RUHR UNIVERSITÄT BOCHUM **RU**B

This guideline has been written by the team of the Chair of Sociology - Transnationalisation, Migration and Labour. It is based on the reader in the Social Science Tutorial Centre (as of March 2023) of the Faculty of Social Science but also contains some additions and reflects our own approach.

Guideline for writing a term paper

A term paper combines all the major techniques of scientific work: literature research, finding a topic, developing a research question, reading and analysing academic literature, structuring your paper and academic writing as well as proper citation (and not plagiarism) and a correct list of references. These guidelines are intended to give you an initial orientation with regard to: 1) content, 2) formal requirements (p. 7), 3) criteria for the evaluation of a term paper (p. 11), as well as 4) recommendations for further reading and resources (p. 12).

1. Content of a term paper

In a term paper, the student must prove his or her ability to work on a subject or question independently and appropriately with the help of various scientific techniques. Thus, a term paper combines different content-related and formal requirements, which prepares students for their final thesis or their (academic) professional career. Above all, students must show that they have understood and can apply the basic rules and techniques of academic work. This means

1. everything must be comprehensible.
2. any argument, even of a normative nature, must be well founded, explained, and supported by empirical evidence, theoretical concepts and arguments.
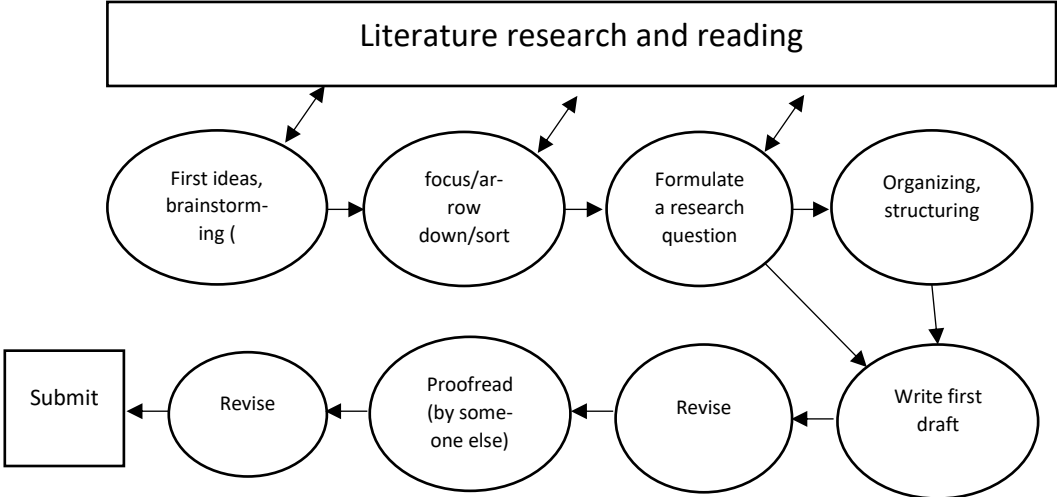3. new insights should be gained.

Above all a term paper requires – in contrast to other text forms – a specific research question with which to approach the chosen subject of investigation. On top of that, it also needs an adequate method or procedure with which one intends to bring new results to light. Ultimately, a term paper or thesis can be thought of as an answer to a previously formulated question, as evidence in support of or against a thesis.

Writing process of a term paper
Writing a good term paper is not an activity that can be completed quickly. Rather, it is a process that can sometimes take quite a long time – depending on the complexity of the research question and the personal interest in the topic.

The course of this process presented below should be understood as a general guideline rather than a linear, standardised path.

In general, the following applies: Start with an orientation and planning phase, usually during the lecture period. It is useful to present your ideas to your lecturer or supervisor regarding the topic and research question, objective, method, and literature to receive feedback and

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Literature research and reading            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

  ( First ideas,    → ( focus/ar-    → ( Formulate   → ( Organizing,
    brainstorm-          row              a research      structuring )
    ing ( )              down/sort )      question )

 ┌────────┐   ( Revise )  ( Proofread    ( Revise )   ( Write first
 │ Submit │ ←            ← (by some-  ←            ←       draft )
 └────────┘                one else) )
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assistance. It is advisable to make an appointment for consultation; the staff of our chair will usually also ask the student to submit a short outline or exposé. In any case, you must respect the deadline. The personal time frame should also be considered (exams, work, holidays, etc.). If for any urgent emergency issues, you cannot meet the given deadline get in touch with your supervisor as soon as possible.

