

Guidelines for Seminar Papers and Degree Theses (Bachelor and Master Theses)

Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Chair of Marketing

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1 Application and Supervision

This guide provides basic information about preparing your seminar paper or degree thesis (bachelor/master) and establishes the rules that students must follow.

In order to submit a **seminar paper** to the Chair of Marketing, students must first apply for enrollment in the seminar. The application deadline for each semester is usually around the end of the previous semester. The seminar will be announced on the Chair's website several weeks before the application deadline. In the case that the number of applications exceeds the supervision capacity, students will be selected according to their grade point average in marketing courses. If applicable, other selection criteria – about which students will be pre-informed – may apply. After being accepted for supervision, students attend the first seminar meeting at the beginning of the semester. Each student will be assigned a topic. The allotted preparation time for the seminar paper is approximately two months. The exact submission deadline will be announced during the first seminar meeting. After the seminar paper has been handed in, it will be evaluated and in the case of a grade higher than 4.0, the student will present her/his seminar paper during a seminar meeting. If seminar participants who have agreed to write a thesis do not hand in a thesis paper, their performance will be graded with 5.0. They will not be accepted for participation in future marketing seminars, should the number of applications exceed the supervision capacity.

In order to submit a **degree thesis** to the Chair of Marketing, students must first apply to the examination board for supervision. The application deadline is March 15 for the summer semester and September 15 for the winter semester. The application form for the degree thesis can be found on the Examination Board's website. The number of theses to be supervised depends on the number of researchers and research assistants working at the Chair. In the case that the number of applications exceeds the supervision capacity, students will be selected according to their grade point average in marketing courses. In addition, the number of marketing courses that students have passed successfully will be considered: if students have passed two or more marketing courses, each additional marketing course will reduce the grade point average by 0.1 points. No other selection criteria (e.g. the duration of study) will be considered. After being accepted for supervision, students take part in a colloquium and choose a topic from a variety of thesis topics. The thesis topic will be registered at the Exams Office after a few days of consideration time. The colloquium takes place at the beginning of the semester as announced by the Chair. No alternative colloquium dates will be offered to master students. Bachelor students have the option to choose between two colloquium dates: one at the beginning of the semester and one in the middle of the semester. Students have to take care that they have fulfilled all requirements to register their thesis at the time the colloquium takes place. If they fail to do so, the supervision agreement becomes void. The thesis preparation time is determined by the respective Study Regulations and starts with the registration of the thesis. All students have to write their thesis in English. Master students have to conduct an empirical study for their thesis. **If students have been accepted for supervision and do not register or write their thesis during the respective semester, they will not be accepted for supervision in a later semester.**

2 General Information

2.1 General Requirements for Seminar Papers and Degree Theses

Students should learn how to answer a research question on their own by writing a **seminar paper**. This will be primarily achieved by evaluating relevant research literature. The aim of the seminar paper is to produce a paper that fulfills academic research criteria. By this, students will be able to prepare themselves for writing their degree theses. The overall length of the seminar paper (introduction, body, conclusion, including all tables and figures, references and the appendix) must not exceed **10 pages**. Exceeding the page limit leads to deduction of points during the evaluation. The seminar paper has to be written **in English**. After finalization, the seminar paper (incl. attachments) must be handed in per e-mail as a Word document to the Chair of Marketing.

The **master's/bachelor's thesis** is a written exam and constitutes a part of the diploma grade. Students should check the up-to-date examination regulations before they start writing their thesis. This time-restricted project must demonstrate the student's ability to work with scientific methods independently, critically evaluate scientific literature, and write in a scientific and precise fashion. The overall thesis length (introduction, body, conclusion, including all tables and figures, references and the appendix) must not exceed **40 pages** for master's theses and **20 pages** for bachelor's theses. The thesis has to be written **in English**. After finalization, bound copies of the thesis must be handed in to the Exams Office. The Word document of the thesis and required attachments must be handed in in digital form (see 4.9).

The use of **artificial intelligence** (e.g., Chat-GPT) to write a seminar or final thesis **is not allowed**.

2.2 General Characteristics of a Thesis

A seminar paper/thesis is a scientific paper. An important characteristic of a scientific paper is the **generalizability** of statements; they should not only address a specific problem in a company or a branch, but also be generalizable. In order to fulfill this requirement, the topics (to choose from) will be determined by the supervisor. Theses written in companies will not be supervised due to conflict of interests.

