

## Notes on the preparation of seminar papers at the Chair of Theology in Contemporary Transformation Processes

*Version from winter semester 2024/25*

First of all: What does scientific work mean?

- A scientific paper aims to answer a previously defined (**research**) **question** in a structured and methodologically controlled manner. Thus, anyone who works scientifically does not simply compile all the information that can be found on a particular topic, but always **conceives** his or her work with a view to the guiding question.
- **Structured** means that every scientific paper follows an outline. The **outline** is always related back to the research question. The outline shows the steps you need to take in order to answer your research question.
- **Methodologically controlled** means: Every academic paper must be written according to the standards applicable to its respective subject. In the humanities - and thus also in theology - these standards include above all the intersubjective **verifiability** and the argumentative character of your text.

What are the first steps?

- Before you begin your work, it is recommended that you prepare a preliminary **outline**, which you can discuss with the lecturer in advance. This serves both to reassure yourself about what you actually have in mind and to inform the lecturer; if necessary, you can also revise your **concept** after consultation with the lecturer.
- The **topic** usually comes from the subject area of the corresponding course and can, for example, be based on a presentation. It should not be too extensive or too detailed, so that the preparation of a seminar paper with a significant result is possible within the time and scope provided. The entire seminar paper, the outline, the procedure, and the selection of the text should serve to deal with this topic.
- The **task** of the seminar paper is to answer the questions arising from the topic and to deal with the problems associated with it. This means that it is not enough to string together quotations, combine tables of contents of texts, etc.: Rather, the presentation and discussion of thoughts and texts should be guided by the **question**.
- The **text basis** must correspond to the chosen topic. You should certainly take into account the texts dealt with in the seminar as well as the insights reached in the discussion, as far as they are relevant to the topic of the paper.

- The **structure** should be clear and should naturally flow from the research question. If you work on a primary text, it is not enough to simply summarise it: a summary in itself is not an academic achievement! Rather, your paper should be the independent treatment of a previously chosen topic (see above).
- **Literature** should be consulted to an extent that is appropriate for a seminar paper and for the topic. Here it is also advisable to talk to the lecturer in case of doubt.

**Important:** Please observe the respective instructions in the subject examination regulations or the module description!

**Formalities:** ▶ Common font (e.g. Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Helvetica),  
▶ font size 11 or 12 (footnotes 9 or 10),  
▶ page numbering,  
▶ line spacing usually 1.5.

Scope and components

The necessary **components** of every paper are a cover page, table of contents, introduction, main section(s), conclusion, and bibliography:

- The **cover page** should include: Name, address, e-mail address, degree programme, semester, matriculation number, title and semester of the corresponding course, name of the lecturer, title of the seminar paper.
- In the **introduction** the topic must be introduced, the research question developed, and the procedure (text basis, method, structure) presented and justified. Developing a question means explaining in what way it arises, from which perspective it arises, why it is important, etc.
- In the **main section(s)**, the question is dealt with by presenting and discussing the literature and by developing (one's own) arguments. The main section should itself be subdivided. How this can be done sensibly and how the main section and its **subdivisions** are named must be decided on the basis of the topic and the question.
- The **conclusion** should contain the summary answer to the guiding question or explain the extent to which the question can be answered. You can also name open questions and perspectives for further work, outline alternative approaches, or reflect on your work.
- The **bibliography** should contain all literature cited and used. The format of the references must be consistent.

## Methodology, Linguistic Presentation, Style

- Scientific work depends to a large extent on the quality of the **arguments**. Judgements must be **justified** as well as possible. Therefore avoid mere expressions of opinion.
- Write as **thoughtfully** as possible and not apodictically. Give reasons instead of only stating assertions. This means, for example, that you collect the arguments for and against a (problematic) thesis – not only from the point of view of an author, his or her text, other authors, but also from your own point of view. Or: Present alternative ways of understanding important statements and explain their consequences. And reflect on possible or actual objections to your thesis and deal with them seriously. In this way, you make your process of **reflection** clear and account for it yourself; it also serves the argumentative quality of your work as well as scientific **transparency** and helps the reader's understanding.
- Make the different **text levels** clear! Separate presentation from criticism. And separate immanent criticism (based on the presuppositions of the respective author) from external criticism (based on other presuppositions). Both types of criticism are important. In the latter case, however, justify why an author should be judged on the basis of these presuppositions that are foreign to him.
- In your argumentation and also in dealing with quotations, distinguish between the different **levels of statement**: the thing itself, which is never completely caught up in language and cognition; concepts, interpretations and descriptions of the thing; the position of an author and your own position.

Thus, the human being as such (or even more so a particular human being) is to be distinguished from the concept of man (for instance as "animal rationale"), from concrete anthropological **interpretations** (e.g. by Max Scheler in contrast to Aristotle) and from your opinion or criticism of a position. Similarly, a careful distinction should be made between the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ as God-Man and second person of the Trinity, and the various interpretations of the person of Jesus Christ in church confessions and theological positions.

- **Linguistic presentation** is a very important aspect of the work. Comprehensibility and clarity are key evaluation criteria. Avoid repetition. Write a fluent text with precise, clear sentences. Avoid unnecessary foreign words. Very **important**: Explain the terms of the theory(s)/author(s) you are working on or those you have introduced yourself (but only in as much detail as the question requires).
- **Context**: At the beginning or the end of a section, make it clear to the reader how it relates to the preceding or the following section. That means, write about your text in between and make the **connections** clear. Guide the reader through your work!

