

How to Write a Term Paper or Thesis

Format, Style, Structure and Grades

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1 Introduction

As part of your studies you will need to write term papers and a diploma/bachelor thesis. A paper¹ is a scholarly document dealing with a specific topic of scientific or practical interest. Writing a paper is challenging in multiple ways. You need to find a topic on which you will focus. You need to do some research about the latest available expert sources relevant to the topic. It is required to constructively consolidate latest findings in your own words. Finally, when writing a paper, you need to follow some standard conventions which apply to contents, structure, style, citation and formatting.

This guide mainly focuses on formal aspects of a paper. Further reading about how to prepare a thesis for academic purposes can be found in Bond (2004) or Oliver (2004). A German book to be recommended is written by Theisen (2004).

After having outlined the general purpose of a paper, this guide will show you how to start working on a paper. One bigger part deals with general formal requirements. Then standard rules will be described regarding how to refer to scholarly sources used in the paper. At the end of this guide how papers are graded will be explained. This document closes with some words about plagiarism.

This guide is meant as a recommended basis to be used by professors at our faculty as agreed in one faculty meeting. However, it is within each professor's own discretion to stipulate academic conventions and grading requirements and expectations.

2 General Purposes of a paper

Term papers and theses have two different purposes. One purpose is to demonstrate and examine a student's ability to deal with a scientific topic or problem. At the same time writing a paper is a powerful exercise in learning how to deal with a topic in a struc-

¹ In the remaining text the term "paper" is used. However, if not indicated differently this relates to both term paper and theses.

tured and constructive manner. And, you learn how to handle a given question within a limited time-frame.

The purpose of a paper itself is to provide the reader with a complete and current view on recent research and findings about a given topic. To give you an example: if your topic were “Trends in Executive Compensation in the Chemical Industry”, your paper would answer major questions around this topic referring to latest expert findings. The reader of your paper should be provided with an overview about major aspects of this topic. As a rule of thumb, you can always assume that the readers are professionals in that area but without any clue about your specific topic.

3 How to start

Before you start writing the first sentence of your paper, you have to be clear about three things: topic, structure and related sources. The topic will impact both sources and structure. In the other hand, available sources will impact your topic. In that sense, the beginning of your work will be like an adventure, where you need to explore new sources, define and redefine your topic and structure until you gain a clear enough picture of your paper. Once you have reached this phase you can now start writing the first sentence. Especially with regards to bachelor thesis and diploma thesis, this journey of finding the appropriate topic and structure could be painful. In planning your working time, it is important to recognize that the time spent defining and redefining your topic and structure is already an essential part of your entire work.

The progress of your work is not defined by the pages you have written but by your level of understanding and structural clarity.

3.1 Defining the Topic

One task is to have the topic of your paper clearly defined in your mind. Topics initially selected naturally tend to be too widely defined. For example, the topic “Employee Compensation” would be a life-long research topic for a leading researcher in that area. “Trends in Compensation” would be a topic which might be appropriate for a 5-year research project. The topic “Trends in Executive Compensation” could work for a dis-

sertation or possibly for a diploma or bachelor thesis.. For a term paper, the topic “Trends in Executive Compensation in the Chemical Industry” could be appropriate in terms of scope and depth. Therefore one major criterion for successful term papers is *focus*. You will learn while researching available sources whether your topic is appropriately focused. The definition of the topic is a task for which the supervisor’s support is especially crucial.

Additionally, the topic should be of current interest and practical relevance. For instance, topics dealing with new technologies (such as the Internet) and their impact on business are in most cases of current interest while topics dealing with scientific management (a management approach heavily discussed in the 60s) might not be sufficiently up-to-date.

Most of all, the topic must be appealing to you personally. If you don’t like your topic, you will not be able to write a good paper. The energy to sustain writing a term paper or thesis must come from your enthusiasm for and curiosity about the topic you have chosen.

