Term paper/thesis:
Question, content, line of argumentation and structure[1]

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What is a scientific term paper?

A term paper or a thesis is an **independent** discussion of a **scientific question** (usually defined by the author).

Finding a topic

- Presentation topic as a possible starting point: Is there an interesting starting point, an unresolved question, the possibility of applying a theory to a case or testing an interesting thesis?
- Starting point: either an empirical phenomenon or an aspect of a theory or typology
- Start using a topic notebook: note interesting theses and ideas during class that could later become topics for a term paper
- Look through the bibliography for your own presentation, use the snowball principle to search for further (new) interesting articles; if necessary, ask lecturers for literature
- Read current research articles including literature reviews. Sometimes you can find suggestions for possible further research here.
- View journal tables of contents. Especially in comparative politics, approaches can often be transferred to other countries. Also possible: Look for case studies in journals to get an idea of their structure.

Research question and topic

- You can usually formulate the topic of your thesis as a question, which helps to strengthen your approach and render it more specific. E.g.: A comparison can be formulated as: “How do cases X and Y differ regarding Z?”
- Narrow down the topic, formulate the question
- Suitable are questions like: How does X work? How should a finding be classified or assessed? Why can something be observed?. Always consider the context of your thesis – is it a comparative analysis of two theories in Political Theory or an empirical analysis of a case in International Relations?
- The question must also be answered at the end!
- Important: Align the structure of the text with the question – no sections that do not contribute to answering the question

[1] *Note on the English version: This version was translated from the original using DeepL and subsequently reviewed by three independent researchers. In case of any discrepancies, the German version shall prevail.*

What makes good research question?

- Scientific relevance of the phenomenon; potential theoretical reference
- It is a question which can be approached/answered *scientifically*.
- Workability: Question is clearly posed, can be answered clearly and within the scope of the thesis (page limitation etc.), the material should also be readily available

Structure/Content outline

Introduction (thematic introduction and overview)

- Short (!) introduction to the topic
- Question, if necessary: explanation/explanation of the question
- Where suited: explain the relevance of the topic
- Outline the theoretical context used in the work
- For longer papers/theses: present the current state of research
- Provide a brief contextualisation of your methodological approach
- Explain the general structure of the work
- (mention the results of the work if necessary)
- Advice: Make sure to come back to your introduction after having finished writing your paper to doublecheck: Did you in fact cover all aspects outlined in the introduction? Alternatively, you might also consider using an "introduction in progress" based on bullet points that can be put into full sentences after having finished the conclusion of the paper.
- Should account for approximately **10%** of the work (as an orientation)

Main body

- **Objective: Examining and answering the question** posed in the introduction
    - For empirical research, a more standardized outline usually applies: The first chapter of the main part should contain **the theoretical and methodological conception** of the term paper (presentation of the theory and/or models used, classification, preparation of theses/hypotheses, operationalization if necessary; case selection). The following chapters of the main part are devoted to empirical research, in which the question is addressed based on conceptual considerations.
    - For theoretically oriented work the outline is more flexible and must be adapted to the specific question individually.
- As **rule of thumb for structuring**: avoid an overly differentiated structure (up to three levels at most), a maximum of two subdivision points per page. No 'single' headings (where there is 4.1, there must also be 4.2)
- Should account for about **70-80%** of the work

Conclusion

- **Summary of results** (based on the main body)
- **Answering the central question**: Question-answer relationship between introduction and conclusion
- Other possible aspects: interpretation of the results, evaluation of the results, outlook on empirical developments, discussion and further contextualisation of the results
- Should account for **10-20%** of the work

When producing text, please note that the paragraphs are also designed sensibly (approx. 1-4 paragraphs per page) connected to one another substantively. This applies within the paragraph and in relation to the overall text as well. Thereby, paragraphs consisting of one sentence only are to be avoided.