

Term paper writing

Session structure:

- I. Term paper: administrative details
- II. General guidelines (i – iv)
- III. Term paper structure
- IV. Avoiding plagiarism
- V. Sample titles
- VI. ‘Types’ of writer
- VII. Writing exercise

Term paper: administrative details

Term paper: administrative details

- Please consult **all** the relevant documents in the 'Term paper information' folder near the top of the VC. You'll find some useful pointers in the **Handbuch** of the LS für Britische Kultur, esp. pp. 131-143.
- Word-limit: **3,000-4,000 words**, including footnotes, but without contents page and bibliography. **Please aim for 4,000 words.**
- You may write your term paper in **either** English **or** German. However, you are strongly advised to write it in English.
- Please choose your topic and a draft title (and email it to me with a plan of action) by **2 February 2024 at the very latest.**

General guidelines (i-iv)

General guidelines (i)

- **Your topic and title should be something you can cover satisfactorily within the word-limit.** It should not be too broad: in other words, don't go for something like: 'British or Pakistani? Living across two cultures'; or 'Literary representations of Diaspora identities'.
- Your title needs a clear focus and a clear 'Problemstellung' or 'Fragestellung' (i.e., a clear set of questions you wish to address): you should focus on a theme relating to colonialism, postcolonialism, and their cultural and literary legacies.
- You may also approach one of our set texts from a different thematic angle to that of 'transculturality' and 'transcultural identities'.

General guidelines (ii)

- Your essay should focus on one novel, 2-3 novels in comparison, a or a cultural (or cultural-historical) theme viewed through the lens of cultural theory.
- Whether you are doing this course for either literary and cultural studies, I will be expecting you to combine literary with cultural-theoretical analysis.
- I would very strongly advise you to stick to the texts and themes we discuss in this seminar; but if you can make a very good case for it, you may also focus on texts from outside the course.
- **N.B. Literary writing is of its nature ambiguous: it *disturbs*, *disrupts*, and radically *questions* categories rather than simply reinforcing them.**

General guidelines (iii)

- You **must** engage in close reading of individual passages. I.e., don't simply provide summaries of plot or character or pile up 'textual evidence'.
- You **must** engage with relevant theoretical and secondary literature in order to **develop your own argument**.
- You should select **a number of specific passages** which shine interesting new light on your topic and analyze them in detail – i.e., offer a 'close reading' of them – in your term paper.

General Guidelines (iv)

- This is **not** a ‘Grundkurs’ exam, but you should articulate your arguments concisely, clearly, and without unnecessary repetition.
- **Style.** You should avoid overly subjective formulations like ‘I think that...’ or ‘I feel that...’. Instead, opt for more authoritative phrasings, such as: ‘It could be argued that...’; ‘Arguably...’; ‘I would maintain that...’. And remember to back up your arguments with concrete textual proof from the passage!
- There are a great many extremely useful websites devoted to academic English writing. One good ‘starting point’ – especially for the *mechanics* of constructing paragraphs – [is this one](#).

Term paper structure

Term paper structure (i)

- A term paper should have the following basic structure:
- Title page
- Outline/table of contents
- Introduction: This contains the problem, objective and research question; furthermore, the research methods, i.e. the approach, as well as the structure of the paper are presented here.
- Body: This is where you address your topic, i.e. answer your research question.
- Conclusion: In this section, you revisit your thesis; summarize the results of the paper and briefly refer to whether your thesis – your main argument – could broadly be substantiated or not (with justification!).
- Bibliography
- Appendix, if applicable (not necessary for all papers)

Term paper structure (ii)

- **Your introduction** should clearly ‘set up’ and justify your topic. Why is this particular book / topic interesting and relevant, and why are you asking *these* particular questions about it?
- **Your first chapter** should set out your overall theoretical framework. What theoretical ideas do you want to use to analyze your text(s)? These could include – e.g. – Edward Said’s theory of orientalism, Welsch’s theory of transculturality, or Stuart Hall’s theory of hybrid identities.
- **Your second chapter -- split into 2-3 broad thematic parts** – should take these ideas and use them to analyze the literary text(s) or other cultural material(s) that you’ve selected (and this may include films). You should aim to quote as far as possible from the primary text(s) themselves and not simply rely on what other scholars have said. Aim to analyze in depth 2-3 extended passages. Avoid the temptation to slip into extended plot or character description or explanation.
- **Your conclusion** draws your ideas and analyses together and states how far it is that you’ve managed to answer your main question(s) – or how far your questions ultimately remain unanswerable. Are there any questions your research has thrown up that might be a useful topic of future investigation?

Avoiding plagiarism

Avoiding plagiarism

1. Plagiarism rules apply to both Seminararbeiten and Referate: you must strenuously avoid it in both.
1. Keep very careful and accurate notes, ensuring that you differentiate very clearly between your ideas and quotations from other authors, **in order to avoid plagiarism.**
2. Pay attention to detail! You should make sure that you follows the footnoting guidelines on the VC precisely.
3. Be consistent! Once you've selected a particular system or convention (ideally following the 'Äußere Form' document on the VC), **make sure you stick to it!**
4. ChatGPT is a powerful but also – as far as **close literary analysis is concerned** – limited tool which requires **human** skill and discernment to use effectively.