Choice and delimitation of the topic

Exact, precise formulation and a reasonable limitation of the topic are decisive for the success of every academic paper. Depending on the seminar, the topic or subject can be chosen freely or should relate to a specific theme. To narrow down the choice of topic and develop a research question, the following steps should be completed.
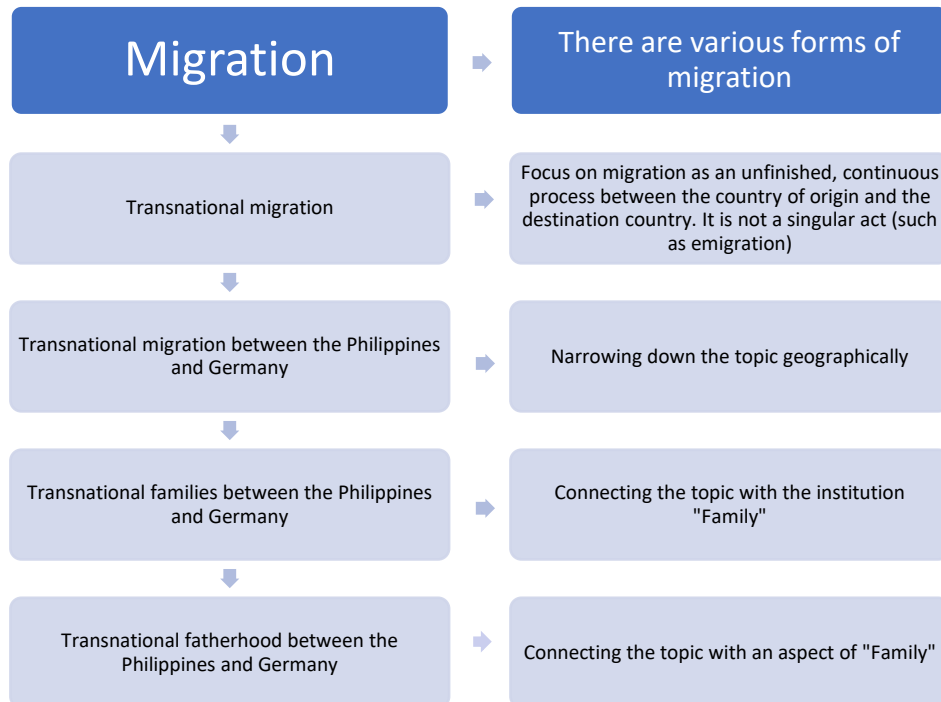
Step 1: Finding a topic for the term paper

Once you decided for a specific theme you can start narrowing your topic so that one does not get lost in all the ramifications and specialisations of the same. The aim is to move from a broader theme to a focussed topic. The following criteria can help you delimiting and narrowing your topic.

Criterion	Example
Temporal	In the 21st century
Geographical	In Germany, in Europe
By institutions/organisations	In the family, at school, etc.

According to persons/groups	According to Max Weber, among young people, working women, etc.
According to methodological principles/levels of observation	Text analysis, qualitative analysis, etc.
By establishment of relationships	Income in relation to education, housing status in relation to the compatibility of family and work, etc.

The following illustration shows an exemplary delimitation of the migration topic:

Migration	→	There are various forms of migration
↓		↓
Transnational migration	→	Focus on migration as an unfinished, continuous process between the country of origin and the destination country. It is not a singular act (such as emigration)
↓		
Transnational migration between the Philippines and Germany	→	Narrowing down the topic geographically
↓		
Transnational families between the Philippines and Germany	→	Connecting the topic with the institution "Family"
↓		
Transnational fatherhood between the Philippines and Germany	→	Connecting the topic with an aspect of "Family"

Step 2: Developing a scientific research question in line with your objective

In order to develop your topic into a scientific research question you need to define the objectives that your paper shall accomplish. The research question represents the internal logic of the thesis, whereas the objective results from the research context. Possible objectives are, for example:

- to make a contribution to the understanding of [...],
- to increase knowledge about [...],
- to compile knowledge about [...],
- to bring clarity to a controversy,
- to publicise something new,
- to bring something forgotten back into the discussion,
- to try out something new (pilot study),
- to replicate [retrace] a study that has already been carried out,
- to evaluate a process or an institution [...].

