



How to Write a (Good) Seminar Paper

Before Writing

(1) *Topic*

Find a general topic that is of interest to you, e.g., climate ethics, animal rights or abortion.

(2) *Literature*

Identify helpful literature that you can rely on in addressing this topic, e.g., by consulting the course's moodle page, the library, Google Scholar or philpapers.org.

(3) *Outline*

Your paper should include an introduction, a main part, and a conclusion. Make an outline, i.e., develop an idea of how you will structure your paper's main part. This requires that you already have some idea of your research question and thesis. In the process of writing your question and thesis will become clearer to you. You may then need to go back and change your outline.

Writing (Go Back and Forth between these Steps)

(1) *Research Question*

Try to come up with a research question that is specific (no "big" questions), interesting (no questions that have obvious answers), and philosophical (no questions that are dominantly empirical). For example, you might want to explore the potential consequences of a thesis, if this thesis were true; identify differences between two theses; assess the plausibility of one or more thesis/theses; try to come up with objections or counterexamples to a thesis, defend a thesis against one or more objections that have been raised by others, etc.

(2) *Thesis (Theses)*

Formulate (a) thesis (theses), i.e., (an) answer(s) to your research question. For example, you may suggest that Singer's drowning child analogy fails or that basic needs are indeed the most promising currency of global justice.

(3) *Arguments*

Your thesis should not be a mere opinion. You need to provide arguments for it. For example, you might argue that basic needs are a better currency than preference satisfaction because they are more objective and universal.

(4) *Revisions*

Re-read and revise your paper several times. Ask yourself whether your arguments are plausible, whether they are explained in sufficient detail for them to be understandable, whether your paper involves irrelevant sentences or passages that may be deleted, whether the paper's structure is clear and suitable, etc.

Additional Recommendations

- Use clear and simple language (e.g., short sentences, familiar words rather than jargon).
- Define your papers' most important concepts. This will help to avoid misunderstandings.
- Use examples. They help your readers (and you) to understand what you mean.
- In the introduction, motivate and explicitly state your research question and your thesis (theses). You can also provide a brief sketch of how you will argue in favor of your thesis (theses).
- In the concluding section you may, among others, summarize your (main) arguments.
- Don't postpone starting writing for too long. What you write does not need to be perfect, especially not at first pass. Write and then revise.
- At the same time, take the effort. If you feel that an argument is weak, a formulation could be improved, etc. then do not move on but make the necessary changes.
- Know when to stop. Writing a seminar paper should take you around two weeks of (hard) work. It is not a doctoral dissertation. So after you have invested sufficient time and effort call it a day and submit your paper.