



**INTERNATIONAL  
MANAGEMENT**



**FRIEDRICH-ALEXANDER  
UNIVERSITY OF  
ERLANGEN-NÜRNBERG**

**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS,  
ECONOMICS AND SOCIETY**

**Guidelines on Writing  
Essays, Bachelor and Master Theses**

**at the  
Department of International Management**

**February 2021**



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## **1. Procedure of writing academic papers**

It is not possible to write an academic paper without basic methodological knowledge and the knowledge of the assessment criteria. Although the content of an academic paper is of primary importance, formal and methodological criteria have to be met as well. These guidelines disclose the main requirements. For more detailed information please refer to the literature mentioned at the end. Especially when writing master theses the knowledge of this literature is crucial.

The general procedure of writing an academic paper is similar for bachelor and master theses. A list of topics and the dates of the assignment are announced regularly on the department's webpage. At first, the student has to choose one of the topics and coordinate any further action with the corresponding advisor. After the topic assignment has taken place, the student has to submit a proposal to the advisor, consisting of 1-2 pages in the case of bachelor theses and 3-5 pages in the case of master theses. The proposal should outline the research question(s), objective(s), structure, planned methodology and expected contribution to knowledge. This orientation phase is supposed to be completed within one month for master theses and within two weeks for bachelor theses. Afterwards the department will register the thesis at the examinations office. If any questions come up during the writing of the thesis it is recommended to contact the advisor, especially if these questions cover fundamental aspects of methodology and content.

Authors of essays, bachelor and master theses should regularly reflect on the paper and check whether it meets the assessment criteria listed in the following section. If, due to certain reasons, a student is not able to take these criteria into account the advisor should be contacted.

## **2. Assessment criteria of academic papers**

The evaluation of essays as well as bachelor and master theses is based on several assessment criteria. These criteria and their weighting can be found in the following table. This form will also be used for the evaluation of the papers. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that one should stick close to the evaluation form and to consider the assessment criteria carefully.



**Evaluation of essays, bachelor and master theses**

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1. Research question and objective</b>	20%		
- Practical relevance - Theoretical relevance - Topicality - Appropriateness/clarity of objective			
<b>2. Structure</b>	10%		
- Systematics - Balance between chapters			
<b>3. Content</b>	25%		
- Range - Depth - Reference to objective - Consistency of argumentation - Originality - Contribution to knowledge			
<b>4. Methodology</b>	20%		
- Appropriateness - Transparency - Analytical Rigor - Quality (Representativeness, Validity, Reliability)			
<b>5. Literature analysis</b>	15%		
- Specificity (Quality) - Topicality - Critical reflection of references - Depth of analysis - Transparency of references			
<b>6. Form and style</b>	10%		
- Comprehensibility - Precision - Illustration through figures and tables - Correctness - Appearance - Uniformity (APA Guide)			
<b>Weighted average</b>	100%		
<b>Total grade</b>			



When assessing an essay, a bachelor and master thesis, the first question that arises is whether the author has managed to elaborate a convincing and illustrative **research question** (why does he deal with this topic?). In this context two criteria are of major importance, namely the *relevance* and the *topicality* of the subject. In regard to relevance one can distinguish between *practical* and *theoretical* relevance. A research question is of high theoretical relevance if the author proves that the problem has not or only rarely been addressed in previous studies or that it is discussed very controversially. This is often the case when current developments challenge central assumptions of theories. The practical relevance of a problem is generally high if new implications for the management can be derived from its solution.

After the research question has been elaborated, the **objective** of the paper has to be defined (which problem shall be solved in the paper?), which again can consist of a theoretical and a practical component. Generally one can distinguish between *descriptive*, *analytical*, *prescriptive* and *normative objectives*, whereas a descriptive objective is usually not demanding enough for an academic paper. In the case of normative objectives, one has to make sure that the recommendations are based on a solid analysis with meaningful efficiency criteria and not only on the description of the phenomenon. In most cases academic papers are based on analytical objectives and e.g. the influence of several independent on one or more dependent variables is analyzed. In master theses potential effects are often analyzed as well.

