

# Instructions for Writing a Seminar Thesis

## 1. General advice

When writing a seminar paper, you should aim at documenting your own skills. You want to demonstrate your understanding of complex scientific reasoning and your ability to summarize it in your own words in a clear and precise way. It is important that you avoid the impression that you just repeat what is documented and said in the original contribution (the work you are studying). Try to develop an independent perspective. You can do this in many ways. For instance, you can try to provide a broader context by interpreting results more extensively than in the original contribution and/or by discussing model-based assumptions and methods beyond what has been done in the original contribution. You can also demonstrate your competence by discussing economic policy implications of theoretical or applied work.

When writing your thesis, try to use your own words while reproducing, documenting and discussing the original contribution. Just copying somebody else's text (or translating it) is not useful. We know that it is not easy to develop an independent perspective. Think of your thesis as something that is, at least in principle, independent of the original contribution you are referring to. Once you start to incorporate different sources and viewpoints, you will find ways to develop and express your own perspective.

While writing, try to reduce complex theoretical and empirical thoughts to their core. By shortening and leaving out things that are not essential, you show your own understanding. Ask yourself what the core of the reasoning is, and what can be omitted or shortened.

When you are discussing different sources, try to demonstrate the main connections in between the different papers. Are there points of overlapping, results that match each other or are disputed? Which are the important points of comparison, as compared to minor differences that can be left unmentioned?

Your thesis should be comprehensible and follow a clear reasoning. Take care of correct spelling and punctuation. Ask someone to proof-read your thesis before you hand it in. Even if the proof-reading person is not an expert, she might help you to judge if your work is comprehensible and formally correct, in particular if you are not a native speaker.

## 2. Structure and Length

A seminar thesis consists of the following parts in the stated order:

### (i) Front page

The front page must include the following: seminar title, title of the seminar paper, semester, name of supervisor, author's name, address, and matriculation number. In the appendix you can find a title page sample.

### (ii) Table of contents

The table of contents should be placed following the title page. It should be structured such that the main content of your thesis becomes immediately apparent.

### (iii) Main part

Consult with your supervisor about the length of the main part. For a seminar thesis, it will typically be between **33.000 – 38.000** characters long (including blank spaces and footnotes, but excluding tables, figures/illustrations/charts and the appendix (if any)). Depending on the layout, number of formula, tables etc., you will end up with about 15 pages of main text. As regards the layout: Select a standard font of 12pt or 11pt; use double spacing; the page margins should be 2.5cm left and right. Footnotes should be placed at the bottom of each page (10pt or 9pt font). Print your thesis one-sided.

### (iv) Appendix

An appendix is optional, but it should not exceed 3 pages. Include significant calculations, tables, illustrations etc. into the main part. You should only place stuff in the appendix if it is not key for following your reasoning in the main part.

### (v) Bibliography (list of references)

All sources and materials which are mentioned or used in your thesis have to be listed in the bibliography (list of references). Conversely, all cited sources have to be mentioned in the paper. The bibliography usually should contain not less than 8 items, the format should be uniform, and all items should be sorted alphabetically according to the first author's name. Style examples are:

#### **Books:**

Oates, W.E. (1972). *Fiscal Federalism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

#### **Publications in trade journals or rather volumes:**

Boadway, R., M. Marchand und M. Vigneault (1998). The Consequences of Overlapping Tax Bases for Redistribution and Public Spending in a Federation, *Journal of Public Economics* 68, 453-478.

Persson, T. und G. Tabellini (1995). Double-Edged Incentives: Institutions and Policy Coordination. In: Grossman, G. und K. Rogoff (ed.), *Handbook of International Economics*, Vol. III. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Wildasin, D.E. (1991a). Some Rudimentary Duopoly-Theory. *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 21, 393-421.

Wildasin, D.E. (1991b). Income Redistribution in a Common Labor Market. *American Economic Review* 81, 757-774.

### 3. Content

- The text part (main part) of a seminar thesis comprising 15 pages should be structured as following:
  - (1) Introduction (about 2 pages)
  - (2) Presentation of the major source (typically the paper you are supposed to cover in- depth) (about 6-8 pages)
  - (3) Presentation of a self-chosen second source (about 4-6 pages)
  - (4) Conclusion (about 1 page)
- It is important that you write a good **Introduction**. It should **justify the subject** (explain what makes the subject interesting, refer to current events/issues, explain how your topic relates to others in a bigger context) and explain precisely what the topic of the thesis is. In addition, you should give a short overview of the literature and summarize the most important results. It is also important that you briefly explain the structure of the remaining parts of your thesis.
- In Part (2), you should elaborate on the major source. Part (3) relates part (2) to the literature by discussing a self-chosen second source (and possibly other ones). Make sure that part (2) and (3) are well connected. In any case, you should discuss the literature you want to cover with your supervisor.
- For each chapter, we recommend to start out with a brief paragraph explaining the chapter's function and its connection to the other chapters. Finish with a short summary of the main results.
- It is important that you relate your main sources to other contributions in the literature throughout your thesis. Demonstrate that you overview the whole topic and that you are aware of other papers, approaches, etc.

## 4. Formal design

- You can refer to fundamental insights from textbooks or scripts without reference. Apart from that, reference should be made to all original thoughts by others you make use of. If you cite an idea or result, you should refer to the source that has first stated it.
- When only citing one source, it is advisable to use the American citation mode: Just mention the name, the year and (only if necessary) the page of the source. This avoids a lot of messy footnotes. For example:

Another approach is discussed by Miller (2000). He states that...

- When the cited source was composed by more than two authors, their names can be shortened to the first author's name by using the abbreviation "et al." ("and others"). For example:

An alternative is proposed by Boadway et al. (1998). The authors argue that...

- Use footnotes only if necessary. They can be used to mention things which are relevant, but not key for following the main text.
- **Figures and tables** and all of its elements have to be explained in the text. The same is necessary for formal expressions, including all formal notation.

## 5. Handing in your thesis

Make sure that you do not miss the deadline for submitting your thesis. Late submission might result in your thesis being rejected.

The seminar paper has to be submitted electronically and in hard-copy.

- Submit your thesis electronically via email as a Word- or TEX-document and additionally as a PDF-document. Hand in your thesis as one document – including front page, table of contents, appendix etc.
- In addition, we ask you to hand in two hard copies of your thesis. **Please do not staple the sheets of paper – just hand in the printed pages as they are.** Your supervisor will return one of the hard copies with annotations once she has read your thesis.

## Appendix A: Sample for front page

### Title of work

Seminar thesis in <module name>

Under the supervision of  
Prof. Dr. Johannes Rincke  
Chair of Economic Policy  
School of Business and Economics  
University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

Nuremberg, <date>

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## Appendix B: Acknowledgement of standards and rules of scientific work

You are asked to confirm on the final page of your thesis with your signature that you are aware of the rules of good scientific conduct, and that your thesis confirms to those rules in all respects. Use the following sample:

### Acknowledgement of standards and rules of good scientific conduct

I hereby confirm that this thesis was written by me without external help and without the use of other than the listed sources. All parts of the thesis using original work by others are marked as such and state the respective sources.

Nuremberg, <date>

SIGNATURE