ELITE MASTER'S PROGRAM
Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures

SDAC Study Handbook 2025-26

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität
Erlangen-Nürnberg

Study Handbook for SDAC students

Dear SDAC-students, welcome to our program! You have entered a journey full of excitement, inspiration and exchange. Being a student in our program and at a prestigious university in Germany means that you have entered an academic educational path. Being a student and becoming an academic means to think. To think for yourself and not let others do it for you – be it fellows, friends, family or Artificial Intelligence. It means to engage intellectually, to think critically and to push yourself in doing so. Being a student also means to organize yourself, your work and your time. All this is not an easy task.

We as your teachers see our roles in training you in this regard on different levels. We want to teach you how to work with academic integrity, how to form intellectual positions ethically, how to address your critical thoughts in oral and written form and how to reflect on yourself as an (emerging) academic. This requires a lot of concrete skills. These skills can only be required in constant learning processes and also we as your teachers are constantly improving our academic capacities. It's normal that you do not know everything and in this regard, making mistakes is normal, too. So try to delve into it and practice. We compiled this booklet to assist you in this process. It delivers a kind of toolkit for your endeavor as a student in our program. Enjoy!

NOTE: Please check our website www.sdac.studium.fau.de regularly! It's our main communication platform and we post everything you need to know there (news, events, course offer, information about staff, etc.).

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Academic Reading

Reading academic articles efficiently involves a targeted approach to extract the key information and grasp the main ideas without getting bogged down by details. Here's a guide to help you read academic articles more efficiently:

1. **Skim the Article:**

Start by quickly skimming through the article. Read the title, abstract, headings, subheadings, and any highlighted or bolded text. This will give you an overview of the article's main topic and structure. Focus on the headings and subheadings to understand the structure of the article. This will help you follow the logical flow of the author's argument.

2. **Identify the Research Question/Objective:**

Pay attention to the introduction section. Identify the research question or objective of the study. What is the purpose of the article? What are the authors trying to achieve? What areas or concepts are the authors engaging with?

3. **Read the Conclusion and Bibliography:**

Before diving into the details, read the conclusion section and bibliography. This will give you an idea of the main findings and the authors' interpretation of the results. It can help you understand the context before delving into the methods and results sections. Reading the bibliography will also help you see to what discussions or debates the authors intend to contribute. Who are their academic "ancestors"?

4. **Read the Introduction and Discussion Thoroughly:**

After skimming, read the introduction and discussion sections more thoroughly. The introduction will provide context and set up the research problem, while the discussion will help you understand the implications of the study's findings.

5. **Review Methodology and Conclusion:**

If the article is relevant to your needs, go back and read the methodology and conclusion. Pay attention to the research design, data collection methods, and key results and think whether they are justified. Focus on the main findings and avoid getting caught up in every detail.

6. **Take Notes**:

As you read, take notes in your own words. Summarize key points, main findings, and any important quotes. More detailed tips will be explained in the following section.

- **Highlight or Mark Important Parts**:
  Use highlighting or annotation tools to mark key sentences or passages. This can be especially helpful if you need to refer back to specific sections later.

- **Consider External References**:
  If the article references other works that are relevant to your research, consider checking those out as well. This can provide a broader understanding of the topic.

7. **Evaluate Credibility**:
Assess the credibility of the article by checking the authors' credentials, the journal's reputation, and the publication date. This is important to ensure you're relying on reputable sources.

8. **Discuss with Others**:
If possible, discuss the article with colleagues, peers, or mentors. This can deepen your understanding and provide different perspectives.

Remember, the goal of reading academic articles efficiently is to extract the most important information and grasp the main ideas. Not every detail needs to be understood thoroughly, especially if the article is not directly related to your research objectives.

Note-taking

1. Book/App recommendation:
How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking
By Sönke Ahrens, 2022
Video explanation:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnS3g68zCXw&ab_channel=ProductivityGame
Note-taking apps: Evernote, Notion, Goodnotes, MarginNote, Notability...

2. Note-taking Tips
Taking effective notes while doing academic reading is crucial for understanding, organizing, and retaining information. Here's a methodical approach to help you take notes efficiently:

Stage 1: Note-taking while reading

a. **Method**

Cornell Method: Divide your notepaper into sections: a narrow left column for cues or keywords, a wider right column for main ideas, and a summary section at the bottom.
Outline Method: Create a hierarchical outline of the material, with main ideas, subpoints, and supporting details.
Mind Mapping: Use visual diagrams to connect main ideas and related concepts.
Annotation: Mark important points, questions, or thoughts directly in the margins of the text.

