Prof. Dr. Markus Gmür

Guidelines for papers submitted at the VMI

Chair of NPO-Management

Institut für Verbands-, Stiftungs-
und Genossenschaftsmanagement (VMI)
Universität Fribourg/Freiburg

www.vmi.ch

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Dear Students

The following guidelines summarize requirements and offer tips for the presentation of term papers, bachelor and master theses (subsequently referred to as papers) supervised by Prof. Dr. Markus Gmür.

Writing papers is a key element of all academic studies. By developing a paper, you will acquire the skills necessary for academic writing (theoretical and empirical insights and methods). The final evaluation will provide a feedback on your current skill level.

Regardless of its nature (term paper, bachelor or master thesis), a paper ought to meet the required criteria of formally correct academic writing. We therefore recommend that you familiarize yourself with the basics of academic writing before beginning with a paper. There is a large variety of books on the market for this purpose.

Progress of an academic paper can roughly be split into the **following steps**, the basics of which will be described in the next section:

1. Choice of topic and registration,
2. Literature research,
3. Development of a proposal,
4. Approval of proposal and determining deadline for submission,
5. Writing of paper,
6. Submission of paper and evaluation.

1. Choice of topic

The basic concept of an academic paper in management studies is to reflect a specific problem with reference to selected academic concepts and theories. Essentially, we distinguish six types of academic work:

- **Literature research**: A research question is based on an extended literature review and further reflections. The main achievement lies in the thorough analysis and presentation of the literature and in a logical and conclusive line of thought. Successful literature research usually relies on solid knowledge of basic management theories (e.g. institutional economics, institutionalism, leadership and motivation theories)

- **Empirical research**: Compared to literature research, the field must be narrowed for empirical research. Following a state of the art based on a literature review, an independent empirical study (document analysis, survey or observation) is conducted. The empirical study may have a quantitative or qualitative focus and may be conducted as a hypothesis generating or hypothesis testing study. The main achievement lies in an adequate choice of literature and methodology as well as in a comprehensible analysis of empirical data and referencing to the theoretical basis. Thus, knowledge of data collecting and analysis methods are required.

- **Secondary analysis**: A systematic analysis of available empirical studies aiming to compile the individual results to an overall result. Secondary analysis has both a qualitative focus (systematic literature review) and a quantitative focus (so-called meta-analysis). The main achievement lies in the systematic approach by means of which the separate findings are aggregated.

- **Bibliographical analysis**: This approach aims at analyzing structures and developments in a defined field of research by counting citations or key words in a larger number of texts (usually research publications). Examples are citation and co-citation analysis. The main achievement lies in the collection and preparation of data as well as in linking the findings to the appropriate theories.

- **Conceptual work**: The aim of this type of academic work is to develop a set of instruments to meet practical everyday management challenges. The concept itself ought to rely on theories and empirical findings. The main achievement lies in the comprehensible connection between the theoretical foundations and the developed set of management instruments.

- **Practice-related work**: This type of academic work is usually only an option for the limited scope of a term paper. The aim is to address a precise challenge in organizational practice by means of theories, concepts and available empirical data. The main achievement lies in the coherent matching of the practical and theoretical perspective.

It is up to you to decide which type of academic work you would like to pursue and then to focus on its specifics.

When developing a concept and writing your paper of any type specified above, it is helpful to refer yourself to existing work in the given field, which can be found through a thorough literature review. Existing papers are a useful reference and help in the early stages of a project.

The current **list of available topics** for bachelor and master thesis is available online on the VMI's website (https://www.vmi.ch/de/uber-uns/universitatsstudium/) and on the message board on the building's ground floor. The list includes topic suggestions, supervisor and the responsible advisor (if required).

The topics lie in the field of management studies and mostly bear direct reference to non-profit organizations:

- Strategy and marketing
- Leadership and human resources management
- Organization and governance
- Performance management
- Crisis and change management
- Comparative management (intercultural comparisons in particular)

It is possible to suggest your own topics, especially for empirical projects related to non-profit organizations. If you choose to make your own suggestion, it is all the more important that you prepare it well.

