# Guidelines for Academic Writing

**Table of Contents**

# 1. Introduction

These guidelines should support students who write their Bachelor and Master theses or seminar papers at the Institute for Environmental Economics and World Trade (IUW). They should help them to get familiar with scientific writing and the formal requirements that ensure academic quality.

Scientific work means to critically assess the findings of other authors on the basis of the most current state of research. Students should develop their own line of argumentation and be able to present this in an adequate way. This means developing and following a line of argumentation throughout the entire work. Instead of just repeating and summarizing other people's work, students should integrate different research ideas and outcomes, and identify the most important points for dealing with their own research question. This excludes personal opinions, but implies independent work. The objective of a seminar paper, a Bachelor or Master thesis is to show that the author is able to draw on relevant literature and arrive at objective evaluations. These evaluations or conclusions should be derived from and based on cited evidence, so that the reader can retrace each step of the research process.

These guidelines should also help students to structure their work, both with regard to contents as well as overall management. After having understood the scientific topic that is to be discussed, students should formulate one to three research questions that guide them in writing the paper/thesis and capture the core essence of their research. To get an encompassing overview of the relevant literature, students should systematically check academic journals that deal with their topic. This is the basis for every paper/thesis. You will find the respective information in section 2 of this document. In sections 3 to 5, formal requirements, outline, and citation rules are presented. Advice on time management and how to finalize your thesis can be found in section 6.

# 2. Literature

## 2.1 Literature review

For seminar papers, students will usually be provided with some introductory literature. Reviews of the current state of research and textbooks should complement this, or serve as point of departure when no basic literature is provided. This might be the case also for Bachelor and Master theses. Please note that these sources are usually secondary literature

presenting findings of primary research (i.e. reports of international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank etc.). As such, they should only provide some guidance, and not form the basis of your work.

Relevant literature can be obtained from several sources.

- The bibliography of assigned literature, surveys, and textbooks

- Thematic search in scientific data bases and journals

    - Wiso-Net, Econlit, Repec, SSRN

- Data bases of the TIB and other cooperating libraries

    - OPAC, GBV

- Google scholar (https://scholar.google.com/)

Google scholar provides you with a detailed overview of previous research related to the terms you type into the search screen. There are several ways to approach your search. If you type the title of an important source you already have, you can then click on "cited by" to find other, more recent papers.

Another option is to simply type the terms you are interested in. In figure 1, you can see the search results for "poverty and vulnerability". With this example, we show the most important functions of google scholar[1]:

- Advanced search: Clicking on the three bars next to the Google symbol and then proceeding to advanced search allows you to search for specific combinations of words, authors, journals, and dates.

- Results: The search results are presented to you just as you are probably used to in the standard google. You might be able to access some articles and books directly as PDF. Otherwise, at least on campus, you can click "*Linkingservices TIB*" to see if our library can help you access the respective sources.

- Cited by: See above. This can be a good way to fully cover an area of research by connecting papers that have some relation to each other.

- Related articles: If other research does not directly cite the source, but was written to cover the same topics, then you can find it under "related articles".

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[1] For more information, see http://scholar.google.de/intl/de/scholar/about.html.