The main focus of the thesis/seminar paper is **scientific argumentation**. Statements except well-known and commonly accepted facts must be documented by referring to relevant literature, by presenting corresponding data or by using logical argumentation. Statements in a scientific study differ from mere suppositions, guesses etc. Hereunto, a scientific study is characterized by **a theoretical orientation and a structured, critical argumentation**. The evaluation of **sources** should meet the up-to-date and international standards.

3 Searching and Evaluating Literature

The right strategy for literature search and determining the sources of information depends on the topic. As a basic principle, **scientific journals** are the main sources of information for preparing a scientific thesis. They can be searched and accessed via electronic databases. The essential step in literature search and evaluation is assessing the **relevance**

of articles. Students do not have to read every article in detail, since the relevance of the article can already be assessed from its title, abstract, and, if applicable, introduction and conclusion. The newness and quality of an article are important. For a better understanding of the quality assessment of the journal an article is published in, students should use the VHB-JOURQUAL journal ranking.

There is no required amount regarding the number of sources that should be listed in the reference list of the seminar paper/thesis. Usually, the number of sources in a seminar paper is around 10. The number of sources in a master's thesis is rarely below 30, and does not necessarily need to exceed 50. For a bachelor's thesis, the number of sources is rarely below 20, and does not necessarily need to exceed 30. All sources must be international journals (i.e., written in English).

4 Components of the Thesis / Seminar Paper

4.1 Sections of the Manuscript

The scheme below is recommended for all theses and seminar papers.

- (1) Cover Page
- (2) Table of Contents
- (3) Introduction
- (4) Body
- (5) Conclusion
- (6) Bibliography/References
- (7) Declaration of Academic Integrity

The page count begins with the introduction and ends with the references (or the appendix, if it is included). The declaration of academic integrity is not included into the page count.

4.2 Title Page

The thesis/seminar paper template, which can be downloaded from the Chair's website, should be prepared in accordance with the above-mentioned scheme as well as the formal aspects (e.g., page margins). A template for the layout of the title page is also included.

4.3 Table of Contents/Outline

The **table of contents** is a part of the finalized version of the thesis. In the table of contents, the whole overview of the thesis is presented. All of the elements making up the text must be assigned to a numerical classification. Furthermore, each numerical classification must be paired up with a page number. The table of contents grasps the **outline** of the thesis/seminar paper. The outline should show how the topic is understood and dealt with. The outline is usually subject to change during the phases of literature search and writing the draft. It serves as a basis for discussion with the supervisor. It should reflect the logical composition of the paper and provide firsthand information about the thesis/seminar paper. A good outline should make it possible so that the whole content and the main focus of the paper are clear and can be fully grasped. In a good outline, the length and depth of the outline is balanced in harmony. The length of each section should reflect the importance of

the set of problems for the study.

4.4 Introduction

The **introduction** aims, in a concise form, to depict the background of the subject, the problem statement, the research questions, objectives and method of the thesis/seminar paper. Among other things, the following aspects should be clarified:

- What is the problem statement of the thesis or what is the aim of the study?
- Why is the topic important or relevant?
- How is the chain of argumentation constructed?

4.5 Body

With regard to the **content**, the text must be cohesive and the presented topic must be fully addressed. **Side notes** must be avoided. **Definitions** appear only in the main part (neither in the introduction nor in the conclusion). They must be chosen according to whether they are suitable and necessary. Students need to make sure that they always stick to the once formulated definitions and classifications.

4.6 Conclusion (Summary/Final Discussion)

At the end of the text, a clear and concise summary must be made. A conclusion should include the following:

- Problem statement, the explored research question(s), if applicable, hypotheses (for empirical studies)
- Research procedure, if applicable, the method used (for empirical studies)
- Important results of the thesis/seminar paper (core assumptions and conclusion), i.e., the findings of the research (for empirical studies)
- Discussion of results and critical appraisal of the subject
- Limitations of scope and open research questions

4.7 Bibliography/References

The bibliography lists the authors of references used in the text in **alphabetical** order (see Section 5.6 for more information).