Projects often originate from an existing contact in a business or non-profit organization. Ideally, such academic work contributes both to a research field and helps solve

a current challenge in practice. Requirements usually differ, however, which can make the combination rather difficult. Exercise caution when an organization commissions you with a cost-effective consultancy mandate disguised as a bachelor or master thesis, expecting you to solve one of its problems with the professor's support. This cannot be the aim of a final academic assignment at university.

Once you have chosen your topic, please contact Prof. Gmür, preferably per email. If you have any fundamental questions concerning the writing of academic papers, please contact the research assistants from the VMI first. Ideally, you will submit a first draft of your proposal by email, discussing your motivation and previous knowledge in the given field. The aim of this first step is to make sure that you have the necessary skills to tackle the chosen topic. Not until then will you receive the approval to proceed with your project.

The approval of your project marks the beginning of the period accorded to complete your paper. The suggested perods are 2 months for term papers, 3 months for a bachelor thesis and 5 months for a master thesis.

2. Literature research

2.2 Relevant academic sources

After approval of your project you may begin with a comprehensive **literature research**. This includes the use of:

- Basic literature such as relevant reference books and textbooks,

- Search of academic literature databases (e.g., Business Source Complete)

- Journals specialized in the field of NPO-management
  - Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
  - Nonprofit Management and Leadership
  - Voluntas – International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations
  - Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing
  - International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing
  - Journal of Social Entrepreneurship
  - Social Enterprise Journal

- Leading International journals on management studies, in particular:
  - Administrative Science Quarterly
  - Academy of Management Journal
  - Academy of Management Review
  - Human Relations
  - Journal of Management Studies
  - Accounting, Organization and Society
  - Organization Science
  - Organization Studies
  - Leadership Quarterly
  - International Journal of Human Resource Management

2.2 Search strategies for academic articles

Several strategies can be pursued when searching for appropriate literature. We recommend the following:

Keyword search (title, abstracts, etc.): Keyword search is the most widely used search strategy for literature. It yields articles whose title, abstract or full text contains the keyword.

Index search: Articles are usually described by a certain number of key terms. These key terms are also referred to as the index. It is advisable to conduct an index search in addition to a keyword search.

Review of pertinent journals: Certain journals specialize in specific fields. We recommend that you scan the table of contents of all issues from the past 10 to 15 years for the journals that may be relevant for your topic.

Citations: Once you have found a suitable article, we recommend that you find out in which further sources the article has been referenced and which sources were used to write the found article. Databases such as EBSCO or "Web of Science" support this search strategy by offering direct links to the referenced articles. This method often yields further useful literature.

2.3 Databases

Many helpful databases are at your disposal for effective literature searches. In the following section we provide an overview of the most important ones we recommend using for your academic work.

Business Source Complete is one of the most extensive databases in the field of economics with a focus on management studies. Many articles are available as a full text download free of charge.

EconLit is comparable to Business Source Premier; the database also includes articles from the field of political economics, however.

Cantonal library of the University of Fribourg/Electronic journals A-Z: This link provides you with a list of journals from a wide array of different fields

In the recent past, **Google Scholar** has developed into a very helpful tool for literature research. Google Scholar works in much the same way as a traditional Google inquiry but limits its search to publications. The number of citations for any given search result is also provided. → http://scholar.google.com/

A further opportunity to search for articles is to access a journal's website directly (can easily be determined using Google). Most websites include a search option granting you access to abstracts at the very least.

Make sure access these search options from the university's intranet or via VPN-client. Otherwise you may have no or only restricted access to certain journals and databases (as access to certain journals is subject to charge)!

3. Writing a proposal

After completing your preliminary literature research and becoming acquainted with your topic, it is time to develop a proposal of 3-5 pages. This normally consists of the following:

- **Problem outline** which makes the practical and theoretical relevance apparent
- **Objectives** and **research questions** with an outline of the intended findings
- **Course of investigation** with a preliminary table of contents
- **Reference list**

The aim of the proposal is to give the supervisor an overview of the intended research project. A detailed **problem outline** enables the reader or supervisor to grasp the topic of the paper, the facts it is based on and what its focus is. On this basis you must put together a detailed and coherent **list of objectives**. The **course of investigation** describes how you choose to proceed and which steps will lead you to achieve the objectives of your research. It should become apparent why you are choosing a certain course of action. A preliminary **reference list** containing the main sources (monographs, articles form academic journals, etc.) rounds off your proposal. Beginning with the proposal, writing style, grammar and formal requirements ought to be given particular consideration.

