Notes on Writing Term Papers and Theses in English and American Literary and Cultural Studies[1]

All term papers and theses need to be discussed with and approved by your supervisor before you start writing. So please make sure to make appointments in time.

1.　　Academic Writing

- A term paper brings together: your research interest, a subject of study (a text or several texts if you wish to compare them), a concrete topic/leading question, the secondary sources and your academic discussion of those.

- **Argument**: Your paper should present an argument in written form, so make sure that you have a leading question (*Erkenntnisinteresse* in German) and a thesis statement (following from that question).

- Provide a coherent argumentative structure; subtitles might help structure your argument.

- **Use of Primary and Secondary Sources**: Do not simply summarize primary or secondary sources. Instead, critically assess and discuss the sources in relation to your topic.

- Do not accumulate a number of individual statements. Rather, bring your sources together to provide a clear and coherent narrative of what you want to say about them and to support your argument.

2.　　Choosing a Topic/Finding Your Thesis or Question

- A topic needs to be academically relevant and move beyond your own value judgment: you cannot simply discuss why you liked or disliked a text/character or simply offer general descriptions of a source. E.g. a statement like "In this paper, I will write about the motifs in …" is **neither** a question **nor** a thesis.

- You should base the topic on your own (research) interests but need to make sure you find a suitable supervisor.

- Focus on your primary source: what is interesting/unusual about the text? Are there formal characteristics you are interested in or specific historical or cultural contexts of the text and its work of representation? What has been said about the text or film in other academic writing?

- You should provide a close reading or a critical discourse analysis of your primary material – which you will have to have studied more than once.

- Set realistic limits: you cannot (and are not expected to) deal with every aspect of a work. Make an informed decision about which aspects you want to focus on.

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[1] Thanks are due to Dr. Sibylle Machat (Europa-Universität Flensburg) whose guide "Some words on the mystery of writing a term paper" served as an inspiration for this guide.
Also check out the resources on the department webpage: https://www.angl.hu-berlin.de/study/org.

- A good guiding question for theses on popular culture could be: "which cultural work does this text perform?" This question does not need to be explicitly stated, but it might be useful to keep it in the back of your mind.

3. Finding Secondary Literature

- While you are not required to cite all secondary sources that are accessible, make sure to use available resources such as the university library catalogue and databases. (If you have not done so already, make use of library tours and tutorials. All of these are available at: https://www.ub.hu-berlin.de/)

- Most importantly, **Primus** (the university catalogue which includes the MLA bibliography) should be your starting point to look up what books, articles or book chapters might be relevant. The **MLA bibliography** and the **Literature Resource Center** can also be accessed separately in the university network via the database catalogue **DBIS** on the library webpage. You will need to use a VPN to be connected to the university network to access all available materials (https://www.cms.hu-berlin.de/de/dl/netze/vpn)

- You might need to use interlibrary loan (*Fernleihe*) to get hold of some of the material. Before you spend money to have books sent over, however, it could be worthwhile to have a look at the libraries at the Freie Universität Berlin or the Staatsbibliothek if you are a member (http://staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/).

- Do not rely on sources like Wikipedia (these might help to give a first overview) but use and reference **academic** online and print resources. The following are all available in the library, either electronically or in print.

    o For information on authors, use the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* for the British and the *American National Biography* for the American context, as well as *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon*.

    o For general queries, check *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

    o Consult glossaries of literary terms and introductions to literary studies for terminology (the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* is accessible in the *Oxford Reference* database). For film terminology, Louis D. Giannetti's *Understanding Movies* or Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan's *Looking at Movies* include useful glossaries.

- Especially for longer papers, such as BA and MA theses, reference management software such as Citavi or EndNote helps to keep your references in order. (Free full licenses are available for all students of the university. Check the library webpage for tutorials.)

4. Outline

- Once you have found a leading question and relevant secondary sources, you need to come up with a logical structure.

- The **Introduction** should introduce the thesis statement and describe the relevance of the topic and your chosen guiding question (without posing obvious or rhetorical questions). It should make the reader curious and explain the general structure of the paper without summarizing each part in detail.

- The **Main body** should be structured into relevant subsections with individual headings (avoid over-general section titles such as "main part"). In this section, you need to introduce

and discuss relevant theoretical concepts and provide textual analyses/close readings of your primary source in relation to your research question and the theoretical concepts introduced.