4.8 Declaration of Academic Integrity (Only for Degree Theses)

The thesis ends with a signed **declaration of academic integrity** on a separate page:

Declaration of Academic Integrity	
I hereby confirm that I prepared this [bachelor's] [master's] thesis independently and on my own, by exclusive reliance on the tools and literature indicated therein. I confirm that I have not used any artificial intelligence to prepare and write this thesis/paper. The thesis has not been submitted to any other examination board.	
Frankfurt (Oder), Date	Signature

4.9 Digital Copies of the Finalized Thesis/Seminar Paper, Data and Digital Sources

To address the growing threat of (partial) plagiarism, the submitted theses/seminar papers are checked for copied passages. Therefore, the **submission of the finalized thesis/seminar paper as a Word document** is required. In empirical studies, the raw data are demanded in a valid format (e.g., SPSS, Excel) along with methodological details (e.g., questionnaire, experimental stimuli). All **online sources** used (i.e. sources that are **only** available on the Internet - which excludes almost all journal articles that are usually available in both print and online) must be documented and submitted in digital form. Please include online sources **in their entirety** as you found them upon retrieval and not just as a link. All files must be handed in as a single CD-ROM/USB-stick (not per email) together with the bound copies of the thesis to the Exams Office. As for seminar theses, the files should be forwarded by e-mail to the Chair.

5 Formatting Requirements

5.1 Layout

A thesis **template** is available for download on the website of the Chair. It has been prepared according to the following instructions. The thesis should be written with a word processing program. As **font**, a proportional font (e.g., Times New Roman) with the font size 12 pt. must be chosen. For **line spacing**, a distance of one and a half line spacing (18 pt.) must be selected. The text must be formatted using hyphenation justification. There must be a distance of two-line spacing between two new paragraphs. The titles must be written with larger line spacing proportionate to their classification level in the table of contents. A non-serif font (e.g., Arial) must be used for the figures. Except for the cover page and table of contents, all other sheets must be Arabic-numbered continuously. Each sheet must include: a left margin of at least 3 cm, a right margin of at least 2.5 cm, a top margin of at least 2.5 cm, and a bottom margin of at least 2.5 cm. The top and bottom margins might also depend on the head notes or where the page numbers are. About 33 lines with 80 keystrokes are the benchmark for the length of a page. The template has been prepared according to this page layout.

5.2 Table of Contents

The **table of contents** must follow a numerical order. There must be at least two lower order classifications under a higher order classification. An example:

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical Background and Significance of Market Research
3. Methods of Marketing Research
 - 3.1. Research Process
 - 3.2. Research Design
- ...

By means of the numerical order, one can easily interpret **cross references** within the the-

sis/seminar paper. A degree thesis/seminar paper should not include numerical classifications with more than three classification levels (e.g., 2.3.1.).

5.3 Tables and Figures

Tables and figures must be clearly labeled with regard to their **content**. Labels of tables are placed above them, whereas labels of figures are placed below them. The tables and figures must be consecutively numbered. In the text, the figures or tables must be referred to (e.g., see 'Table 3'). The figures and tables must be well readable.

5.4 Citation Technique

Correct (i.e., complete and comprehensible) citation serves as a proof of scientific work. It reflects both the honesty of the author and the ability to build arguments with appropriate sources. **Harvard referencing** must be used where the source in brackets is added to its corresponding position in the text and not in the footnotes.

5.4.1 Direct Quotations

In direct quotations, the reference is given with the quote inside quotation marks such as " (Assael 2001, p. 115). If some parts of direct quotations are excluded, these parts should be marked with rows of three full stops ("... by which attitudes [...] are affected..."). Here, as for all quotations, the original relationship must be maintained and the meaning of the quotation should not be changed. Direct quotations should be used sparingly in a scientific work. Direct quotations are most likely used for important definitions and particularly striking or brilliant formulations. A series of direct quotations will be regarded as plagiarism, as well as the use of slightly modified, but almost literally the same quotations by which the author seeks to avoid independent formulations and own argumentation.

5.4.2 Indirect Quotations

In an indirect quotation, if the source is addressed as a whole, the reference is given without page numbers. In particular, page numbers should not be indicated when working with journal articles or articles from anthologized works from which references to concrete results (e.g., empirical results) or direct quotations are not made.

However, it would be naive to believe that, similar to how Vance Packard (1966) tried to persuade in his book "The Hidden Persuaders", marketing gives the society a silver bullet.

If concrete passages (e.g., empirical figures) are addressed, the source appears at the end of the sentence as evidence of the previously made statement, with page numbers. If a source is directly (by mentioning the names of the authors) addressed, the reference can be given directly after the names of the authors.

The authors identify an effect size of 0.2 ... (Jacoby et al. 1974a, p. 15)

or

Jacoby et al. (1974a, p. 15) identify an effect size of 0.2 ...