4. Approval of proposal and deadlines

As soon as the proposal has been approved by the supervisor, you will be required to commit bindingly to writing your paper by registering. From then on, the time frame at your disposal is:

- for a term paper: 2 months
- for a bachelor thesis: 3 months
- for a master thesis: 5 months

These are not deadlines but may serve as an orientation for your planning.

5. Writing of paper

5.1 Formal requirements

The length of academic papers is as follows:

- for term papers 15-20 text pages
- for bachelor theses 30-40 text pages
- for master theses 60-80 text pages

Additional pages not counted as text pages are to added for the table of contents, list of abbreviations, figures, tables, references and/or interviews, the appendix and the declaration form (for bachelor and master theses only). Text pages are to be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3 etc.), the table of contents and various lists and appendices with Roman numerals (I, II, III etc.).

Times New Roman is the **font** that has largely prevailed as it is well legible and space-saving. Select a **font size** of 12 pt for the main text and 10 pt for footnotes. **Line spacing** is to be set to 1.5 in the main text and 1.0 in footnotes. Enter a line break between paragraphs.

The **margins** are to be formatted as follows: 4cm on the left, 2cm on the right, 2.5cm at the top (incl. header) and 2.5cm at the bottom (incl. footer).

When subdividing a chapter, it must consist of at least 2 sub-chapters (i.e. there cannot be a section 2.1 without a following section 2.2).

5.2. Structure of papers

An academic paper is to be structured as follows:

- Front page
- Table of contents / list of abbreviations (if applicable)
- Text pages of the paper proper
- Reference list / list of interviews (if applicable)
- Appendix (if applicable)
- Declaration form (only for bachelor and master theses; forms are available at the dean's office or can be downloaded from the faculty website).

5.3 Front page

Master thesis submitted to attain the degree of MA in Management at the
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the
University of Fribourg

The future of non-profit management

submitted by

cand. MA in Management John Doe
17, Exemplary Street
1700 Fribourg

submitted to

Prof. Dr. Markus Gmür
Chair of non-profit management

Fribourg, March 1st, 2012

5.4 Table of contents

The table of contents encompasses all sections of the paper and should therefore be clearly laid out. Four basic elements can be distinguished: Introduction (Chapter 1), theoretical foundations (Chapter 2), the main section of the paper where the selected research questions are answered empirically or conceptually (Chapters 3 through x) and the conclusion of the paper. Decimal classification is to be used to structure the main text. Four levels of classification are to be used at the most. Figure 2 illustrates an example of a table of contents.

5.5 List of abbreviations

The list of abbreviations only includes and defines topic-specific abbreviations. This includes abbreviations used in the list of references. Refrain from using too many abbreviations as this impairs the reading fluency. Commonly known abbreviations must not be listed.

5.6 Text body of the paper

As mentioned above, the main text of a paper typically consists of four sections (introduction, theoretical foundations, main section and conclusion). It is important to assure an adequate weighting of the sections and make sure that a coherent line of argument (red thread) is recognizable throughout the paper.

The **introduction** more or less corresponds to the already written proposal and includes the problem outline, the objectives and the course of investigation. The latter should describe briefly how the student proceeded with the analysis of literature and data, interviews and surveys as well as corporate documents and why he chose that particular course of investigation.

The **theoretical foundations** ought to include all basic principles discussed in the literature that are necessary to address the selected research questions (objectives). The theoretical section's scope should not exceed the core of the research questions. While compiling the theoretical foundations it is advisable to regularly reassess whether the theories in question are conducive and absolutely necessary in order for the reader to follow the line of argument and grasp the sought results. A separate chapter for terminology isn't necessary; notions are to be defined sufficiently as soon as they are introduced to the line of argument.

The **main section** of the paper answers the selected research questions either conceptually or empirically and is, in this respect, the core of the paper which ought to be attributed the according importance in terms of pages. The contents ought to bear reference to the topic at all times, follow a logical and unambiguous line of argument and controversial subjects should be depicted from different angles. An individual theoretical achievement in the course of such an assignment is imperatively required. Such an achievement can be a theoretical advancement, a systematic comparison, a derivation or deduction, for example. It is important to separate and to clearly distinguish personal assessments and comments from academic discussion.