- o Do **not**: provide a plot summary (unless explicitly discussed with your instructor) or add a biography of the author (unless necessary for your argument). Do not add any other interesting trivia that have nothing to do with your question or thesis.

- The **Conclusion** is not a summary of the paper. Avoid simply repeating what you said before. Instead, you should pointedly alert the reader to your central findings. Rather than *summarizing* the argument and providing an *opinion*, the conclusion *synthesizes* the argument and provides a *judgment* (reached via the argument).

- Most importantly in structuring a term paper: avoid redundancy.

5. Theoretical Foundation of Your Research

- You need to put your argument in relation to the academic discussion (no ornamental name-dropping).

- o By the way: a "scientist" is a *Naturwissenschaftler*in*, a *Geisteswissenschaftler*in* is a "scholar" or "critic".

- Use analytical terminology correctly (is it a metaphor or a simile? a hetero- or homodiegetic narrator? What shot size or camera movement are you referring to?). Use reference works[2] such as M.H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* or the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* to double-check. Or consult Giannetti's *Understanding Movies* or Barsam and Monahan's *Looking at Movies* for film terminology.

- Literary or visual interpretation of subject matter should always be linked to an analysis of the formal composition: "exploring the form of the meaning and the meaning of the form" (Meyer 58).[3]

- Voicing an "informed opinion" means that you can agree or disagree with other authors by arguing with what is postulated in their texts.

- Avoid clichés and over-generalizations by all means (e.g. "human beings have always loved reading books"). Instead, you should present ideas like this: "In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt argues that the success of the novel form is linked to the increased importance of publishers and booksellers in eighteenth-century England (cf. Watt 53)."

6. Citing and Bibliography

- **Plagiarism is a fundamental violation of academic standards and will result in your failing the paper. In severe cases it may have disciplinary effects beyond this.[4]**

- Beware: not referencing correctly is a form of plagiarism, too.

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[2] Cf. https://www.angl.hu-berlin.de/study/org/tools/bibliography for an extensive bibliography of reference books in literary and cultural studies.

[3] Cf. Meyer, Michael. *English and American Literatures*. 4th exp. ed. Francke, 2011.

[4] Cf. this helpful overview on plagiarism https://www.ub.hu-berlin.de/de/recherche-lernen/tutorials/lotse (check the section: *Zitieren und Plagiate vermeiden*) and https://www.hu-berlin.de/de/forschung/gute-wissenschaftliche-praxis.

- Always, *always* acknowledge the sources you are quoting from, no matter if you are doing so directly (Watt 25) or indirectly in a paraphrase (**cf.** Watt 25) – you need to provide page references for both.

- Use both paraphrase and direct quotes, but make sure they take up no more than 1/3 of your paper. AI generated content too does not count as your original contribution and needs to be clearly marked. The use of AI might not be allowed for all MAPs, if in doubt, check with your supervisor (see more information on how to cite AI below).

- In a paraphrase, make sure to explain what the author is arguing **in your own words** (do not simply change a word here and there).

- Quotes that are longer than three lines (or, roughly, 40 words), are separated from the main text, justified (*Blocksatz*), indented (*eingerückt*) and are formatted using single line spacing. Also, they do not require quotation marks.

- Quotes shorter than those three lines belong into the regular text and are put into double quotation marks (English: "text" – not German: „text").

- If you have quotes within quotes (where, for instance, the secondary source you want to quote uses a quote from your primary text), turn double into single quotation marks for the interior quote ("Main quotation: 'interior quotation'").

- Avoid second-hand quotes: always quote from sources directly if possible.

- **Quotes alone never replace argumentation: make sure that you explain what you are trying to show with a quote.**

- A term paper should not read like a string of quotations with some connecting sentences in between them, but should rather showcase your own work, your own thoughts, with quotations supporting your line of argumentation.

- Follow a documented citational system: We recommend following the conventions suggested by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in their 2021 edition of the ***MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*** (9th ed.).[5] However, other citational systems, including earlier MLA styles, are acceptable if **consistent** in the paper (if in doubt, check with your supervisor).

- **In-text citation** is preferable to footnotes which should be reserved for information you might want to provide but which is not relevant enough to be included in the regular text.