Sources

Your paper must be based on latest expert sources. A term paper is not about your own ideas and opinions. A term paper rather combines latest findings constructively and analytically. Therefore you need to search for appropriate academic literature, which includes peer-reviewed journals, text-books, books and articles written by scholars in the field, and reports provided by widely-recognized expert institutions. Encyclopaedias (e.g. Wikipedia), newspaper articles, literature of popular science, other unpublished term papers are *not* appropriate sources. Examples for appropriate versus inappropriate sources are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Examples of Sources appropriate and not appropriate for scientific papers.

Appropriate Sources	Inappropriate Sources
International Journal of Human Resource Management Journal of Business Strategy Reports from the Corporate Leadership Council Reports from Allensbach Insitute	Wikipedia; Encyclopaedia Britannica Spiegel-Online VS Campus Most sources in the Internet Interview with ...

Students at the Furtwangen University are in the advantageous position of having access to the EBSCO HOST Research Database². There you will find most of the relevant sources in English about most topics. There is no excuse for not finding the right sources except in those cases, where in fact literature is rare. When searching for literature on EBSCO you should use one or two key words at the beginning. If you don't get suitable results, use different key words. At the beginning you need to learn how to search.

For articles on business management topics in German, our university also has access to the WISO Database and our librarians are here to help you. All books available in any library in Germany can also be ordered through the Library Loan service which our librarians can also show you. Thus, inability to find any literature on your topic is not acceptable and means either the students did not use all of the support provided or needs to redefine his/her topic.

A final word about researching latest findings in the Internet: *Do not google around*. It's a waste of time and it will lead to sources, which are by far not sufficiently appropriate. Most sources are expensive and hardly available for free in the World Wide Web.

² <http://search.ebscohost.com/>

3.2 Structure

When writing a thesis you *scientifically* deal with a *practical* problem. Ideally, it is a combination of both theory and practice.

Theory

In your thesis you should start with theory. Again, the reader of your work is somebody with a solid background in business lacking sufficient knowledge about your particular topic. Therefore you firstly need to lay the ground by explaining the most relevant concepts, theories and terms related to your topic based on latest expert findings. Here, you don't need to refer to the real problem (company, project etc.); you just talk theory. To give you an example: Imagine you deal with the (fictive) topic "Analysis of the Market Potential of Life Insurances in the Middle East. An Empirical Study conducted for the Allianz Group". In that case you would need to explain the following concepts in separate sections: Market Potential and how to analyse it, the nature of life insurances, relevant aspects of the Middle East economy. That's theory and you don't need to write anything special about Allianz.

Practice

After having described the theoretical foundation, you move to the practical problem, which in most cases includes firstly a description of the company, the project, business area and related circumstances and challenges. Secondly, you discuss the practical problem based on the theoretical foundation and practical findings critically and constructively. To take the example above, you could start describing Allianz as a company and its life insurance division.

If you have conducted an empirical study, you could place it in this practical part. The study itself should closely relate to the combined discussion of theory and practice. The description of the study is a separate section in your work, which includes the problem your study is about to answer, the methods used, the statistical results of your study and a discussion of the results with regards to your theoretical assumptions.

An example of a possible structure , based on the example given above is shown in Figure 1.

1.	Introduction
2.	Theory
2.1	Market Potential
2.1.1.	The Meaning of Market Potential
2.1.2.	Methods to Analyse Market Potential
2.2	Life Insurance
2.3	Middle East
2.3.1.	Economy
2.3.2.	Life Insurances at Middle East
3.	Practice
3.1	Allianz
3.1.1.	The Company Allianz
3.1.2.	The Life Insurance Division at Allianz
3.1.3.	Current Position of Allianz in the Middle East
3.2	Empirical Study
3.2.1.	Problem
3.2.2.	Methods
3.2.3.	Results
3.2.4.	Discussion
4.	Conclusion

Figure 1: Example of how a bachelor/diploma thesis could be structured.