For the table of contents, the argumentation and the choice of adequate research methods, it is very useful to have the formal character of the objective in mind as well as to explicitly illustrate and explain it. The precise phrasing of the objective is of major importance and it serves as a “yardstick” for the evaluation of the content of the paper. A common mistake is to choose a too demanding objective (e.g. “a general and encompassing model shall be derived”), which cannot be fulfilled in the given period of time. Often the objective is phrased so generally and vaguely, that at the end of the paper one cannot judge whether the objective has been achieved (e.g. “foreign direct investment in India shall be analyzed”). Many authors lose sight of the objective they stated in the beginning of their paper and in the end provide an answer that does not match the question raised in the beginning. It is highly emphasized that a statement such as e.g. “the objective lies in displaying the existing



approaches” does not stand for a proper objective, as its generalized wording does not imply a research question and therefore no knowledge progress can be expected (the systematic presentation of existing approaches relating to a certain topic can, however, be a reasonable objective if the author proves that such does not yet exist and that relevant approaches have not yet been presented, analyzed or compared with each other).

The **table of contents** derived from the research question and objective should be balanced and systematic. The individual chapters have to exclude each other logically (mutual exclusiveness) and cover the entire superior segment (collective exhaustiveness) (*MECE principle*). The table of contents and structure of the paper should not only be presented, but it should also be justified why the chapters are relevant to answer the research question and how they are related to each other.

Regarding **content**, the **discussion** on the research question which in most cases is the most extensive part of the thesis, is especially assessed in terms of its relevance to the solution of the objective, as well as its theoretical range (are all relevant aspects mentioned?) and depth (does the author make operational, that is, measurable and verifiable statements?). Other criteria are the consistency (is the line of thought structured clearly or are there many gaps and repetitions?) and originality of the argumentation (does the writer reveal new and surprising findings or are largely known facts simply repeated?). The last criterion is especially important if the topic has already been dealt with in literature often and extensively.

The evaluation of the discussion tends to be particularly positive if the writer uses a solid **theoretical concept** (e.g. transaction cost theory, learning theory, motivational theory) which is followed consequently and on which the discussion is based upon. In a strict sense, the term “theoretical” has to be understood as a systematic reduction of complexity. Especially regarding papers with practical reference, the term “theory part” is used frequently to exclude the empirical investigations, but basically simply describes the statements taken from literature. Another deficit that can often be seen in papers with a strong practical focus is the lack of developed theoretical concepts in the empirical investigation. Even if there are no findings on some of the theoretically developed variables, the theoretical concept should be followed by all means. A plausible evidence of missing data often does not imply a deficiency, but rather an important finding of an academic paper from which implications for future research can be derived.



Concerning empirical papers, the **depiction of the used methods of data collection, preparation and analysis** are of major importance. The author should reflect on the basic quality criteria of scientific research (validity, reliability, representativeness, etc.) and demonstrate how they were taken into consideration (analytical rigor). The approach should be comprehensible for readers. This includes interview documentation in an appendix, the explanation of codification, et al.

Besides this, it is important that the author takes a **critical stance** towards his research topic. This is especially valid for papers with practical reference. Science and practice follow different logics. “Science should collect and systemize all existing empirical practices, test them for their methodical stability and, if necessary, develop new methods, apply the logic of practitioners and its implicit assumptions on verifiable theories or create such and eventually reveal the practical significance (...). The practitioner necessarily follows a different logic of actions. He is supposed to find solutions adjusted to concrete situations while acting innovative and clever; he is much more under pressure of time and has to economically justify his actions in an area that is covered by the imperative of profit realization and protection of liquidity. An exchange, the ‘dialogue’, can be prolific for both sides, if these differing logics of action are considered and ‘consensus’ is not the primary target” (Wächter, H. (2006): Stellungnahme zur PIX-Diskussion, in: Zeitschrift für Personalforschung, 20. Jg., 2, S. 99-101).

Another important assessment criterion is the question whether the paper comes to a **comprehensible and systematically derived conclusion** which is related to the objective set in the beginning. It is not always crucial whether the objective has been solved completely or not. The greatest scientific progress comes from papers which convincingly prove that the methodology chosen after a profound analysis of existing literature is not suitable for contributing to the solution of the research question. In any case, there should be a **critical reflection** of the methodology towards the end of the paper. This may include, for example, a discussion of whether the results are robust, i.e. how much they depend on the theoretical framework or methodology used in the study, and whether the findings may be transferred to other contexts (e.g., companies, industries or countries). It is often critical, however, if at the end of the paper completely new aspects come up (“Outlook”) or recommended actions for practice are derived which mostly only are a commonplace (e.g., “Companies should check their choice of foreign markets precisely.”) or “creeds” (e.g., “the inclusion of employees in corporate-



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policy decisions is important”). This does not mean academic papers cannot give practical recommendations; the author of an essay, bachelor or master thesis should simply be aware of the fact that the derivation of well-founded scientific recommendations of action is highly demanding.