- Examples for in-text citation:

  o **Citing works with one author:**

  "It was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris" (Hemingway 36).

  Or, as Hemingway says, "it was always pleasant crossing bridges in Paris" (36).

  o **Citing works with multiple authors:**

  "Thus transformative media events do not respond to situations of urgency" (Katz and Dayan 168).

  For a source with three or more authors, list only the first author's last name, and replace the additional names with et al.

  o **Citing more than one work by the same author:**

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[5] An overview of this style can be found, for instance, on the web page of the Purdue Online Writing Lab: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/.

To avoid confusing the reader as to which of the author's books you are taking about, include a shortened form of the title to distinguish one work from the other. Put short titles of books in italics and short titles of articles in quotation marks.

"Who is the higher authority? Who do I call? Who saves me?" (Doctorow, *Daniel* 188).

"I wanted to log as many miles as I could before Bennett got up in the morning" (Doctorow, *Loon Lake* 141).

All texts cited (not everything you read) need to be included in your Works Cited list (also called Bibliography).

- General format of a Works Cited list:
    o Your Works Cited should start on a new page at the end of your paper or thesis.
    o Entries are listed alphabetically by the author's last name (an exception being sources without known author, in which case the title is listed first)
    o Indent all lines following the first line of your reference by 1,25cm to create a *hanging indent [hängender Einzug].*
    o Single space your entries and do not add spaces between entries.
    o Printing out your bibliography in the end helps to spot inconsistencies.

- There are rules for how you refer to different kinds of works in your Works Cited. In general: capitalize each word in the titles of books, movies, articles, etc. – except for definite and indefinite articles (the, a, an), short prepositions or conjunctions (unless one is the first word of the title). Titles of books, journals and movies are always put into *italics*. Titles of poems, internet articles or journal articles go into "double quotation marks." General rule of thumb goes: larger works are italicized and shorter works are put in quotation marks.

- Here is a list of some of the more frequently used formats:

1. A book with a single author

Last name, First name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year of Publication.

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge UP, 1989.

2. A book with more than one author

If there are more than three authors, you may choose to list only the first author followed by the phrase et al. (Latin for "and others"). Order the author(s) in the same way presented in the book.

Last name, First name, and First name Last name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year of Publication.

Dayan, Daniel, and Elihu Katz. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Harvard UP, 1992.

3. More than one book by the same author

List works alphabetically by title, list solo works first (disregard articles (i.e. sort *The Argonauts* under A rather than T).

Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible – Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. Methuen, 1986.

---. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Westview Press, 2000.

4. A reprinted book

If it is a book by one author, then cite it as you would a book with a single author, but add the date of the original publishing after the title of the book, like this:

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*. 1789. Penguin, 2003.

5. A work in a collection (an article in a book)

Last name, First name. "Title of Essay." *Title of Collection*, edited by Editor's Name(s), Publisher, Year, pp. Page range of entry.

Kristeva, Julia. "The Ethics of Linguistics." *Modern Theory and Criticism – A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, Peason Longman, 2008, pp. 349-58.

6. An article in a journal

Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, Volume, Issue, Year, pp. Page range.

Buehrer, David. "'A Second Chance on Earth': The Postmodern and the Post-Apocalyptic in García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*." *Critique*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1990, pp. 15-26.

- Please note that you do **not** necessarily need to add an additional URL/DOI if you list articles in print journals even if you access PDFs as long as you list vol./no./pp.

7. Citing a website

Author, or compiler name (if available). *Name of Site*. Name of institution/organization affiliated with the site (sponsor or publisher), Date of resource creation (if available), DOI (preferred), otherwise include a URL or permalink. Date of access.

Felluga, Dino. *Guide to Literary and Critical Theory*. Purdue U, 28 Nov. 2003, www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/. Accessed 10 May 2006.

8. Citing a film

Title. Director, Film Studio or Distributor, Release Year. (If relevant list performer names after director's name.)

Eileen. Directed by William Oldroyd, Neon/Focus Features/Universal Pictures, 2023.

9. Citing a TV Show

Recorded Television Episodes
"Episode Name." *Series Title,* Writer, Director, Distributor, Year of Distribution.

"The One Where Chandler Can't Cry." *Friends: The Complete Sixth Season,* written by Andrew Reich and Ted Cohen, directed by Kevin Bright, Warner Brothers, 2004.

