



Seminar on Academic Writing and the MSc Thesis

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www.keynes.dk (these slides will be made available here)



Plan for today

1. I will talk about:
 - The process of writing an academic paper
 - How to read for an academic paper
 - The structure of an academic paper
 - Citation guidelines
 - How to proofread your paper
 - Where to go for help
2. Peter Erling Nielsen will talk about:
 - Important rules you should be aware of
 - Specifics of writing for economic seminars and working on the master's thesis



The process of writing an academic paper

Start writing before you are "ready" to!

1. Have a clear idea of what you want to write about.

Result: A subject

2. Find relevant books and articles.

Result: Reading list

3. Make notes.

Result: Notes

4. Organize your paper.

Result: Essay plan

(this may evolve during the writing process)



The process of writing an academic paper (cont.)

5. Write a first draft, discuss with other students,
teacher/supervisor.

Result: List of revisions

6. Update your draft. You may need to go back to point 2.

Result: A new draft

7. Proofread your draft. It is a good idea to get someone else
to read it through.

Result: Final version

8. Check one more time.

Result: Your paper should be ready to hand in!



Reading for an academic paper

- Ask at the library for information on how to search for literature.
- Have an idea of what will be relevant before you begin.
- Start by skimming the text.
- If you feel the text is useful, note the important points.
- Don't write too much!
- Remember to note where you took the information from.
- Texts will often reach different conclusions: Note these differences and those in methodology.
- Note others' critical comments and judge *for yourself* the value of a source. For example, does there seem to be any major weakness in their argumentation?
- Be careful when taking information from the internet.
- Each text will provide numerous references – use these!



The structure of an academic paper

Your paper should include:

- Title page
- Main text, consisting of
 - Introduction
 - Main body
 - Conclusion
- List of references



Introduction

This is one of the most important parts of your paper.

It should:

- Explain why your topic is of interest and make it interesting for the reader.
- Set out clearly what question or questions you aim to have answered by the end of your paper.
- Explain the structure of your paper – how you intend to answer the questions.



Main body

- This should be divided into paragraphs, which aim to look at specific aspects of your problem.
- The reader should be able to understand the relevance of each paragraph and how they relate to each other.
Danish: *Den røde tråd* (the red thread!)
- Start each paragraph with a clear statement as to what it aims to achieve.
- It is often a good idea to end a paragraph with a mini-conclusion and a link to the next paragraph.
- Do not be afraid to write paragraphs in a different order from that in which they will appear in the finished paper.
- Avoid paragraphs that are too short or too long.



Conclusion

This should:

- Be a summary of your main results.
- Explain the significance of your conclusions and optionally provide suggestions for future research.
- Above all leave the reader with a sense that the purpose of the paper as set out in the introduction has been achieved.



Citation guidelines

- An important part of academic writing is being able to present other people's ideas.
- It is important that you have understood the material you are using.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated!
- Direct citations should be in quotation marks ("") and followed by a clear reference to the source.
- Where you have used information from a certain source, this should also be followed by a clear reference to this source.
- If you do not mention a source, it will be assumed that the words and ideas are your own.
- In order to avoid confusion, I recommend the "Harvard" system.



The "Harvard" system

- Citations and bibliographical references in the text and footnotes should be written as, e.g. (Persson 1993, p. 105)
- References at the end of the paper should be written in the following style:
 - PERSSON, K.G. (1993). Was there a productivity gap between fourteenth century Italy and England? *Economic History Review* 66, pp. 105-14.
 - ZAMAGANI, V. (1993). *The Economic History of Italy, 1860-1990*. Oxford: Clarendon Press



Points to look out for when preparing the final draft / proofreading

Two main things to look for:

- Difficulties with the style of writing
- Grammar / spelling errors

Both of these distract from the intellectual content of your paper.



Writing style

- Is the sequence of ideas within individual sentences and paragraphs clear?
- Are words used accurately/precisely?
- Are words used appropriately? (e.g. formal/informal, emotional/neutral)
 - "The guys at the World Bank ..." vs. "The World Bank ..."
 - "EMU was a ridiculous idea ..." vs. "EMU presents certain practical difficulties ..."
- Are words used economically, i.e. have the least possible words been used without loss of clarity?
 - "in view of the fact that" vs. "because"
- Avoid vagueness and sweeping statements.
 - "Currency unions just cause problems, as the European example shows."



Spelling and grammar

- Use the tools on your computer ...
- ... but they are no substitute for a proper proofread.
- The internet has plenty of grammar guides.

You can ask me if you are having difficulties with English:

- I am English.
- And have previously worked as an English teacher.
- So please feel free to send an e-mail.

However:

- It is a requirement that you are able to write understandable English at university level.



Final checklist before you hand in your paper

Ask yourself:

1. Have I answered the question(s) I set?
2. Is everything I have written relevant to answering the question(s)?
3. Does the paper fit together in a logical and coherent way?
4. Is the paper easy to understand, without confusing phrasing and spelling/grammar errors?
5. Have I acknowledged all my sources?
6. Does my paper live up to Department requirements regarding page limits etc.?



Important!

- The Department of Economics has strict rules about how papers should be written and presented.
- **If these rules are not followed, your paper might not be accepted!**
- Peter Erling Nielsen will go through some of these with you.



How to get in touch

- I can help if you have questions about any general aspect of writing papers at the Department of Economics:
paul.sharp@econ.ku.dk
- Go to your lecturer/supervisor for questions about the specifics of a course!
- The Faculty of Social Science's *Pedagogical Centre* can help with study/writing technique:
pcs@samf.ku.dk
- Ask the student counsellors:
studievejledningen@econ.ku.dk