An academic paper requires an extensive and detailed **analysis of literature**. The following websites may be helpful for literature search:

- EBSCO: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com>
- Electronic journal library: <http://rzblx1.uni-regensburg.de/ezeit/search.phtml>
- Springer (via university): <http://link.springer.com/>
- OPAC: <https://www.opac.uni-erlangen.de>
- Gateway Bavaria: <https://opacplus.bib-bvb.de/>

It is essential to not only analyze general basic literature (textbooks) but also *special literature on the respective topic* (articles in professional journals and edited volumes, dissertations, et al.). A reader’s basic textbook knowledge can be assumed and therefore should not be reproduced. Other criteria are the topicality and range of used literature (analysis of foreign sources and sources of adjacent areas of science) as well as their quality. Regarding their evaluation, the Jourqual III-ranking of the “Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft”, may be helpful (<http://vhbonline.org/en/service/jourqual/vhb-jourqual-3/gesamtliste/>). It is especially important to not only cite sources, but to adapt and reflect on them critically. The knowledge and reception of publications on the particular subject written by members of the department is regarded as self-evident.

Finally, the **style of writing** is an important assessment criterion. This includes the *scientific presentation* (no journalistic jargon), the *consistent and coherent usage of essential terms*, a *clear presentation* (e.g. no nested sentences or sentences spanning multiple lines) as well as the *illustration by appropriate examples*. *Clearly arranged figures* do not only help the reader understand the line of argumentation, but – even more importantly – the author to formulate the arguments in concise and systematic way. It is particularly important, to not use any kind of discriminatory terms. An elegant and comprehensible language is often a sign for how well-read and informed the author is about the subject. As for the final editing, one should read the paper out loud and check the intonation in order to sort out unnecessary words.



### **3. Structure of academic papers**

In general, the structure, the content and the argumentation of an academic paper should be coherent. The paper should start with a meaningful introduction - comprising the practical and theoretical relevance - from which the research question, the objective of the paper and the methodology emerge. All subsequent explanations should visibly follow this structure. The chapters should not simply be titled “introduction”, “main part” or “conclusion”, but rather give a good overview of the main contents of the chapters. For example, the title of the final chapter should indicate whether the author wants to summarize the results, give an overview of the hypotheses or show up further perspectives on unsolved problems.

Especially for papers with an empirical focus the following table of contents is suitable, as most academic papers are structured in this way. The author therefore should stick to it unless otherwise agreed upon with the advisor.

- 1 Research question, objective and structure of the paper
- 2 State of research (theoretical foundations and empirical studies)
- 3 Derivation of research hypotheses
- 4 Methodology
  - 4.1 Sample: selection of respondents
  - 4.2 Methods of data collection
  - 4.3 Measures: operationalization of variables (often with reference to former studies)
  - 4.4 Methods of data processing and analysis
- 5 Findings
  - 5.1 Description
  - 5.2 Analysis and test of hypotheses
- 6 Discussion of the results
- 7 Contributions, limitations and implications
  - 7.1 Contributions to practical and theoretical knowledge
  - 7.2 Limitations: critical reflection of methodology
  - 7.3 Implications for future research

The single bullets should be listed both in the table of contents as well as in the text itself. A subchapter 1.1 has to be followed by 1.2 and so on. Normally subchapters should not be shorter than one page



as this can quickly get confusing. In that case a structure within the text using a), b), c), boxes (■) or dashes (-) should be preferred.

The pages of the editorial part have to be **numbered** consecutively in Arabic numerals; “1” has to be assigned to the first editorial page. All other pages, except from the cover sheet, are to be numbered consecutively in Roman numerals, starting with “II” on the first page of the table of contents. After the editorial part – identified with Arabic numerals – the Roman numbering has to be continued (e.g. with “III”).

#### 4. General formal requirements

- DIN A4, justification, proportional script (text: Times New Roman, titles: Arial), font size 12, line spacing: 1.5, paragraphs are to be separated by blank lines.
- Headers and footers: font size 10, single spacing
- Margins: left margin 4 cm, right margin 2 cm, upper margin 3 cm, lower margin 2 cm from the bottom of the footnotes, margin from the header to the top of the page 1 cm
- If several figures, tables or abbreviations are used, special directories are to be created. They should be placed between the table of contents and the editorial part. Well-known abbreviations (e.g., resp., etc.), that are listed in official reference books, do not have to be added to the list of abbreviations.
- A separate cover sheet is needed (cf. exemplary cover sheet in the appendix).

