Requirements for term papers (Prof. M. Klepper)

(see also the file "Wie schreibe ich eine Seminararbeit" on the American Studies homepage under "Research and Writing Tools" http://www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/tools/index.html"

1) **Length**: length is not the most important point about a term paper. However, in case of Magister or Staatsexamen a 'Hauptseminar' term paper should be between 15 and 20 pages long. For BA or MA see the requirements for the MAP in the Prüfungsordnung!

2) **Topic**: Take your time finding a topic. Talk to your instructor! Avoid topics which seek to explain everything or which reduce a text to the biography of its author. Don't be afraid to take on things which puzzle you or which seem too small to you. Go into detail instead of giving a comprehensive overview!

3) **Thesis or Question**: One central principle of a scholarly term paper is that you have a specific question, which you try to answer ("Erkenntnisinteresse") or a clear thesis! You **cannot just write 'about' something**!!! You must state your question or thesis in your introduction and come back to it in your conclusion. Unless you have a thesis or a question you don't even need to start writing your paper! E.g.: "In this paper I will write about the motifs in ..." is **neither** a question **nor** a thesis! For examples of questions see "Wie schreibe ich eine Seminararbeit"! Please remember that there are other legitimate formats of writing (such as the essay, the wiki, the book report, a feuilleton article, the popular book etc.) but that you **are writing a term paper with its own specific rules**!

So please don't just add up a heap of interesting information or sections and hope that the instructor might find a deeper wisdom hidden in them! Your paper should be one unity held together by the thesis or central question!

4) **Structure**: In your introduction you state your thesis or your guiding question and you argue why it is interesting or important. You may also put in into relation with scholarship done (secondary lit.), with which you may agree or disagree. You can also explain how you are going about to argue your thesis or answer your central question.

In your main section (which may be subdivided) you argue your points or go about answering your question by looking at several aspects of the point at hand. It helps if you state at the beginning of each subchapter what you are about to do.

In your conclusion you come back to your thesis or main question and summarize how you supported your point or answered your question. You may state questions which remained open and suggest which points deserve further research.

5) **Argumentation**: Your argumentation must be logical and convincing. Please check whether your statements follow from each other. If some aspects contradict your ideas, don't be afraid to state them. Please remember: sentences and paragraphs are logical units: one sentence one statement, one paragraph one concern! Don't start a new idea in the middle of a paragraph! And please don't use various different sorts of paragraphs (new line, space in between, adjusted and not adjusted) – use just use one kind of paragraph!

6) **Documentation/Citation**: The second central principle of writing a scholarly paper is that you enter a discussion! You don't invent the wheel all over. Entering a discussion means that you have to cite/document other opinions sources. **You must document all sources you use**
In a "Hauptseminar" term paper you should use at least 6 to 12 (more towards 12) secondary sources—your primary sources, chapters in books, papers, handbook entries, whatever. You find secondary sources in the MLA bibliography and in the university catalogs. You may use internet sources—but you have to double-check if they are reliable, since there is much trash in the internet. This checking is your responsibility!

To format your references please see the MLA-Style Sheet on the "Research and Writings Tools" Page

Please note: only include in your bibliography or works cited what you have quoted in the text! Don’t put in everything you have read or seen in your life, including other interesting books about the topic. Your bibliography should be a list of "works cited"—quite literally!

7) Do not: provide a plot summary (unless explicitly discussed with your instructor) or add a biography of the author (unless necessary for your argument) or add any other interesting trivia, which have nothing to do with your question or thesis! Do not feel you have to explain everything or give an exhaustive answer valid for all times! If there are open points, no problem!

8) Language: Do review your work and, if possible, have it proofread by a friend! Your language is part of the quality of the paper. Mistakes count! If there are too many mistakes you will receive your paper back for revision!

And remember: you "discuss something" not *about something! And a scientist is a "Naturwissenschaftler", a "Geisteswissenschaftler" is a scholar!