b. **Content**

Focus on Key Concepts:
Identify the main concepts and ideas in each section. Write down the most essential information that contributes to your understanding of the topic.
Highlight or Mark Important Passages:
Use highlighting, underlining, or annotation to mark important passages or quotes that you may want to refer back to or cite later. But avoid overdoing it; focus on the truly significant parts.

c. **Organize information**

Structure your notes logically. Use headings, bullet points, and indentation to organize information hierarchically. This makes it easier to review and understand your notes later.
Ask Questions and Make Connections:
Write down questions that arise as you read. Also, make connections between the current material and what you already know. This critical thinking helps you engage with the content more deeply.
Separate Personal Thoughts:
If you have personal thoughts, reflections, or ideas that aren't directly from the reading material, make sure to distinguish them from the notes you're taking. This clarity is important when you review your notes later.

Stage 2: Permanent Notes

a. **Summarize in Your Own Words:**

Instead of copying entire sentences, aim to summarize the main ideas and key details in your own words. Paraphrasing helps you understand the material better and prevents plagiarism.

b. **Include Citations:**

Whenever you take notes from a source, include the necessary citation information (author, title, page number, publication date). This will save you time later when you're compiling your references.

c. **Create keywords:**

The keywords are like hashtags. They are used to mark the notes and help you locate the notes faster later. They will also help to connect different things together.

! Remember, the goal of note-taking is to capture the most important information and concepts while keeping your notes organized and easy to review later. Adapt your approach based on the complexity of the material and your personal preferences.

Tips on how to write a term paper

1. Introduction

A term paper is a written assignment tied to specific course module requirements at SDAC. In general, the length of a term paper is between 12-15 pages long. The deadline for the paper submission depends on the respective course lecturer's requirements.

Written Assignments ("Hausarbeiten") such as term papers need to follow certain academic standards. Consult your course lecturer before you start composing your paper and follow the instructions with respect to each class subject and refer to your assignment supervisor for any specific requirement. The following is the standard format of term paper assignments at SDAC:

- The reference style follows the APA (American Psychological Association) Publication Guidelines. While some variations are possible, it is vital that you are consistent. For a more detailed description of citation conventions according to the APA Style, please refer to the official pocket style guide here:
  https://www.sdac.studium.fau.de/files/2019/04/apa-handbook.pdf
- For your main body of text, use justified type alignment, a line spacing of 1.5 lines and either Times New Roman (font size 12 pt) or Arial (11 pt). Top and bottom margins should be 2 cm, left margins 2.5 cm and right margins 3.5 cm in order to leave space for corrections.

2. Contents

The main purpose of the paper is to demonstrate your ability to work scientifically. You have to show that you:

- Understand and be able to reflect on academic literature, facts and approaches.
- Make it your own topic, set your own focus and guiding questions or hypotheses.
- Are able to apply knowledge gained from literature and transfer that knowledge to other areas or aspects, including your own examples and analysis.
- Demonstrate the ability to critique your sources (constructively and in an appropriate academic style) and position yourself in relation to them.

As you reflect on what you have read or collected, be sure to ask yourself why something is the case, don't just say that it is so. For example, you might state the gender roles of filial piety are changing in certain Asian societies. Having said this, you should then ask yourself the question: why is that? Try and offer systematic explanations in a way that is academically acceptable. Regarding the content, each paper is of course different. However, here are some general guidelines, which will help you write a good paper:

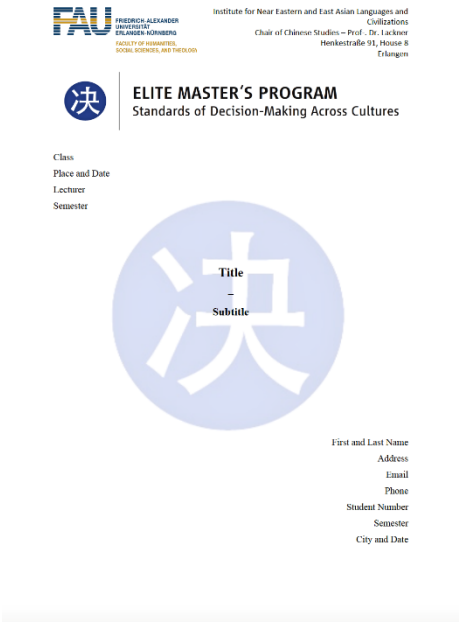
- Build your paper around a concise and precise research question; make your main topic clear in the title already, so that the reader knows what the paper is about; in the text, stick to this.
- Provide arguments to support or dispute your thesis, or to discuss your topic from different perspectives.
- Do not just report what you have read in the secondary literature, do not simply sum up your sources; a term paper has to include your own research, assessments and critical thinking.
- Do not just accept what you read; question your sources. If you do not agree with what you read, state how your views differ from it and criticize constructively.

