Tips for Academic Writing*

This document serves as a support for students and their advisors in the preparation of academic papers. It complements and clarifies the "Style Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers" and the "Criteria for Evaluating Academic Papers." **These tips do not claim to be exhaustive. Reading this document does not fully replace the reading of a standard book on academic writing such as Theisen, M.: Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten (available in German only).**

General hints	
Rating structure	Weaknesses in one area of an evaluation can only be compensated to a limited extent by strengths in other areas. Primary focus of the assessment is on the quality of the content, in particular "problem handling", "train of thought and own ideas" and "results". In company practice, only the result counts in the end. In science, however, the way to the result is also very important, the same as accuracy. Deficiencies in formal requirements (style, formal presentation, citations, documentation, etc.) are therefore not less important in rating. Especially in academic writing, high standards with respect to the formal evaluation criteria are to be set. Deficiencies lead directly to a more negative evaluation. Many significant formal errors in the work (e.g. fundamental deficiencies in citations or the accumulation of many formal errors) result in a "failing" grade.
Iterative process (work in loops)	All different aspects of an academic paper are ideally prepared in the form of several loops (iterative process). Each aspect gains maturity with each additional loop. It is recommended to review each chapter with a certain temporal distance in order to examine critically whether the content is really a.) relevant, b) correct, c) factual, and d.) comprehensible.

Structure	
Weighting of sections	The scope of individual chapters and subchapters must correspond to the importance of their content. Do not write a long preface while dealing with the real problem only on the last pages (see also the evaluation criterion "problem handling"). Chapters should not be too short, e.g. contain only one to two sentences or just one picture without text.
Headings	The structure of the different headings should be as similar as possible, especially when a group of headings in a chapter is concerned, for example: • Keywords, clause or interrogative form • Nouns or verbs • Singular or plural Formulate headings as short as possible, but also expressively.
Structuring system	Single subchapters are not acceptable. Either include the text directly below a main chapter heading or include at least two subchapter headings.
Introductory remarks	Short introductory remarks **can** come directly after a main chapter (e.g. Chapter 4). Alternatively, they can also form the first subchapter (e.g. Chapter 4.1 Introductory remarks).

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Page numbers	It is recommended to use Arabic numerals for the main text, and Roman numerals for the rest. The first page of the work is the title page, however, this page does not have a page number.
Table of contents	The table of contents (TOC) contains all parts of the work that follow the table of contents. All chapters and subchapters of the text part have to be incorporated in the TOC. Each part or each chapter of the work is to be listed in the TOC with the corresponding page number where it starts.
List of figures/ abbreviations/tables	If you only have a few abbreviations, diagrams or tables, the corresponding list may be omitted.

Problem handling	
Problem orientation, general	A good academic work tries to keep close to the questions posed and to focus on the key issues. The following questions should be asked during the whole editing time again and again: • Have all key concepts been explained? • Are all key aspects of the main question(s) discussed? • Are topics included which the discussion of the main problem does not require? If so, remove them! What is considered important or unimportant in academic works is subject to a certain degree of subjectivity. Using different basic knowledge for a problem would lead to different outcomes in terms of what is considered as important or unimportant. Two findings result of this fact: 1) a profound study of basic knowledge is essential, 2) science is controversial. Any ambiguity should be removed in consultation with the advisor.
Theoretical basics	Each solution to a problem should be based on solid theoretical basics. Theoretical statements need to be integrated into the development of practical recommendations. Frequently the first part of papers includes theoretical statements to which, however, no or little reference is made in the practical part. This should be avoided.

Train of thought and own ideas	
Target groups	The target group (readers) of a work should be determined and specified right at the beginning of the draft. In principle, the target reader **can** range from a fellow student to an expert in the field. The target group of an academic work are experts with corresponding knowledge in the topic area. Against this background, the author needs to decide which basic facts need to be explained and to what extent. In a Bachelor thesis, for example, a multi-page description of the net present value concept can be omitted.
Introduction (beginning of the paper)	In the introduction the author should clearly and concisely formulate the problem, the objective(s) of the work and the approach. These elements must be followed-up in a way that is clearly traceable and recognizable for the reader throughout the entire work. In order to achieve this, the author always needs to be aware of the key issues and decide according to them which aspects are relevant or not. The introduction should draw interest, explain the importance of the work and introduce the reader to the topic. Suitable introductions might include e.g. current developments and trends, a catchy example or interesting figures. Avoid trivial or general statements like "because of the ever fiercer international competition", "because of the new challenges of globalization", etc., especially without having

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	references. The introduction should get to the heart of the topic as briefly as possible, specify the problem and it should be in a reasonable proportion to the main part (not too long and not divided into too many subchapters). It should not merely be a corporate presentation without any reference to the problem, nor a promotion for the workplace training provider. The heading for the introduction should be chosen appropriately, e.g. express the problem.
Quality	A good short text is better than a bad long one. The quality of the entire work, i.e. the sum of all individual statements, is crucial. The expected number of pages is merely an aid to determine the expected scope of work (workload). Issues are often unnecessarily repeated. Unnecessary redundancies should be avoided. In many cases, cross-references help. Especially in this point, keep the target readers in mind.

