Guidelines for Preparing a Seminar Paper or Thesis

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Seminar Paper Submitted for the Seminar [name of seminar] on [date]

Supervisor: [name]

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List of Abbreviations

NGO   Non Governmental Organisation

…

1   Functions of a Seminar Paper

A seminar paper is the written analysis of a particular topic specified in the seminar. It has to fulfil all requirements for a scientific article: the ideal seminar paper resembles a journal article. Any research paper is a means of communication between the researcher and the academic community. Sometimes it may also address other groups such as policy makers or NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations). The fundamental goal of all research papers is to contribute to the existing body of literature in their fields.

A seminar paper is also an excellent opportunity to exercise scientific writing before writing a thesis. In order to get the maximum learning effect from this opportunity, we suggest that you contact your supervisor at least three times during preparing your paper: first, in order to fix the topic, second, if you have developed the structure of the envisaged paper and third, with a(n almost) complete version before submitting it.

2   Things to Do Before Starting to Write a Seminar Paper

- Fix a specific topic in accordance with your supervisor.

- Get a first overview of the existing literature (literature review is one of the important parts of your work for a seminar paper. Generally, this is in your own responsibility, but you may get hints from your supervisor).

- Specify the structure in accordance with your supervisor.

3   Structure and Elements of a Seminar Paper

3.1   General Approach

Any seminar paper has to include an abstract, a list of contents (including page numbers), a list of abbreviations, in case of many tables/figures a list of tables/figures and, at the end of

the paper, a list of references. Furthermore, there are at least three basic elements in a seminar paper: introduction, the body of the research, and discussion of the findings.

3.2   Introduction

The first section of the seminar paper is the introduction. The introductory section should establish the importance of the topic, define a meaningful research gap, and explain how the present paper attempts to fill the gap. The introduction should also explicitly outline the contributions of the paper. An introduction ends with explaining the organization of the rest of the paper. The key purpose of the introduction is to motivate the reader to read the rest of the paper. Examples of good introductions can be found in good journal articles.

3.3   Body of the Research

In theory, the purpose of this part is simple. It describes how the research question was answered. In practice, there are many ways to organize this part. For empirical papers, the structuring is commonly quite straightforward. First, previous literature is reviewed in detail. Second, hypotheses are developed building on the existing body of knowledge. Third, the methodology used in the hypothesis testing is described. Fourth, the results from the tests of the hypotheses are reported.

However, in seminar papers, the common approach is to write a literature review. Empirical studies are also welcome but not required. For papers focusing on literature review, there are many alternatives for structuring the body part. The topic and the selected approach largely determine the optimal structure. Please refer to relevant analogous journal articles or other research papers for identifying structures that could work in your case and agree upon a structure with your supervisor.

3.4 Discussion of the Findings and Conclusions

This section discusses the findings and their implications. The author should derive own conclusions based on the body of the research and not only repeat conclusions found in other papers. Also limitations and suggestions for future research can be discussed.

4 Guidelines for the Layout and Style of the Seminar Paper

4.1 Layout

The structure of the paper should consist of numbered headings. Text should be in 12 point font (Times New Roman), double-spaced, with single-spaced footnotes (please use footnotes, not end notes). Footnotes should be numbered consecutively and should appear on the same page. Pages should be numbered.[2] The minimum length for a seminar paper is 10 pages, the maximum 20.

All tables and figures should be numbered consecutively and have a title. The sources need to be given below the table/figure.

4.2 Style

A few notes on style:

- Always structure your work in advance.

- Know what you want to say before trying to write it.

- Each sentence must follow logically from the one before. A well written text is a "chain of ideas".

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[2] These guidelines are written in a format suitable for a seminar paper.

- While writing, keep your reader's needs in mind. This means providing a "verbal map" of your document so that your reader knows what to expect, and placing "verbal signposts" in your text to explain what is coming next.

- At the end, proof-read your work carefully and check your spelling and grammar. Ask a friend or relative to read your proposal.

- Don't use words when you are not absolutely certain of their meaning and don't use difficult words to impress your reader. Avoid repetitions.

- Choose for British English or American English language – don't mix. Some examples of differences between American English and British English are listed below (for more consult dictionaries such as http://dict.leo.org/):

Table 1: American and British English

American English	British English
favor, favorable	favour, favourable
analyze, analysis	analyse, analysis
organized	organised

Source: Own compilation.