If a source has more than two authors, the first-mentioned author should be considered. The co-authors must be mentioned in reference brackets or in the footnote by using et al. (et alii - and others). All authors must be mentioned in the bibliography.

If **more than one reference** is used for a statement, they must be in alphabetical order (Gatignon / Robertson 1985; Green / Gold 1981). When several references to the same author, or to the same author team are made, a comma must separate the publication years of the sources (Moschis / Moore 1978, 1979). If several references from the same author or from the same author team have the same publication year, distinctions between these sources must be made by assigning lowercase letters in alphabetical order which must also be used as such in the bibliography (Moore 1980a, 1980b).

Secondary quotations (“cited in”) are not admissible.

5.4.3 Citing Illustrations

If illustrations (figures and tables) from other sources are copied, the in-text citation rules apply. The source of the illustration is then indicated in the figure’s title (below the figure) or the table’s title (above the table). The illustration must be referred to in the main body of the manuscript (e.g. ‘Table 1 illustrates the revenues’).

Table 1: Development of Sales (McTable 2011, p. 312)

	1. Quarter	2. Quarter	3. Quarter	4. Quarter
East	20.4	27.4	90.0	20.4
West	30.6	38.6	34.6	31.6
North	45.9	46.9	45.0	43.9

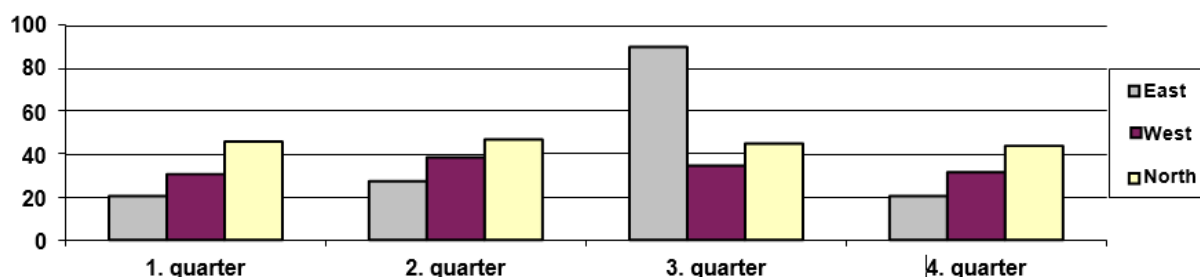


Figure 1: Sales per Quarter (McFigure 2011, p. 99)

5.5 List of References/Bibliography

In the list of references or the bibliography, **all sources cited in the text** must be indicated in **alphabetical order by the surnames of the authors**. Sources that are not referred to in the text should not be included. Specifically, the following information for the complete reference to a source is required in the bibliography:

- **Editor or author: last and first names** (must be mentioned and spelled out)
- **Publication year**
- **Title of the study or article**

- For articles from journals, the title of the journal should also be indicated.
- For articles from anthologies, the title of the anthology should be mentioned. Before the title of the anthology is mentioned, the name of the publisher followed by the note '(ed.)' for one editor or '(eds.)' for two or more editors must be written.
- **Volume, edition** (for monographs and edited volumes with multiple volumes or editions, the edition number must be mentioned starting from the second edition)
- **Place of publication** (for monographs, edited volumes, articles in edited volumes)
- **Publisher** (for monographs, edited volumes, articles in edited volumes)
- **Publication volume** (and **number** if several issues are published in a volume) **of the journal**
- **Page numbers** (for journal articles and articles in edited volumes)
- **Complete URL** and **date of retrieval** (for online sources)

The instructions mentioned above apply to all types of sources in the bibliography. In the following, examples that highlight how different types of sources are correctly indicated are provided. Some formal details, such as the use of punctuation or the use of underlining and italics, are not binding. In any case, **the formal details ultimately used in the bibliography must be consistent** (e.g., the use of upper case and lower case letters in titles must be consistent and cannot change from title to title).

Books and Writings

Blackwell, Roger D. / Miniard, Paul W. / Engel, James F. (2001), *Consumer Behavior*, 9th edition, Forth Worth et al.: Harcourt College Publishers.

Articles in Edited Volumes

Jöreskog, Karl G. (1993), Testing Structural Equation Models, in Bollen, Kenneth A. / Long, J. Scott (eds.), *Testing Structural Equation Models*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 294-316.

Articles in Journals

Mittelstaedt, John D. (2002), A Framework for Understanding the Relationships Between Religions and Markets, *Journal of Macromarketing* 22(1), 6-18.

