Writing a Term Paper in English Literary Studies

The guidelines listed below shall assist you in writing term papers and theses throughout your study of English Literature.

Deadlines: see "Regelungen und Fristen für den Erwerb von studienbegleitenden Leistungsnachweisen in Kursen der englischen Literaturwissenschaft" issued in each course at the beginning of the semester.

Form and Style: see "Style Sheet" available on the EngLit Homepage.

1.   Preparing the Primary Text

With your topic (which you will need to have discussed with your lecturer beforehand) in mind, read the primary text closely, formulating theses and highlighting important passages that are relevant for your topic and either support or contradict your theses. Write down your arguments and support them using quotations from the primary text in order to avoid unintentional plagiarism (cf. 5.).

2.   Searching and Preparing Secondary Literature

2.1 Searching Secondary Literature

- Make use of what you have learned in the tutorials "Einführung in die Benutzung und den Katalog der Universitätsbibliothek für Anglisten" and "Einführung in die Datenbankrecherche für Anglisten." Search for literature in OPAC, the MLA Bibliography and the databases offered by the university library (e.g. JSTOR); check secondary literature that has been discussed in class or provided via the VC. If there is a "Semesterapparat" for your course, the literature there might serve as a good starting point for further reading/research into your topic. Part of the task of writing your term paper is doing independent research yourself; it is therefore inappropriate to contact your lecturer without having thoroughly checked the library and online sources yourself. An extension due to missing secondary literature can only be granted in exceptional cases and on due prior notice.
- Be careful with sources from the internet. Whenever information is available in both printed and digital form, the printed source is preferable to the digital one. When searching secondary literature on the internet, pay attention to academic standards; do not quote

private homepages, presentations published by students, or entries in open source networks like Wikipedia; these media often do not meet academic standards and may therefore weaken your arguments instead of supporting them.

2.2 Preparing Secondary Literature

- Read and organise your secondary literature: What are the writers' basic arguments (focus on introduction and summary)? Do the writers use literary theory? If yes, what theory? What passages of the primary text do the writers quote? Do the arguments presented convince you? Why (not)?
- Compare the arguments you have found in different texts/articles with each other and with your own points: Do you agree with important arguments from secondary literature? Why (not)? What are the points of intersection? Can one identify dominant approaches towards your primary text? Theory? Topic? Are there interesting differences in the details of the arguments?
- Think for yourself: always consider your own arguments as the basis of your term paper – points from secondary literature should be read in relation to your arguments and used to add to them or to provide contrasting views. Keep in mind: you are a literary scholar yourself! Thus, do not confine yourself to repeating and (re)arranging arguments from secondary literature but choose quotations carefully in order to support your own (counter)arguments.
- If you want to make excerpts from secondary literature or note ideas you have when reading other writers' arguments, always and immediately write down the source to avoid unintentional plagiarism (cf. 5.).

3. Writing the Term Paper

3.1 Length

Cf. "Style Sheet." Meeting a given length is required in most academic writing. If your term paper is considerably shorter or longer than specified in the "Style Sheet", your term paper will be graded down or handed back.

3.2 Form

Cf. "Style Sheet." The "Style Sheet" is based on the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. If any questions concerning style occur, refer to the most recent edition of the *Handbook* before applying to your lecturer. The ability to comply with given forms is required in many professions. A disregard of given forms (e.g. regarding quotations) will negatively influence the assessment of the term paper.

3.3 Language

The term paper has to be written in English. While mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar will have no consequence for the assessment of the term paper, the mastery of the English language is indispensable to a successful study of English literature as it guarantees the full comprehensibility of presentations given and term papers written in English.

3.4 Content

1. **Title Page**: cf. "Style Sheet."

2. **Table of Contents**: All (sub)chapters, the list of works cited and appendices (optional) need to be listed with page numbers in the table of contents and need to be repeated within the text word for word. However, the (sub)chapters should not only provide the structure of the term paper; thus, do not call the chapters "Content", "Theory", "Main Part", "Analysis", "Summary" etc., but formulate headings as short theses (ideally without verb) in order to guide the reader through the text. A heading should "summarise" the content of the respective chapter.

3. **Introduction (or you may use an adequate title)**: Explain your topic and its relevance for literary studies, formulate your thesis and introduce the structure outlined in the table of contents, i.e. explain your specific approach to the topic. If necessary, explain and/or define basic concepts, e.g. if you analyse *morality* in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, you have to explain the definition of *morality* you use. If you need to define several basic concepts or consider it necessary to give more detailed definitions, explain the basic concept(s) at the beginning of the main part. Authors' biographies, summaries of the primary texts, and personal opinions are not to be included in term papers. Only if indispensable to the development of your line of argument, biography and summary may be included in the introduction. However, always keep in mind that the readers you should have in mind for your term paper are educated in literary studies and thus familiar with both authors' life and the primary text(s).

