

## WRITING GUIDE – HOW TO WRITE A TERM PAPER

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## WRITING GUIDE – HOW TO WRITE A TERM PAPER

Dear Reader,

Welcome to this overview on How To Write a Term Paper! This Writing Guide is the outcome of a tutorial called “Einstieg mit Erfolg”, so basically “a successful start/beginning”. Here, various tutors aimed to help students throughout the writing process of their first term paper(s). With the end of the tutorial, we decided to also *write down* the content and results of the tutorial to further support students in their writing process. Therefore, with the usage of material compiled by Britta Karnarski and Leonie Schmidt, this Guide was written by me, Nele Grosch, an M.A. student majoring in Anglophone Literary, Cultural and Media Studies. This Writing Guide is mainly a collection of guidelines, suggestions, and examples. Most things you can find in this compilation do not have to be done exactly the way as suggested here (except for citations and the content borrowed from the English department’s style sheet, that’s definitely a must!). However, we find that these ideas and approaches have helped many students to have a better understanding of what a term paper actually is and what it might or should look like. Hence, this Writing Guide focuses on getting started. Writing the actual term paper is (sorry to say) going to be your work, and yours alone. Nevertheless, the following guide will provide some ideas on how to start the whole process, how to structure your ideas and paragraphs, and suggest approaches to research, writing, editing, etc. Furthermore, in some classes you will have to write an abstract for your term paper, so we will introduce this format, as well. Along the way you will also find ideas, examples, and exercises you can work and practice with. The Writing Guide will thus be structured in the manner presented on the title page. You can skip to a specific section any time you want or simply work through the Guide step by step.

Have fun and good luck!

## 1) TOPIC AND THESIS FINDING

### 1. How to Find a Topic

Let's begin. You have to write a term paper. The main suggestion on how you can make your term paper and the writing process as easy as possible for you, is to find a topic you are sincerely interested in. You can, of course, have a look at the topics your lecturer proposes for term papers or pick one of the headings on the syllabus you find most intriguing. That is definitely a good start, but this Guide would like to suggest a few more options for you to find your perfect term paper topic. This chapter provides a few ideas and exercises on how to find it.

#### Exercise A: How to Find a Term Paper Topic in Fifteen Minutes

- a) *Take a piece of paper and write down the title of your favourite or least favourite novel or film.*  
*You have five minutes to write down everything about this novel/film that comes to mind. Keep writing without pausing to think or to read or correct what you have written so far. Do not lift the pen from the paper for the full five minutes! If you realize that your thoughts stray from the topic, try to focus by writing down the title of the novel/film once more. You do not need to worry about spelling or grammar. This text is only for you.*
- b) *Read your text or notes and highlight those words or passages that seem most important and/or interesting to you. Can you make out any ideas or even patterns of ideas that repeatedly appear in your text/notes/bullet points? What interests you the most in terms of your (least) favourite novel/film? Try to structure those ideas in the form of a single full sentence or a preliminary title at the very end.*
- c) *This technique can now be applied to your term paper. Simply repeat the process with a focus on the content of your seminar. Think about which ideas, theories, literature, etc. you found most interesting and write down your notes in a similar manner as described above. Again, try to structure those ideas in the form of a single full sentence or preliminary title at the end.*

### Example A:

If you are reading Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and you seem to be interested in the analysis of gender fluidity, binaries, and presentations, try to firstly put these bullet points in a title-like 'statement':

