



Guidelines on Seminar Papers (long papers)

1. Preliminary Remarks

There is no single format for seminar papers in the Masters' program African Studies at the University of Basel since the interdisciplinary program combines courses and faculty from various disciplines from the Social Sciences and the Arts to Environmental Sciences and Health. The following guidelines are based on the Social Sciences, which make up the majority of courses in the program. The various subject areas have specific expectations documented in the respective manuals (e.g. toolkit of the Department of History). Please check with your supervisor which style to apply.

Writing a term paper within the framework of a seminar is about independently addressing and presenting a scientific research question. This encompasses the following elements: (a) identifying a suitable topic and formulating a research question, (b) researching the topic making use of the relevant literature, (c) establishing an argument and (d) breaking it down into adequate steps of argumentation and relating them back to the overall context, and (e) presenting the argument and result in an adequate written form.

Any written assignment requires (1) the presentation and explanation of concepts and theories, (2) the application and/or comparison of these concepts and theories by establishing a hypothesis (or several hypotheses), (3) the application of a suitable method established in the subject area for discussing and testing the hypothesis (4) linking the results to theory and thereby evaluating the said theory. The assessor of the paper evaluates whether the work is convincing with regard to all four points listed above.

Please remember that the first impression irrespective of the quality of the content is visual and that a clean presentation both in style and language allows the assessor to focus on the quality of content.

2. Scope, form and style

Length: As a rule, a seminar paper is of 20–25 pages' length (main body including footnotes but without bibliography). This results in a word count of 8000–10 000. The expectations of assessors may vary – please check when discussing the prospective assignment with the member of faculty.

Scope: A seminar paper should be based on at least 10 distinct academic texts. If the paper is based on an empirical study of your own or if it discusses one particular source, fewer references might be acceptable.

Formatting: We recommend to use the standard **styles** (Absatzformatvorlagen) provided by your word processor (headings 1–4, etc) which allow for an automated table of contents, figures and the like. Avoid empty breaks but insert page breaks instead.

Page layout: The margins should be no less than 2.5cm and the spacing between lines 1.5 in order to allow for annotations. Please insert page numbers.

References (see below): all works quoted directly or indirectly or simply referred to must be properly referenced using one specific style guide consistently (Harvard, Chicago, or MLA depending on the subject area and/or personal preferences).



Language: Whether you write in English, German or French – It is expected that your seminar paper is flawless not only on the level of content and style but also on the level of language. Please make sure to proof read your paper thoroughly and let it cross-check by peers.

3. Referencing

Scientific work implies that any reader can verify the statements made. Therefore, the thoughts and ideas of others – whether included in the paper as direct or indirect quotations – must be identified by a reference. If you include or mention statements and arguments from the existing literature (books, journals, newspapers, internet etc.), you must refer to the author by way of a proper reference, otherwise they are considered plagiarism.

It is key that all references and the bibliography are consistently in one single style (Harvard, Chicago, MLA, ...) depending on the disciplinary orientation of your paper.

Before submitting your paper please do a self-check with Turnitin:

<https://ub-easyweb.ub.unibas.ch/en/plagiarism/>

4. Statement on Scientific Integrity

Lecturers are obliged to report plagiarism to the Dean of Studies. In the case of a seminar paper, plagiarism results in the following sanctions:

- Will be marked with the grade 1 (complete failure/ totally unacceptable)
- The paper may not be re-written in the framework of the same course, i.e. the student has to do a fresh attempt in the framework of a different seminar.
- In the case of repeated plagiarism the student will be suspended (exmatriculated) from the University of Basel for the duration of one or more semesters.

Your seminar paper must be accompanied by a plagiarism statement in which you confirm that you duly referenced all sources used and that the work is your own. A template in German language is available for download on the website of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science:

<https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/studierende/plagiat/>

The wording in English is as follows:

I hereby confirm that I have taken note of the regulation on scientific integrity contained in the "Ordnung der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Basel für das Masterstudium vom 25. Oktober 2018" (§25) and that I have observed the rules of scientific integrity. Furthermore, the present paper has not been submitted, neither in whole nor in part, to another faculty or university for review and/or has not yet been recorded as a course achievement, e.g. in the form of credit points.

[Followed by title of paper, name of author, date and signature]



5. Structure

As a rule, a seminar paper consists of the following elements:

- Title page: title, course (with course number, course convenor and semester), date of submission, name of the student, student number and email-address
- Table of contents with page numbers
- Introduction: research question, argument, choice of method, structure of paper, review of the literature
- Main body: addressing the research question (70–80% of the paper)
- Conclusion: summarize how you addressed your research question and present the results of the discussion in the main part, present your conclusion
- Bibliography: lists all works used in writing the paper
- Appendix (if applicable)
- Plagiarism statement (see 4)

6. Submission

Please submit your seminar paper by email both as PDF and Word document.

7. Further information

Our mandatory course **Academic Skills in African Studies**, which is offered each autumn semester, offers a systematic introduction to writing papers. The Language Center of the University of Basel also offers specific courses (both language and writing).

We highly recommend the Online Writing Lab of Purdue University, which addresses all issues related to writing and offers quick access to style manuals and the like.

Harvard Referencing Guide

www.ukessays.com/referencing/harvard/

The Chicago Manual of Style

www.chicagomanualofstyle.org

The MLA Style Center – Writing Resources from the Modern Language Association

<https://style.mla.org>

Style Guide of the American Psychological Association (APA)

www.apastyle.org

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