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GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

Institute of Strategic Management

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1. Introduction

The professional development of an academic work (seminar paper, bachelor's thesis, master's thesis) is an important part of your studies. Besides content quality also the formal layout and the citation system play a crucial role. Structure, argumentation and methodology must be comprehensible.

These guidelines inform you about the writing of a correct academic paper (seminar paper, bachelor's thesis, master's thesis) at the Institute of Strategic Management. Feedback on these guidelines is welcome in order to further develop them.

2. Theme and Objectives

The theme of the academic work can be formulated by the Institute (especially seminar papers) or can be chosen individually by the students (especially bachelor's and master's theses). In any case the theme must be stated precisely in order to define the frame and direction of your work.

The concretization of the theme is based on the formulation of one or a few objectives. Objectives determine what exactly you intend to research in your academic work. Objectives are key elements and determine direction, structure and content of the work and are also the basis for the methodological approach. It can be appropriate to specify the objectives by formulating research questions. Research questions provide specific details and support the systematic work on the theme.

The detailed specification of the theme is an often laborious but indispensable process at the beginning of your work. Problems with working on the theme particularly arise if the theme is formulated in very general way and the objectives are too complex and/or vague. It is preferable to discuss a relatively narrow theme in depth than a broad theme superficially.

Important: Objectives are to be formulated clearly, comprehensibly, and without ambiguity.

3. Structure

A clear structure is the basis of a good academic work. The structure is the "roadmap" of the academic work and it provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes of the work. For the development of the structure an extensive literature analysis in relation to the objectives is required.

It is important to reflect on the following issues:

- Which themes and sub-themes are relevant?
- Which themes have priority?
- Are there interdependencies between the themes and if so: what are these?
- Which chapters and sub-chapters result from the above?

The structure should be as meaningful as possible, consistent and plausible. The structure must reflect the contents and the priorities. In a first step it is helpful to define the main points and then the relevant sub-points. Be mindful of the logic of the structure and avoid repetitions. Headlines should be

short and concise and put the contents in a nutshell. In this context the preliminary title (subtitle) of the work can be formulated. It should be precise enough to provide a relevant orientation.

***Hint:** „Mind-Mapping" is a useful tool for structuring the topics and their sub-categories. Possible inter-dependencies can be systematized in a well arranged way. (Software is available on the internet).*

4. Sections of a Scientific Work

A scientific work, in principle, consists of the following sections (parts):

- Title page
- Signed statutory declaration (exception: seminar papers)
- Executive Summary
- Table of contents
- List of figures
- List of tables
- Abbreviations (if necessary)
- Introduction
- Main part
- Conclusions / Résumé
- List of references
- If appropriate: appendix/appendices (e.g. questionnaire, complementary materials)

4.1. Executive Summary

Short survey of the work: problem statement, objective(s), procedure, theoretical foundations, results, conclusion.

4.2. Introduction

The introduction provides an overview:

- Problem statement
  Clarification of the theme, (theoretical and practical) relevance
- Objective(s) / Research Questions
  Definition of the objective(s) of your work
- Method and procedure
  Show, with which methods you reach the objective(s). Pay attention to consistency of objectives and method. In the case of an empirical work (qualitative / quantitative surveys, case study) it is necessary to describe the research design (e.g. methods, case selection, data collection and analysis…) in detail.
- Structure and content
  Describe / explain the chapters of your work and if necessary their interrelationship. For complex themes the illustration and overview in a figure can be useful.

4.3. Main Part

Important elements are:

- Description of notions / definitions
  Define the key notions of your work in a clear and unambiguous way. If various, distinct definitions are relevant for your work (e.g. because of multiple perspectives) you have to explain these in an explicit and comprehensible way.
- Theoretical foundations – „State of the Art“
  Provide an overview of the various perceptions and findings concerning the theme. The focus must be on those themes which are crucial for attaining your objectives in the work. Your arguments must not be superficial or too shortened. They must not be a mere copying exercise from the sources you use. Be aware, that the actual “state of the art” of the scientific discussion has to be demonstrated.
- Practice oriented (empirical) work:
- ☐ Methods and empirical results
  Describe and substantiate the methodological procedure and show the empirical results of your work. Be aware, that the theoretical foundations and the empirical part have to be consistent.
- ☐ Discussion of the theoretical foundations and interpretation of the results
  Based on the empirical research meaningful conclusions have to be drawn. It must become clear on which theoretical foundations your work is based and which empirical results are derived.

4.4. Conclusion / Résumé

Summary of the most important insights / findings. Critical comments should be provided if appropriate. As the case may be an outlook on additional related themes and options of further developments could be provided.

5. Literature Search

A comprehensive and systematic literature search is indispensable for a good scientific work.

The present state of the art of the scientific discussion can be found primarily in pertinent scientific journals. Therefore, use especially on-line data banks of the University of Linz library (https://www.jku.at/en/bibliothek/bibliotheken/main-campus-library/digital-library/):

- EBSCO
- Web of Science
- WISO

Examples of relevant journals:

- Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)
- Academy of Management Review (AMR)
- Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)

- Creativity and Innovation Management
- Die Betriebswirtschaft (DBW)
- Futures
- Harvard Business Review (HBR)
- Industrial and Corporate Change
- International Journal of Innovation Management
- Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)
- Journal of Management
- Journal of Management Studies
- Journal of Product Innovation Management
- Management Science
- Managementforschung
- Organization Science
- Organization Studies
- Schmalenbach Business Review
- Schmalenbachs Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung (zfbf)
- Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal
- Strategic Management Journal
- Technological Forecasting and Social Change
- Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Studium (WiSt)
- Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft (ZfB)

Top ranked journals (A+, A, B) should be preferred (see: https://vhbonline.org/en/vhb4you/vhb-jourqual/vhb-jourqual-3/tables-for-download).