#### For essays

- Essays have to be stapled, perforated and handed in (without folder) before the deadline. In addition to that, the paper has to be sent to the department via e-mail as a word file.
- Length
- Seminar: 15-20 pages (if not mentioned otherwise)



### **For bachelor and master theses**

- Two bounded copies of the bachelor or master thesis have to be handed in at the examinations office before the deadline. Furthermore, a digital copy (Word file format + PDF file format) must be enclosed on a CD-ROM or USB. This should also include copies of all electronically available documents (journal articles, newspaper articles, company reports, etc.) that are cited in the thesis. If data have been collected during the writing process, the dataset has to be enclosed as an Excel or SPSS file as well.
- Material that has been collected during the course of empirical papers (questionnaires, transcribed interviews, statistical analyses, etc.) has to be summarized and handed in with the paper at the examinations office.
- If not mentioned otherwise, bachelor theses contain a maximum of 30 pages. Master theses contain a maximum of 70 pages. Deviations absolutely have to be coordinated with the advisor.
- The last, unnumbered page must contain the following assertion:

I ensure that I wrote this thesis without the help of others and without the use of other sources than mentioned. This thesis has never been submitted in the same or substantially similar version to any other examinations office. All explanations that have been adopted literally or analogously are marked as such.

Nürnberg, .....

Signature

## **5. Citation style and formal composition**

In an academic paper, all explanations that have been adopted literally or analogously have to be marked as such. If this does not happen and the writer presents the thoughts of others as his own (e.g.



adoptions from websites, books and papers, or from theses retrieved from the internet), he is committing **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is theft of intellectual property which is drastically sanctioned due to legal and ethical reasons. Experienced advisors usually recognize plagiarism at first glance and regularly use special programs designed for plagiarism checks.

Regarding **citation style** and formal composition, aside from the specifications here, the rules of the American Psychological Association (**APA rules**) are to be followed. Amongst others, the following online source can be used for further explanation: <https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/handouts-guides>. Questions regarding formal composition and citation style are generally not answered by the advisor. In cases that are not covered by the APA rules, please use a way of citing that comes closest to their philosophy.

When composing scientific papers, the use of **literature management software** is recommended. Next to efficiency, the advantage lies in not having to learn every single detail of a citation style. In fact, the APA guide is implemented automatically. The program Citavi shall be mentioned here, which is available as freeware for a capacity of up to 100 managed documents (<http://www.citavi.com>). Students at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg have the opportunity to acquire a “campus license” for Citavi, i.e. they can download it from the fauXpas server on the website of the computing center (<http://www.rrze.uni-erlangen.de>). The department cannot provide support for Citavi.

## 6. Additional literature

The following literature provides detailed and further information concerning goal-oriented working on scientific papers:

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6. ed., Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Blumberg, B., Cooper, D.R. & Schindler, P.S. (2014). *Business Research Methods*. 4th Edition, Boston, Mass. et al.: McGraw-Hill.

Eco, U. (2010). *Wie man eine wissenschaftliche Abschlussarbeit schreibt*. 13. Aufl., Stuttgart.

Huff, A.S. (2009). *Designing Research for Publication*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage



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Mohrman, S.A., Lawler, E.E. & Associates (2011). *Useful Research: Advancing Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Nicol, N. & Albrecht, R. (2010). *Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten schreiben mit Word 2010. Formvollendete und normgerechte Examens-, Diplom- und Doktorarbeiten*. 7. Aufl., München.

Stickel-Wolf, C. & Wolf, J. (2016). *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten und Lerntechniken. Erfolgreich studieren - gewusst wie*. 8. Aufl., Wiesbaden.



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## **Appendix: Exemplary cover sheets**

### **Essays**

..... (Title) .....

Essay

Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg  
School of Business, Economics and Society  
Department of International Management

Seminar: (Course title)  
(Lecturer)  
(e.g. SS 2008 or WS 2008/2009)

Author: (First name, last name)  
(Matriculation number)  
(Phone, e-mail)  
(Program, semester)

Nürnberg, (Date of submission)



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## **Bachelor and master theses**

..... (Title) .....

Bachelor and master thesis

Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg  
School of Business, Economics and Society  
Department of International Management

Professor: Prof. Dr. Dirk Holtbrügge

Advisor: (Name)

Author: (First name, last name)

(Matriculation number)

(Phone, e-mail)

(Program, semester)

Nürnberg, (Date of submission)