Narrow objectives can be, for example,

- to solve a defined problem,
- to explain a phenomenon,
- to (re)test a claim,
- to analyse a connection (between two phenomena),
- to make sources accessible, to compare, contrast, evaluate sources,
- to compare or justify theories, positions, etc,
- to discuss arguments in favour of and against a scientific position,
- to analyse an issue (theory, subject, etc.),
- to interpret a work or an issue,
- to systematise a subject area (field of reality)"

Step 3: Structuring and writing a term paper

The structure of a term paper is usually based on a standardised scheme. In addition to a title page and a table of contents, a term paper consists of an introduction, the main part, a conclusion, and a list of references. For information on the title page, table of contents and references see the formal requirements below.

Introduction

The thesis begins with an introduction about the topic and its relevance within the social sciences, or a specific reserach field. This section explains the research question and the method or procedure used to address it. At the same time, you distinguish your topic from other fields of research and briefly explain and justify your approach. At the end of the introduction you present and quickly summarize the chapters or sections of the paper.

An introduction is usually written at the end. It contains the following elements that should be "worked through":

1. introduction, epistemological interest ("Why am I writing this paper?")
2. object of investigation ("What is the sociological relevance of it?")
3. research question
4. (state of research)
5. (theoretical-methodological approach)
6. structure: brief description of the individual chapters of the thesis to give the reader an overview - with an explanation of the presentation method (e.g. focus on structure, on empiricism, etc.)
7. (sources used, material - if this is important, special, etc.)
8. delimitation of the topic to other research areas

The following questions can be helpful in writing a suitable introduction:

- Do I have a hook? Why is my term paper relevant?
- What is the narrower scientific strand of my term paper topic?
- What is the state of research relevant to my topic? Who has written what about my topic?

- Which questions are interesting or still need to be answered in view of the current state of research?
- How would I like to proceed to answer this question?
- What remains outside the scope of consideration (due to capacity constraints)?
- What is the structure of the thesis?

Main part

The chapters and structure following the introduction vary. They should follow the internal logic of the research question and reflect the steps that are necessary to answer it. The scope of the term paper must be considered here. The following chapters can be included in the term paper, depending on the topic (Please note, that these are not section titles):

Theoretical framework

This part embeds the topic in the theoretical context. Central terms that are necessary for understanding your topic are clarified. It should be weighed up which terms can be assumed to be known and which are particularly relevant in the specific context and therefore require explanation. In addition, this part presents the state of research around your topic, i.e. the theoretical approaches or models that are relevant to the research question. The theoretical chapter is intended to shed light on different perspectives and explains existing debates and findings from the international academic literature. In doing so, the literature covered in the seminar as well as independently researched literature will be discussed. The theoretical framework should support the research question and methodological approach.

Object of investigation/case/historical background

Especially when referring to a specific empirical phenomenon, this chapter is necessary to contextualise the work. The social, historical, political, geographical, etc. backgrounds and particularities of the event or field being analysed are discussed in more detail. This categorisation should be based on the current, international state of research that already exists on the chosen object of investigation.

Methodology

A chapter on methodology is only necessary if your paper is empirical and draws on primary data. The choice of methods and the specific procedure should be justified and explained in a comprehensible manner. However, even when relying on other studies, it may sometimes be necessary to also mention their empirical methods, sample, and procedure.

Analysis

This part should be the focus of the paper. The analysis chapter provides a systematic answer to the research question: an answer should be revealed logically and systematically, with recourse to the chosen methodology. A red thread is essential here:

Attention should be paid to a clear structure and reference to the research question. The question can be answered either by a selected social science method, such as a document or discourse analysis, or by a literature review, i.e. by preparing, analysing or comparing the state of empirical research or theoretical literature on a topic. The approach should be transparent from the outset and mentioned in the introduction already.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, the findings are summarised with reference to the task formulated in the introduction and explained again - now that all the results are available - in the overall context. In addition, the methods used, the chosen approach and the findings obtained should be reflected on and weighed up. Possible inconsistencies and problems should be addressed. Please note: Opinions are not part of a term paper. On the contrary, your conclusions must be formulated in the form of transparent, well-founded, literature-based and well-argued positions, i.e. supported by intersubjectively comprehensible evidence, for example by rejecting two out of three alternatives and justifying "your" favourite. You can conclude with an outlook on research work still to be done to clarify unanswered questions or to explore a new subject area that has only just been discovered. Avoid including new literature here. The conclusion is based on the content analysed in the main section.