It is advisable to proceed in a systematic way and to systematize and document the contents found. It is a challenge to decide, which information and sources are deemed to be relevant for the work, and therefore should be used. The literature search, in principle, ends with the completion of your work only but is highly intensive in the first phases. It provides and determines the overall basis and orientation for your work.

Hint: *Start your search with standard literature (handbooks, course books) and on this basis, continue to search the advanced and state of the art scientific journal literature.*

6. Scientific Writing

Basic principles / rules of scientific writing are: honesty, self-reliance, objectivity, possibility of verification / validation, thoroughness (completeness) and clarity.
Be sure, that your arguments are clear and consistent.
Useful hints to support you in the systematic development of your work:

- Formulation of introductions to prepare your argumentation
- Formulation of bridge passages in order to combine arguments
- Summaries and if the case may be explanations to relate the contents to the theme and objectives of your work

Often arguments are difficult to understand because they are considered to be self-evident and are not being explained.
In theory as well as in empirical work critical reflection is of high importance. Do not use un-substantiated statements and do not formulate statements without a rationale or a factual ex-planation.

A good scientific work impresses not only by content but also by formal coherence (consistency) and linguistic style. Be aware of an understandable and precise style of writing. Avoid long and complicated sentences. Observe the rules of orthography and grammar. Do not use conversational language, poetic turns of expression, “first person account”, banalities, stagy play of words, senseless filler words.

7. Design

A usual format of the work is e.g. DIN A4, 1.5 space, Arial 11 or Times New Roman 12.

Paragraphs facilitate reading and understanding of the text. It is appropriate to separate lines of thought also visually by using paragraphs.
Meaningful figures are effective for providing overviews, interrelationships etc. Make sure that figures are clear and understandable. They have also to be explained verbally. Avoid using figures just to “fill pages”. Figures must have a title and the source must be quoted.

Carefully eliminate all orthographic, grammar and other mistakes in your work. (Proofreading is important!)

8. Citation Method

A crucial criterion for scientific writing is the clear and detailed citation of all use of intellectual property of authors. Be sure to use a consistent and uniform citation method providing the following data in the text:

- Family name of author(s) (in the case of more than two authors name the first author only and use „et al. (et alii)
- Date of publication
- Page reference
- In principle, there is to differentiate between word for word citation and analogous citation.
  - The word for word citation of a text has to be between quotation marks. No changes of the text must be made. Omissions of passages of the quoted text should be identified by using three points.
  - In the case of an analogous citation of a text passage the main arguments / thoughts are presented in your own words without using quotation marks.
- Citations in the text:
  Examples are:
  - (Lynch, 2009, 523)
  - (Welge/Al-Laham 2008, 311)
  - Johnson et al. (2014, 47) argue that ...

9. List of References

The used sources are quoted at the end of the work in a list of references in alphabetical order of the authors in a consistent format.

The „minimum musts“ are:

- Books: Family name(s) first name(s) or initials of all authors, year of publication, title of book, place of publication, possibly publisher (not compulsory).
- Scientific Journals: Family name(s) first name(s) or initials of all authors, year of publication, title of article, name of scientific journal, volume, pages of article (from-to).
- Compilations: Family name(s) first name(s) or initials of all authors, year of publication, title of contribution, editors, Family name(s) first name(s) or initials of all editors, title of compilation, place of publication, possibly publisher (not compulsory), pages of contribution (from-to).
- Internet sources: For citation of internet sources the following format should be used: Family name(s) first name(s) or initials of all authors, year, title, URL [dl: date of download].

When using and quoting electronic sources a print out of this material has to be presented at the Institute upon request.

Hint: *A professional online bibliography and citation tool simplifies citation. “Citavi” is available on the homepage of the University of Linz library.* *https://www.jku.at/en/bibliothek/find-materials/additional-tools/citavi/*

10. Grading

The following criteria are the basis for assessing and grading your scientific work:

- Executive Summary
  - ☐ Does it contain the key issues and results (conclusion) of the work?
- Problem statement, objectives, content structure
  - ☐ Is the problem statement comprehensible?
  - ☐ Are the objectives clearly defined?
  - ☐ Does the content structure correspond with title and objectives?
- Is the style of writing appropriate for a scientific work?
- Is the theme covered in a substantial (depth) and comprehensive (scope) way?
  - ☐ Theoretical part
  - ☐ Practical part (in case of an empirical study)
- Is the argumentation logical and comprehensible?
- Are the objectives attained?
- Extent and quality of used scientific literature (especially scientific journals)
- Résumé
  - ☐ Is there a clear reference to objectives, methods and results of your work?

Hint: *Secure in time feedback by your supervisor and check if you are on the right track. This can considerably contribute to the quality of your work and your grade.*