- Revisit what you have learned during the course in question and apply them in your analysis and argument.

3. Structure

In principle, the paper must contain the following sections: title page, table of contents, and introduction, main part, conclusion, and references/bibliography, appendices (if required), an affidavit (*Eigenständigkeitserklärung*). This must be signed and attached to the assignment. (Since the affidavit is not part of the assignment itself, it is not included in the table of contents.)

3.1 Title Page Templates:



Institute for Near Eastern and East Asian Languages and Civilizations
Chair of Chinese Studies – Prof. Dr. Lackner
Henkestraße 91, House 8
Erlangen

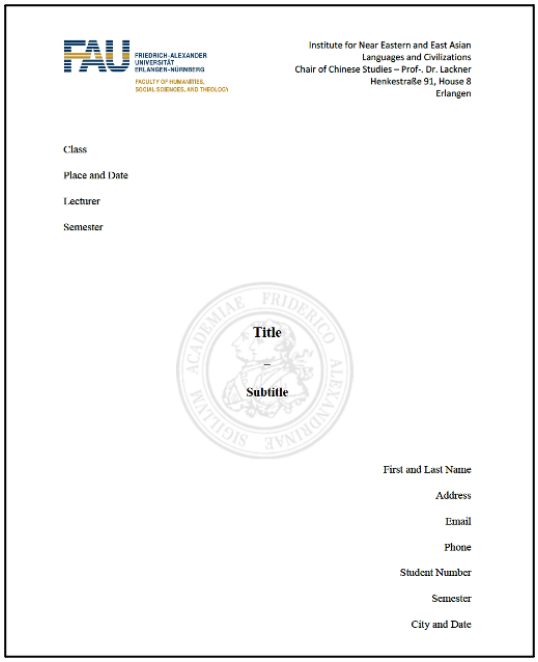
ELITE MASTER'S PROGRAM
Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures

Class
Place and Date
Lecturer
Semester

Title
–
Subtitle

First and Last Name
Address
Email
Phone
Student Number
Semester
City and Date

or



Institute for Near Eastern and East Asian Languages and Civilizations
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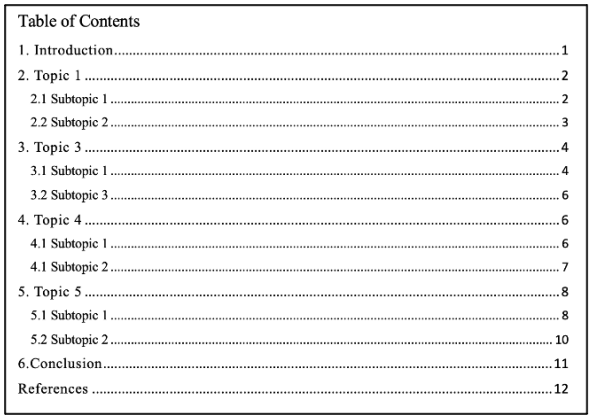
Class
Place and Date
Lecturer
Semester

Title
–
Subtitle

First and Last Name
Address
Email
Phone
Student Number
Semester
City and Date

3.2 Table of content template:



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3.3 Introduction

As a rule of thumb, the introduction should not be longer than 10% of the paper. In this part, you introduce the reader to your topic. Explain what the object of your study is and how you will approach it (including the theories and methods applied). What are your main research questions, and why should these questions be asked, or: what knowledge and insights can

be gained? Why is this topic relevant to SDAC? You can already hint at the results which you hope to achieve by the end of the paper.

3.4 Main part

After the introduction comes the main part of the paper, divided into sections (if necessary with subsections). In this part, you offer a comprehensive treatment of the topic of your paper and the different aspects related to it. You may include a summary or critical interpretation at the end of each major section. At the very latest, this summary and critical interpretation must be included in the conclusion.

The structure of the main part follows the logical flow of your argument. If you are not sure about the structure or which aspects to include, ask your peers for their opinion or, discuss the issue with your lecturer.

Even though you should show that you have read and understood the literature available for your topic, use quotations sparingly to enhance your own arguments. If you directly quote passages from a book or include pieces of literature, it must be clear why you are doing so, i.e. it must be justified by the discussion you are engaged in at that point in your paper. You should not just include quotations for the purpose of filling pages. Do not string them together but integrate them into your writing. After all, this is your text, and the reader (i.e. your lecturer) wants to hear what you have to say in your own words (see Citation practices and Paraphrasing below). This will show that you have processed the information mentally for yourself.