4 Formal Requirements

Writing a paper requires a special kind of craft or trade, in which specific and professional techniques need to be applied. In the academic field it is required to follow some formal conventions, the most important of which are outlined in this section.

4.1 Major Elements of a Paper

All papers should have a formal and standardized structure. In the following all relevant elements of a paper will be briefly explained.

Title Page

The title page provides most relevant information about topic, author, date, course and university. The layout of the title page must be formal and does not need any eye-catching illustrations or fancy decoration. Please find an example at the end of this guide (see Appendix). You could use this example as a template if you wish. Do not download the HFU or Faculty of Business logos to paste on your cover page: these are registered trademarks.

Table of Contents

The table of contents provides an overview of the material being presented and its location in your paper. Included in it are the major sections of the paper. Use a separate page to show the table of contents (as you can see in this document).

Introduction

The introduction is more or less the promise you give to the reader. Firstly, it should clearly state the question, problem or issue to be considered, the limits or boundaries of the work and define important terms or concepts used.

Secondly, you need to convey why your topic is so relevant, or, in other terms, convince the reader in a few words why it is worth spending time on reading your work. An introduction to the area or field of inquiry is required in order to situate the topic and provide a brief background.

And, the introduction should briefly outline the structure of the term paper. The introduction should generally not be longer than 10% of your entire work.

Body

The main part of the paper should present your arguments in a logical sequence, supporting each with evidence. Headings are useful in emphasising the structure of the essay and in breaking up the text. In order to structure and write the body, you need to be clear about what the main elements are which you want to address. In that sense, the structure of the body must follow a kind of “story book” (see also chapter 3.2).

The body should make up two- thirds of the entire paper (excluding title page, table of contents and references)

Conclusion

A conclusion should succinctly sum up your position. It should not merely consist of a summary of your paper; rather, it should state conclusions you have drawn, based on the arguments you have assembled in the main body of the paper and, if applicable, the results of your empirical study. The conclusion should not contain any new ideas not covered in the body.

References

At the end of your paper, all the works cited are listed in full, following the citation rules given in section 5.2.

4.2 Length

The length of a paper is defined by the number of pages including the introduction, main body and conclusion without illustrations. A term paper usually consists of about 12 pages if it is written by *one* single student, while a thesis consists of about 60-80 pages.

One important word about the length: When you start working on your thesis, the number of pages to be written seems to be the major challenge (“so many pages to be written and so little time”). At the end, if you have done well, you will realize that the major challenge is to keep the thesis concise (“I have so much to say and so little space!”).

4.3 Writing Style

Your paper should be a review of relevant scholarly studies related to a practical problem. Writing for academic purposes is different from other types of writing. This kind of scholarly writing avoids personal anecdotes, flowery language, verbosity, metaphor, and literary elegance, all of which are so important to creative writing. This type of writing also dictates that you should be concise, be organized, avoid excessive use of adjectives, and use consistency in verb tense. Furthermore, you should usually use third person. Remember, your primary purpose is to inform, not to entertain.

4.4 Formatting the Paper

Present the text of your work on numbered pages beginning with 1 at the introduction and continuing, in sequence, to the last page. This document might serve as an example for all recommendations about formatting.

- Type your work using 1.5 spacing between lines.
- Use Times New Roman (or Arial). Font size should be 12 (or 10) points.
- Leave a margin of 3cm on all four sides.
- Use different styles for including headings.

- Use black print

It is strongly recommended to use style sheets offered by most text-processing software packages, at least for the headings. Style sheets help you to format your work in a consistent and efficient way. When writing a master or diploma thesis, you will be required to use style sheets.. So, if you write a term paper, take it as a kind of exercise.

