

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ESSAYS AND FINAL PAPERS in the American Studies division (updated: April 2025)

The following guidelines apply to term papers and final theses written in American Studies. However, be sure to check in with your instructors as they will provide more advice. Specific requirements for each course can typically be found on the syllabus.

General guidelines:

- **Term Papers:** 5000 words
- **Bachelor's Thesis:** 30–40 pages (approx. 400 words per full page); two bound copies to be left in the secretary's office or in the first and second examiners' pigeonholes on the seventh floor before the deadline, pdf-document to be sent to the first and second reader and to office@engsem.uni-hannover.de before the deadline
- **Master's Thesis:** 50–60 pages (approx. 400 words per full page); two bound copies to be left in the secretary's office or in the first and second examiners' pigeonholes on the seventh floor before the deadline, pdf-document to be sent to the first and second reader and to office@engsem.uni-hannover.de before the deadline
- All papers must be written in English

Finding a topic

Typically, your term paper topic should be relevant to the course you are taking. With a BA or an MA thesis, you are a little freer. However, you should have written a term paper in one of your advisors' classes before you write your final thesis with them. You have to choose your topic independently, both for term papers and final theses.

A term paper should be analytical. It should approach a primary text, which can be a novel, a film, a number of poems, as well as cultural texts more broadly, such as a film's online paratexts or newspaper discourse. Additionally, you need subjects, contexts and/or categories that focus your analysis. These can include historical contexts (industrialization in the 19th century, the Great Depression, etc.), literary and cultural theories (affect theory, discourse theory, feminist theories, etc.), periods (modernism, realism, etc.), genres (detective fiction, sentimental literature, etc.), or larger concepts (myths like "the American Dream," ideologies like true womanhood, or political movements like Republicanism). The concepts and categories you use should benefit the analysis of your primary text – the point of the paper is to mount a convincing analysis and interpretation (not just to reproduce secondary literature).

When preparing your paper, read (watch, listen to...) your primary texts carefully and take notes. Compile a body of secondary literature and remember to take notes, too – add references right away to avoid unintentional plagiarism. You can find secondary texts through the TIB library catalog and the hobsy (hannover-wide) library catalog, and you can use interlibrary loan (through GVK). Through the tib.eu website, you can access databases to search for journal articles – make sure to use Project MUSE, JStor, and the MLA Bibliography. You can also use scholar.google.com. Remember that you need to try out multiple keywords – research takes time! If you plan on doing your research off campus, install a VPN Client in order to ease your access to the library catalog and online databases. Be sure to consider the different registers of your sources. Depending on the topic of your paper, a blog entry or newspaper article might

have a different relevance and context than a scholarly text. If you are unsure how to engage with your sources, contact your advisor.

Outline, Style, and Formatting

Papers and final theses should be formatted according to MLA style. For detailed information on MLA style, see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01>.

A few simple exceptions apply:

- Use 1,5-line spacing
- Create a title page

Overall, your paper or thesis has to include

- A title page
- An outline
- The main text
- A bibliography/ works cited section
- A plagiarism statement

The following details should appear on the title page:

- Name, address, matriculation number, e-mail address, degree course, subject, and semester
- The exact title of the paper (choose general formulations, such as "Constructions of Gender in Susan Warner's *The Wide Wide World*")
- Title of the seminar, semester, lecturer, name of module (for seminar papers)

The contents page shows the structure of the paper, with sections and subsections, and the corresponding page number. Identical formulations should appear on the respective pages as chapter titles. The titles should give a concise indication of the gist of the respective chapter or section (e.g. 3.2. "*Huckleberry Finn* and the Tall Tale Structure").

Example of a clear structure:

1. Introduction

The introduction should explain your thesis statement and outline the structure of the following text (explain why chapters are needed). You should also briefly introduce your primary text(s) – however, do not include long summaries of primary material or authors' biographies.

2. Theory/ Method/ Context/ Categories

This is where you outline your theoretical approach or method, and/or define crucial concepts and terms, or aspects of history that are necessary for you to make your argument about the primary text in the following section.

3. Main section

In this section, you analyze your primary text (or body of texts) and formulate your argument. The analytical part is the main part of the paper, and its most important part. Like the previous section, it can be divided into subchapters. However, make sure that you follow a coherent argument at all times and refer back to the key concepts that you introduced in your previous section in order to demonstrate their relevance to your analysis.

4. Conclusion

This is where you draw final conclusions. Please do not repeat what you wrote before and do not go step by step through the entire paper summarizing every subchapter. You can point towards further areas of inquiry if you wish.

Works Cited

The works cited section typically is not numbered.