NB. I use the (very effective) 'Turnitin' plagiarism software to check all Seminararbeiten for traces of plagiarism: **so don't be tempted. We can also easily spot uncritical use of raw ChatGPT data.**

Institute plagiarism & AI statement (I) (Stand: WS 2023-24)

“I hereby declare according to § 10 para. 4 APO that this paper is the result of my own independent scholarly work and that in all cases, material taken from the work of others is acknowledged. Quotations and paraphrases are clearly indicated, and no materials or tools other than listed have been used. This written work has not been submitted at any university before. I understand that the use of sources whose authenticity cannot be verified is a serious violation of the principles of good academic practice (cf. <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/studium/im-studium/studienorganisation/quellen/> and <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/forschung/profil/gute-wissenschaftliche-praxis/>; only available in German).

Institute plagiarism & AI statement (II)

“Furthermore, I declare that I have used text- or otherwise content-generating artificial intelligence (AI) software (e.g. ChatGPT) only after consultation and with the permission of my instructor/examiner and that I have noted this under “Tools”. I am prepared to provide detailed documentation of my use of AI software (e.g. chat transcripts) if clarification is required.

I hereby also declare that I have handed in an identical electronic version of my paper as required.

I am aware that this digital version can be subjected to a software-supported, anonymized check for plagiarism.”

Sample titles

Sample titles (past semesters)

‘The Vampire as a metaphor for social desires, anxieties and problems at the fin-de-siècle and the 21st Century: Comparing Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Alan Ball’s *True Blood*’.

‘Modernity in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*: Functions of Technology’

‘Chivalry in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*: Tracing the boundaries of fin-de-siècle gender roles’

‘A Freudian Assessment of the Uncanny in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*’

'Types' of writer

'Types' of writer (i)

- **The draftsman/draftswoman:** you sketch out a broad plan, which you mark out with titles & section titles. While sticking to these, you also alter them as often as necessary. You jump to the part(s) that seem the easiest to work up at any given point. You continually rework and correct yourself both on the level of content and the level of language.
- **The oil painter:** you are the 'free explorer' or 'free discoverer'. You start off with a very rough 'first idea', just start writing freely, and note down ideas as they first occur to you (which you can then build in at a later stage). You're driven onwards by your themes and your moods, and you're constantly revising. You find the thought of 'committing' too soon very uncomfortable.

‘Types’ of writer (ii)

- **The bricklayer / mason:** you build up your text brick by brick and you revise it continuously. You polish every sentence, in both content and style, as you write: it must all be perfect before you move on to the next. You might find it difficult to keep the ‘big picture’ in view, and when you have produced a first draft, you revise your work very cautiously.
- **The architect:** you depend on a functional plan, which absolutely must be set down on paper (or in a document) at a very early stage. This is often quite a detailed masterplan, which you fill in with section titles. You then ‘fill up’ each section. You start with whichever section is easiest. When you start to write, you have a real need for ‘control’, and you determine the structure for the whole work near the start of your reading & research. However, you revise your **text** very thoroughly – and generally in the order you’ve already planned.

‘Types’ of writer (iii)

- **The watercolourist:** you’re not only a painstaking planner but also someone who works out the whole text ‘in your head’. You don’t necessarily draw up a written structure, but you do have one in your mind’s eye, which you follow as you write. You write the whole thing in one go, virtually in its final form. You revise the whole thing only minimally, and following your original structure.

NB: this typology very closely follows that set out (in German) in Dzifa Vode’s training booklet of 2019, ‘Studierende beim Schreiben beraten’. Almost no one belongs to any single type: everyone is a mixture of two or more. But it’s helpful to have some (rough) idea of the composition and the **ratio** of the mixture in your particular case.

Writing exercise

Writing exercise

You have a choice of tasks:

- a) Take the text(s) you'd be interested in writing a term paper on and start developing some ideas for a title, a small set of 'research questions', and your overall argument.
- b) Take one or texts – e.g., one of our novels, and one of our essays (or short stories) – and think about how they have challenged and even changed your views on multiculturalism, transculturality, or identity more generally. Try to work out *how* they have changed your views.

Writing exercise

1. Select one of the above tasks and take **15 minutes** constructing a 'cluster mind map' (see p. 13 of Vode's writing guide), grouping your impulses/ideas – like bullet points – around a specific theme or concept. The idea is that particular connections or constellations should begin to emerge – and maybe even a rudimentary structure for your term paper.
2. This cluster can open new perspectives; give you initial orientations and impulses; and become a starting point for the writing itself.
3. After **1 minute of planning**, take **10 minutes** and write between one and three paragraphs in English, in full sentences, starting to develop two or more of the points you've mapped out. **Don't stop writing for more than 30 seconds at a time: just keep going!**
4. And *what* are the results?