

Thesis Writing Workshop (course description)

This seminar is building up on the guidance provided by the academic writing center and the different courses related to research methods and research design students took during the fall and the winter term. More specifically, the seminar's focus is twofold: on the one hand, we'll further deepen your understanding of aspects related to the operationalization of concepts, the development of a viable research strategy and the formulation of a convincing argument/thesis and sharpen your research question. On the other hand, we'll dissect the different sections of a thesis and discuss various styles, structures, and do's and don'ts (particular attention will be paid to the introductory chapter, the literature review and the writing up/discussion of the results).

Participation in the seminar is mandatory. The material shared during the seminar, the group and individual exercises as well as the discussions should help you to quickly shift your focus – away from course work to your thesis.

In order to make the most out of this course, you'll be working with material from your own thesis (the proposal, first attempts of a literature review, etc) throughout this course.

Goals

This course should help you to hit the ground running and start working (or continue) working on your thesis right after the end of the winter term. After the three sessions you should have:

- 1) a good sense of the thesis writing process (individual timeline)
- 2) a well-defined argument/statement that motivates your thesis
- 3) a research strategy that is both, in line with your argument and in line with the time frame of writing your thesis

Requirements & Structure

This course is mandatory for one-year MAPP students and MPA students writing a thesis. Mundus MAPP students are welcome to participate. For each session there are a small number of key readings, which you should read prior to the session. In addition, you find a list with recommended reading that you may find helpful to consult during the thesis writing process. The readings are on the process and structure of **writing** in the social sciences more generally (writing literature reviews, introductions) or specific **substantive** issues we discuss during the three sessions (formulating an argument/thesis or motivating your paper, research design). I expect you to read these short texts or chapter while thinking about how they apply to your project and how to improve or reformulate your project based on these readings.

The meetings will be structured as follows: short 'theory' blocks will be followed by group work or individual exercises. Your thesis topic will be at the core of the individual exercises that you'll be carrying out. Discussing the outcomes of the

exercises in class and exchanging work should help you to improve your topic and sharpen your thinking.

Session 1 (Research Question/Argument/Motivation - Thesis Structure/Milestones)
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The aim of this session is twofold: 1) get a good grip on the time that remains until the submission date and 2) working towards a sound argument/thesis and motivation of your thesis.

Both issues are crucial for writing a sound paper. Having a clear cut research question and related argument is as important as knowing how to structure the different steps and parts of your thesis. The research question and argument should essentially serve as a guidance for the whole thesis: the literature that you draw on, the empirics that you use, the way concepts are operationalized etc.

This session thus critically engages with your own research proposals. For this, you will have to submit your (one-page) thesis proposal until Monday March 18 (upload it to the moodle platform of this course). We will actively work with the proposal during the session!

Readings:

- Framing Questions: Craft of Research (Chapter 1 and 3)
- What is a research question? (in: Intelligent Research Design, by Hancké)
- From Questions to Problems: Craft of Research (Chapter 4)

Additional Readings:

- Making Good Arguments: Craft of Research (Chapter 7 & 8)
- Creswell: Research Design: The Use of Theory (Chapter 3)
- A brief guide to the Elements of the Academic Essay (Harvard College Writing Program)

Session 2 (Research design – Research Ethics – Literature review)

The aims of the second session are the following: we will discuss questions related to the structure and the content that should go into a methods or research design section. Relatedly, social scientists are often working with sensitive data (from interviews, surveys, etc.) and we'll discuss the most important issues related to 'research ethics'. The second goal is related to the task of drafting and writing a literature review. Again, we will discuss how to structure a 'good' literature review.

Exercises (to be completed BEFORE the session):*Literature Review:*

- Find at least a dozen references – books, articles, book chapters – on your topic. Skim them quickly. Write up the structure of the literature and how you relate the various strands these literatures belong to.
 - o Skimming papers: what is the research question, what are the key findings, hypotheses
 - o How did the literature develop in the field that you're interested in (can you identify different strands, opposing views, competing claims, etc).

Research Design:

- Write a one- to two-page memo about how you will go about your research, include how you will measure or operationalize theoretical concepts. Upload the memo until

For each of the two assignments described above: Spend max. 2.5 hours on each of them. For the research design: first sketch the structure, then fill in the paragraphs. Focus on getting your ideas on paper while thinking about feasibility (data availability, time etc) and clarity. Your research design memo will be used in class.

Readings:*Literature Review*

- Terrorized by literature (Howard S. Becker)
- Knopf: Doing a literature review

Research Design

- Making Measures Capture Concepts: Securing Correspondence between Theoretical Ideas and Observations (in: Research Design in Political Science)

Session 3 (Getting to Grips with Empirics & Introductions and Conclusions)

Similar to the prior session, we'll again focus on a more substantive topic (writing up empirical results) and a topic that is more linked to the 'writing process' in general. Substantively, we'll discuss different ways to structure the discussion of the results and ways to improve the readability of your result section. The 'writing' block is dedicated to two key chapters of your thesis: the introduction and the conclusion. These chapters are key as they are the first and last chapter that your audience reads. Many readers already build an opinion about the quality of the piece while reading the introduction, which is why this chapter should be drafted very carefully.

Readings:*Introduction & Conclusion:*

- Introduction and Conclusion: Craft of Research (Chapter 14)
- Revising Style: Telling your Story Clearly: Craft of Research (Chapter 16)
- The role of an introduction (Pomona College)
- It's a wrap, writing effective conclusions (Pomona College)

Writing up your results

- Writing up your research (in: Intelligent Research Design, Hancké)