# Syllabus: Thesis Writing Workshop

This seminar is building up on the guidance provided by the academic writing center and the different courses related to courses on research methods and research design students took during previous terms. 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 dos 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 at the start of the spring 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.

**Tasks before the course starts**

The workshop hinges upon you coming prepared to the course, i.e. with a fairly good idea of what you want to do in your theses in terms of research question, research design, and the literature you are going to use. We will make use of the work you already invested in your project and try to give it more structure. To do this, following theoretical presentations at the beginning of each session, there will be practical elements where you work in groups.

In order to facilitate the group work and to be able to connect the discussions to your projects, we ask you to **prepare three documents** prior to the start of the workshop, and to **upload them to Moodle by Monday, April 12** (for more details on the documents, see below in the session information):

* A one-page thesis proposal, providing an overview of the research question and the main argument of the thesis
* A brief literature review about the main texts on your topic and how they relate to the research question
* A one-page memo about the research design, including how you plan to measure and operationalize your theoretical concepts.

**Session 1 (Research Question/Argument/Motivation – Thesis Structure/Milestones)**

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, April 12 (upload it to the Moodle platform of this course). We will actively work with the proposal during the session!

# Readings:

* Turabian, K (2007): *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (Chapter 5: Planning Your Argument).
* Hancké, B. (2009): *Intelligent Research Design: A Guide for Beginning Researchers in the Social Sciences,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (Chapter 1: Research in the Social Sciences).
* Booth, W., G. Colomb, & J. Williams (2008): *The Craft of Research,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (Chapter 4: From Questions to Problems).

**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.
	+ Skimming papers: what is the research question, what are the key findings, hypotheses
	+ 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-page memo about how you will go about your research, include how you will measure or operationalize theoretical concepts.

Upload both documents until Monday, 12 April to the Moodle page!

**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*

* Becker, H.S., 2008. Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press (Chapter 8: Terrorized by literature).
* Knopf, J.W. (2006): Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(1), 127-132.

*Research Design*

* Toshkov, Dimiter (2016): *Research Design in Political Science*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Chapter 4: Concepts and Operationalization).

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

Similar to the prior session, we will 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 will 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:*

* Booth, W., G. Colomb, & J. Williams (2008): *The Craft of Research,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (Chapter 16: Introduction and Conclusion).
* Booth, W., G. Colomb, & J. Williams (2008): *The Craft of Research,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press (Chapter 17: Revising Style: Telling your Story Clearly).
* The role of an introduction (Pomona College): [Link](https://www.pomona.edu/administration/writing-center/student-resources/general-writing-resources/introductions#:~:text=The%20Role%20of%20an%20Introduction,topic%2C%20and%20state%20your%20thesis)
* It’s a wrap, writing effective conclusions (Pomona College: [Link](https://www.pomona.edu/administration/writing-center/student-resources/general-writing-resources/writing-effective-conclusions)

*Writing up your results*

* Hancké, B. (2009): *Intelligent Research Design: A Guide for Beginning Researchers in the Social Sciences,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (Chapter 5: Writing up your research).