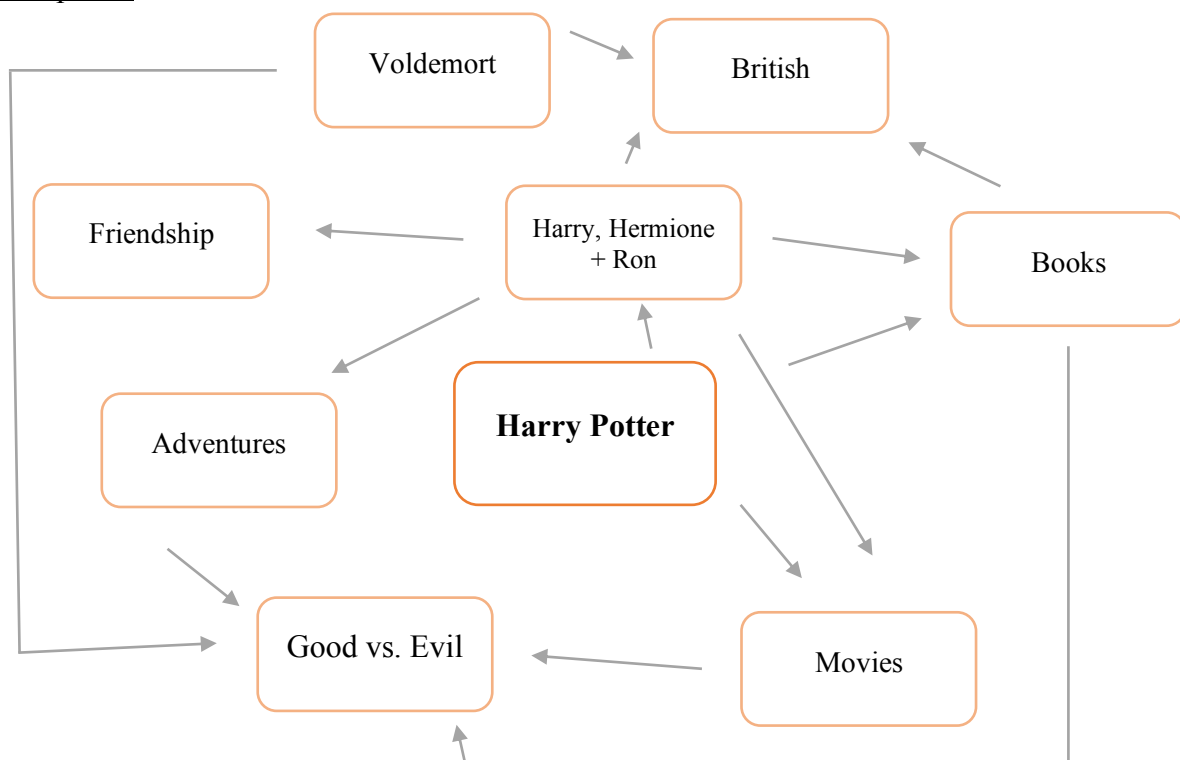
“Presentations of Gender: Binaries and Fluidity in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928).”

We will come back to the specific title of your paper at a later stage (e.g. 2.: Finding a Narrow Research Topic and Possible Title).

### Exercise B: Creating a Concept Map

- a) *A concept map is similar to a mind map. It focuses more on a sort of 'follow-up thoughts' design, lastly creating a 'concept', more than a collection of ideas. Again, you can of course start with thinking about your favourite movie/book, or right away write about your seminar or term paper topic.*

### Example B:



b) *The arrows point quite literally to the interconnection and correlation between different aspects you might think about when reading or watching the Harry Potter series. If you follow the arrows, you might come to the conclusion that in both the novels and the movies, Harry, Ron and Hermione established a close friendship and are constantly fighting for 'the good', fighting against 'the evil'. The books are written by a British author, the characters are British, and the novels and films are set in Britain. Connecting all those points, you could therefore underline the fact, that good vs. evil as portrayed in a British cultural context. Thinking about a more concrete topic, you can thus ask: How are stereotypical aspects of good vs. evil in British culture portrayed in one of the Harry Potter novels or films?*

## 2. Finding a Narrow Research Topic and Possible Title

The topics we have established so far are still very broad. Particularly for a term paper, however, your topic (and thus the title of your paper) should be as concise as possible. Therefore, we need to find key words and specific aspects you want to analyse. The approach you want to follow, is:

➡ from broad to narrow!

### Example A:

- Victorian Imperialism
- Late 19th-Century Victorian Imperialism
- Representations of Imperialism in Late 19th-Century Literature
- Representations of Imperialism in Late 19th-Century Novels
- Representations of Imperialism in R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883)

Regarding the Harry Potter Example (B) from above, you need to follow a similar pattern:

- Harry Potter
- The Depiction of Good vs. Evil in *Harry Potter*
- The Depiction of Good vs. Evil in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)
- A Literary Analysis of the Depiction of Good vs. Evil in British Cultural Contexts in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)

### Exercise C: From Broad to Narrow

*After having taken a look at the different options of how to find a topic for your research, now it is your turn. If you have already completed the exercises above, sort your notes and ideas and try to find a narrow topic (or maybe already a title for your paper) by following the suggested steps above.*

### 3. Finding (a) Research Question(s) and/or a Thesis Statement

Depending on the kind of paper you are writing, you will need either one or more research question(s) and/or a thesis statement. The research question(s) is/are basically just asking what you want to find out in your paper.

#### Research Question(s)

##### Example A:

Topic/Title: Presentations of Gender: Binaries and Fluidity in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928)

Research Questions: How is the concept of gender presented in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928)?  
How are gender binaries and gender fluidity narrated/depicted/etc.?

##### Example B:

Topic/Title: A Literary Analysis of the Depiction of Good vs. Evil in British Cultural Contexts in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)

#### Exercise A:

*What do you think could be (a) possible research question for Example B? Write down your ideas and question(s).*

### Exercise B:

*Take another look at your previous notes and your topic and preliminary title. What do you think is/are the question(s) you want to answer in your paper? Write down your question(s).*

NOTE: During the upcoming research and the writing process, you might find yourself focusing on a different subject than the one specified in your title and research question(s). If you realise you are unhappy with your original research question, you are allowed to adjust it at a later stage. However, be careful to consistently keep your question(s) in mind during the research and writing process. We will revisit the research question(s) in the final stages of polishing and editing (Chapter 6).

