

How to write a BA or MA thesis with me: some pointers

The basics:

Every essay needs to have a research question and a thesis statement (which is, in a way, the answer to that question). You can put these in the first paragraph of your essay or present them later after a few preliminary paragraphs that guide readers toward your core concern.

Make your thesis statement *very* explicit: “I want to argue that...”

The basic structure of any essay in cultural studies is as simple as introduction/main part/conclusion. There are no fixed lengths or ratios for them, and every topic might need something different depending on the approach.

The structure of “introduction/theory/methodology/discussion/analysis/conclusion” is for linguistics papers and does not apply here; neither do others you may have learned about in other fields.

Use direct quotes by default and only paraphrase in exceptional cases where the precise wording of the statement is negligible. (Hint: It rarely is.) An essay without direct quotes is unacceptable.

Contact me any time and as often as you like if you have questions about your writing, whether they’re about content, form, or anything else.

Writing is at least a two-stage process: You create a first draft and then revise it to shape your material. This is *not* proofreading but a deliberate step to make your essay coherent so that every part of it relates to your research question and thesis statement.

Do research. You must engage with the critical discourse. There is no minimum number of references, and you need as many as you need to support your argument with sufficient evidence. The only unacceptable number by default is zero.

LLM/ “AI” usage:

For your thesis, you can use LLM/GenAI tools to aid you in your research, to improve your writing, and to ensure your documentation is correct. I do not recommend using them as sole research tools to find critical texts, as they are very limited in that respect. You must not use them to generate any substantial content of your essay or to fundamentally change its style (not least because you want my feedback on *your* writing and *your* content to improve and learn). Asking for a synonym or the correct idiomatic phrasing is acceptable; general prompts such as “make it sound more academic” are recipes for disaster. Use LLMs and GenAI like you use autocomplete on your phone: You can use it, but you wouldn’t trust it without double-checking.

If you use LLMs/“AI” at any point, document your usage after the declaration of academic integrity, including specific prompts if necessary. Undocumented use of such tools means you’ll fail the assignment.

Citation / documentation:

Use MLA style (8th or 9th edition) for in-text citations and the list of works cited. See the Purdue Online Writing Lab for details and familiarize yourself with the conventions even if you use citation managers; you'll want to be able to check them:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_page_basic_format.html

Make sure your list of works cited is absolutely correct and complete.

In-text citations:

See Purdue OWL again:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html

If the source is clear from the context, you don't need to add the name to the parenthetical reference.

Place periods after the parenthetical reference (unless it's a block quote).

Always give the full page range in MLA style (i.e. Pynchon 12-15). There is no "f." or "ff." in MLA style.

Always give parenthetical references even if you repeat the preceding one; there is no "ibid."

Only use two digits in page ranges unless the third or fourth digit changes as well (215-14; 398-402).

Formatting:

Format your thesis like this: Times New Roman, font size 12, 1.5 line spacing, one-inch margins (2.53cm) all around.

Italicize titles of standalone publications (e.g. a novel, a film) but use quotation marks for anything that is published as part of something else (e.g. an essay in a journal or a poem in a collection).

Indent first lines except when the paragraph begins a new section. Do not indent the paragraph after a block quote.

Only use block quotes for anything longer than four lines. Block quotes are indented, single-spaced, set off by a blank line before and after, and have no quotation marks. The period precedes the parentheses at the end.

Templates:

Use the following templates for 1) the title page and 2) the declaration of academic integrity in addition to the one our Prüfungsverwaltung requires you to sign:

1) <https://tu-dortmund.sciebo.de/s/rYBoommGjtfdbqr>

2) <https://tu-dortmund.sciebo.de/s/3KXMc49bmWsooPc>