Tips for Writing Final Papers
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Students in my classes who are writing final papers often approach me with questions about guidelines for writing final papers. While the topic is best addressed by taking one of my courses specifically devoted to research methods, below are some of the most common problems I see when grading student papers.

1. **Finding Sources and Literature**. I often find that students struggle to find appropriate primary sources and secondary literature on the topics that they hope to write about. When thinking about a paper topic, your first move should be to perform several searches for related terms in the University of Regensburg's University Library catalog (https://www.regensburger-katalog.de/). In general, works that have appeared more recently and with reputable presses are likely to be more reliable than sources you can find with Internet searches. If books you are finding via your catalog searches are in the shelves (rather than in the library stacks), often going to the library yourself and looking for books next to it can lead you to new works. Likewise, consider looking at the introduction of the first books you find and their bibliographies. This way, you can begin to construct a list of works that are relevant for your topic. Along the way, you should consider contacting one of the library system's reference librarians, who can assist you in finding works. Here, for instance, is the e-mail for the specialists on history: geschichte.ub@ur.de.

   While the University Library should be your first starting point, it should not be the only resource you consult as you look for primary sources and secondary literature for your final papers. One good starting point can be major library catalogues outside of Regensburg, such as HOLLIS, the catalog for Harvard University's library system. When you identify secondary literature in such large library catalogues, you can often see the subjects keywords that are associated with it. (Subject keywords are metadata that are assigned to items in library catalogues that allow users to sort books according to their subject, rather than according to their author or publisher, for instance.) Through catalogues like HOLLIS, you can often search for all books that are, for instance, autobiographies related to the Vietnam War—and then often even sort among these books for those written in English (or Vietnamese, or Chinese, etc.) Beyond the catalogues of large libraries like Harvard, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin or the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, you should also look at "catalogues of catalogues," the best known example of which is Worldcat (www.worldcat.org). These catalogues can perform global searches for books, which can be helpful if you are looking for books not in English or German or on rare topics.

   The above advice primarily concerns secondary works (i.e. books), but your University Library account also gives you access to an extensive selection of databases that contain primary sources, such as newspapers, historical documents, and digital archives. Your best starting point here is DBIS, the website for which is here: https://dbis.ur.de/. How best to use DBIS is a complicated subject, but you can sort among databases covering most topics that you might write about when studying with me.

2. **Interlibrary Loan.** Students often ask me how they can obtain books that are not physically available in Regensburg. The best solution in 95% cases is Interlibrary Loan (ILL) (German: *Fernleihe*), a service that allows you to request copies of books that

may not be in Regensburg, but are at other libraries (primarily in Bavaria and Berlin, but in some cases also elsewhere). To use the system, you need to go the UR library catalogue (https://www.regensburger-katalog.de/TouchPoint/start.do?Language=de&View=ubr&Branch=0) and type in the book you are looking for. Your initial results may often show that the book isn't in the holdings of Regensburg, but if you then click on the tab "Verbundkatalog," you will tell the system to look through (almost) all libraries in Bavaria as well as select libraries in Berlin. You should be able to find the book as one of the results there (#2 in the list for me). Click on it. When the page loads (make sure you are logged into the UR library system) you can click on "Services" near the bottom of the screen and then, to the right of "Fernleihe," "bestellen."

You will then be walked through several steps that should be self-explanatory and you can then order the book. It will typically take about a week for books to arrive, since they physically have to be delivered to Regensburg from, say, Bamberg or Würzburg or Berlin. Once the book arrives, it will contain a yellow paper slip in it that you have to return together with the book (you have to pay a fine or a processing fee if you lose the slip). ILL is free for 99% of books that are being delivered within Germany. In very rare cases, you may need to order books from outside of Germany, in which case you may need to pay a fee. ILL can be a powerful tool to broaden your range of reference, especially when combined with the tips mentioned under the first point to find secondary works.

3. **Essay Structure.** During your secondary education, many of you may have been taught to structure your essays with explicit sections and subsections (1, 1.A, 1.A.i etc.). This was good advice when you were just learning to write more complex compositions, but as you mature and develop as a writer, I encourage you to abandon these "training wheels" and use your words through style and syntax to guide the reader through your essay. As you write your paragraphs, for instance, consider connecting them to the preceding and successive paragraphs through words and expressions like "likewise," "moreover," "meanwhile," "in contrast," "be that as it may," etc. Having strong first and last sentences in your paragraphs—necessary given that paragraphs contain units of thought—will make it easier for you to connect one paragraph with another.

   Looking for models for how to do so? Simply read the works of authors for respected presses like C.H. Beck, Suhrkamp, Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, etc. You will find that they very rarely use the kind of explicit sections that you have been taught to use, and instead rely on their sense of style to guide the reader through their arguments.

4. **Paragraph Length.** The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines a paragraph as "a section of a piece of writing, usually consisting of several sentences dealing with a single subject." When I receive final papers from students, however, their paragraphs are often either too long (because they deal with too many topics) or too short (because they have not reflected enough on what they want to say). This can be distracting for the reader, since the reader is likely to lose their attention over the course of a very long paragraph, while excessively short paragraphs can be exhausting, too, not giving the reader time to digest your argument. Writers who do not give their readers time to "rest" or "breathe" with a new paragraph risk losing

their readers' attention.

Therefore, as you write and revise your work, a good rule of thumb is to double check the length of your paragraphs. If a paragraph is more than around 10 lines in length, you should reflect on whether it really contains just one point. Perhaps there is a chance to break the paragraph into multiple paragraphs. Likewise, if a paragraph is less than 3 lines in length, you should reflect as to whether the point in it is fleshed out enough. Under almost no circumstances should a paragraph be multiple pages (A4/Letter) in length. While the occasional short paragraph can serve the purpose of jolting the reader to attention, too many short paragraphs will give the impression that you have not yet organized your thoughts.

5. **Colloquialisms.** Like many other languages, divergences exist between formal, academic written English and colloquial spoken English. When you write your papers for a university context, you should aim to write in the former style. One way of doing this is by avoiding colloquialisms. Perhaps the most common example are "a lot of," "lots" or "lots of" When you want to use these words to modify for a noun (i.e. "a lot of problems"), consider using words like *many* or *several.* When you want to use these verbs as an adverb (I.e. I missed her a lot), consider other adverbs like *greatly*. The University of Cambridge Press had excellent advice on this matter at their website: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/much-a-lot-lots-a-good-deal-adverbs

This list should not be considered exhaustive, but if you are looking for additional advice, I recommend the following books. They should be widely available at the University Library or via Inter-Library Loan.

- William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*
- Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis*
- William ZInsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*
- Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*
- Thomas S. Mullaney and Christopher Rea, *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You (and the World)*

I wish you the best of luck with writing your final papers—and with your development as writers!

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