### Thesis Statement

Moreover, it is in most cases helpful to establish and write down your thesis statement. A thesis statement announces the analytical argument you intend to make and prove in the duration of your paper. It serves as a ‘map’ for your paper, and it tells the reader what to expect. In order to be able to form a thesis statement, you have to either, already be informed about the topic, or start your research beforehand and try to find out what you want to claim in the course of your paper.

### Example A:

Topic/Title: Presentations of Gender: Binaries and Fluidity in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* (1928)

Research Questions: How is the concept of gender presented in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928)?

How are gender binaries and gender fluidity narrated/depicted/etc.?

Thesis Statement: 1) The concept of gender in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) is depicted through the protagonist Orlando; it is shown to be fluid and not necessarily binary, and thus presented as a social construct rather than a biological fact.

2) I will demonstrate that Woolf depicts the social construction of gender in her novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by underlining the fluidity and non-binary of gender rather than insisting on it being biologically given and unchangeable.

### Exercise A:

*Refer back to your notes, your topic and/or title, and your research question(s). What do you think could be a clear and precise thesis statement for your paper? Choose the idea or pattern of ideas you like the most and turn it into a question about your topic. Starting with the interrogative particle “what?”. Then answer the question. Try out different questions and answers. Once you have formulated a what-question and an answer that seems interesting to you, take your answer, and turn it into a question that begins with the interrogative particle “how?”. Again, answer the question. Now all you have to do to formulate your thesis statement is combining your questions and answers in one or two sentence(s). You can write “I will argue/demonstrate/show that the author(s) ... (what?) by (how?) ...” You can also turn the questions and answers around. Try out different versions of the thesis statement and see what works best for you and your topic.*



### Thesis Statement Checklist:

- ✓ **Is my thesis statement narrow and specific enough?**  
Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: *why* is something “good”; *what specifically* makes something “successful”?
- ✓ **Does my thesis pass the “how?” test?**  
If a reader’s first response is “how?” your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.
- ✓ **Does my thesis pass the “So what/why?” test?**  
If a reader’s first response is, “So what?” or “why?” then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- ✓ **Do I make a claim about my material and have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?**  
If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it is possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
- ✓ **Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?**  
If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It’s okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.

(The Writing Center 2014: n. pag.)

## 2) RESEARCH

### A Few Notes on Research

Research and its process and timing are a personal choice. Thus, this Writing Guide cannot tell you exactly how to conduct your research or find and choose your sources. Some people prefer doing it all at once, some do it step by step and chapter by chapter. A good mixture of both is probably the most efficient way to go. Getting a sense of the existing works on your topics before starting to dive in deeper while actually writing the respective chapters might be a good approach. Therefore, this Writing Guide will mention the research process throughout the former chapter as well as during the next ones without telling you exactly when and how to do it. Sadly, there is generally no clear guideline; it is an individually chosen process and timing. However, I can promise you that it will get easier and eventually you will get the hang of it! While the university's library search engine (JUSTfind) and alternatively databases like ProQuest, JSTOR or Project MUSE are always a good place to start, this short overview also provides some helpful tips on what to consider or keep in mind:

- Look for key words or phrases that you want to discuss or work with.
- Research your primary source(s) (look up the title and/or author in the search engines of your choice)
- Some articles, books, authors, etc. will keep reappearing. It might make sense to follow-up on those sources.
- Depending on your thesis statement/research question(s), consider looking for literature that argues for and against your thesis and build your arguments on that.
- Skim the chapter/article titles in order to find the ones that apply to your topic.
- Read the first and last sentence of each paragraph in an article/chapter to quickly check whether the content is related to your topic/thesis/question(s).
- When you find a good source, already note down bullet points and/or quotes (incl. page numbers!), you might want to use them later on in your paper.
- You have to stop and make a cut somewhere! At one point it might seem like there are a million other important theories, but you cannot discuss them all.
- Always keep your thesis statement and research question(s) in mind!

### 3) STRUCTURE

#### **How to Structure the Term Paper**

The first step to start the research and the writing process, is to create a structure for your term paper. This is necessary in order for you to know which topics, theories, material, key words, etc. you need to research, and later on, how you want to establish your arguments. Writing an outline is a great way to create a first overview on how you want to proceed.