The introduction and conclusion form the frame that holds the entire paper together. These two parts represent the question and answer and relate closely to each other to make the work appear coherent. In principle, it should be sufficient to read them alone to understand the quintessence of the term paper.

Step 4: Revising the term paper

Once you have finished the draft of your paper, you will have to make revisions. This process can be very intensive, especially if you need to make corrections to the content, but is also concerns formal issues and style. The following questions can help with the revision process:

- **Revision of content:**

Is the meaning of the completed manuscript graspable, i.e. do the "pieces of the puzzle" make sense together when reading the entire text? Is the argumentation structure logical and stringent? Have all technical terms been explained? Are all important assertions adequately substantiated and, if necessary, supported by references?

- **Formal revision:**

Are the list of content and the reference list consistent and correct? Are the citations in the text correct? Has the layout been prepared as required? Are there any grammatical or spelling errors? Are there any punctuation errors?

- **Revision of style:**

Are the sentences understandable? (short and concise rather than convoluted sentences)
Is the writing style perhaps too colloquial or, in contrast, too highbrow? Have I used unnecessary filler words?

- **(External) review/Feed-back:**

It is advisable to give the term paper to someone else to be reviewed?

The reader is always right! It's not about how you understand the passage yourself, but how it is understood by the reader, so listen to your proofreader and eliminate any ambiguities. If the term paper is not written in your native language, having a native speaker (e.g. a fellow student) proofreading it could be advisable. This is not obligatory.

2. Formal requirements for a term paper

In addition to the requirements concerning the content, there are also formal requirements for a term paper, which must be observed. They are also element in the assessment of academic term papers.

- **Title page:** The title page contains the following essential information: Title of the term paper (does not correspond to the research question in the paper), all information about the seminar in which the term paper was written (university, seminar title, semester, lecturer) and information about the author of the term paper (name, matriculation number, e-mail address).
  Here is an example of a title page:

Ruhr-University Bochum
Faculty of Social Science
Semester
Seminar Title
Lecturer

Title of the term paper

Name
Matriculation number
E-mail address

- **Table of contents:** The table of contents serves as a visualisation of the structure and other elements (appendices) of a scientific paper. There are some formal rules that must be observed:
  - Chapter headings and their respective subheadings must be visually distinguishable (e.g. by typographical emphasis). Please note that when using subchapters, a chapter should have at least two subsections. As a rule, two levels (rarely three or more) are used.
  - Each chapter (including the first level) in the current text should be filled with content.
  - Headings for chapters and subsections should be formulated as briefly and precisely as possible.
  - Abbreviations should be avoided in headings. Here is an example of a table of contents:

Contents

  - Tip: Use the corresponding outline function of the Office programme to create a table of contents automatically. It contains directories with correct titles, page numbers and exact formatting. This function saves you a lot of time and work. You can find various videos on the Internet that explain the automated outline function.

- **List of figures and abbreviations:** It is only advisable to create a list of figures or abbreviations if you generally work with many illustrations or abbreviations. If you decide to do this, you should follow the examples below:

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EEC	European Economic Community
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union

- **Page numbers:** The page numbers start from the table of contents, whereby the page number on the first page is not displayed. The numbering in the table of contents starts with (p.) 2.

- **Text body:** The text is formatted in justified text with the hyphenation function activated. Exception: Headings are formatted flush left. The line spacing is 1.5 lines. The page margin: 3.5 cm on the right-hand side and 2 cm on the left-hand side

- **Font:** The recommended fonts are Times New Roman or Arial. The font size is 12 points for Times New Roman and 11 points for Arial.

- **Declaration of authorship:** This is to ensure that you have written the term paper independently and have listed all sources, aids and explanations used. It must be signed before the term paper is handed in. If no illustrations or sources from the Internet were used, this must be cancelled in the declaration of authorship.
Here is an example of a declaration of authorship:

- **Submission:** Please send us your term paper via Email in pdf format. Don't miss the submission deadline!