- All versions: Authors usually publish a working or conference paper that is revised several times before it is published in a peer-reviewed journal. Here, you can find all available versions. Sometimes, working papers contain detailed information on methodology that is significantly shorter in later versions. Also, these versions might offer some guidance when you cannot access the published versions. However, try to use the most recent published version.
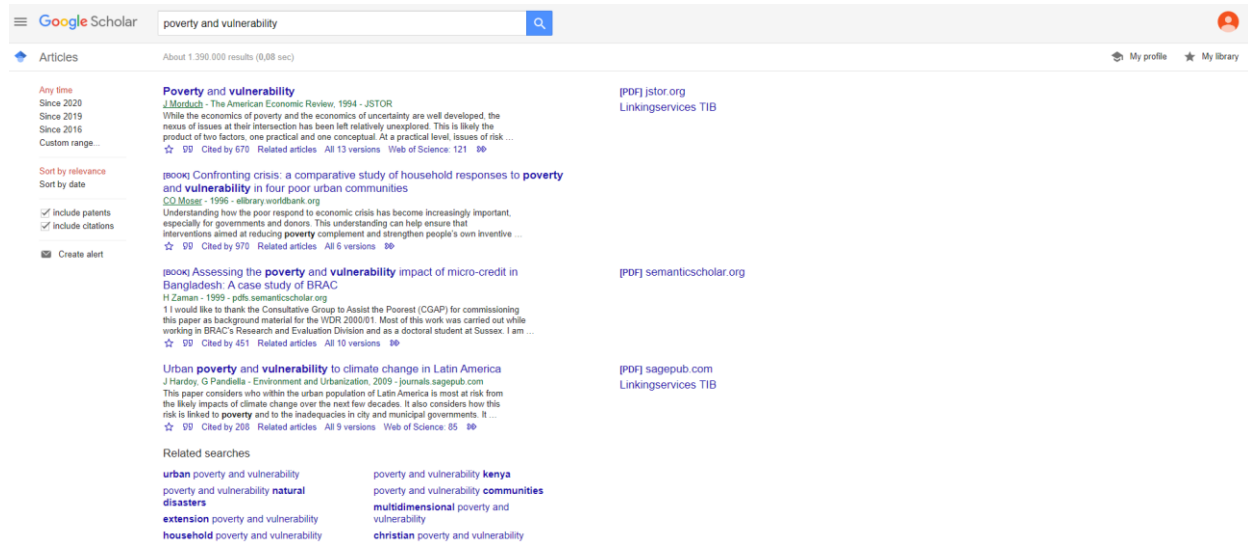


*Figure 1 Exemplary Google Scholar Search. Source: Google Scholar (2020)*

## 2.2 Accessing literature and ensuring quality

The use of international journal articles is encouraged, and published papers should form the basis of your research. You can access these via your university account or VPN-client[2]. Most journal articles can in fact be found online. You can check in the electronic library of journals ("*Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek*") to see which journals can be accessed with our university license. Visit http://rzblx1.uni-regensburg.de/ezeit/. The archive of the library also offers many possibilities (search, copies, interlibrary loan, search in the GBV catalogue, order of copies).

Please remember that not all journals have the same quality. Published references are generally citable if they meet scientific standards. Do not cite other theses, lecturer notes, Wikipedia etc.! You can make use of several rankings to ensure that you rely on relevant and reliable journals.

- Handelsblatt journal ranking ("*Handelsblatt VWL-ranking*"): This ranking lists more than 1400 economic journals according to a specific key. Despite being somewhat subjective,

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[2] This service enables you to connect to the internet with the same opportunities you would have on campus or in the library. See https://www.luis.uni-hannover.de/netz_vpn.html

this ranking can give you an idea about the overall quality of the listed journals. Check https://www.handelsblatt.com/downloads/9665428/1/journal-ranking.pdf (Handelsblatt, 2020).

- The Kiel journal ranking and the ranking of the Tinbergen institute can give further guidance. Since these are frequently updated, try to find a recent ranking.

- Number of citations: The number of citations in google scholar points to the importance of a source in the respective field. A high number of citations usually indicates that other authors have relied on the quality and impact of the respective source.

Use online sources as little as possible, and only after checking whether they meet common quality standards. If you cannot identify the author or the date of publication, rather refrain from using that source. The same holds when you are uncertain about including the source for other reasons.

## 2.3 Processing the literature

After having collected relevant literature, the student should ask him- or herself two questions:

- Which sources are relevant for the topic?

- Which sources are methodologically suited to work with?

Therefore, please make sure that you meet the following criteria while working with sources:

- Understand the aim of the respective source. Recognize the core question and identify the most important thoughts that the authors build on to answer that question.

- Acquaint yourself with the employed methods and data. This will help you to compare the main points of each study and critically assess them.

- Compare related studies to validate the conclusions and identify questions that have been left unanswered. This process can lead you to search for additional literature and formulate secondary research questions.

- Do not use direct quotations, unless they provide some distinct advantage.