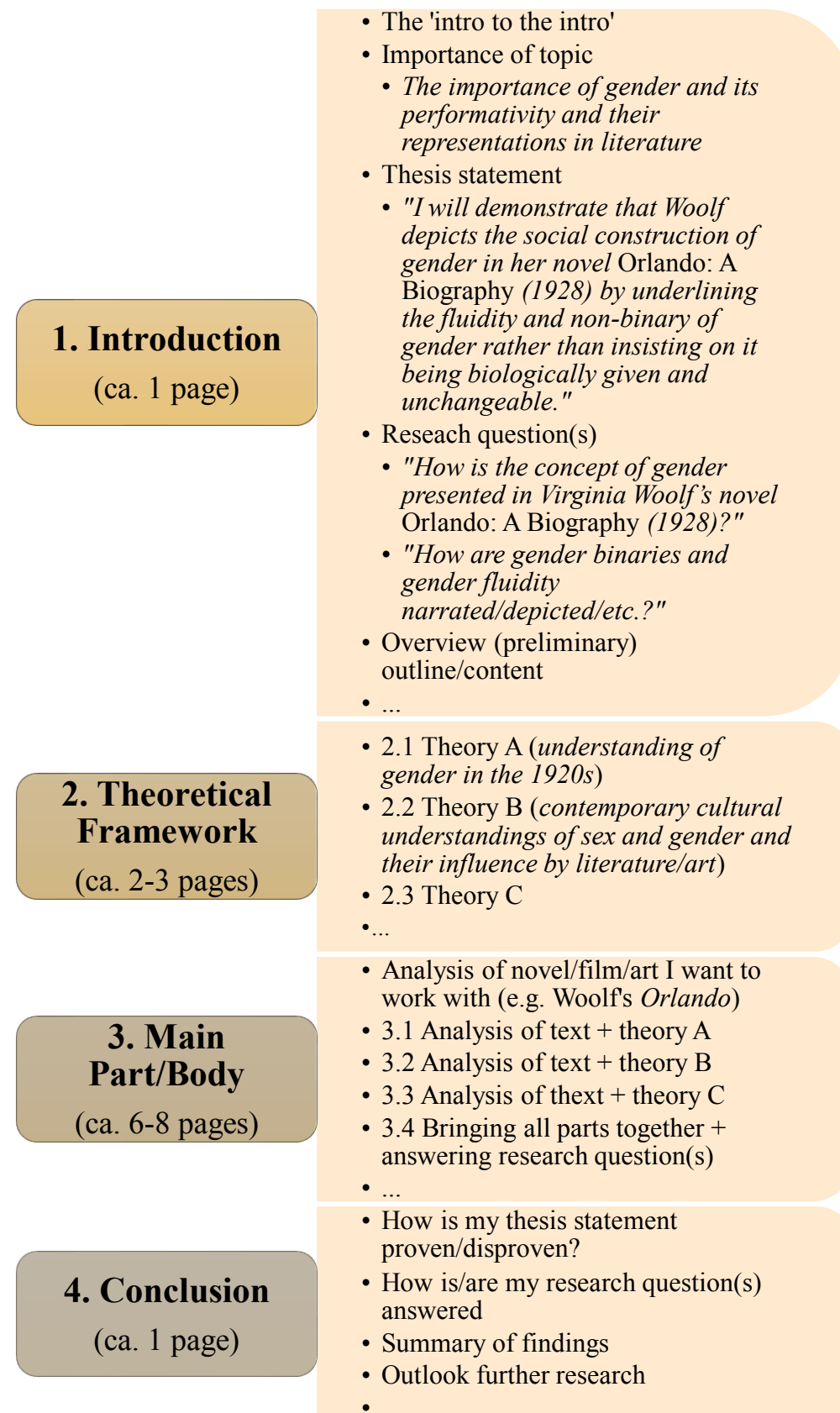
#### **Outline**

[https://youtu.be/\\_ZWe3mmLcoA?t=30](https://youtu.be/_ZWe3mmLcoA?t=30)

Your outline can include anything you find helpful, and a general structure and notes to yourself while researching and writing. It can be useful to note down the page numbers you intend (or are required) to write per chapter. An outline is not the same thing as a content page, so maybe you find it helps you to add bullet points with your most important (or required) aspects and contents you want to include. Furthermore, your outline is not set in stone. When you realise while writing the paper that you found another idea you think is important or absolutely needs to be included, you can always go back and revise your outline as well. However, you need to make sure to have a concise structure. When in doubt, always go back to your thesis statement and research question(s). Exemplified by the Grammar Squirrel, the video from the link above shows how helpful it is in most cases to create an outline for your paper before writing it. It simplifies and structures the research and writing process. For some people it makes sense to start with the outline before beginning the research, others prefer to have an overview of the research material before creating the outline. Most often noting down a preliminary outline first, helps in order to have a broad idea of what you are looking for; revising your outline after finding material you want to work with makes sense as a next step. Once you are happy with your outline, you can start looking for more specific sources and begin your actual writing process.

