

## **BA Thesis Papers in American and British Literature & Culture** **General Guidelines & Standards**

### **I. LANGUAGE**

The BA research paper in American Literature and Culture should be written in English and follow the grammatical and orthographical rules of either American or British English (depending on your topic) consistently.

### **II. FORMATTING ISSUES**

1. The work must be typed, using 12-point Times New Roman, 1.5-line spacing with 2.5 cm margin on all sides.
2. Please type no more than 10.000 words including bibliographical references (ca. 20 pp.).
3. Professional presentation is expected, meaning that you should:
  - include a **title page**: clearly stating the name of your institution and department, the title of your essay, your name, matriculation number and major, as well as the name of your supervisor, date of submission
  - include a **table of content** (*Gliederung*): listing the number of chapters and chapter titles
  - insert **page numbers** in the lower right-hand corner of all pages EXCEPT for the title page
  - follow **MLA in-text-citation** style:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)
  - provide **proper in-text citations** and observe the correct sequence of citation marks, parenthesis and punctuation, e.g. ....” (Kermode 17). For detailed info, see:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_quotations.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_quotations.html)
  - provide **complete bibliographical references** at the end of your essay in a “Works Cited” section according to the **MLA bibliographical style**
  - We also require a signed statement, in which you pledge that you have **not received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work**.
  - For more detailed information refer to the **Style Sheet for Research Papers in Literature**.

### **III. COMPOSITION ADVICE**

- Discuss the topic of your paper with your advisor and begin research on your topic in a **timely manner**. Allow yourself plenty of time for writing and REVISION.
- After initial research, discuss the thesis and outline of your argument with your advisor.

- Keep in mind that you are writing for an **informed readership**; hence it won't be necessary to provide biographical background information on the author/artist or to include lengthy plot summaries and character descriptions. Assume that your reader has at least a rudimentary knowledge of the text/work of art.
- When **writing the introduction** to the essay try to “hit the ground running” in the first sentence, orienting the reader by indicating the authors and the books you are going to focus on and tackle your chosen topic directly. **Avoid trite generalizations** that, more often than not, lead to a superficial argument. **Providing a detailed conceptual map** to the paper as a whole is one important function of the introduction. It clearly lays out all of the main points to be developed (explained in detail) in the rest of the essay and establishes their relation to each other. A strong introduction that accomplishes these goals makes writing the rest of the paper very easy. However, on completing the essay reflect on what the introduction says to see if it **needs revision**. New ideas arise during the writing process, and the introduction may require revision to reflect these changes.
- Be sure the **body of your essay** lays out the argument and evidence for your thesis or main point in a logical and integrated manner, paragraph by paragraph. An essay should not simply describe or narrate (e.g. it should not give a plot summary or an overview). It should **analyze, back up its claims**, and end up **persuading its readers**.
- The first sentence in each paragraph (**topic sentence**) states the main point to be developed in that paragraph. This sentence almost always presents a new step in the overall argument. The last sentence in each paragraph is a “**clincher**” sentence that drives home the point that has just been developed and that, ideally, points toward the main point or idea in the next paragraph. There needs to be a “**conceptual bridge/transition** between each paragraph that links an idea or point just explained to the idea or point that's coming. A bridge should not be purely mechanical or list-like but articulate the logical connection between paragraphs.
- Be sure the **conclusion** brings your essay to a fitting close – it should not simply stop. A conclusion should briefly summarize the main points of the argument and restate the thesis statement in different words. If possible, your conclusion should end with a nice “twist” or “punch” that goes beyond what the reader expects but is consistent with all that goes before. Do not introduce entirely new ideas in the conclusion.
- **Finally**: Remember that abstract terms like culture, civilization, values, solidarity, conflict, morality, humanity, discourse etc. have to be broken down and made specific in relation to the discussion at hand!

#### IV. ASSESSMENT—Or, questions we ask ourselves when grading your work:

- **How strong is your understanding of the texts?** – How well have you shown you read them carefully and understood them? Have you confused or omitted key points? How well have you supported your argument with specific evidence from the texts? Have you represented them fairly as regards the ambiguities and complexities that they entail? Have you demonstrated an understanding not only of ‘WHAT’ the texts say but ‘HOW’ they say it?
- **How well have you demonstrated an ability to think critically about the texts?** – Have you taken a clear position on the question(s) in your introduction? How willing have you been to risk a fresh approach of your own rather than rehash what other critics have already pointed out? How well are you able to analyze statements, opinions, and arguments presented by authors in question?

- **How effectively have you expressed your ideas?** – How much control do you have of your argument? Is there a thesis that is clearly stated and that you present in step-by-step fashion? Is it followed up in unified paragraphs that show coherent and clearly linked thought? Are there transitions between sentences and paragraphs that make sense? How much care have you shown in your use of language? How persuasive is your argument to the informed reader? Have you defined new or unfamiliar but necessary terms? How clear have you been?

## V. GRADING STANDARDS

"1" work is consistently superior. It commands attention on its own right, taking the assigned topic as an occasion for thoughtful and extended development of an original idea. It shows a clear familiarity with the ideas and works relevant to your topic and uses them to present an individual insight or viewpoint with enough fullness and cogency to command readers' respect, if not their assent. "1" work is generally free of grammatical errors, and uses language clearly and with sophistication.

"2" work is good, meeting all the assignment's expectations with competence. It states a substantive thesis and develops it with evidence from the text(s). While it may not have the subtlety or sophistication of "1" work, it provides a thoroughly developed response to the question, demonstrating a command of the material and a well-thought-out argument. The structure and development of the "2" essay should also be competent, demonstrating the writer's ability to focus, select supporting details and organize them effectively, and write concisely and clearly.

"3" work is adequate. It states a thesis that can be supported with evidence; however, it may not use evidence as flexibly or state as adequate a thesis as work receiving higher grades. Often "3" work has only negative virtues—that is, it is not seriously flawed but has no striking insights either. Generally, "3" work demonstrates mastery of the material or of an argument, but usually not both; often it lacks stylistic sophistication, thorough development, and/or sufficient use of supportive evidence.

"4" work falls short in one or more of the following categories: thesis, development with evidence, style, structure. It is clearly inadequate, failing to answer the question fully or to express a substantial thesis. Usually "4" work also demonstrates serious errors in grammar or usage; persistent minor errors alone will not usually elicit a "4" except in combination with other problems.

"5" denotes clear failure to understand either the assignment or the conventions of written work. This grade usually indicates that the student cannot competently perform the tasks required in the course. The writing fails with regard to analysis, argument, or both.