

Requirements for the term paper

Formal requirements

The formal criteria for writing a term paper at the Chair of *Comparative Politics* are formulated in the following document. The scope of the term paper should be 5,000 words ($\pm 10\%$) excluding the abstract and references. If your study regulations requires deviating formal criteria, please let me know.

The term paper is due **30.09.2026**. Any later submission leads to a downgrade of the evaluation.

Content requirements

The term paper should relate to the contents of the seminar. The paper should propose a realistic research design that could be employed in the context of a term paper or thesis. The structure of the term paper should follow that of an empirical article in a scientific journal (please refer to the readings of our seminar).

Accordingly, the seminar paper should begin with a **research puzzle** (an empirical phenomenon that cannot be explained by existing studies), introduce the specific **research question**, and explain the scientific and societal **relevance** of the topic. This should be followed by a **targeted literature review**, on the basis of which a **theoretical foundation** along with testable **research hypotheses** should be developed. Subsequently, the **data** used as well as the key **methodological steps** of the analysis must be explained. Finally, students should give a brief summary of the proposed design and discuss potential challenges in the future implementation.

Structure

1. Introduction

- (a) Research question
- (b) Relevance of the research question
- (c) Brief explanation of the empirical design
- (d) Brief review of implications of proposed research and limitations

2. Literature Review

- The goal is to embed your research question into the existing literature
- Literature reviews should be targeted and specific
- The goal is not to summarize all literature on a topic, but to show what the literature as a whole has already accomplished and where its limitations lie — which your research ideally helps to address

3. Theory

- You should build your theory section following the fourfold-classification Powner (2014) describes:
 - (a) Expectation
 - (b) Mechanism(s)
 - (c) Assumptions
 - (d) Scope conditions
- It's likely that you'll dedicate varying space to the four components
- At the end of your theory section, you should derive empirically testable hypotheses

4. Data

- (a) Presentation of the data (e.g. existing survey, macro-level data, interview data, etc.)
- (b) If part of the research design involves collecting data, please outline how you intend to collect data and specify items/interview questions
- (c) Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the data used

5. Methods

- (a) Introduction of the method used
- (b) Description of the method's implementation

6. Outlook

- (a) Brief summary of your design
- (b) Strengths of your proposed design (make a case why this helps advancing the literature)
- (c) Weaknesses/Limitations of your design (if possible, mention how these could be addressed)

Evaluation criteria

The following points are included in the evaluation of the paper:

- **Substantive criteria**

- In general, attention is paid to whether all requirements mentioned in the outline are met, including:
- Was the research question clearly and understandably formulated?
- Was the relevance of the research question clearly demonstrated?
- Was the existing state of research critically and systematically evaluated and linked to the research question?
- Was an appropriate data basis identified and clearly explained?
- Was a suitable method chosen for the research question and the proposed hypotheses?
- Is the proposed implementation of the method plausible?
- Were potential limitations addressed in the outlook?

- **Structure**

- Are all (necessary) components from the outline included?
- Is there a clear line of argument? Are the individual sections coherently connected?
- Were unnecessary repetitions avoided? [Some repetition between the introduction and conclusion is natural]

- **Formal Requirements**

- Is the text linguistically clear and easy to understand?
- Was proper citation used?
- Are all figures and tables labeled? Are they referenced in the text?
- Was the paper submitted on time?

Software

For writing the paper, **Microsoft Word**, **LibreOffice**, **LaTeX**, or other similar word processing programs are permitted, as long as they can compile a .pdf file using the predefined formatting standards.

For citations, it is strongly recommended to use **Zotero** or any other citation management software that produce a coherent citation style (e.g. APA or Chicago).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism and all forms of ghostwriting are prohibited. Written assignments will be checked for plagiarism using Turnitin. AI tools are generally permitted, but it must be transparently disclosed to what extent and which tools were used (e.g., what prompts were employed?). Submissions in the seminar must be based on the students' own ideas and be completed independently. No paper written by an AI should be submitted. In case of suspicion, the assignment or final paper must be orally defended.

Students are expected to use scholarly sources and cite them correctly. If you have any doubts about proper citation, please consult the Guidelines for Academic Writing provided by the Institute of Political Science.

Literature

Powner, L. C. (2014). *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. CQ Press

Schimmel, J. (2012). *Writing Science: How to Write Papers That Get Cited and Proposals That Get Funded*. Oxford University Press, USA