4.5 Tables, Graphs and Figures

Tables, graphs, figures and illustrations can greatly enhance assignment presentation, if they are used in moderation to convey relevant and useful information. Do not use several paragraphs to explain information that could be easily conveyed in tabular or diagrammatic form. As with the written word, make sure that information presented in this manner is properly referenced. Include tables, graphs and other forms of illustration only where they serve a definite purpose. Do not try to convey too much information in any table or graph. Design of graphs and illustrations must be simple and reduced to the best possible minimum. Do not use colours or shadows. It is not even appropriate to post pictures on the title page. Try to avoid three-dimensional graphs and illustrations. Graphs do not need to be spectacular; they need to support your argumentation in a professional manner. Place them as close as possible to where they are referred to in the text.

While graphs, charts and other kinds of illustration can be referred to under the general caption of "Figures", it is customary to use the word "Table" as a caption. Headings of figures are usually placed under the illustrations, while headings of tables are positioned above (as demonstrated in this document). The correct method of introducing them into your text is to refer to the Figure or Table by number: "As Table 4 shows...." or "(See Figure 2)". An example of how illustrations can be captioned is given in Figure 2.

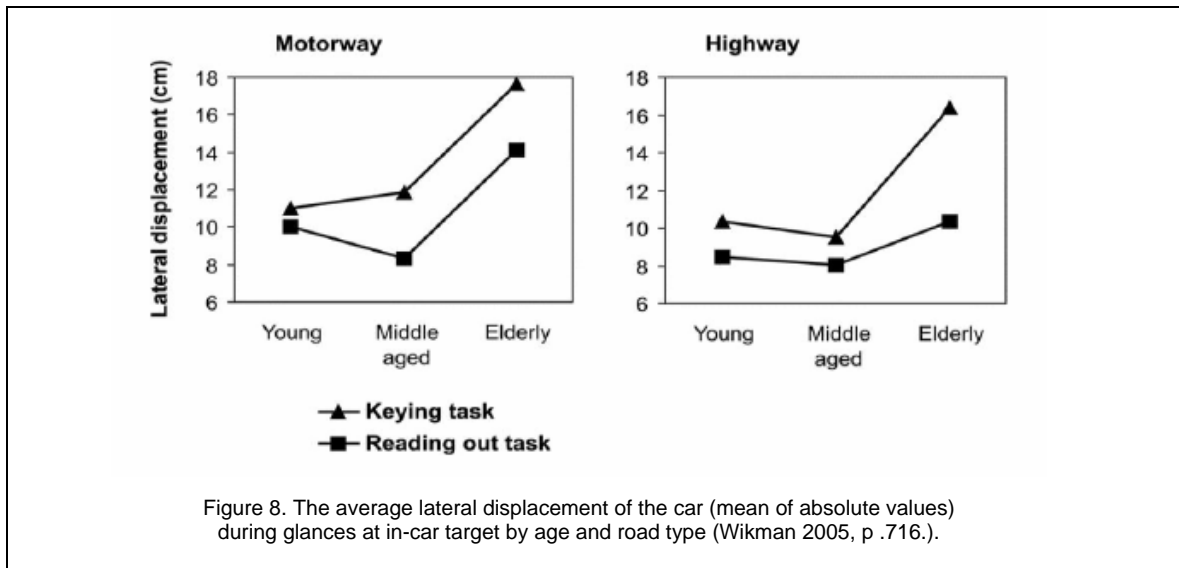


Figure 2: Example of how illustrations are captioned.

Photographs are only allowed in cases where they are absolutely essential to bring an idea across. If you post photographs, use black and white only. Do not use photographs just to decorate your term paper or to try to make it look more interesting.

If you take an illustration from a source, you have to refer to the source as you need to do with any ideas you take from other authors. If you design your illustration on your own, you do not need to indicate that explicitly. Avoid captions such as, “Source: Own Source”).

4.6 Printout and Submitting papers

Regarding term papers you can print your work on one side. It is definitely not required to put the printed paper into any kind of folder or loop-binding it. To hand your term papers over, just use a simple stamp at the bottom of the left-hand side. Plastic folder covers or binding are not required.