### Example A:

The outline and preliminary structure of your term paper might look like this:



### Exercise A:

*Refer back to your notes regarding your ideas, topic(s), thesis statement and research question(s). Try to create your own outline for your term paper.*

### Structure

The basic structure of a term paper mostly follows this rule of thumb:

1. Introduction: “In this paper I will show X. I will demonstrate X by looking at A, B, C, etc.”
2. Main Part/Body: Sections A, B, C, etc.
3. Conclusion: “Now that I have looked at A, B, C, etc., I have shown X.”

NOTE: Different classes, departments or lecturers have different requirements or expectations or prefer different versions of structures. If in doubt, you can always talk to or email your lecturer and confirm your outline or preliminary structure with them!

#### Example A:

- 1 Introduction
  - 2 Body
    - 2.1 Theoretical/Historical Framework
    - 2.2 Argument A
    - 2.3 Argument B
    - 2.4 Argument C
  - 3 Conclusion
- Bibliography

#### Example B:

- 1 Introduction
  - 2 Body
    - 2.1 Argument A  
(+ Framework)
    - 2.2 Argument B  
(+ Framework)
    - 2.3 Argument C  
(+ Framework)
  - 3 Conclusion
- Bibliography

### Exercise A:

*Once again, take a look at your previous notes and perhaps your outline. Think about what structure makes sense for your term paper. Try and write down a preliminary structure for your paper based on your research and outline.*

## 4) INTRODUCTION

### **How To Write an Introduction**

Writing the introduction can be the hardest or the easiest part of your term paper. It is the point where you actually have to start writing. Alternatively, it can be the part you write last, after you know exactly what you want to say. Some people prefer to start with their introduction and write their term paper chronologically, others write it after the rest of the work is done. For most people, a compromise of both tactics works best. Having a look at your notes in the outline (and perhaps the rest of this section), you can start by writing down your ideas for the introduction in bullet points or even whole sentences. As soon as the first draft of your term paper is finished, you want to go back to your introduction and add information and findings you found along the way, revise the structure you announce in your introduction to match the one you ended up organising your paper by, and check the thesis statement, research question(s), and their respective answers.

### **Dos and Don'ts**

- Do state your thesis rather sooner than later.
- An introduction should be neither much shorter nor much longer than one page.
- Do not write single sentences but complete (coherent) paragraphs.
- Do not write: “In the end I/the paper will come to a conclusion” but rather “I/the paper will conclude that...”.

### **Elements of an Introduction**

The main elements of an introduction are:

- A general introduction to the topic: The ‘intro to the intro’
- Your thesis statement
- Your research question(s)
- A description or overview of the structure of the term paper
- Your position (with regard to other scholars)
- The relevance of your topic and investigation

### **The ‘Intro to the Intro’**

There are different ways to start your introduction. The introduction to your introduction is, of course, the very beginning of your paper. Therefore, you want to catch your reader’s attention and convince them to continue reading. The most common types or elements of the ‘intro to the intro’ are:

- Funnel introduction
  - o From broad to narrow: You structure your ‘intro to the intro’ like you are giving information through a funnel. Starting with general input and comments, your introduction then becomes more detailed and precise until you state your thesis statement.
- Dramatic, interesting or funny story
  - o Pretty self-explanatory: You want to draw your reader in by (shortly!) telling a story your reader can relate to or finds interesting, funny, catchy, etc.
- Surprising statistics or facts
  - o Again, you want to entice your reader. Here, you can use either statistics or facts that seem surprising, shocking, or whatever fits your topic and thesis.
- Historical background
  - o You can also provide a historical background to your paper and its topics. Naturally, this only makes sense if a historical background is needed in order to better understand or communicate your topic.

NOTE: Generally, you can also combine these methods. Nevertheless, you always need to consider your topic, thesis statement and research question(s); the method(s) you choose depend on and should always correlate to these elements.

Example A:

The complexity of gender, sex, and sexuality is a highly discussed and important cultural subject, now more than ever. While conservatively sex and gender are still seen as one and the same, research proofs that not only gender is a social construct based on its performativity, but the binary system of the biological sex is significantly more diverse than commonly believed. The cultural significance of the topic is perfectly demonstrated in countless works of art, film, and literature amongst others. A prime example of representation of gender and sex fluidity as well as sexuality and its many facets is the 1928 published novel *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf. As a queer author, Woolf tells the tale of the protagonist Orlando, who during the course of the book, changes their gender from male to female while being romantically involved with people of different genders. In this paper, I will thus demonstrate that Woolf depicts the social construction and performativity of gender in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by underlining the fluidity and non-binary of sex and gender rather than insisting on it being biologically given and unchangeable.

In order to answer the questions of how the concepts of sex and gender are represented in Woolf's novel and how gender binaries and their fluidity are depicted, I will begin by highlighting key theories of queer, gender, and sexuality studies. These theories and the historical context of the 1920s are consequently woven into the following analysis of the novel. This chapter will be parted into several subchapters, examining Orlando's gender performativity firstly as a man and secondly as a woman. Lastly, I will conclude that Virginia Woolf created a work that represents not only the possibility of genderfluidity based on self-understanding, identity, and performativity, but ultimately of queer love.

