

February 2022

Political science, University of Basel

Seminar papers information sheet¹

1. Preliminary remarks

The goal of written assignments produced for seminar courses is to work independently on a scientific question and present this work. This involves: identifying a suitable research question and developing the topic using relevant literature; breaking the argumentation down into separate stages; placing these arguments within a broader context; and presenting the work in a suitable written format.

All written work requires: (1) the presentation and clarification of scientific concepts and theories (and ideally the development of one's own theoretical arguments); (2) the use and / or comparison of these concepts and theories through one (or several) hypothesis (es) derived from these; (3) the contextualisation and evaluation of the hypothesis using a suitable method from political science; (4) the tying in of the results with the theory, thereby assessing the theoretical considerations of the paper. All stages of the research (including empirical analysis) must be transparent and presented so as to be reproducible.

The following provides information regarding the **formal** framework of the seminar paper.

2. Length and layout

The length of a bachelor's course seminar paper is 6000 to 8000 words, including footnotes, but excluding the bibliography (16 to 20 pages). The length of a master's course seminar paper is 8000 to 10,000 words, including footnotes, but excluding the bibliography (20 to 25 pages). These specifications can vary between seminar courses, and should be discussed with the respective course leader. Word counts are directly visible in Word in the status bar, or by clicking on the "Review" tab, and then "Word count" under the "Proofreading" section. In OpenOffice.org, the word count can be accessed under "Tools" → "Word Count". If appendices are present, they are not included as part of the word count.

Bachelor's seminar papers should make use of at least five different sources (preferably more), and master's seminar papers at least ten different sources (preferably more). These sources must be scientific texts.

The papers should be written using standard fonts (like Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, etc.) and the font size should be appropriate (11 or 12pt). There should be sufficient margins left, right and at the top of the document to allow feedback comments. Line spacing should be at least 1.5. Footnote fonts should be a little smaller than the font of the main text (9 or 10pt). Footnotes should be consecutively numbered. Pages should be numbered either at the top or the bottom, and multi-line headers should not be used.

Students should pay due attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar.

¹ The translation of this document is unauthorized and can therefore not be referred on.

3. Structuring a seminar paper

The document should feature the following:

- Title page: title of the paper, corresponding course, word count, instructor, semester, hand-in date, name, address, matriculation number and email address of the author.
- Contents page: with page numbers.
- Introduction: brief presentation of the primary research question, explanation and justification for the approach used, brief mention of the current state of the research, a brief preliminary presentation of the results (length: approx. 10% of the total text).
- Main body: engagement with the research question: theory (including a discussion of the literature), hypotheses, analysis, presentation and discussion of the results (length: approx. 80% of the total text).
- Conclusion: brief overview of the work and findings (length approx. 10% of the total text).
- Bibliography: list of the literature used for the work.
- Appendices (if used): description of the data, descriptive analyses, additional analyses (e.g. robustness checks), R-Code (copied from R).
- Plagiarism declaration: this can be found here: <https://philhist.unibas.ch/studium/plagiat/>

4. Figures and tables

All figures and tables must be consecutively numbered and must have a brief but informative title.

Reference should be made to these figures in the main text, for example with phrases like: *as figure 5 shows...* Generally speaking, tables and figures should be comprehensible without the reader having to refer to the text, and the text should be comprehensible without the reader needed to consult the figures.

Only in exceptional circumstances can tables and figures be copied from other texts. If figures are taken from elsewhere, the source (including the page number) must be clearly indicated.

Tables containing regression analysis results (or other analyses) must not be copied directly out of the statistics programmes used (do not paste R output as an image into the text). Good examples of correctly presented regression tables can be found in peer reviewed journals (ex. American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics, European Journal of Political Science).

5. Citing sources correctly

A key characteristic of scientific work is that all statements and claims made are verifiable. This means that the thoughts of others must be clearly indicated as such - either as direct or indirect citations. When statements and arguments from the literature (books, journals, newspapers, internet sources etc.) are used, their authors must be clearly referenced. Not doing this is considered **plagiarism**. Translating entire sentences or paragraphs directly from, for example, an English language text (without citing) is also considered plagiarism. Essentially, the text must be written in the author's own words. A plagiarism declaration should be downloaded and submitted alongside every seminar paper (found here: <https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/studierende/plagiat/>).

