



Guidelines for seminar and term papers

Department of Business Decisions and Analytics

Introduction

Writing papers as part of your courses is an important element in your academic education. Term papers not only show what you have learned in a course. In preparing the paper, you also do your own research, and in writing the paper, you learn how to present your work to others. Even if you do not aim for an academic career, collecting information from various sources, integrating it, combining it with your own ideas and presenting everything together in your own words in the form of some report will most likely be part of your future job.

These guidelines will help you to acquire the necessary skills. They also illustrate the criteria used for evaluating your papers, so following the guidelines will increase your chances to obtain a good grade for your work.

General remarks

In your paper, you provide some information to your readers. The most important criterion for a paper is therefore that this information is understandable and well structured. Do not assume that the readers already know everything that you want to tell them and try to build a logical flow of ideas, where one thing builds on the other.

A well-structured paper typically has at least three parts:

1. **An introduction:** The introduction should capture the attention of the reader and motivate to read on. State the goal of your paper clearly and tell the reader what he or she will learn from reading the paper. It is also helpful to illustrate why the topic of your paper is important, and how reading your paper can help to better understand the topic. In longer papers, you should also give an overview of the structure of your paper, so that the readers know what to expect.
2. **A main part:** Here you go into details. If necessary, you can explain the question you are addressing in more detail. You also should explain the research you were doing (in a seminar paper, this will typically refer to the literature you studied, in a Master thesis, you might e.g. also describe some experiments which you have performed or interviews which you conducted). Then of course you will show your results to the reader, and perhaps present a critical evaluation and a discussion of these results.
3. **A conclusion:** The conclusion should not just repeat what you have said before, but provide a critical reflection of the results which you have obtained, discuss their limitations and present your own opinion on the topic.

Seminar and term papers are typically based on existing literature. There are two major mistakes that one can make in writing a literature-based paper:

The first mistake is to lose focus. In preparing your work, you will read a lot of papers. Each paper will hopefully contain some information that is relevant for your own topic, but it will also contain some information that is relevant in another context, but not for your work. That information should not be present in your paper, be selective and concentrate on what is relevant for your topic.

The second mistake is structuring a paper according to literature. If you have read several papers, and perhaps made notes on each of them, it is tempting to simply convert these notes into a paper where you first write three pages on what you have read in paper A, then three pages on what you have read in paper B, and finally three pages on what you have read in paper C. This approach does not lead to a well-structured paper of your own. Papers A, B, and C will contain some similar ideas, or conflicting points of view on the same topic. If you present these related ideas far apart, it will be hard for readers to establish a connection. This is the work you should do, and not leave it to the reader. Try to structure your paper by ideas. Discuss one idea and explain what authors A, B, and C have to say about that, then move on to the next idea (again referring to several sources) and so on.

Throughout the paper, you should use material from different sources. This also means that you have to integrate the information which they provide. Different authors will sometimes use different terms to mean the same thing, and will most likely also use different symbols in mathematical expressions to represent the same variable. To create a coherent paper, you need to eliminate these differences, and use consistent wording and notation throughout your paper. Of course, you have to be careful whether different words used by different authors really mean the same thing, or whether there are subtle differences that should be preserved.

Dealing with literature

The paper that you write is your work. Readers therefore will assume that any statement you make is your own idea, unless you indicate where in literature you have found it. To avoid making false claims (and thus plagiarism), all ideas and statements that are not your own must clearly be identified as coming from literature.

Information that is presented in an academic paper (and your term papers are academic papers!) must come from reliable scientific sources. Wikipedia and similar internet sources are great ways of getting quick information for everyday life. But you should be aware that information in these sources is not thoroughly checked for correctness (as papers in peer reviewed academic journals are). Everybody can write anything in the internet. Therefore, information from such sources should be avoided, or at least it needs to be double-checked by comparing it to reliable other sources.

Ideas from literature can be presented in your paper in two ways: As **verbal quotes**, or by **paraphrasing**, i.e., by presenting somebody else's ideas in your own words. Verbal quotes should be used only rarely, for example, important definitions will often be quoted verbally. They should

also be comparatively short, mostly one or two sentences. Any verbal quote must be clearly marked by enclosing them in quotation marks ("...") and indicating the exact source (including page numbers). Verbal quotes must be written exactly as in the original text (even if that contains spelling errors). If any part of the text is omitted, this should be indicated by ..., added text is enclosed in square brackets [added text].

Paraphrasing means that you present an idea in your own words. "Own words" really means your own words, changing a few words or slightly rearranging a sentence is not enough. Very useful guidelines on how to paraphrase and quote, and what is acceptable paraphrasing and what constitutes plagiarism can be found at the web page <http://www.plagiarism.org>. This page also provides links to other helpful pages on writing academic papers.

Formalities

Papers should be written in 12point Times Roman or a similar serifed font with 1.5 lines space. Serifed fonts are the fonts having short lines at the top and bottom of letters like Times roman (in which this text is written, or Georgia (the font for official texts of the university). "Modern" fonts without serifes like e.g. Arial look nice on short texts, but are hard to read when the text becomes longer. Sections should be numbered and the document should also have page numbers.

References to literature can be made in the text using one of the following methods:

1. as footnotes
2. by including name of the authors and year of publication in parentheses in the text, e.g. (Vetschera, 2012). This method is frequently referred to as the "Harvard" style of references. If different papers which have been published by the same author in the same year are referenced, they are distinguished by letters, e.g. (Vetschera, 2013a, Vetschera, 2013b). These abbreviations should be included in the list of references.
3. by their number in the list of references, enclosed in brackets, e.g. [2] refers to the paper number 2 in the list of references

The information to be contained in the list of references depends on the type of work you cite.

For papers in journals, the author(s), title of the paper, title of the journal, year of publication, volume of the journal, if available the issue within the volume, and page numbers should be provided. For example, if you use the Harvard style:

Vetschera, R. (2013): Negotiation processes: An integrated perspective. *EURO Journal on Decision Processes* 1 (1-2), 135-164.

For books, the author, title, year of publication, publisher and place of publication should be provided. If there is more than one edition of the book, the number of the edition should also be mentioned. For example:

Raiffa, H. (1982). *The Art and Science of Negotiation*. Belknap, Cambridge, Mass.

For papers in collective volumes (books that contain chapters written by different authors), information on the book (editor, title and publisher) as well as on the individual paper (author, title, pages) must be provided, for example:

Kiesling E., Gettinger J., Stummer, Ch., Vetschera, R. (2011): An Experimental Comparison of Two Interactive Visualization Methods for Multicriteria Portfolio Selection. In: Salo, A., Kreisler, J., Morton, A. (eds.): *Portfolio Decision Analysis: Improved Methods for Resource Allocation*. Springer, Berlin, 187-209.

As already explained, internet sources should be used only with caution. A reasonably reliable type of internet documents are working papers published by a university. For all internet documents, the url (uniform resource locator) and the date on which the document was accessed should be specified in addition to authors and the title of the document. If the source is a working paper, there is usually also a series title and a number within the series; such information should also be provided. For example:

Sarabando, P., Dias, L., Vetschera, R. (2009): *Approaches to suggest potential agreements: Perspectives of mediation with incomplete information*. INESC Working paper 11/2009, http://www.inescc.pt/documentos/11_2009.PDF, accessed Sept. 20, 2016.

Many electronically available documents (journal papers, book chapters etc.) also have a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) number. If available, this number should also be added to your reference. Providing a DOI makes it easy for the reader to find the full text of the document in the Internet.