

Exact dates and time to be confirmed!

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 "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 for one-year MAPP students and MPA students writing the optional thesis. For all other programs, this course can be selected as an elective. 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.

Throughout this course, you'll be working with the core idea of your own thesis. **Thus it is key that you have at least a short outline/proposal of your thesis ready.** Ideally, you also started to work with/read through some of the literature that will inform your work.

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 double sessions you should have:

- 1) a good sense of the thesis writing process (with an established 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

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 your thoughts/receiving feedback from peers should help you to improve your topic and sharpen your thinking.

Tasks before the start of the workshop

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 thesis in terms of research question, argument, and research design. This also includes having an idea of the literature that you have to consult or having some knowledge of the literature that you'll use already. Ideally, we will make use of the work you already invested in your project and try to give it more structure and clarify the direction you'll take. To do this, there will be practical elements embedded in each session where you work in small groups or individually.

To facilitate this and make sure that the discussions we have in class can be connected to your projects, I'd like to ask you to prepare the following:

- **Short thesis proposal** (1 page): the proposal provides an overview of the research question, the main argument of the thesis. This – ideally – includes a clearly defined and testable hypothesis (optionally two or more hypotheses)
- A one-page **memo**, first sketch about the **research design** that you envisage. Focus on how you plan to measure and operationalize your key theoretical concepts and the empirical method that you plan to apply.
- Find approx. **10 references** (books, articles, book chapters) on your topic. Skim them (take notes on: what is the research question, what are the key findings, hypotheses, methodology). Bring these notes to class.

Spend no more than **2.5 hours** for each task and upload the **thesis proposal** and the one page **memo on the research design** to the e-learning platform until **four days before your workshop (exact date will be communicated)**. My goal is to read through your proposal to get a better sense about your projects.

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.

Readings:

- From Questions to Problems (in Booth et al: “Craft of Research” (Chapter 4)
- What is a research question? (in: Intelligent Research Design, by Hancké, Chapter 1)
- Planning your Argument (in: Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations)

Additional Readings:

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

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’ (how to work with sources, how to deal with sensitive data, plagiarism, etc).

The second goal is related to the task of drafting and writing a literature review. We will discuss what we expect ourselves from a good literature review and, therefore, how a ‘good’ literature review should be structured.

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 (read the abstract). Write up the structure of the

literature review 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- to two-page memo about how you will go about your research, include how you will measure or operationalize theoretical concepts. Upload the memo (**exact date will be communicated**).

Readings:

Literature Review

- Becker, H.S., 2008. Writing for Social Scientists. How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article. (Chapter 8: Terrorized by Literature)
- Knopf, J.W.: Doing a literature review. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(1), 127-132.

Research Design

- Toshkov, Dimiter (2016): *Research Design in Political Science* (Chapter 4 & 5: Concepts and Operationalization; Measurement).
- 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 (in: Booth: The Craft of Research, Chapter 14)
- Revising Style: Telling your Story Clearly (in: Booth, The Craft of Research, Chapter 16)
- The Introductory Chapter (in: Evans et al: How to write a better thesis)

Writing up your results

- Writing up your research (in: Intelligent Research Design, Hancké)
- Handling Attention Points: Data, Charts, and Graphics (in: Dunleavy, Authoring a Thesis)
- Communicating Evidence Visually ()
- Writing Up Qualitative Research (in: OHB of Qualitative Research)