

## Information on the content of academic papers at the Chair of Social Policy (seminar paper, Bachelor's thesis, Master's thesis)

### 1. Preliminary remarks

With an academic paper (seminar paper or thesis), the author should demonstrate that he/she is able to work on and present a problem in his/her subject independently and according to scientific methods. The following notes describe general and, in some cases, chair-specific information on the content of written academic papers. The content of written papers is assessed at the Chair of Social Policy according to these or similar criteria. For the formal rules of presentation, see our "Formal style guide".

### 2. General information / checklist of critical questions on content design

#### ANALYSES:

- a. **Compatibility of the evaluation criteria<sup>1</sup> with the question** (*"Are the selected evaluation criteria suitable in terms of content for answering the question?"*)
- b. **Compatibility of the evaluation criteria with the group of recipients<sup>2</sup>** (*"Are the chosen evaluation criteria suitable for discussing the topic with an audience that is predominantly shaped by economic theory (fellow students and academic staff)?"*)
- c. **Compatibility of the analytical focus with the research question** (*"Which analytical focus (descriptive, empirical, theoretical) is most suitable for answering the research question given the available literature / data?"*)

#### SELECTION AND SCOPE OF THE TEXT ELEMENTS<sup>3</sup>:

- d. **Focus on the question** (*"Which text elements are really necessary to answer the question given the number of pages? Which text elements are appropriately detailed and which should be expanded / shortened?"*)
- e. **Focus on recipients** (*"Which text elements are necessary / appropriately detailed given the prior knowledge of the (student) recipients of the paper?"*)

#### STRUCTURE AND TABLE OF CONTENT:

- f. **Choice of classification criteria<sup>4</sup>** (*"Are the selected classification criteria suitable for the structuring of the text considering the research question?"*)
- g. **Hierarchy of structure criteria<sup>5</sup>** (*"Is the chosen hierarchy of the outline appropriate in light of the research question?"*)
- h. **Sequence of the structuring elements** (*"Do the individual sections and subsections build on each other in a logical manner?"*)

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the issue at hand, the use of various more abstract or more concrete evaluation criteria be meaningful. Examples for more abstract economic evaluation criteria: "Efficiency effect", "Equity effect". Examples of more concrete economic assessment criteria: "Unemployment rate", "Fertility rate". The choice of assessment criteria depends on the topic and should be discussed with the supervisor at an early stage.

<sup>2</sup> Insofar as the chosen evaluation criteria are not economic evaluation criteria commonly used in the literature, the following question should be asked: "Is there a clear reference to standard economic evaluation criteria?"

<sup>3</sup> Table 1 provides more specific information on the selection of text elements.

<sup>4</sup> Types of structure criteria (examples): analytical level (e.g.: "Descriptive analysis of institutions XY", "Theoretical relationships between A and B", "Empirical analysis"), methodological level (e.g.: "Differences in differences analyses", "Fixed-effects analyses" etc.), factual level (e.g.: "Child benefit regulations", "Parental benefit regulations" etc.). The choice of structure criteria depends on the topic and should be discussed with the supervisor at an early stage.

- i. **Adherence to the outline** ("Do I adhere to the content requirements imposed by my outline within the individual sections?")

#### INTERNAL STRUCTURE:

- j. **Redundancy** ("Do I avoid repetition of content, i.e., saying the same thing in too many places, only in different words?")
- k. **Variation of the level of abstraction** ("Do I discuss central questions on a higher as well as on a lower level of abstraction? Do I make the connection between levels of abstraction?")
- l. **Common thread** ("Do I establish a logical link to previous and subsequent text elements to an appropriate extent, i.e., at the beginning of a main chapter?")