'Intro to the intro': funnel introduction

Thesis statement

Research questions

Overview of process/outline



NOTE: Please note that this introduction is not necessarily complete due to its exemplifying character. An introduction can be structured in different ways and ideally the theories you want to focus on can be presented a little more precisely. Furthermore, here it was decided to work with Example A in terms of an overall term paper structure. If you or your lecturer prefers Example B, naturally your outline overview has to look a little different. However, you can always refer to the general information of this chapter. If in doubt, look up various other example introductions online. After finishing your paper, go back to your introduction and double-check its structure and overall information. Does everything still coincide with the final version of your paper? Did you find another theory that needs to be mentioned in your introduction? Did you change the outline or structure? If so, correct your introduction and read it over again.

#### Exercise A:

*Now that you have figured out your topic, thesis statement, and research question(s), you probably also will have started with research. Remember the elements of an introduction and try to write down your own for your term paper.*

## 5) PARAGRAPH WRITING

### How to Structure Paragraphs

You have probably already learned how to structure sentences in a different class, like “Reading and Writing” or “Composition”. Therefore, this serves only as a quick reminder and/or overview. The structure of a paragraphs basically follows the so-called TTEB-pattern:

**T**ransition Sentence

**T**opic Sentence

**E**vidence and Analysis

**B**rief Wrap-up Sentence

### Transition Sentence

A transition sentence connects the last paragraph to the next. Hence, it ensures a smooth and concise reading flow.

#### Example A:

END OF PARAGRAPH:

*Hence, Orlando’s masculinity was mainly perceived due to its historical contemporary understanding to be performed and perceived as such.*

TRANSITION SENTENCE:

*In contrast to the concept of masculinity, however, femininity is performed in a much more nuanced way.*

## Topic Sentence

Every paragraph should have a topic sentence, which is the most important sentence of the paragraph and clearly states the topic and the main or controlling idea. It indicates what the paragraph is going to discuss and is therefore a helpful tool to guide the reader (and the writer themselves!).

### Example A:

TOPIC CONTROLLING IDEA  
Gender is not a biological and natural given, but rather a social construct based on its performativity and perception.

NOTE: The topic sentence is usually (but not always) the first or second sentence in a paragraph. Most readers expect and want to see what they are going to read about right at the beginning. Sometimes the topic sentence can be placed at the end. In this case, the paragraph often starts with a series of examples, statistics or facts; the topic sentence at the end then serves as the conclusion.

## Evidence and Analysis/Supporting Sentences

The evidence and analysis are also called the supporting sentences. They explain or prove the topic sentence. Supporting your topic sentence is the most important thing and basically what writing a term paper is all about! The failure to explain your ideas properly often is one of the biggest problems in student writing. So remember: You need to use specific and concise details in your paragraph to be thorough and underline your point. This is your analysis. Here, you can use numerous kinds of specific supporting tools: Examples, statistics, quotations, etc. When writing your term paper in literary, cultural, and media studies, you most likely need quotations of literature, films or other pieces of art. Additionally to the most important part – your own ideas and arguments – secondary literature is your closest ally and your primary source(s) your best friend(s). Sorry to tell you, but there are no examples here, every term paper should be a unique work and this Writing Guide cannot tell you how to write your analysis. You can do this!

### **Brief Wrap-up Sentence/Concluding Sentence**

A brief wrap-up or concluding sentence serves two purposes: Firstly, it signals the end of a paragraph, and secondly it states the most important idea(s) for the reader to remember. This can be done either by summarizing the paragraph's main points or by repeating the topic sentence in other words.

#### Example A:

Hence, the social construction of gender in contrast to the biological understanding of sex, is not only argued for by scholars like Judith Butler (e.g. 1990) but also underlined by representations in literature and other forms of art.

NOTE: A paragraph does not always need a concluding sentence. Sometimes, especially for single and/or long paragraphs, a concluding sentence helps the reader (and writer) to remember the most important idea(s) or point(s). However, you do not need to end every paragraph with a brief wrap-up sentence, particularly if you continue your main idea in the following paragraph. If in doubt, look at the transition and topic sentence of the paragraph in question and compare them to the ones of the one you intend to write your next.

#### REMEMBER:

- 1 paragraph = 1 idea
- Roughly 2-3 paragraphs per page (do not shorten a paragraph in case this does not fit. The most important thing is to have a concise structure, you do not have to have an exact number of lines or paragraphs on one page. This is a useful guideline, however.)
- Never end a paragraph with a direct quote! You want your reader to remember your own idea(s) and analysis, not something another person said.
- Follow a clear structure (TTEB)

NOTE: A headline never stands alone. If you start a new (sub)chapter, you always need to write at least one paragraph beneath the heading. A heading always signals a new beginning of some kind, either a whole new chapter or a new subchapter. Therefore, when you start a new chapter (e.g. Chapter 3) you always need to include some information before you continue with the headline of the subchapter (e.g. Subchapter 3.1).