Quotation of different literature types

We use American citation style, that is: author, year of publication and, if applicable, the page number. Example of a citation: (Leuze/Unger 2015, p. 30). The list of references at the end of the paper includes the complete bibliographical details of the sources used (so-called "full reference"). In principle, this bibliographic information contains three elements:

- Author
- Title
- Publication modalities

How exactly this information is appropriately documented in the list of references varies depending on the type of literature. The specific presentation of the information (e.g. writing out first names, order of information, punctuation) varies according to the citation style. We recommend Harvard Style or similar, in any case references must be consistent with one style only. You may use the Citavi programme, in which the citation style can be set so that all information is automatically uniform and correct; nevertheless you always have to check your final list manually. The "RUB Social Sciences" style can also be selected there, which fulfils the criteria of the citation style used at the faculty. Citavi is available for all RUB students.

In the following, the most common types of references in are listed and exemplary citations are shown:

Monographs

Fauser, Margit (2020): Mobile Citizenship. Spatial privilege and the transnational lifestyle of senior citizens, London: Routledge

Contributions to edited volumes

Fauser, Margit (2023): Gegen die Prekarität ist der Kampf der einzige Weg - Migration und Arbeit in Zeiten fortgeschrittener Globalisierung und Unsicherheit, In: Martin Seeliger (Hg.), Strukturwandel der Arbeitsgesellschaft, Weinheim: Beltz Verlagsgruppe, 61-82

Journal articles

Menke, Katrin (2023): Geflüchtete Musliminnen im SGB II-Bezug - Antimuslimischer Rassismus und Gender im Kontext ihrer Vermittlung in Erwerbsarbeit, Z'Flucht Zeitschrift für Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung, 7:2, 360-390. doi: 10.5771/2509-9485-2023-2-360.

Newspaper article

Farolfi, Sara (27.02.2016). The bought passport. Citizenship for cash. *taz*, https://taz.de/Staatsbuergerschaft-gegen-Bares/!5278655/

Internet sources

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) (2024). Migration and resident, https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/MigrationAufenthalt/migrationaufenthalt-node.html, last access 31/01/2024.

Information from television and radio programmes

o. V. (2015). Intersexuality: Why there are more than two genders. Programme: Quarks. WDR, Broadcast on: 05/05/2020, 21:00 - 21:44 (44:33), https://www1.wdr.de/mediathek/video/sendungen/quarks-und-co/video-intersexualitaet-warum-es-mehr-als-zwei-geschlechter-gibt-100.html/, last access: 27/05/2020.

3. Criteria for the assessment of a term paper

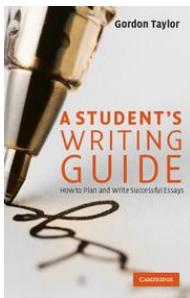In our evaluation of students term papers we use the following criteria.

1. (In-depth) Understanding
   a. Extent and coherence of literature review (as reflected in the text)
   b. Explanation of topic/research question (relevance, statement of problem, aim or expected results of the study)
2. Application
   a. Use and definition of key terms and concepts
   b. Use of theoretical material in relation to the topic
   c. Adequacy of methods and empirical data, or use of other material/evidence
   d. Convincing development of a research question
   e. Comprehensive analysis and conclusions related to problem statement and research question
3. Style, Presentation and Formalia
   a. Coherence of argument and read threat
   b. Structure of the work
   c. Language, style, grammar
   d. Correct use of academic sources and citation

4. Further recommendations

Here you will find the link to the Sowi-Reader, recommendations for further literature as well as information on counselling and support for the preparation of term papers at the RUB.

Literature recommendations

The SoWi-Reader for the Bachelor course "Introduction to the Study of Social Sciences and the Techniques of Scientific Work" at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (in German). Link: https://www.sowi.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/sowi-tutorium/ersti.html.de

Taylor, Gordon (2010): A Student's Writing Guide. How to Plan and Write Successful Essays. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609749.

This book provides an English-language introduction to academic writing with a focus on research techniques, essay writing and the use of appropriate academic language.

Support and counselling for the preparation of term papers at RUB

The **Centre for Teaching and Learning** (Zentrum für Wissenschaftsdidaktik, ZfW) supports students in all matters relating to academic writing, from small writing assignments to final theses. In addition to individual counselling, the centre also offers a writing café and writing events. The writing café offers advice on all aspects of writing from specially trained students. Counselling takes place Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the ground floor of the University Library. Click here for the website: https://zfw.rub.de/welcome/