The Harvard referencing system must be used for political science seminar courses. Here references must be located in an appropriate position in the text, often just before the end of a sentence, or at the beginning or end of a paragraph. The reference should be placed in brackets and should indicate the author, year of publication and page number. This is how one page should be referenced: (Bahrtdt 1984, 29); for two pages: (Bahrtdt 1984, 25-26) or (Bahrtdt 1984, 25f.); if several pages are referenced: (Bahrtdt 1984, 25-35) or (Bahrtdt 1984, 25ff.). **It is important that the sources and literature used are**

referenced in a consistent manner, and that references allow the cited texts to be reliably found.

Citation can be carried out by paraphrasing, where the thoughts of another author are presented in the seminar paper author's own words. Such paraphrasing requires the texts read to be cognitively processed to a high level of understanding. If you wish to emphasise the authorship of a citation, the following phrasing can be used: *according to Martinez (1971, 23-25) a party consists of...*; or *as Martinez (1971, 23-25) states...*

If you are referencing a core concept of a book or article, it is sufficient to indicate just the publication date (Martinez 1971). When referencing multiple authors: (Bahrtdt 1984; Martinez 1971).

Whole sentences, or several sentences should only be directly quoted word for word if they are concise and relevant to your own text. They must be quoted exactly, with each character being identical to the original. Any omissions or remarks added must be clearly indicated. Source references must be positioned after the last character of the quote and **before the full stop** of the encompassing sentence. Longer quotes should be presented as block text. For example:

Bailer et al. note about the motivation of politicians to represent disadvantaged groups:

"[W]e argue that these representational efforts become weaker over time because MPs must eventually choose between group representation and their individual career paths. Representing interests of the group MPs belong to bestows credibility when they have hardly any legislative track record and few opportunities to demonstrate their expertise" (Bailer et al. 2021, 2).

If possible, quotes should be integrated smoothly into your own text as in the following: *Lowery and Gray (1995, 1-2) term the size and number of interest groups that focus on a specific topic as the "population ecology of interest groups"*.

6. Bibliographical references

All the literature used must be listed in a bibliography. There are a variety of different styles of bibliography. The style found below (American Political Science Association) is recommended.

The most important point is that all necessary information about the publications used is provided and that the bibliography **is consistent** in style. The bibliography lists **all the texts that have been cited** in the main work, and only these.

The authors are listed in alphabetical order. If there is more than one work by the same author, the works should be ordered chronologically according to their year of publication. If several publications are from the same year, the works are differentiated by adding a, b, c, etc. after the year of publication: for example, Luhmann (2008a) and Luhmann (2008b). **It is essential that in-text references exactly match those found in the bibliography.** When compiling a bibliography, it is important that all the information included fulfills a specific purpose. This means working in a thorough manner and checking every single reference - this also constitutes a key part of writing a seminar paper.

Monographs

Single author

Nielinger, Olaf. 1998. *Demokratie und Good Governance in Afrika: Internationale Demokratisierungshilfe als neues entwicklungspolitisches Paradigma?* Hamburg: Lit-Verlag.

Two authors

Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet Corbin. 1990. *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

If there are more than two authors, it is possible to refer to them using the expression "et al." (abbreviation for the Latin term "and others"). It is common, however, to only use this when referencing more than three authors.

Journal articles

Dür, Andreas, and Gemma Mateo. 2013. "Gaining access or going public? Interest group strategies in five European countries." *European Journal of Political Research* 52(5): 660–86.

Articles or chapters in edited volumes

Gerring, John. 2008. "Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, eds. M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 645-84.

In the case of reprints, it can be useful to indicate the original date of publication, or the number of the edition.

In all cases, it is advisable to use a referencing software (ex. Endnote, Citavi, Zotero, etc.), which will help you to quickly adjust the style of the bibliography as and when it is needed.

Internet sources

When citing internet sources, particular care must be taken, as these sources present more problems than traditionally printed texts. On the one hand, in contrast to printed media, the contents of webpages can be changed at any time.

Furthermore, long-term access to internet sites cannot be guaranteed. For this reason, both the URL and the date the site was last accessed must always be given.

Ross, Alex. 2016. The Frankfurt School knew Trump was coming, *The New Yorker* (5th December 2016), available at https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming?mbid=social_facebook (accessed on 12th December 2017).

7. Further literature

Brink, Alfred. 2005. *Anfertigung wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten: Ein prozessorientierter Leitfaden zur Erstellung von Bachelor-, Master- und Diplomarbeiten in acht Lerneinheiten*, 2. überarbeitete Auflage. München: Oldenbourg.

Eco, Umberto. 2015. *How to write a thesis*. MIT Press.