#### Exercise A:

*Start your paragraph and overall term paper writing process now. Try to follow the structure mentioned above step by step. This is your main work and constitutes the biggest part of your term paper. Remember to include your results and main findings in your final conclusion.*

## 6) THE STYLESHEET: CITATIONS & BIBLIOGRAPHY

Welcome to the second-shortest chapter of this Writing Guide! This section simply aims to inform you about the English Department's style sheet and to urge you to please (!) consult and use it. It does not make sense to present it all here in the Writing Guide again, so this is just a very brief overview: The style sheet is a compilation of information on how to cite correctly, how to note down sources in your bibliography, and how the overall layout of your term paper is supposed to look. It might seem a bit overwhelming at first, but you will get used to its structure pretty quickly and learn to appreciate how easily the information you need can be accessed.

<https://www.uni-giessen.de/faculties/f05/engl/GenIn/StySh/stylesheets/style-sheet-for-term-papers-english-department>

### Citations & Bibliography/Works Cited (a short overview)

- Parenthetical citation in the text: Document your source after you have used it in the text by stating the source in parentheses:  
“Quoted text” (author's last name (space) date of publication of text: page number) your text.
- The Works Cited is a list of each and every source cited in your text (and only those that you actually used/worked with/cited).
- Different kinds of works/sources require different citations! Always check the correct way to cite in the style sheet (!) and compare it your list of Works Cited/Bibliography at the end of the paper.

### Exercise A:

*Have a look at the following title and the English Department's style sheet. Try to cite them correctly in term of a listing in your bibliography. In order to know what kind of work you are citing, look up the titles in the university library's search engine (JUSTfind).*

*Orlando: A Biography – Virginia Woolf*

*Half of a Yellow Sun – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

*New Approaches to Narrative: Cognition – Culture – History – Vera Nünning (Ed.)*

*“On Being Queer and Postcolonial: Reading Zadie Smith's NW through Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway” – Alberto Fernández Carbajal*

### Exercise B:

*After that, look at the sources you have used in your own term paper so far and either add them to your bibliography/list of works cited or double-check their citations.*

NOTE: In most cases it helps to write down the source you are using as soon as you quote them in your paper. Maybe create a new Word (or other) document and compile your bibliography there during the research and writing process. After your paper is finished, you can simply copy and paste the list of works cited into your term paper document.

## 7) POLISHING: REVISING & EDITING

### Polishing Your Term Paper

Last but not least: Polishing your term paper is the final step of your writing process. It includes two steps: revising and editing. Here, revising means having a look at the ‘big picture’ and the larger and general issues, like content and organisation. During editing, however, you work on the smaller problems like grammar and punctuation. With both steps you make sure your paper is concise, follows a clear general structure, presents arguments for your thesis statement, answers your research question(s), meets the style sheet’s specifications, quotes correctly, etc. Often, asking a friend, family member or fellow student to read and correct your term paper is very helpful as well. However, putting in this last piece of work yourself is the final part of a successful writing process.

#### 1. Revising

After you have written the first draft of your term paper, the next step is to revise it. During this process, try to improve your text as much as possible. You check for content and organisation, including unity, coherence, structure, and logic. Feel free to change, rearrange, add, or delete, until you feel you are communicating your ideas in a clearer, more effective, and perhaps even more interesting way. However, please remember: Correcting grammar, spelling or punctuation is proofreading, which you will do later.

#### Revision Checklist

- ✓ Overall: Did you achieve your stated purpose?
- ✓ General logic and coherence (in the whole paper and in each individual paragraph)
- ✓ A topic sentence in each paragraph (the topic sentence has a central (main) focus and is developed with sufficient supporting details. If there is something missing, either make notes in the margins such as “add more details/an example” or, in case you already have something in mind, add it right away)
- ✓ Unity (try to cross out sentences that are off topic)
- ✓ Usage of transition signals
- ✓ Does the paragraph have or need a concluding sentence? Is the final comment on topic?



## 2. Editing

The second step in your polishing process is proofreading and editing your paper in terms of possible errors in grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. Here, you want to double-check your paper regarding those ‘little’ mistakes. To proceed with this after revising often makes sense, particularly due to the errors that can arise when you rearrange sentences and paragraphs or add new information to them. Reading your paper over and concentrating on grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation as a last step is thus always a good idea.