3.1 STYLE

Write mainly in short sentences with active verbs and give verbal constructions preference over noun phrases. Avoid repetition. Write clearly and make use of the special vocabulary of the academic field in which you work. To make a text coherent, it is important not to jump abruptly from one thought or topic to the next, but to link them by signposting the connections (e.g. "as a result..."; "In contrast..."). Make sure that whenever you cite or paraphrase, your text clarifies what conclusion you draw from the reference.

3.2 QUOTATIONS

Shorter quotations (up to three lines) need to be grammatically integrated into the running text – unless they are in another language, in which case they should be syntactically coherent and contained. Frame all quotations with double quotation marks. Note the difference between the German („...“) and the English ("...") norms for quotation marks. Distinguish any direct speech within the quotation (or a quote within a quote) by single quotation marks. For example: "'Cheer up, we won't bite,' their smile seemed to say" (Mansfield 39).

Longer quotations should be indented. Since this already signals quotation, double quotation marks should not be used.

Quotations must correspond exactly to the original, omissions being marked with three periods preceded and followed by a space: Brackets around ellipses are usually not needed, unless they clarify the use of omissions. Additions are marked by square brackets (e.g. "In recent years it [i.e. the Reconstruction era] has attracted the attention of critics."). Quotations should not be italicized, except for italic printing in the original (in which case you should write "emphasis in the original") or to emphasize particular words (in which case you should write "emphasis added"). When you mention books or films by title in your text, use italics (like in the works cited section).

Do not quote without first checking if it is necessary. **Paraphrasing with source reference** is often enough. When you use quotations, incorporate them into your argument with appropriate

formulations (e.g. "Miller argues that..."; "I have reservations about Morrison's argument that..."). Make sure that one quotation does not directly follow another. Show that you are **working with the quotations**. Distinguish clearly between your own thoughts and those of someone else. Even if you are indebted in a general way to a secondary source or if you express thoughts of someone else in a slightly different way, it is important to provide a source reference, such as (see Brown). Failure to do this exposes you to suspicion of **plagiarism**.

3.3 FOOTNOTES

Make sure to use the variant of **parenthetical citation** (in-text citation) that the MLA prefers. Footnotes are not used for providing bibliographical details but only to add information and explanations that would interrupt the main text or to refer to other publications of interest. Quoted or paraphrased sources are indicated by the author's name and the page reference in parentheses in the running text. If you are referring to more than one work by the same person, you should clarify which work you are referring to at any one time by means of short titles (e.g. Hutcheon *Politics*, 56).

4. Works Cited

The works cited section contains **full bibliographical details** of all works that have been referenced in the paper (be sure that you properly mention all the material that you consulted in your parenthetical quotations in the course of the paper). Ensure that the bibliographical details are equally thorough for sources that are not complete books (e.g. give the page numbers of articles). For sources from edited collections, it is important to list each separate article – the name of the volume and its editors will not be enough. The bibliography must be set out **alphabetically by authors' surnames**, which is why the surname here precedes the first name. Note that the first line of each entry should be aligned to the left, whereas each following line of the same entry is indented (hanging indentation).

The following list shows examples for compiling a bibliography for an English-language paper according to the MLA stylesheet:

- Konzett, Delia. *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Location*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. (= example for the work of an author)
- Giles, Paul. "Virtual Americas: The Internationalization of American Studies and the Ideology of Exchange." *American Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, Sept. 1998, pp. 523-47. (= example for a contribution to a journal)
- Freeman, Carol. "christmas morning i." 1968. *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, Black Classic Press, 2007, pp. 329. (= example for a poem in an anthology)
- Double Indemnity*. Directed by Billy Wilder, performances by Fred Murray, Barbara Stanwyck, Edward G. Robinson, Universal Studios, 1944. (= example for a film)
- St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*. Gale eBook, Gale Virtual Reference Library, 2003, <http://www.gale.com/gvrl>. Accessed 10 Oct 2005. (= example for an electronic medium, e.g. ebook)
- Sundquist, Eric J. "Realism and Regionalism." *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, edited by Emory Elliott, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 501-24. (= example for a contribution in a reference work)

"Treehouse of Horror." *The Simpsons*, directed by Wesley Archer, Rich Moore and David Silverman, 20th Century Fox Television, 1990. (= example for an episode in a television series)

The access date (when you consulted the source, e.g website) of electronic media and the details of the electronic publication (medium and – optional – URL) must be specified.

5. Declaration of Authenticity

Please don't forget to add our "Statement on Plagiarism and Use of AI Tools" to confirm that you have written the work yourself. Do read the statement carefully before starting to work and take it to heart – particular this section here: "*We urge our students to rely on their own research and data, and we encourage them to develop a personal writing style. The English Seminar does not approve of AI tool usage to generate the contents and arguments of student texts.*"