## Citation and identification of sources

- Make sure that your sources are **relevant** and **scholarly**: From the very beginning, you should base your work only on relevant academic books and articles. Wikipedia, in particular, could be used for initial superficial research, but not as a basis for argumentation - or only if you can substantiate the contents found there with scientific sources. Only the latter should be included in the footnotes and the bibliography.
- If available, cite according to the corresponding pagination.
- **Referencing obligation**: You must identify the origin of all the ideas that are not your own and that cannot be considered general knowledge (or self-evident knowledge in your field). Any adoption of texts, whether verbatim or in spirit, must be marked (in the case of verbatim quotations, by inverted commas).

The identification of quotations is not an end in itself but serves **transparency**. Taking over text passages - verbatim or with slight changes - without citing the source is not only unscientific, but also constitutes an attempt to deceive, which may be subject to criminal law.

- The **citation** must be appropriate: The reader must be able to check if you have taken over the foreign elements correctly.
  - ▶ When citing sources, the author, title, place, year and page numbers must be given.
  - ▶ In the case of articles in anthologies, the title and publisher as well.
  - ▶ And in the case of articles in journals, the journal title and volume number as well.

General references without page numbers should be avoided if possible. If you refer to specific passages, you must also give the exact page number(s) – author and year alone are not sufficient! You should cite in footnotes or in brackets (not in endnotes); in any case, the format must be **consistent** throughout the seminar paper.

- **Internet sources** must be cited as well as printed literature. In addition to author, title and year of publication (if recognisable), the URL must be given as well as the date on which the respective source was last read on the internet.
- **Extent of direct citation**: A good academic text is characterised by an independently developed line of argument, not by excessive use of verbatim quotations. Write as much as possible in your own words. Central statements or particularly concise formulations should be directly cited.
- **Bibliography**: At the end of the paper, there must be a list of the literature used in the seminar paper. This should include cited sources as well as sources that are not directly mentioned but have an influence on the content of your paper. Make sure that the bibliographical references are consistent (For example, make sure that the order of authors' names, years, etc. remains consistent.) In the bibliography the complete text (monograph, journal artikel, book-chapter, etc.) is included, not the reference to quoted pages.

## Conclusion and submission

- You should proofread your work thoroughly at least once - if possible, a few days after you have finished it, because mistakes, gaps in argumentation, inconsistencies, etc. are usually more obvious from distance than immediately after writing. Check the **coherency** of your work once again. A quite comprehensive revision is not only normal for a scientific paper, but also generally serves to guarantee its quality. Also pay attention to incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences, spelling, and punctuation. Numerous errors of this kind lower the **quality** and thus also the evaluation of the work.
- In addition, the seminar paper must include a **declaration of authorship** in the following form:

"I hereby declare that I have written the seminar paper independently, that I have not already used it to obtain another certificate of achievement and that I have not used any aids and sources (including internet sources) other than those indicated. <date and signature>"

## Guidelines for the correct citation of quotations

### Abbreviations

- *ibid.* = "ibidem" latin: refers to the same page as the last footnote.
- *id.* (Sg.) = "idem" latin; *ead.* (Pl.) = "eadem" latin: refers to the same author(s) as the last footnote.
- *f.*: passage continues on the following page.
- *ff.*: The passage continues on the following pages; this notation is to be avoided, better to give the exact pages, e.g. 4-8.
- *cf.* = "compare": Indicates indirect quotations and further sources.

### Basic structure of each bibliographical note (examples)

[Alternatively you can also quote by author and year (and page quoted) and give the complete biographical note at the end in the bibliography (Harvard style, including page quoted). Example: ..." (Derrida 2002, 95)]

Author's surname, first name (at least initial): Title of the work. Place of publication, year of publication, number of the quoted page.

**Example:** Hünemann, Peter: Jesus Christus – Gottes Wort in der Zeit. Eine systematische Christologie. A systematic Christology. Münster 1994, 121.

Information such as academic titles or ISBN numbers are not necessary and may even be incorrect. Series numbers are optional (e.g. "Wege der Forschung" volumes).

However, the following information is **necessary** (if available): title, subtitle, publisher (if an **anthology** is to be cited as such, then the publisher takes the place of the author), volume number if applicable, page numbers of the article, page number(s) of the citation.

**Example** of citation from an anthology: Greshake, Gisbert: Der Wandel der Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Theologiegeschichte. In: Scheffczyk, Leo/Affemann, Rudolf (eds.), Erlösung und Emanzipation (QD 61). Freiburg i. Br. 1973, 69-101, 72.

**Journals:** Here there is usually no mention of the editors; journal titles are often given in official abbreviations; subtitles of the journal (not of the essays!) are omitted, as is the place of publication.

**Example:** Rudolph, Enno: Europas unsterbliche Seele. In: Dialektik. Vol. 2. 1997, 11-33, 17.

**Encyclopaedia** articles: Cf. anthologies. However, one usually gives a prefix such as "keyword" or "Art." before the title or place it in inverted commas; columns ("Sp.") are often named instead of pages. The author reference of the article may be omitted if necessary.

**Example:** Drumm, Joachim: "Dogmenentwicklung", in: LThK3 Vol. 10, Sp. 295-298, 296.