your grading and academic standing. If you make use of ChatGPT (or similar tools) in any way, the prompt(s) you insert as well as the date of access must be indicated as verbatim quotations.

The following uses of AI software violate norms of academic integrity:

- ghostwriting: use of AI to produce entire sections <> your paper = your original work & your voice!
- fabrication of a structure for your research paper
- fabrication of a line of argumentation
- fabrication of data (e.g. textual examples)

If you use AI software for input (e.g. brainstorming, translation, etc.), it is your responsibility to critically evaluate the output and to verify the accuracy of all information provided.

By following these guidelines, our universities and academic staff uphold academic integrity, foster critical thinking, and ensure that students engage meaningfully with their studies and respectfully with their peers in the academic discipline. By complying with these rules, you are honouring the practices and standards of the academic community and are actively and proactively helping us ensure that these standards will be upheld by and for the next generation of academics.