



How to Write a (Good) Seminar Paper

Before Writing

(1) *Topic*

Find a general topic that is of interest to you, e.g., intergenerational climate justice or climate justice in non-ideal theory.

(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; compare the strengths and weaknesses of 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 other philosophers, etc.

(2) *Thesis (Theses)*

Formulate (a) thesis (theses), i.e., (an) answer(s) to your research question. For example, you may suggest that basic needs are the most promising currency of intergenerational climate justice or that historical emissions do not need to be considered in allocating global carbon budgets.

(3) *Arguments*

Your thesis should not be a mere opinion. You need to provide arguments for it, i.e., reasons for accepting it. For example, you might argue that basic needs are a better currency of intergenerational climate justice 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 paper's 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.

Further information on writing a philosophy seminar paper can be found at:
<http://www.jimryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

Assessment

The grade of your seminar paper will be based on the following criteria:

- (1) the appropriateness of your research question,
- (2) the soundness and relevance of your arguments,
- (3) the clarity, succinctness and intelligibility of your language,
- (4) the adequacy of your paper's structure, and
- (5) the appropriateness of your citations.