Netflix, Hulu Disney+ etc.
"Title of Episode." *Series Title,* season, episode, Studio/Distributor, Date of Release. *Platform,* URL.

"94 Meetings." *Parks and Recreation,* season 2, episode 21, NBC, 29 Apr. 2010. *Netflix,* www.netflix.com/watch/70152031.

Entire Series
Creators (Last Name, First Name). *Series Title.* Production Companie(s)/Network, Year of Release.

Steinberg, Jonathan E. and Robert Levine, creators. *Black Sails.* Starz, 2014.

11. Citing a YouTube Video

If the author's name is the same as the uploader, only cite the author once. If the author is different from the uploader, cite the author's name before the title.

Deren, Maya. "Meshes of the Afternoon." *YouTube,* 1943, uploaded by MuminekBambo, 22 January 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWQcJyn981M.

12. Citing a Song or an Album

Artist Name. "Song/Track Title." (if applicable) *Album Title*, Label, Date of Publication. Website Title or Medium (CD/MP3/MIDI/Cassette/Vinyl), URL. Access Date.

Nirvana. "Smells Like Teen Spirit." *Nevermind*, Geffen, 1991.
Beyoncé. "Pray You Catch Me." *Lemonade*, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, www.beyonce.com/album/lemonade-visual-album/. Accessed 02 Feb. 2024.

13. Citing a Video Game

Alan Wake 2. Directed by Sam Lake and Kyle Rowley, Remedy Entertainment/Epic Games, 2023. Sony PlayStation 5 game.

14. Citing Social Media

See https://style.mla.org/citing-social-media/.

15. Citing Artificial Intelligence

If you use AI in your research or writing, all passages need to be clearly marked as you would citations and cannot replace your own analysis. Please check in advance with your supervisor, if the use of AI is allowed for the MAP you are taking. Make sure you reference the source (e.g., ChatGTP) and your prompt. For more information on how to cite text production models, see https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/.

For a complete reference guide, see the *MLA Handbook* (9th edition).[6]

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[6] More information here: https://style.mla.org/works-cited/citations-by-format/.

7.   Language

- Present your paper in grammatically correct and idiomatic English (be consistent in your use of either British or American English spelling).

- Check your spelling (team up and proofread each other's papers before handing them in).

- Avoid colloquialisms.

- Avoid passive constructions like: "In this paper it will be shown that … ." Rather write: "This paper deals with" or "In the following, I will argue that" (**you can use "I").**

- Remember that whenever you summarize sections of a fictional text, you use present tense.

- Avoid run-on sentences.

- Check your punctuation (avoid exclamation marks and excessive comma use).

- Avoid biased or harmful language:

  o Please avoid unnecessary iteration of racist or ableist language.

  o Please use gender neutral language:[7]

    • Try to find gender neutral alternatives to gendered nouns. For example, say "humankind" instead of "mankind"; "mail carrier" instead of "mailman"; "police officer" instead of "policeman"; etc.

    • Avoid using the generic "he." When referring to non-specific individuals or generalized groups, do not use "he." Instead, use plural constructions (e.g. do not say, "a student should always hand in his paper before the deadline" but rather "students should always hand in their papers before the deadline"), or the singular "they" (e.g. "If someone is late with their paper, they might get in trouble.")

    • When referring to a specific person, make sure to use the pronouns they themselves identify with. If you do not know the gender of the person, use the singular "they."

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[7] For further guidelines, please also consult the Purdue OWL guides on "Gendered Pronouns & Singular 'They'" https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/pronouns/gendered_pronouns_and_singular_they.html, and on "Stereotypes and Biased Language" https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/using_appropriate_language/stereotypes_and_biased_language.html.