#### ARGUMENTATION

- m. **Critical distance from the literature** ("Do I consider the statements from the literature with sufficient criticality? I.e., do I also deal with specific assumptions of individual arguments from the literature and discuss whether these could be sensitive to the results?")
- n. **Critical distance to one's own argumentation** ("Do I question my own substantive conclusions, i.e., those derived from my own argumentative connections, sufficiently critically by pointing out not only these, but also one or more other, well-founded plausible argumentation possibilities?")
- o. **Avoidance of implicit assumptions** ("Do I disclose the assumptions actually made implicitly to derive my own statements and thus make the origin of my results / conclusions transparent and comprehensible?")

#### LANGUAGE

- p. **Formal correctness** (spelling, punctuation, grammar)
- q. **Linguistic-content congruence** (example: "Do I avoid using the adverbs "therefore", "hence", "consequently", etc. if the sentence to be formulated should not actually contain a real logical conclusion?")
- r. **Clarity** ("Does this sentence really say exactly what I want to say in terms of content, or could I formulate the same thing in another way that is even clearer / less easily misunderstood?")
- s. **Simplicity** ("Does this sentence say what I want to say in the simplest possible way, or can it be formulated even more simply (without sacrificing clarity)? Do I tend to use long "chain sentences", which could perhaps be divided into several shorter sentences? Do I use unnecessary foreign words?")

#### LITERATURE

- t. **Selection of literature** ("Is the selected literature the most suitable for answering the question in the context of a seminar paper?")
  - Publication status / Publication rank
  - Balance between level and manageability
- u. **Identification of external statements** ("Do I always cite the relevant source for all statements (data, facts, assertions, argumentative links, conclusions, etc.) taken from external sources?")

#### FORM

- v. **Compliance with the format requirements** (see information sheet "Formal style guide").

<sup>5</sup> Depending on the research question, analytical, methodological or factual structure criteria, for example, can be in the foreground / i.e., at the highest structure level (see also previous footnote)

### 3. More specific information on the content

**Table: Required text elements (no outline specification)<sup>6</sup>**

Regardless of the analytical focus of the work	Depending on the analytical focus of the work
<p><b>Description of the research question and methodology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explanation of the research question</li> <li>• Justification of the analytical focus and, if applicable, the topic limitation<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• Explanation and brief justification of your own assessment criteria<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Brief overview of the paper (approach, outlook on results)</li> </ul> <p><b>Descriptive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation and interpretation of already prepared descriptive data</li> </ul> <p><b>Theoretical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of theoretical results from the theoretical and / or empirical literature with reference to your own research question</li> <li>• Critical analysis of theoretical arguments from the theoretical and / or empirical literature with reference to the student's own research question</li> <li>• Summarizing the most important theoretical hypotheses from the literature that can in principle be empirically tested</li> <li>• Independent derivation and formulation of empirically testable theoretical hypotheses (only for final theses and project seminar papers)</li> </ul> <p><b>Empirical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of relevant empirical research results incl. brief description of the used methods</li> <li>• Critical examination of research results including a brief critical review of the method used</li> </ul> <p><b>Summarizing and concluding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of the results (non-evaluative)</li> <li>• Evaluation of the results based on the selected evaluation criteria formulated at the beginning: evaluative conclusions</li> <li>• Outlook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sections of own data analyses (in case of a descriptive focus)</li> <li>• Intensive discussion of individual, particularly relevant theoretical research papers (in case of a theoretical focus)</li> <li>• Sections of own empirical analyses (only for final theses and project seminar papers)</li> <li>• Intensive discussion of individual empirical studies (in case of empirical focus)</li> <li>• Sections of own analyses (only for final theses and project seminar papers)</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> The text elements presented do not have to represent closed chapters or sub-chapters of the thesis, but can also (and should for some questions) be divided into different sub-chapters. For information on the structure of the outline, see above.

<sup>7</sup> Priorities and / or topic restrictions should be discussed with the supervisor at an early stage.

<sup>8</sup> If the question clearly specifies the evaluation criteria, then this element can be very brief (especially the justification). Example: The question "Effects of instrument XY on income distribution"; here the choice of the evaluation criterion "distribution" would not have to be justified.