Krämer, Walter. 1999. *Wie schreibe ich eine Seminar- oder Examensarbeit*. Frankfurt/M: Campus.

Plümper, Thomas. 2012. *Effizient Schreiben*. 3. Auflage München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag. Online: https://www.degruyter.com/view/title/317029?tab_body=toc

Powner, Leanne C. 2015. *A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Los Angeles: Sage/CQ Press.

Evaluation criteria for seminar papers

In order for the seminar paper to be graded, the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- You have met your instructor during an office hour to discuss the research design of the seminar paper.
- The seminar paper has a clear structure and contains the following sections: title page, introduction, theoretical section (including a presentation of the argumentation and / or hypotheses), empirical section (including a discussion of the argumentation and / or hypotheses), conclusion, bibliography and plagiarism declaration.
- Citation style should be that stipulated by the political sciences information sheet for seminar papers. Sources for citations and paraphrasing must be indicated.
- A seminar paper must be 6000-8000 words long for BA programmes, and 8000-10,000 words for MA programmes, excluding bibliographies, but including footnotes.
- Seminar papers must be written in grammatically accurate German or English.

The criteria listed below can be used as a checklist for the seminar paper, and should help students to write a high-quality assignment. The requirements listed below may vary dependent on whether a quantitative or qualitative research approach has been chosen for the seminar paper. Seminar papers are assessed according to the following criteria. Please note, however, that the following criteria constitute general guidelines only. Students should always ensure that they clarify requirements specific to their work with the relevant instructor.

Seminar paper topic and research questioning		+	-	(missing or insufficient)	Comments
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The theoretical and empirical relevance of the topic and the research question is explained. The contribution of the paper to the body of literature is discussed. 				
Research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear research question has been formulated. 				
Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current state of the literature on the selected topic and research question is presented in the seminar paper. The literature review cites at least five research articles which have been published during the last ten years <u>in peer-reviewed international science journals.</u> The review includes the most important contributions in the literature on the topic. 				

Theory		+ (present)	- (missing or insufficient)	Comments
Choice of theory(ies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The chosen theories, or the students own theoretical arguments, are appropriate for addressing the research question (ex. suitable level of analysis has been adopted) 			
Theory(ies) overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most important assumptions and statements of the theory(ies) are presented and discussed critically. If the assignment makes use of existing theory: what are the strengths and weaknesses of the theory(ies) employed? 			
Arguments and hypotheses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argumentation and hypotheses are derived from theory <u>The arguments and hypotheses offer answers to the seminar paper research question.</u> A seminar paper can also employ theory to answer a research question using a specific approach, instead of using the theory to derive a hypothesis. In this case, the paper should explain how the theoretical approach has been used. 			

Assumptions and definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical assumptions or assumptions made as part of the chosen approach have been presented. • Important terms have been defined 			
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Research design		+ (present)	- (missing or insufficient)	Comments
Case selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case selection has been logically justified • <u>The case selected is appropriate for addressing the research question</u> • If the study uses one (or more) qualitative case study(ies), the implications and the relevance of the case study(ies)s are examined and discussed. 			
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The method applied is discussed and an explanation is provided as to <u>why the chosen method is useful for addressing the research question</u> 			

Operationalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an empirical analysis is carried out, explanations are provided of how the variables of the hypotheses are operationalised • The sources of the datasets used are briefly discussed • If the work addresses its research question using qualitative methods, the approach, terminology, sources and data are examined and discussed. 			
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Empirical Analysis		+ (present)	- (missing or insufficient)	Comments
Quality of the empirical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The empirical analysis is built on a systematic approach 			
Presentation of the results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results are presented in a reader-friendly manner using tables and graphs. • In the case of qualitative studies where visuals are unsuitable, particular attention has been paid to good text structure and well-developed argumentation. 			

<p>Discussion of the results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The results are discussed in relation to the arguments and hypotheses presented at the beginning of the work.</u> • Discussion section clarifies which arguments and hypotheses can be confirmed or rejected. • In the case of qualitative works, where hypotheses are not tested in the strict sense of the word, the empirical analysis serves to answer the research question, for example by employing a theoretical approach or examining a case study. 			
<p>Conclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conclusion provides an <u>overview of the core findings, answers the research question</u> and suggests further future research steps. • The key findings are discussed in the light of the current literature: i.e., what further insights has the work contributed? • The implications of the work, including data or case-study limitations are discussed, as well as possible aspects of the problem which have been neglected. 			