# 3. Formal Requirements

The following details provide some first orientation to the student on how to format the thesis (slight adjustments are possible according to own preference):

- Margins: 2.5 cm on all sides
- Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt. font size
    - 14 pt. and bold for first level section titles
    - 12 pt. and bold for lower level section titles
    - 11 or 12 pt. and italic for figures and tables
    - 9 pt. for footnotes
- Line spacing: 1.5 line spacing throughout, except for footnotes where you use single space
- Leave 6 pt. space between all paragraphs
- Justified text (flush left and flush right)
- Text length (including text with tables and figures but without references and annex):
    - For seminar papers: 15 pages (unless otherwise specified)
    - For Bachelor theses: around 30 pages
    - For Master theses: 60-70 pages
- Numbering of pages
    - Before the introduction: Roman numerals
    - Starting with the introduction: Arabic numerals (beginning with 1)
    - Title page and statutory declaration are not paginated

A template for the layout of the title page of seminar papers is provided at the end of this paper. For Bachelor and Master theses, templates for title pages and the statutory declaration are released by the *Studiendekanat*. The following numbers of hardcopies have to be submitted: 3 for seminar papers, 2 for Bachelor and Master theses. A PDF version has to be sent to the supervisor. In addition, Bachelor and Master theses have to be bound.

In most cases, you can choose to write your thesis in English or German; however, English is often preferred, especially since the underlying literature is often in English.

## 4. Outline

### 4.1 Structure

For a brief orientation, the general outline of any seminar paper or thesis should be like this:

- Title page

- Table of contents

- List of figures (only if the text contains more than 3 figures)

- List of tables (only if the text contains more than 3 tables)

- List of abbreviations (only if the text contains more than 5 abbreviations that cannot be found easily)

- Introduction

- Main part

- Conclusion

- References

- Appendix

- Statutory declaration

In the main part, two to four subsections are usually sufficient. Note that you must always have at least two subchapters, i.e. if there is a chapter 2.1, then there has to be a chapter 2.2 as well. Additionally, the content of the main part has to be well-balanced, which is reflected by the number of subchapters per chapter.

### 4.2 Contents

When you write your paper or thesis, be advised that the language should be strictly formal. Avoid slang or short forms (i.e. don't). Expressions such as "I think" or "I believe" do not belong in a scientific paper. Read other scientific work to understand the style and formulations of more advanced authors.

A seminar paper or thesis always starts with an introduction. The aim of the **introduction** is to motivate the particular topic and to highlight the research gap. You might also want to highlight the added value of your paper. The objectives and/or the research questions should be mentioned explicitly. At the end of the introduction, the structure of the work should be briefly described.

The **main part** significantly depends on the topic and the extent of the paper or thesis and should be discussed with the supervisor. Based on the introduction, the course of argumentation is developed. Depending on the topic and the extent of your work, you might want to include some descriptive statistics or general information on a specific topic as some background information. In any case, your work should contain a literature review. Ideally, there should be a theoretical and an empirical literature review part. The individual subchapters have to be connected in a meaningful way in order to follow a straight line ("*roter Faden*"). The argumentation considers contrasting views from the literature that are indicated by references, and works out the respective limitations. Own ideas are developed and justified out of these considerations. If you work with data, your results are connected to your framework and theoretical basis.

The **summary and conclusion** close your paper or thesis. Here, you summarize the main findings and draw further conclusions. You should first mention and answer the research questions expressed in the introduction. Furthermore, a conclusion discusses the results and points to limitations of the own work. Policy recommendations are derived and further research needs are stated at the end of the conclusion. In covering those aspects, you connect your findings to the problem definition in the introduction. This improves the overall readability and enables you to refocus on your motivation.

**Master students** should include – next to some background information and the literature review - an empirical part (with data and methodology) in their thesis. This could be based either on qualitative or quantitative data. Generally, IUW can provide quantitative data as part of our projects (e.g. www.tvsep.de). If you would rather like to collect your own quantitative or qualitative data, you are somewhat more flexible in choosing your topic. Mostly consumer surveys are carried out and you design your own questionnaire (e.g. with LimeSurvey[3]). You can carry out the evaluation using various statistical programs (e.g. SPSS, Stata). Please note, that in the summer semester, we normally offer an econometrics course in the computer lab, in which you can take part in order to refresh your knowledge of Stata using concrete empirical examples.

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[3] A short guide on how to get access to LimeSurvey can be found at https://www.luis.uni-hannover.de/limesurvey_use.html. The corresponding online form can then be found at: https://survey.uni-hannover.de/register/
After registration you will receive the access data by email and you can log in with your user data here: https://survey.uni-hannover.de/index.php/admin/authentication/sa/login
Then you can start right away by creating the questionnaire. LimeSurvey is very easy to understand and you can actually find any questions online.

## 5. Citation and Bibliography

### 5.1 Citations

**You have to cite correctly!** To work scientifically means that you indicate whenever you take another person's thoughts and ideas and use it in your work. Failing to correctly cite will result in failing your examination. Your work is to be submitted in electronic form so that it can be checked for possible attempts of deception.

Every sentence or paragraph that is based on anything but your own ideas has to be cited. Elaborate on the sources that you quote. This shows that you have both understood the things you quote, and that you advance the current state of research. This will also facilitate easy reading by sticking to the main points of your work, instead of being a mere collection of different quotations.

When citing references, we ask you to use:

- In-text citation style, in line with the Harvard style of citation (Mendeley, 2020),

- whereas footnotes contain additional information, not your references![4]

Each time that you cite, you have to provide the necessary details for the reader to be able to locate the publication in the list of references.

- Author surnames (for 4 or more authors, use first author's name followed by "et al."), year of publication. A page number is only required if you refer to a "direct quotation".

### 5.2 Quoting

There are two ways to proceed:

- Direct quotation

- Indirect quotation

Direct quotations should be rather the exception. But when you do quote directly, meaning that you copy word-for-word from the original source, you have to put quotation marks at the beginning and the end of the quotation. Minor omissions are permissible if they ensure easier reading without changing the meaning, and have to be marked by "…". The citation has to enable the reader to locate the source in your list of references, and to locate the respective sentence in the source. This means that you provide the exact page. The quote should only

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[4] Footnotes are often shortened sentences that contain additional information not directly related to the text. They always begin with capital letters and end with a dot. Use footnotes as little as possible.

contain those parts of the text which are absolutely necessary to support the argument that is being made. Quotations are taken from the original source. Example:

*"Our findings indicate that the gender gap in Internet use is non-existent among internal migrants" (Sharma and Grote, 2019, p. 3).*

Indirect quotations are statements and findings which you reproduce in your own words while drawing on the work of other authors. These of course also have to be cited correctly. Example:

*Female and male internal migrants do not differ in their internet use (Sharma and Grote, 2019).*

## 5.3 References

The list of references contains **all sources that you have used in your work**. It contains **only those sources**, and not anything you might have read without using and citing it. It starts on a separate page after the main body of text. It is sorted alphabetically by the surnames of the authors. If you have several sources of the same author, they are sorted chronologically. Younger references are named first, followed by older sources. If sources from the same author are from the same year, distinguish them by adding "a", "b" and so forth to the year. References and citations never include titles, such as "Prof." or "Dr." etc. In the following, you find detailed examples of how to display your references.

a) Books / Monographs

- Last name and initial(s) of all authors (year of publication).
- *Title and subtitle.*
- Edition (if required).
- Place of publication: publisher.

Deininger, K. (2003). *Land policies for growth and poverty reduction.* Washington DC et al.: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

b) Journal articles

- Last name and initial(s) of all authors (year of publication).

- Article title.

- *Journal title,*

- Volume and issue number,

- Page numbers of the article, indicated by "pp.".

Pingali, P. L. (1997). From Subsistence to Commercial Production Systems: The Transformation of Asian Agriculture. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics,* 79 (2), pp. 628–634.

c) Contributions in edited books

- Last name and initial(s) of all authors (year of publication).

- Article title, including subtitle.

- In: cite the edited book as you would cite a normal book/monograph, add ("ed."/"eds.") to the editing authors

- Volume number (if required)

- Page numbers.

Berdegué, J. A., Rosada, T., and Bebbington, A. J. (2014). The Rural Transformation. In: Currie-Alder, B., Ravi Kanbur, S.M., Malone, D., and Rohinton, M. (eds.) (2014). *International development. Ideas, experience, and prospects*. First Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 463–478.

d) Working papers / Policy reports

- Last name and initial(s) of all authors (year of publication).

- *Article title.*

- Working paper series and number.

- Place of publication.

- Publisher / institution (if available).

Hirsch, P., Mellac, M., and Scurrah, N. (2015). *The Political Economy of Land Governance in Viet Nam*. Vientiane, Lao P.D.R. Mekong Region Land Governance.

Cazzuffi, C., McKay, A., and Perge, E. (2018). *The Impact of Commercialization of Rice on Household Welfare in Rural Viet Nam*. WIDER Working Paper, 2018/130. Helsinki, Finland. United Nations University Institute for Development Economics Research.

e) Internet sources

- Last name and initial(s) of all authors (year of publication). ("No author" / "No year" if unidentified)

- *Title, or title of page/site.*

- [Online]

- Available at: Functional URL (if too long, separate by a "-" just before a "/" that is already in the address)

- (Accessed: Day Month Year).


World Bank (2020). *World Development Indicators: Arable Land (Hectares Per Person)*. [Online] Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.HA.PC?view= chart (Accessed: 11 February 2020).

If you are not certain about how to correctly state your reference, check sources that describe the Harvard style of citation. Make sure to have a consistent system for your reference list.

## 6. Finalizing the Paper / Thesis

- Pay attention to spelling and grammar. When writing in English, the web pages of the Oxford learner's dictionaries provide a good overview. With linguee.de or leo.org, you can translate from German and enlarge your vocabulary. This helps you avoiding repetition and makes it easier for the reader.

- Use a spellchecker and ask relatives, friends and fellow students to proofread your work. It can be a good idea to split tasks. One person without any knowledge in economics might be well-suited to look out for grammar and spelling mistakes. Someone else can check the overall readability, while a fellow economist could be charged with details.

- Note that some errors become visible when printed.

- Write short and simply understandable sentences. If you have to read a sentence several times to understand it, you might want to split it into several sentences.

- Read only introduction and conclusion to check for conformity. Any reader should be able to know what happens in the main body of your text without actually reading it.

- Make sure that the title and the page number of chapters correspond with the title and page number stated in the table of contents. The same is true for any references to tables and figures.

- Make sure that you regularly check the state of your research and where it is located with respect to previous research. Writing a scientific work can be considered a dynamic process which is subject to frequent checks.

- Lastly, control whether you followed all notes explained in this guideline.

# References

Berdegué, J. A., Rosada, T., and Bebbington, A. J. (2014). The Rural Transformation. In: Currie-Alder, B., Ravi Kanbur, S.M., Malone, D., and Rohinton, M. (eds.) (2014). *International development. Ideas, experience, and prospects*. First Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 463–478.

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Hirsch, P., Mellac, M., and Scurrah, N. (2015). *The Political Economy of Land Governance in Viet Nam*. Vientiane, Lao P.D.R.: Mekong Region Land Governance.

Mendeley (2020). *Harvard Format Citation Guide*. [Online] Available at: https://www.mendeley.com/guides/harvard-citation-guide (Accessed: 17 February 2020).

Pingali, P. L. (1997). From Subsistence to Commercial Production Systems: The Transformation of Asian Agriculture. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 79 (2), pp. 628–634.

Sharma, R., and Grote, U. (2019). *Determinants of Internet Use Among Migrants in South-East Asia: A Case Study of Internal Migrants in Thailand and Viet Nam.* Migration Research Series 58. Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration.

World Bank (2020). *World Development Indicators: Arable Land (Hectares Per Person)*. [Online] Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.HA.PC?view= chart (Accessed: 11 February 2020).

# "Title"

Seminar Paper

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Degree program

Matriculation number

E-Mail address

Submitted to:     Name of supervisor

Name of examiner (professor)

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Leibniz University Hannover

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