Digital Sources

The citations of digital sources have this structure:

Author (year), Title, [type of media], Available: Site / Path / File [Date of Retrieval].

Smith, Michael (1999), *Understanding Digital Markets: Review and Assessment*, [Online], Available: <http://ecommerce.mit.edu/ERF140.pdf> [April 28, 2009].

If the author is not mentioned, the owner of the page (mentioned in the

Legal Disclosure) should be indicated. If the publications are available in digital and in conventional form, the conventional source must be cited. Online sources should be used sparingly. Most online sources (e.g. Wikipedia) are not scientific sources!

6 Some Advice for Successfully Writing a Thesis/Seminar Paper

Students should prepare a **timetable** and not postpone writing the manuscript. A common mistake is to underestimate the time required for final formatting, proofreading, and copying. Computer problems (e.g., crash, data loss) are not accepted reasons for an extension. Students should back up their files.

The reader, who the student has in mind when writing the degree thesis/seminar paper, is someone with a similar background and knowledge in the area of marketing, but has only little knowledge in the topic of the thesis/seminar paper. Therefore, students should avoid extensive comments on the content that the reader already knows (e.g. definitions of marketing) and better focus on what is new and interesting for the reader.

Here are some instructions for a good **style of language**. Note that the scientific way of writing does not refer to cumbersome and incomprehensible language.

- The first-person singular pronoun “I” and the first-person plural pronoun “we” should be avoided.
- Using filler words, empty words, trimming unnecessary verbiage, poetic words and unnecessary foreign words should be avoided. Instead, simple words should be used, while sticking to the marketing terminology. Short sentences, a compact style of expression, and a clear and exact language are mandatory.
- Chapter titles should be formulated such that they are both precise and as meaningful as possible.
- Language is an important tool in social sciences. Although being a non-native English speaker is taken into account during the evaluation of the thesis/paper, frequent grammar, spelling, sentence structure, wording, and punctuation mistakes lead to a deduction of points. Therefore, computer programs to check spelling and grammar should be used and proofreading is recommended.
- **Footnotes or endnotes** should not be used.

If an overview of various theories, models, studies, or methods is provided, they must be based on preliminary **classification criteria** that must be explained and classified, not just listed. If only a selection of relevant theories, models, studies, or methods are presented, the exact reasons to why they were selected must be explained. Hypotheses, experiences of practitioners, theoretical considerations, plausible knowledge, and empirical results are different **kinds of knowledge** on which one can build her/his argument, but need to be explained accordingly. Self-drawn conclusions and judgments must always be logically justified; undifferentiated value judgments lead to deduction of points during evaluation.

7 Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the degree thesis requires the independent preparation of the subject, as insured by the declaration of academic integrity signed by the author. No corrections or evaluations take place beforehand. The whole thesis should be the sole work of the author. The following criteria are considered during the evaluation of the thesis:

- Substantive Content, Theoretical Foundations, and Delineation of the Thesis
 - Understanding and use of concepts, theories, and methods
 - Thematic relevance and coverage of the topic
- Argumentation
 - Train of thoughts and organization of the thesis (structure, classifications, emphases, proportions, logical consistency)
 - Degree of selection and integration of arguments, soundness of conclusions
 - Clarity of thoughts, intellectual rigor, quality of critical reflection and discussion
- Selection and Evaluation of Literature Sources
 - Consideration of the relevant literature
 - Quality of evaluation and integration of the literature
- Formal Aspects
 - Correctness of citation techniques and bibliography
 - Style/expression, clarity
 - Grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - General appearance and quality of visual aids

8 Defense of Master Thesis

According to the examination regulations for master's theses, students have to defend their work during a colloquium. The candidate, the supervisor of the thesis, and an expert assessor take part in the colloquium. After evaluation of the thesis, the grade for the written performance and the defense date are announced, provided the thesis has been graded with at least 4,0. A discussion about the evaluation of the thesis is only possible after the thesis defense.

During the defense, the candidate should present the results of the thesis, classify them within a larger context, and defend them against critical objections. For the **presentation of the results of the thesis** (i.e., the whole thesis, not only parts of it), 15 minutes are given. The discussion takes not more than 15 minutes. Not complying with this timeframe may result in deduction of points during the formal evaluation, and if necessary, the evaluators may ask you to end your presentation. As a general rule, the presentation should be supported with handouts and slides (Power Point).