- A good reference for matters of format, layout and style is The University of Chicago Press (2003).

5 References

5.1 General Idea

References are one of the most important parts of writing a scientific text. Anytime you take a thought from another published source, this must be referenced with the author's name and the year of publication. Full details of the publication must be given at the end of the paper in a reference list. Failure to properly referencing your text, and particularly copying text directly from internet sources, other papers or books without referencing constitutes

intellectual theft. Intellectual theft will have serious consequences which may include a non-pass grade or, in serious cases and with exam theses, exmatriculation.

5.2 References in the Text

We suggest using the "author-date system" for referencing throughout the text. References should be given as follows:

Meinheit (1995) shows that trade restrictions can be justified by economic theory as internalizing….

Or:

A second rationale for domestic mandatory animal welfare standards is that the government acts in order to implement reflective preferences of consumers, which may differ from their market preferences (Mann, 2004).

If the reference has two authors, cite like (Brennan and Lomasky, 1984).

If the reference has more than two authors, cite as (Theuvsen et al., 2005).

If there are two or more references by the same author (or by an identical group of authors) published in the same year they are distinguished by "a", "b", etc., added after the year: (Commission of the European Communities, 2006a).

Literal citations must be in citation marks and the page number(s) of the source must be added:

The WTO secretariat, in an analysis of the negotiating history, comes to the conclusion: "The negotiating history suggests that many participants were of the view that standards based inter alia on PPMs [Process or Product related Measures] unrelated to a product's characteristics

should not be considered eligible for being treated as being in conformity with the TBT Agreement" (WTO, 1995a: 2).

Also cite page numbers when you paraphrase or summarize very specific arguments or findings of authors, which may be difficult to find for the reader otherwise:

…in contrast to the hypothetical willingness to pay that is assessed in various contingent valuation analyses (Theuvsen et al., 2005: 11-12).

5.3 Reference List

In the reference list at the end of the paper, all references cited in the text are to be listed in alphabetic order. There are many options of format. If you consult the websites of scientific journals you will find that most of them have their "house style". Most important features for the reference list are

- completeness: give full details (author or authors, year of publication, title and publisher), and

- consistency (use the same approach for all publications).

For an example see the reference list at the end of this paper.

6 Presentations

Some hints for your presentations[3]:

- The maximum time for your seminar paper presentation is 20 minutes in order to have enough time for discussion. Check whether you get along with your presentation within 20 minutes before!

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[3] Part of this section is based on Lengauer (2004).

- Give an outline of your presentation in the beginning.

- It is supporting for the audience if you bring a printout of your presentation (if prepared in Power Point, you can print 6 pages on one A4 sheet).

- Select a sufficiently large font (not below 26 pt for Times New Roman).

- A matter of taste, but please: choose colours and animation judiciously and consistently. Nothing is as unnerving as a slide that looks like a box of M&Ms or a presentation which is animated as a video clip…. So, employ animations in a goal-oriented and limited fashion.

- Only write on the slide what you will actually refer to in the talk, and keep the slides isomorphic with your oral presentation. Otherwise, while you are speaking, the audience will be distracted by reading the diverging content on your slides.

- Putting complex slides up only for a few seconds and not referring to their content or mention their essential point is a bad habit that is widespread. So the rule is: If you do not talk about it, do not put it on the slide.

- Sometimes you cannot avoid using slides that are complex and of which you only address excerpts. In this case you should let the audience know that you do not expect them to understand the whole slide. Otherwise they will try to do so, be distracted and possibly miss important material. By the same token, if you include forward references in the talk, i.e., if you mention points that you explain in more detail later (or never), then you explicitly have to say so. Otherwise the audience will ponder what they should understand and what comes later or never, and again they will be distracted.

7   Hints for Searching Literature

There is a great website on this topic – we don't have to add much more here: http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/sh/29498.html.

The two key methods for searching literature are:

- Find the most relevant and important pieces of research on the topic area and track the references used in them.

- Conduct literature searches in databases (and Google…) using identified key terms.

If scanning a lot of literature, it is difficult to keep in mind what the one was about which one read two weeks ago. Therefore, it is often useful to take notes on previously read papers and summarizing the most important content, for example by creating summary tables.

8   References

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