The **conclusion** summarizes the key statements and findings and offers a personal assessment by the author with regard to achieving the defined goals. For empirical work, it makes sense to discuss limitations of the study. The paper is rounded off with a consideration of further research.

5.7 Appendix

Additional documents such as questionnaires or other documents, which contain information necessary for the understanding of the paper, should be included in the appendix. The sources used to write the paper are to be compiled in the list of references. Information included in the appendix must be referenced in the text.

5.8 List of interviews

Relevant survey or interviews conducted by the author in order to address his or her research questions must be listed in the list of interviews. The latter is to be sorted in alphabetical order of the interview partners' names and must contain the following: name and initials of the interlocutor, organization, function, location, approximate duration and date of the conversation. The interlocutor must be cited when the results of the interview are presented in the text. Name and date of the conversation are to be mentioned. There is no need to provide a complete written version of the interview; it is sufficient to provide an audio file.

5.9 Reference list

The list of references compiles books, journals, newspapers and other documents and is to be sorted in alphabetical order of author names. Every source cited in the text must be fully mentioned in the reference list.

For **monographs** the entry is as follows:

> *Name, First name* (possibly abbreviated) (Year): Full title, Edition (if not the first), Place of publication.
>
> *Allen, R.S* (2015): Market Orientation in Nonprofit Organizations, 2. Edition, Princeton N.J.

For **journal articles**:

> *Name, First name* (possibly abbreviated) (Year): Full title, in: Name of journal, Volume, Issue Nr. (if applicable), Page reference(s).
>
> *Berger, T.S./Shelley, M.* (2016): Volunteer Management in Australian Sports Associations, in: Nonprofit Science, Vol. 46, Issue 1, pp. 54-62.

For articles in **edited volumes**:

> *Name, First name* (possibly abbreviated) (Year): Full title, in: Name of editor(s) (eds.): Title of edited volume, Edition, Place of publication, Page reference(s).
>
> *Calloun, B.* (2004): Network Analysis of Collaborating Organizations in the Health Sector, in: Dickson, M./Read, H.G./Willings, P. (Eds.): Health Care Management, New York, pp. 59-86.

Articles published on the **Internet**:

> *Author* or *Name of editing organization* (eds): Title of article, precise URL, Date of query.
>
> *Ernst & Young* (eds.): Results-based management at the heart of a new public governance?, http://www2.eycom.ch/publications/items/public_services/2008_public_policy_evaluation/2008_EY_Overview_Public_Policy_Evaluation.pdf, 08/12/2010

5.10 Citations

Literal citations: Whoever adopts someone else's text either literally or textually and passes it off as one own is guilty of plagiarism. Surprisingly, a number of term papers are full of plagiarism or may in some cases even be considered as a single case of plagiarism.

In order to avoid such plagiarism it is necessary for students to be acquainted with and carefully respect the different forms of citation. It is not possible to quantify the ideal number of citations; the latter depends on the consulted sources and the literature used in the text.

Indirect citations: Most citations in an academic paper, however, are indirect citations. The required form of citation follows the "Harvard method" which is being widely used in international management research. As opposed to the traditional German method which places source references in footnotes, the Harvard method requires references to be set in parentheses directly in the text.

Examples of **Harvard citations**:

[…] Second, preferences are difficult for individuals themselves to identify accurately. Several researchers have concluded that what people say they prefer and what their behavior suggests they prefer is not always the same (see Slovic and Lichtenstein 1971; Nisbet and Wilson 1977; Argyis and Schon 1978). Third, the preferences of individuals change, sometimes dramatically, over time. For example, Cameron and Whetten (1981), Quinn and Cameron (1982) and Miles and Cameron (1982) found that criteria of effectiveness changed among constituent groups over the life cycle development of organizations. What was preferred at one point in time was not valued at another point. Fourth, contradictory preferences are held by individuals and pursued by organizations simultaneously. It is not unusual for individuals in organizations to prefer both growth and stability, efficiency and flexibility, high capital investment and high returns to stockholders, autonomy and control, and so on. Organizations try to cope with these contradictions using strategies such as sequencing (Cyert and March 1963), satisficing (Simon 1948), or incrementalism (Lindblom 1959). This relationship between contradictions and effectiveness is discussed in a following section. […]

Page references are included if the citation is a literal one or if an indirect citation refers to a limited text passage in the cited document (particularly relevant for citing passages from monographs).