4. **Main Part (NEEDS an adequate title)**: Elaborate upon your thesis as presented in the introduction. Your line of argument should be concise, stringent and comprehensible; you should be precise in the points you make and prove them by quoting relevant passages from the primary text. You should, however, avoid too many quotations; you should use only those that support your arguments and/or scrutinize positions represented in secondary literature. By summing up positions on your topic held by those critics you have read, you can represent the state of research in your paper and show your familiarity with different positions to the reader. Additionally, it is thus easier to clarify in which aspects you agree or disagree with the arguments found in secondary literature. Always keep in mind that your reader is interested in your ideas; thus, do not simply repeat arguments from secondary literature but make your own line of thought the basis of your

analysis. Most importantly, never lose track of your thesis: the question you have set out to answer should 'shine' throughout your whole paper.

In your analysis, avoid re-narrations, "intentional fallacy" (i.e. avoid telling the reader what you think the author wants to say) and "affective fallacy" (i.e. avoid empathetic interpretations that tend to confound fiction and reality). Do not list formal aspects or stylistic devices unless they are relevant to your line of thought.

Depending on length, your analysis can be divided into several chapters which can again be subdivided (remember: all chapters and subchapters need to be included in the table of contents); yet, the number of chapters must suit your line of argument; as a rule of thumb, avoid too many subdivisions: every chapter should provide the reader with a substantial, new point.

5. <u>**Conclusion (or you may use an adequate title)**</u>: Summarise the results of your analysis by referring to the thesis first mentioned in the introduction. You may give some prospect for future research. New arguments, personal thoughts and emotions are not appropriate.

6. <u>**Works Cited**</u>: List all the primary and secondary texts that you have referred to in your term paper. Stick to the rules for writing down a List of Works Cited laid out in the "Style Sheet".

4. Submitting the Term Paper

- Before submitting the term paper, re-read it regarding formal aspects (especially consistency), spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. If there is time, put the paper down for a few days and proof-read it again.
- <u>English Literature</u>: Submit a printed version (Postfach EngLit or Sekretariat der EngLit, Frau Lupprian, U9/02.03) **and** an electronic version via e-mail to your lecturer (Word or PDF format).
- Due to ecological and economical reasons, binding is not obligatory; however, please make sure your pages are stapled or paperclipped.

5. Plagiarism

The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* defines two different kinds of plagiarism, intentional and unintentional plagiarism.
Intentional plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person's ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person's work constitutes intellectual theft. Passing off another person's ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud. (52)

Unintentional plagiarism "happens because researchers do not keep precise records of their reading, and by the time they return to their notes, they have forgotten whether the summaries and paraphrases contain quoted material that is poorly marked or unmarked" (55). The best method to prevent unintentional plagiarism is diligent note-taking: "keep careful notes that always distinguish among three types of material: your ideas, your summaries and paraphrases of others' ideas and facts, and exact wording you copy from sources" (55). Although the adjective *unintentional* already implies that the student is not aware of plagiarism, unintentional plagiarism has the same severe consequences as intentional plagiarism: the student will fail the course. Thus always acknowledge quotations and paraphrases from primary and secondary literature.

Each student needs to include the following statement into her or his term paper:

[Attached to your written term paper/seminar paper or final thesis, please submit the following Declaration and Personal Report]

. . . .

Declaration of Academic Integrity

I hereby declare according to § 10 para. 4 APO that this work is the result of my own independent scholarly effort and that in all cases material from the work of others is acknowledged. Quotations and paraphrases are clearly indicated and no material or tools other than listed have been used. This written work has not been submitted at any university before. I understand that the use of sources whose authenticity cannot be verified is a serious violation of the principles of good academic practice (cf. https://www.uni-bamberg.de/studium/im-studium/studienorganisation/quellen/ and https://www.uni-bamberg.de/forschung/profil/gute-wissenschaftliche-praxis/; only available in German).

I hereby also declare that I have handed in an identical electronic version of my work as required. I am aware that this digital version can be subjected to a software-supported, anonymized check for plagiarism.

Furthermore, I declare that I have used text- or otherwise content-generating artificial intelligence (AI) software (e.g. ChatGPT) only after consultation and with the permission of my instructor/examiner and that I have noted this in the reference section under "Tools". I also declare that I have answered the questions below on the use of AI software truthfully. I am prepared to provide detailed documentation of my use of AI software (e.g. chat transcripts) if clarification is required.

_____   _____
Place, Date   Signature

<u>Personal Report on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools</u>

In the composition of this paper/thesis I have used AI tools.

Yes / No   [Delete as appropriate]

[If yes, please continue with questions 1 to 3 and write 1 page maximum in bullet point style. If no, please leave them out.]

1. I have used the following <u>specific AI tools</u> for the following <u>purposes</u> (e.g. Elicit to find literature, ChatGPT to suggest a summary, Grammarly to correct the final text, DeepL Write to achieve a more academic style, Jenni.ai to propose an introduction, …):

[Insert your text in bullet point style here]

2. Their use has <u>influenced my workflow</u> in the following ways:

[Insert your text here]

3. I have encountered the following <u>strengths</u> and <u>weaknesses</u> and see the following <u>dangers</u> in their usage:

[Insert your text here]

For further information about and advise on writing term papers, see:
Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. **8th ed.**
New York: MLA, 2016.