Literature and references	
Literature	Academic works at Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University usually have a very practical relevance. Nevertheless, the author needs to establish a certain theoretical basis of the identified problem and its solution and therefore a minimum of literature research is indispensable. The required/expected minimum level of literature research should be explicitly specified and agreed between the advisor and the student (on the student's initiative).
Literature research (in general)	A thorough literature research starts with the relevant standard textbooks and is then focused and deepened with the objective of the work in mind. This deepening process follows the following formula: the processing of information from basic literature related to the original problem arises additional questions which themselves require more literature to be reviewed and processed. Standard textbooks should not be used without critical reflection. A "marketing mix" should be cited from a reputable marketing book (e.g. Meffert or Kottler) and not from a general introductory business administration textbook (e.g. Wöhe or Jung). Many standard textbooks contain only the didactically prepared and condensed contents of other academic works. If so required by the topic, primary sources should be used. In order to achieve the necessary depth in scientific discussion, the author of the paper should provide additional specialist literature sources (e.g. for brand management a book or an article of Esch or Elliott). The current scientific debate is primarily taking place in scientific journals.
Journals	Sometimes journals are not included in literature research, but only books and Internet sources. However, the research of relevant journals is absolutely necessary. REDI / WISO / NWB (see homepage of the DHBW Mosbach library) are tools to support literature research and the loaning of materials. Pay attention to the scope of the included professional journals in the databases. If not included, relevant journals must be researched via other means.
Internet sources	Internet sources are useful for up-to-date data and facts. However, fundamental theoretical statements should primarily be taken from classical, printed literature. It is important to assess the reliability, trueness and timeliness of Internet sources. The same as with printed publications, authors and distributors (website operators, comparable to a publisher) must also be evaluated. Term papers from university websites are not quotable. Theisen (acknowledged German professor, expert in academic writing in business administration) says about Internet sources: "The Internet is an important source of information, which - because of the information chaos mainly prevailing there – can only be of a complementary nature. ... This is because anybody can post any

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	information at his or her discretion on the Internet. Often it is not even clear who the author actually is, what were the criteria for gathering the information, how reliable it is and what interests the author/s pursue/s. In addition, Internet information may be falsified by third parties". For the search of scientific literature there are search engines like http://scholar.google.de
wikipedia.de (among others)	Open encyclopedias like www.wikipedia.de are generally interesting to get quick access to information. Contributions in these encyclopedias often even meet scientific standards. Nevertheless, Wikipedia (et al.) is not quotable because no editing or formal examinations of the entries are made by a scientific publisher.
Evidences	Statements must be sufficiently documented. In a statement like "the unemployment rate in 2002 was at 9.8%" the scientific reader would like to know where the information comes from. A statement like "Germany will maintain and increase its leading position in industry x on a global scale in the coming years" also needs a support. Besides references to experts (literature sources), which support a statement, a statement may also be based on logical reasoning (chains). A proof by literature sources indicates an appropriate literature research. A proof by logical reasoning indicates independent scientific performance. Both options are valid.
Typical referencing errors	The following typical mistakes should be avoided: - Several paragraphs or (sub) chapters have no references. It should be kept in mind: intellectual property of others as such must be indicated. - The use of one single source over several paragraphs. Personal contribution shall go beyond the scope of copying and summarizing a source. - Frequent use of only one specific, dominant source: an important aspect of academic work is to gather and critically examine information from different sources and to combine it independently and in a meaningful way. - Massive referencing errors contradict the formal and substantive requirements of academic papers and lead to a negative evaluation.