Bachelor and diploma thesis should be printed one-sided. Use adhesive binding, which is the most simple and cheapest way to bind books (also called “soft cover” or paperback). Use a transparency to cover the title page.

5 Referencing

All assessable work must be referenced in accordance with a recognised referencing style. The use of the Harvard Citation System is recommended. This requires the author to document the source(s) of information used in the work. When you write your paper you need to refer to the work of others to support your discussion, add credibility to your argument, show evidence of your research and acknowledge the source of ideas so that others may verify and consult the source. Referencing must be consistent throughout the piece of work, allowing the reader to easily locate the source and the reference within the body of work. Acknowledgment needs to be made regardless of whether you are using books, journals, newspapers, articles or conference abstracts. You need to reference whenever you directly quote another author, when you write their ideas in your words (paraphrasing), or when you copy graphics.

You are free to use the citation system of your choice but use only one system consistently throughout your paper. The Harvard or author-date system is widely accepted, due to its relative ease of use and accessibility.

There are two parts to correct referencing. One part is referring to work of others in the text and the second part is the list of references at the end of a piece of the term paper.

5.1 Within the Body of Text

The Harvard system is an author-date system that requires the name of the author, the year of publication and the page(s) from where you are taking the information/idea(s) to be included in the body of your work. Page numbers are only essential when citing a direct quote. However, they may also be used if the citation is long and where the page numbers may be useful. Direct quotes must be enclosed in inverted commas. For long quotes of more than thirty words do not use inverted commas but indent and use single spacing. If you are paraphrasing or stating what someone else has said in your own words, the text is not enclosed in inverted commas; however, the reference must be acknowledged. In this case, page numbers are not required, only author/s and year of publication. Use pp. to indicate more than one page and p. for one page only.

Referencing single authors

Example

When discussing experience, Fitzgerald (2002, p. 101) states 'The experience of a phenomenon itself leads to an understanding of its meaning'.

In the example above, the reference precedes the quotation, yet for reasons such as paragraph construction, continuity in presentation of ideas and style variations, you may want the reference to follow the quotation.

Example

The role experience plays in how people come to know about something is seen by some to be of central importance as 'The experience of a phenomenon itself leads to an understanding of its meaning' (Fitzgerald 2002, p. 101).

By convention the author's first name or initial is not used within the body of your writing unless you have two or more authors of different articles with the same last name.

Example

A. Pearson (2001, p. 123) differs with other writers (Pearson, E 2001, p. 456) on the experience of mother and son relationships.

When you are referencing the same author and using two or more articles published in the same year, a lower case letter is inserted after the date to differentiate between the articles, and is included in the reference list.

Example

Evans' (2003a, p. 567) paper on brandy appreciation provided insights on taste, while further work (Evans 2003b, p. 789) provided insights on costs.

Referencing work by two or three authors

When citing two or three authors of the same book or article you must, at all times, show all authors. When citing all authors in the text, the word 'and' is used, however, when the authors are cited within brackets the ampersand (&) is used. For example, ten occupational risks of theatre nurses (Borbasi & Ellison 2003, pp. 129–135) or Borbasi and Ellison (2003, pp. 129–135) state 'ten occupational risks of theatre nurses'.

Referencing work by multiple authors

When there are multiple authors, you must show all authors with the first reference, for example (Sleepy, Doc, Dopey & Sneezy 2001, pp. 207–208). For all subsequent references to the same work you can use the principal author plus the Latin abbreviation et al. (meaning 'and others') for example, (Sleepy et al. 2001, pp. 207–208). Your reference list at the end of the term paper should contain the names and initials of all authors.

Secondary source citations

When you are not citing original work but rather are relying on, say, Wiechula who quotes Foley, it is necessary for you to acknowledge both the original and secondary source. It is not generally acceptable in academic papers to go beyond secondary sources, so you need to go back to either the primary or secondary source.