Citability: Please note that only published sources that are traceable and checkable may be used (no term papers, master theses or lecture notes).

In academic research, citability of a source depends primarily on the review process it has undergone prior to publication, resulting in the following hierarchy:

1. Journals which have been through a double blind peer review. This means that an article submitted without mention of the author is anonymously evaluated by several experts from the scientific community who then express their revision requirements. A journal ranking exists based on the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) which regularly surveys citation frequency as a sort of market value. Journals inform about this reviewing process, which has become somewhat of an international standard, on their respective websites.

2. Journals, edited volumes or monographs published by university publishers which have gone through a single review by the editors and/or experts from the scientific community.

3. Specialist literature destined for practitioners.

4. Literature destined to the broader public.

Citations from journals destined to the public whose boundaries with scientific journals are blurred (e.g., Harvard Business Review, California Management Review) are problematical. In case of doubt, such sources are to be left out and replaced by others, as such journals often contain common knowledge not worthy of citation (the same applies to other popular magazines and newspapers such as Newsweek, New York Times etc.). Pure consumer magazines (e.g., Vogue, Harper's Bazaar) aren't citable under any circumstances. Furthermore, the following aren't to be cited:

- common knowledge available in encyclopedias,
- common technical terms,
- conventional terms from specialized encyclopedias,
- mathematical formulas.

Citing sources from the Internet is also problematical as such content is seldom subject to any kind of supervision even though they are being consulted ever more frequently. Internet sources may be used as visualizing material but are usually not suited to support academic lines of argument. Minimize the number of citations from Wikipedia or from consultants' websites!

5.11 Academic Language

It is assumed that correct spelling and punctuation as well as easily readable syntax may be taken for granted for the writing of an academic paper. Complicated sentence structure and sentences containing too many subordinate clauses should be avoided as well as a journalistic style of writing using excessive filler words and flowery phrases. The use of first-person narrative is unusual in academic writing. The author ought to guide the reader through the text, for example by referencing other chapters or sections of the paper.

6. Submission of the paper and evaluation

The submission has to follow the regulations of the faculty of management, economics, and social (please take note of the faculty website!). The supervisor receives the thesis as well as an electronic version from the dean's office.

Please send additional material (e.g. an Excel or SPSS file with the empirical data) directly to your supervisor by e-mail.

After submission, the responsible supervisor proceeds with the evaluation of the paper. Evaluation is based on the following rating sheet. The latter can therefore also serve as a checklist to students.

Evaluation sheet for bachelor and master theses:

Author	
Supervisor (Professor)	
Title of paper	

Evaluation of content (70 points max.)	Target	Achieved
1. Introduction (10 points max.)		
1.1 Logical structure of the paper	4	
1.2 Problem outline	3	
1.3 Clear objectives and logical course of investigation	3	
2. Theoretical foundations (15 points max.)		
2.1 Basic terminology	5	
2.2 Presentation and justification of relevant theories/approaches	5	
2.3 Linking of theory and topic of the paper	5	
3. Main section of the paper (40 points max.)		
3.1 Conclusive argumentation with close link to topic	5	
3.2 Presentation and justification of chosen methodology	5	
3.3 Analysis and interpretation	10	
3.4 Findings of study/achievement of goals/reflection	10	
3.5 Own contributions by author	10	
4. Conclusion (5 points max.)		
Limitations of author's study and consideration of further research	5	
Subtotal for content	**70 points**	

Formal evaluation	Target	Achieved
5. Formal requirements (25 points max.)		
5.1 Meeting formal criteria (length, font size etc.)	3	
5.2 Completeness (structure, list of illustrations etc., appendix)	2	
5.3 Academic phrasing, style	2	
5.4 Spelling, grammar, punctuation	5	
5.5 Citation (original sources, honesty, uniformity etc.)	5	
5.6 Presentation (illustrations, pagination etc.)	3	
5.7 Reference list	5	
6. Process of project progress (5 points max.)		
Autonomy in running project	5	
Achieved points for formal requirements	**30 P.**	
Grade:	**100 P.**	

Overall assessment of paper: