

Freie Universität Berlin
Institute for East European Studies
Department of History
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Formal guidelines for the completion of term papers and final theses

Compliance with these instructions is mandatory for all students writing a term paper or thesis at the Department of History of the Institute for East European Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. These instructions are limited to formal and technical aspects. If you have any questions regarding content, please consult the resources listed on the website of the Department of History or - even better - please contact your lecturers!

How to write with style?

- Write clearly, precisely and correctly. Avoid "pseudo-scientific" jargon, slang and Anglicisms
- Write actively. Avoid passive constructions.
- Name historical actors as concretely and precisely as possible. Avoid formulations that conceal the actor, such as "One...", "It happened..."
- Have the courage to use short, concise sentences. Avoid nested sentences, noun chains (nominal style) and the excessive use of foreign words. A "sentence" of more than three lines should be broken up.
- Write complete sentences. Avoid ellipses, i.e. "sentences" without a predicate.
- Only write down what you really know. Avoid unchecked assumptions.
- Distance yourself from normative source language and the theses of other historians. Use quotation marks and the subjunctive mood to distance yourself from the judgments of others.
- Use paragraphs to structure your thoughts and arguments. You are welcome to follow this rule: One paragraph (approx. 10-15 lines) = one argument.

Notes on scientific style (in German):: https://www.studium.ifp.uni-mainz.de/files/2013/11/wis-senschaftliches_schreiben.pdf

Should, must or can I use gender language in my work (applicable to German-language papers)?

- Language must be respectful and precise.
- Whether to use gender language in your work or not is up to you.
- With regard to historical actors, please note that gender concepts of our present are often not transferable to historical constellations (example: the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party has only included men since 1949).

If you want to know more: Guide to scientific work (in German)

https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/fmi/bereiche/ab_nolte/arbeitstechniken/technikenreader/index.html

<https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/werkzeugkasten-geschichte/>

What do the others write? You can find excellent term papers by students of history here (in German):

- Zeitschrift „Die junge Mommsen“ des Instituts für Geschichtswissenschaften der HU Berlin <https://www.junge-mommsen.de/>
- Zeitschrift „Global Histories“, publiziert am FMI der FU https://www.cedis.fu-berlin.de/services/e-publishing/e-journals/ojs-journals/global_histories.html

Before you start...

- Familiarize yourself with the study and examination regulations that apply to you.
- Discuss the topic/question/procedure/deadlines with your lecturers.
- Write a synopsis of your work in consultation with your lecturers.

The first impression matters! Therefore: please pay attention to the formal design and do not forget any of the important elements of a term paper:

- Cover sheet (contains: Details of university & institute, semester, seminar title, name of lecturer, your name, title of paper, your contact details, course of study, module, matriculation number).
- Table of contents.
- Page numbers - only the introduction begins with p. 1.
- Text formatting: justified text, line spacing 1.5, font size 12 point, legible font (Times New Roman, Garamond, or another serif font), please activate automatic hyphenation.
- Structure your text with subheadings and paragraphs. Remember: a sentence is not a paragraph.
- Separate the list of sources from the bibliography. In both lists, only list titles in alphabetical order that you have actually consulted and to which you have referred in the footnotes of your work.
- The bibliography and list of references should contain a total of approx. 15 to 20 titles for Master's theses.
- List of figures and abbreviations, if applicable.
- Declaration of independence.

The eight elements of a good introduction (Tips in German: <https://gwd.hypotheses.org/876>)

- Topic of the work.
- Concrete subject ("case study").
- Research question.
- Cognitive interest: Relevance of the work in relation to the subject and state of research.
- State of research.
- Approach.
- Clarification of key terms.
- Thesis(es).

In the main section, you will discuss the questions raised in the introduction

- Present the results of your empirical analysis, i.e. based on historical sources, along a common thread.
- Do not merely reproduce "facts", but develop a coherent argument.
- Answer your own questions.
- Have the courage to develop your own theses!

In the final section you draw a conclusion

- Summarize the results and discuss the theses.
- Emphasize the significance of your results for larger contexts and/or current problems related to your topic.
- Do not deal with new topics and do not merely reproduce the viewpoints of the literature.
- Possibly provide an outlook for further research or open questions.

How do you actually know all this? Citation forms and style

- Use footnotes, not in-text citations.
- Footnotes: Use a standardized citation system. Recommendation: The first time a title is mentioned in the footnote, give full bibliographic details; from the second mention onwards, a short title is sufficient.

Tips in German: <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/werkzeugkasten-geschichte/wissen-schaftliches-arbeiten/zitierformate/>

What do I have to quote and how?

- Direct quotations (i.e. quotations of the wording) must be marked with quotation marks and referenced at the end of the sentence with a footnote (bibliography including specific page number).
- Indirect quotations (i.e. borrowing other people's ideas in your own words) must be referenced at the end of the relevant paragraph at the latest with a footnote (bibliography including specific page number).
- If you do not do this, you are violating the rules of good scientific practice and risk failing the examination as a minimum.

Tips in German: <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/werkzeugkasten-geschichte/wissen-schaftliches-arbeiten/zitieren/>

Overwhelmed by complexity or running out of time?

- Plan realistically and be honest with yourself.
- Divide the "housework" project into small(est) subtasks. It's better to invest half an hour every day than to do nothing at all. Also plan a buffer for unforeseen events (such as illness).

- If you are not getting anywhere: Contact your lecturers in good time.
- Get together with "fellow sufferers". Your fellow students are all writing a term paper too.

Before submitting your work...

- Gain some distance to the text: leave the work for a few days and only then revise it.
- Have the work proofread by another person. Never hand over a text that has not been proofread by at least one person.
- Take your time to revise! Writing is deleting, shortening, correcting!
- Check formatting, spelling and formal aspects.
- Sign the declaration of independence.

All done?

- Submit your work as a pdf file by e-mail.
- Send it and relax!

Good luck!