Example

Wiechula (2003, p. 17) quotes Foley (2003) as saying that the incidence of violence in emergency departments '... is no higher than it was in 1990'.

OR

Example

The incidence of violence in emergency departments, according to Foley (2003, cited by Wiechula 2003, p. 17) '... is no higher than it was in 1990'.

Relying to secondary sources is appropriate only in those cases in which the primary source is rarely available.

Edited books and journals

When referring to work from edited books or journals, it is necessary to cite the author of the actual chapter/article and not the name of the editor of the book or journal. In the following example (Magarey 2002, p. 37) would appear in the body of your writing but the complete reference would appear in the reference list at the end of your essay, as the following shows:

Example

Magarey, J 2002, 'Monitoring weeds in the veggie patch', in *Clinical advances in intensive care gardening*, T. Jones (ed), Wychwood Press, Adelaide, pp. 65–83.

Referencing from the Internet

A formal system of referencing work from the Internet is still evolving. However, there are some guidelines that can be applied for referencing. You need to acknowledge the source of information and provide a mechanism for someone else to be able to locate the work.

If a document is also available from a source other than the Internet then it is to be referenced in the normal manner. So if you have accessed an online journal which is also available in paper form, then it can be referenced in the normal manner for a journal.

If you have accessed a document produced by an organisation, then the title of the document, date of production, the author if known and name of organisation is to be acknowledged. If the author is unknown, then the organisation becomes the author. If someone wishes to trace the document, the organisation will be able to provide copies.

If you have accessed a document which is only available on the Internet then you need to acknowledge author, date, title and a web site address, also quoting the time and date accessed. Internet sites are subject to revision and thus need to reflect the actual time referenced.

Example (Journal Article from the World Wide Web):

Fitzgerald, F. 2001. The GST and electronic commerce in Australia. E law 6: 6+ <http://www.Murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v6n3/fitzgerald63.txt> (accessed June 30, 2001)

Example (Newspaper Article from World Wide Web):

Megalogenis, G. 2002. Women win the jobs race. The Australian, 12 November: 13. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au> (accessed November 12, 2002)

5.2 Reference list

All the works cited are listed with the complete bibliographical information at the end of your work. A new page is required for this and it is headed References. The reference list for the Harvard system includes only those works you have cited within the body of the essay. The reference list is compiled alphabetically according to the last name of the first author(s).

It is not necessary to separate books and journals. If the work is by an organisation or company then it is listed under that name. With the exception of title of periodicals, this system uses minimal capitalisation, no full stops or spaces in people's initials and single quote marks are used for titles of chapters.

For books the format is in the following order: author's name and initial, date of publication, chapter number and title, title of book (in italics), publisher, place of publication.

For journals the format is in the following order: author's name and initial, date of publication, title of article, title of journal (in italics), then volume, issue number and pages.

Four examples follow. Note the order of appearance, use of italics or underlining, and the punctuation marks used.

Book:

Borbasi, S 2003, *The lived experience of chocolate consumption*, Haigh Press, Adelaide.

Journal article:

Ellison, L 2003, 'Computing resources in the home', *International Journal of Computer Networks*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 23–29.

Edited book:

Magarey, J 2002, 'Monitoring weeds in the vegetable patch', in *Clinical advances in intensive care gardening*, T Jones (ed), Wychwood Press, Adelaide, pp. 65–83.

Multiple author listing:

Sleepy, D, Dopey, D & Sneezy, D 2001, *Dwarf hobbies*, 2nd edn, Butterworth-Heinemann, London.