### Editing Checklist

- ✓ Correctness and completeness of each sentence (no fragments and no choppy or run-on sentences)
- ✓ Each sentence includes a subject and a verb, subject-verb agreement, correct verb tenses, noun plurals, articles, etc.
- ✓ Mechanics: Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization
- ✓ Incorrectly used or repeated words (search for synonyms!)
- ✓ No contractions (“can’t”, “isn’t”, “I’ll”, etc.)
- ✓ Over-all completeness: Title page, page of content, written text, works cited/bibliography, statement of authorship

### Exercise A:

*Keeping these checklists in mind, begin the polishing process. Firstly, revise the overall coherence, secondly, edit the grammar, spelling, and punctuation.*

### THE END

Congratulations, you have successfully researched, written, and polished your term paper! There is not much left to do now, except to add the statement of authorship, probably transform your file into a PDF, and hand it in (either electronically, as a printed version, or both). Nice work! Hopefully, this Writing Guide was of some help to you and please feel free to come back and check it anytime. Good luck!

## 8) ABSTRACT WRITING

This is an additional chapter of the Writing Guide. You do not have to write and hand in an abstract every time you work on a term paper. In case you do, however, you are of course welcome to consult this part of the Writing Guide as well.

### **What is an Abstract?**

An abstract is a short overview in terms of what your paper either is or will be about. There are two kinds of abstracts:

- Type One: A brief summary of the major thesis and arguments of a published article
- Type Two: The same structure but used to plan a paper

### **Main Characteristics**

The main characteristics of an abstract are the following:

- Brief, concise, precise (avoid vagueness)
- Word limit of 200 to 250 words (generally)
- Fully self-contained description of the paper
- Type Two: You mostly use the structure of the abstract to plan ahead for your paper
- Outline both your scope and your central argument

In a literary/cultural studies paper specifically, the abstract in most cases includes the following sections (each section typically a single sentence, although occasionally parts are merged or spread among a set of sentences):

- (Working) title
- Information on the topic you plan to write about in your term paper (specific!)
- Naming the primary text(s)
- Thesis statement and research questions
- Content/structure/approach
- Inclusion and naming of secondary literature

Hence, if you need to write an abstract before you write your term paper, it most likely makes sense to go **back to the roots**: Refer back to Chapter 1): TOPIC AND THESIS FINDING.

### Checklist 1 (Reminder: TOPIC AND THESIS FINDING)

- ✓ **Which text(s)** (literary, cinematic, televisual, journalistic, etc.) are you analyzing?
- ✓ What do you find **most interesting** about this text/these texts? What strikes you most?
- ✓ Translate into (a) **research question(s): what do you want to find out?**
  - a) “What?”-question (What happens in the text regarding your topic and what is the function of it?)
  - b) “How?”- question (How is this shown in the text in terms of form?)
- ✓ What is your **preliminary answer**?
- ✓ **Turn answer into thesis statement**
- ✓ **Formulate title of term paper**
- ✓ Structure:
  - Notes about which passages/scenes/techniques/aspects of the text(s) you are going to discuss in detail
  - How to structure your analysis around these excerpts/aspects (NOT a contents page)
- ✓ **Secondary sources** you are using (list at least three and include information on why they are relevant for your paper)

## Abstract Writing Checklist

- ✓ **(Working) Title**
  - What would be a good *title* for your term paper as you plan it now?
- ✓ **Research Questions & Problem Statement**
  - Which *problem(s)* are you trying to solve in your term paper? What is the *scope* of your work/argument?
- ✓ **Motivation**
  - *Why do we care* about the problem and the results? Why is your argument relevant? This section should include the importance of your work, the difficulty/current state of research in the area, and the impact it might have if successful.
- ✓ **Approach/Structure**
  - *How will you go about solving* or making progress on the problem? Will you use theory, analytic models, close reading? What is the *extent* of your work, what examples do you use for analysis? What material, i.e. *primary sources* will you use for analysis? Which *secondary sources* will be most important for your paper?
- ✓ **Thesis Statement & Research Question(s)**
  - *What is/are your research question(s) and what is your hypothesis/thesis statement? What is going to be your line of argument?* Specifically, most good papers conclude that some smaller part of analysis is relevant for a larger contextual question
- ✓ **Conclusion(s)**
  - *What are the likely implications* of your answer / line of argument? Are your results *general*, potentially generalizable, or specific to a particular case?

## THE (FINAL) END

Okay, this time we really are the end of this Writing Guide. Thank you for your attention and congratulations on your work!

## FURTHER REFERENCES (EXAMPLES)

- Aczel, Richard (1998). *How to Write an Essay*. Uni-Wissen Anglistik/Amerikanistik. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag. Print.
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- Nünning, Vera, and Ansgar Nünning (e.g. 2018). *An Introduction to the Study of English and American Literature*. Uni-Wissen Anglistik/Amerikanistik. Transl. Jane Dewhurst. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag. Print.
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- Turabian, Kate L. (2013). *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Print.

### Websites:

- MLA: <https://style.mla.org/>
- Chicago Manual of Style: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>
- The Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/>