8. Formatting

A term paper should include the following:

o **Title page** (for BA and MA theses, please use the templates provided by the Fakultät/Lehre und Studium/Bachelor or Master):

The title page is not numbered and should include the following information:

- name of university and department
- current semester (e.g. SoSe XX / WiSe XX)
- date the paper is handed in
- type and title of the course (including module)
- lecturer's name
- title (and subtitle) of your paper
- your name, address, email, subject-specific semester
- your Matrikelnummer

o **Table of contents**

Pagination begins on the first page after the table of contents.

o **Main part** (do not call it that in the table of contents) **with sub-sections**

o (Appendix; only if needed)

o **Works Cited/Bibliography**

The pages you use for the bibliography do not count towards the overall page count of your paper but do have a page number in the table of contents.

o **Selbständigkeitserklärung**[8]

- **Layout:**

  - font: Times New Roman, font size 12pt (Arial or Calibri are also acceptable)

  - line spacing of **1.5 in regular text (not double spacing as recommended in US guides)**

  - line spacing of 1.0 in indented quotes

  - left and right margin should be 3 cm (or 4 cm left and 2 cm right in the case of a bound manuscript)

  - top and bottom margin 2 cm

  - justify your text (Blocksatz)

- **Length:** Please consult the requirements for the MAP or BA or MA thesis in the Studien-/Prüfungsordnung.

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[8] Can be downloaded here:
https://fakultaeten.hu-berlin.de/de/sprachlit/lehre/selbstaendigkeitserklaerung_ab_2024.pdf.

9. Criteria for Evaluation

Your paper will be judged according to the following criteria:

- **Content:**
  - Rigor and plausibility of the argumentation (logical, contextually correct)
  - Relevant topic, convincing objectives, clearly identified problems
  - Convincing close reading that supports your argument
  - Selection and use of quotations (their relevance and the quality of your interpretation of them), quality of research for material and secondary literature
  - Well-supported thesis

- **Form:**
  - Convincing structure
  - Smooth and well-organized argumentation (Pay attention to the logic of individual paragraphs and transitions between chapters. Avoid redundant summaries at the beginning and end of subchapters.)
  - Formally correct documentation of sources and list of works cited (as well as title sheet and table of contents)

- **Language:**
  - Spelling
  - Grammar
  - Style
  - Register (academically appropriate language)
  - Word choice and sentence structure

- **Contribution:**
  - Presence/clarity of your own original ideas

Appendix:

I. Possible Topics (find your own in conversation with your supervisor; this is just for general orientation)

Approach:	Central Question/interest:	Possible Title:
Theory and Text	What does Freud write about apparitions and the uncanny? How does James enact these perceptions in *The Turn of the Screw*? How would a psychoanalytic reading explain the novella and what would it leave unanswered?	A Psychoanalytical Reading of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*
Intertextuality	Which intertextual allusions can be found in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and which purposes/effects do they have?	Intertextual Allusions in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*
Transmediality	How does the movie *Blade Runner* transmediate the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* And which ideas does the novel *Neuromancer* take from the film? How do themes and effects transform in transmediation?	Philip K. Dick, Ridley Scott and William Gibson: A Lesson in Transmediality
Comparison of two novels/texts regarding one thematic focus	To what degree do the motifs of rise and fall in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Frank Norris' *McTeague* reflect the trajectories of Naturalism/Determinism?	Rise and Fall: Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Norris' *McTeague*
Race, Gender, Sexualities and TV	Ostensibly, the vampires in the HBO series *True Blood* stand for homosexuality – but there are also allusions to race, trans* and queer sexualities, religion, social status etc. What is the function of this ambiguous play with marginalizations?	The Vampire Trope in *True Blood*

II. Sample Outline

Topic: *Giovanni's Room* and Race

- **Question**: Beside the suppression of (homo- and bi-)sexuality, to what extent does James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* explore questions of race and privilege?

- **First Outline**:

1. Introduction

   - The cultural significance of Baldwin's work

   - Gender and race in the nineteen fifties

   - Thesis/Guiding Question

2. *Giovanni's Room*

3. Race and privilege

4. Conclusion: David and whiteness

5. Works Cited

- **Sample Table of Contents**

III.   Sample Title Page for Term Papers (for BA/MA Theses, please use the samples on the webpage of the Fakultät/Lehre und Studium/Bachelor or Master)[9]

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin   WiSe/SoSe XXXX

Sprach- und literaturwissenschaftliche Fakultät

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Seminar: XXXXXXX

Dozent*in: Prof. Dr. XXXX

TITLE
SUBTITLE

NAME   Matrikelnummer: XXXX

ADDRESS   X. Semester

ADDRESS   Studiengang/Fächer/Modul

E-mail: XXXXX@hu-berlin.de

Berlin, den XX.XX.XXXX

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[9] https://fakultaeten.hu-berlin.de/de/sprachlit/lehre