Style and formal presentation	
Importance of formal rules	In academic work, formal requirements are not an end in themselves. Their function is to support understanding, objectivity, accuracy, traceability, as well as systematics and logic. With this in mind, formal freedoms have to be filled appropriately.
Accuracy	The evaluation area "style and formal presentation" should be considered as a whole and follow the guideline: "How well does the author help the reader to understand the information." Explicitly pay attention to the accuracy provided in a paper. A bad print image can be just as disturbing for understanding as bad writing, lack of illustrations or tables (e.g. for illustration or overview purposes) or excessive spelling errors.
Uniformity	Uniformity is of highest priority in the formal field of academic work. Wording, citation/references, bullet points or structure of footnotes - once a format is chosen, it has to be strictly observed (among others for the reason of consistency).
Academic style	Academic style is factual, accurate and seeking objectivity. Nevertheless, it doesn't need to sound "overblown". The art is to express what one wants to express. And

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	this from the perspective of the reader. Colloquial expressions are to be avoided, for example: “the till rings", "temptations of software", etc. Be careful when using extreme or apodictic statements such as "enormous", "always", “never" or "all".
Trivial statements	Trivial statements should be avoided or eliminated. For example: "Firms earn money with products" (with what else?). The same applies to imputations, e.g. "as everybody knows”, “as is generally known", etc.
Illustrations, tables and references	There must be references to figures, tables and appendices in the text. This applies to both tables and figures in the main text as well as in the appendix. In many cases, the explanation of a figure or table in the text is useful or even indispensable. For example, the curve progression in a chart has to be explained. Unnecessary verbal repetitions, however, should be avoided.
Illustrations in the main text or in the appendix	Where should a figure be placed, in the text or in the appendix? In the text: if it is a key representation which is necessary for understanding or which is at least helpful and is discussed in the main text. In the appendix: if the representation is background information, generally extensive source material or a complex presentation, which were simplified in the text and explained by means of a more compact presentation and are not of crucial importance for the train of thought. The appendix is not a melting pot for all eventualities (restrict it to relevant information).
Waiving filler words	Formulations have to be optimized when finishing individual aspects. When proofreading, eliminate all words which do not necessarily contribute to understanding. Typical candidates are: "certainly", "namely," "actually", "certain"...
Forming and formatting of paragraphs	Paragraphs provide a finer structure to subchapters. New ideas or aspects require new paragraphs. For a clear form and better readability of an academic paper, use line breaks with hyphenation.
List of abbreviations	A list of abbreviations should only include those abbreviations that are not commonly used (for example "e.g." is not to be listed there).
Abbreviations	Abbreviations should only be used in justified cases (e.g. ECR). Abbreviations for the sake of convenience (for example, "HH" for households) are to be avoided.
Bibliography	Literature is to be listed in alphabetical order. Academic titles are redundant. All other bibliographic details should be listed completely and consistently.
Technique of citation	Indirect quotes in the footnote always start with "See”/”see" or “Cf.”/”cf.”. Example: [35] See Smith, P. (2002b), p. 38. Direct (literal quotes) are given in quotation marks and footnotes begin directly with the author. Example: [36] Mayer, P. (2002a), p. 24.
Placement of footnotes	Footnotes should never be used in headings. Commonly, footnotes are inserted at the end of an indirect quotation. When using several sources within one section, following the principle of traceability and verifiability, several references are required.
Titles and salutations	In academic papers, titles such as “Prof.”, “Dr.” etc. are omitted. Only last names are used, without being considered impolite, for example "Meffert, for example, stresses ..."; "Kotler, on the other hand, refers to the fact that ...“.

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Direct quotations, changes and omissions	A direct quote must be exactly reproduced from the source, in visual, verbal and written form. If for example an italicized word in the original is not reproduced in italics, it should be inserted directly after the word: [italics in original, author's note]. If a word has to be added for the purpose of understanding, the same procedure shall apply, e.g.: "It [the gross national product] increases by 0.8 percentage points."

Results	
Conclusion (end of paper)	The conclusion provides the core findings of the work. The following hints should help to write a successful final part: the introduction serves to give the reader an overview of the work. In the final part (conclusion), he expects to be informed about the results of the research process. Then the reader decides whether he wants to have more details and if so reads the parts between the beginning and the end. The conclusion may also provide an outlook, for example, name existing and remaining gaps of the problem solutions (the limits of the work). The final part is not identical to an "abstract". An abstract is a quick overview of an entire work, and is to be placed at the beginning of the work. Abstracts are usually not required at our institution. Partly they are required at foreign institutions of higher education.
Problem solutions	Problem solutions need to be detailed and specific, not abstract or vague. Solutions should be methodical and systematic. In practice-oriented academic papers this means, for example, that a problem solution must be implementable. A good or very good paper usually requires a certain degree of innovation.
Comprehension of the topic	Works that only summarize statements of other authors without any reflection cannot yield good results. Rather, the author should demonstrate by using appropriate deriving, structuring and reflecting statements that the topic has been understood and knowledge (present or gathered) has been used adequately to develop results.

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