Journal Article from the World Wide Web:

Fitzgerald, F. 2001. The GST and electronic commerce in Australia. *E law* 6: 6+
<http://www.Murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v6n3/fitzgerald63.txt> (accessed June 30, 2001)

Newspaper Article from World Wide Web:

Megalogenis, G. 2002. Women win the jobs race. *The Australian*, 12 November: 13. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au> (accessed November 12, 2002)

6 Grading

Academic papers will be graded along a given grading scale ranking from 1.0 to 5.0. Your paper must at least meet a 4.0 grade to pass. The following criteria will be considered to grade papers (the criterion Method applies for thesis only):

- *Content.* The topic is clearly focused, and the question to be answered in the paper is clearly stated. There is a clear structure following a compelling logic. Basic concepts, terms and theories are reflected correctly. The contents reflect current thinking and relevance.
- *Level.* The paper demonstrated the student's deep understanding of the topic. A constructive and analytical elaboration of the topic and the sources referred to is evident. Multiple and current expert sources are referred to. The term paper adds value and copes with complexity.
- *Style.* The paper is written comprehensively. The language used is clear and supportive and follows a scholarly, systematic style, which is characterised by logic, objectivity and reasonable conclusions for a student at this point in his/her academic career.
- *Format.* Standard rules regarding format and referencing are consistently applied. The paper is professionally formatted following the academic conventions as given in this guide.
- *Method.* Appropriate scientific methods are used and applied in reasonable, constructive and correct ways to deal with the topic in question. Even if the thesis is

a theoretical work, the usage of sources and ideas are systematically combined. A clear argumentation is demonstrated.

The five criteria are used differently for term papers and theses as table 2 indicates. Methods are evaluated regarding thesis only. For theses the criteria style and format are combined.

Table 2: Criteria Usage for term paper and theses..

Term Paper	Thesis	Points
Content	Content	3
Level	Level	3
Style	Style & Format	3
Format	Method	3

Here, different professors and instructors may weight the criteria differently, or may use different ones. If the professor weights the criteria equally, according to this guide, a student could get a maximum of 3 points per criterion. 3 points reflect a perfect or nearly *perfect* match with the criterion in question. 2 points reflect a *good and solid* piece of work. If performance is still acceptable, but the paper shows obvious weaknesses regarding a criterion it will be graded with 1 point. 0 points are given, if performance on a criterion is not acceptable. In total one could achieve a maximum of 12 points. Table 3 demonstrates the relationship between points and overall grade of a term paper.

Table 3: Points and Grades

Points	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2-0
Grade	1.0	1.3	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.7	4	5.0

A term paper will not be accepted if at least one criterion is rated with zero points.

7 Plagiarism

Through the increasingly intensive student use of the Internet, plagiarism has become a serious problem, as some cases have shown in the past. It is strictly forbidden to copy and paste bigger parts of other sources into your own work without references to them. It is also not appropriate to copy and paste entire paragraphs of foreign sources of one page and more, even if you indicate the related source.

Plagiarism will be treated by the faculty in a very serious manner. By any means, plagiarism will be reported to the dean of the faculty. In extreme cases, plagiarism could lead to removal from the register of students.

For bachelor and diploma theses a signed statutory declaration is required on a separate page included in your work. You can use the following phrase:

I hereby certify this thesis is my own work and contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, in respect of any other academic award or any other degree. To the best of my knowledge all used sources, information and quotations are referenced as such.

Signed, date

8 References

Bond A 2004, *Writing a Master's Thesis: How to Plan, Draft, Develop and Publish Your Thesis*, Studymates, Abergale.

Oliver P 2004, *Writing Your Thesis*, Sage Publications, London.

Theisen MR 2004, *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten*, Vahlen, München.

9 Appendix

The following page shows a good example of a term paper title page. With regards to theses, you can leave the heading but need to indicate somewhere who has supervised your work.

International Human Resource Management
Elective Course in Winter Semester 2006/2007 at Furtwangen University
by Prof. Dr. Armin Trost

Major Trends in Executive Compensation in the Chemical Industry

Term Paper presented by

Garth McGrath

(Matriculation-# 214 711)

IBM6

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78054 Villingen-Schwenningen

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