3.5 Conclusion

In this section you should try to summarize and give a final judgment on your major findings (briefly), drawing together the various findings and threads of arguments developed in the paper. A critical evaluation of the material should be offered to the reader and you should try to express your own views on what you have read and presented in your own words. The conclusion should be at least half a page long. You may decide to pick one or more of the following ways to conclude your paper:

- Review your initial research question and summarize your results.
- Consider the relevance of your results and whether you can make any suggestions on the basis of your findings.
- Embed your findings in a wider context of present, past or future research.
- At the very end of the paper, it is always good to add an outlook. In the outlook, you can mention questions that still need to be looked into and any interesting issues related to your topic that you could not cover but that would be worth investigating in the future.

3.6 Bibliography/References

This section must include all references mentioned in the body of the text (not including secondary sources mentioned in quotations from other authors). Do not put books or articles in the references section which you did not quote in the body of the text.

References are listed in alphabetical order (by name of author, or by title in case of sources without author). Please consult the details on how to format various bibliographic information (images, audiovisual sources, online sources etc) from the APA Manual, which can be found in the following link:
https://www.sdac.studium.fau.de/files/2019/04/apa-handbook.pdf

3.7 Appendices

The appendix is not part of the running text, i.e. it does not count towards the total number of pages that you are expected to write. You do not need to have an appendix but it can be useful if you want to add information that you consider important but too long to show in the running text (e.g. longer tables, additional graphs, maps, or primary data in the form of transcripts, etc.). If you need to subdivide your appendix (which will only be the case in longer papers), use the section title 'Appendices' instead, then subdivide into A, B.

3.8 Affidavit (*Eigenständigkeitserklärung*)

By signing the affidavit and attaching it to your paper, you declare that you made a clear distinction between your own ideas and those of others throughout your paper. If you violate this code of practice, you are guilty of plagiarism and your paper will automatically receive a fail grade ("nicht bestanden"). A single passage in your text is enough to constitute such an offense. It is also considered plagiarism to translate text passages and present them as your own (i.e. without a reference). You will need to sign the following declaration and attach it to your paper:

Affidavit

I hereby truthfully declare that

1) I wrote the submitted paper independently and without illicit assistance;
2) I did not use any materials other than those listed in the bibliography and that all passages taken from these sources in full or in part have been marked as such and their origin has been cited individually in the text stating the version (edition and year of publication), the volume and page of the cited work, and in the case of Internet sources stating the complete URL and the date of access;
3) I did not use any form of artificial intelligence;
4) I have listed all institutions and persons that supported me in the preparation and production of the paper;
5) I have not submitted the paper to any other institution and that it has never been used for other purposes, neither in full nor in part.

I am aware that any violation of this declaration will result in a fail grade (*nicht bestanden*).

Erlangen, ...

Signature

4. Academic conventions

With the term paper, you are meant to enter into a critical dialogue with other researchers who have worked on similar academic topic. For this reason, you have to present their arguments and views in an accurate and adequate manner. This is done with the help of quotations (verbatim quotes from other texts) and paraphrases (summaries of the ideas or texts of others in your own words).

4.1 Citation Practices

All sources must be specified clearly, not just at the end of your paper in the bibliography, but by a reference in the body of the text. However, do not insert a reference after each sentence. Bear in mind that using information without acknowledging it is plagiarism, which is intellectual theft and a criminal offense. Any student found guilty of it will automatically fail the course in question, with possible further penalties.

Short verbatim (direct) quotations (fewer than 40 words) are set in double quotation marks and are incorporated in the running text. They are accompanied by a short reference in the form: (author(s), date of publication, page number). Here are the examples:

According to Jones (1998), "Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time" (p. 199).
or
Jones (1998) found "students often had difficulty using APA style" (p. 199).

Effective teams can be difficult to describe because “high performance along one domain does not translate to high performance along another” (Ervin et al., 2018, p. 470).

Long quotations are separated from the text and indented:

Jones's (1998) study found the following:

> Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time citing sources. This difficulty could be attributed to the fact that many students failed to purchase a style manual or to ask their teacher for help. (p. 199)

Researchers have studied how people talk to themselves:

> Inner speech is a paradoxical phenomenon. It is an experience that is central to many people’s everyday lives, and yet it presents considerable challenges to any effort to study it scientifically. Nevertheless, a wide range of methodologies and approaches have combined to shed light on the subjective experience of inner speech and its cognitive and neural underpinnings. (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015, p. 957)

For more detailed variations on citation placement, please check the APA guidelines.

Other things to consider:

- When using Internet sources in writing a term paper, you must specify them as precisely as possible. In order to pick and choose from the incredible amount of information found online, you need to make sure that you only use materials from trustworthy providers (for example, an official university server, a respected academic online journal, or a government agency). Be sceptical about anything you read on the Internet and try and confirm the information you take from it by consulting at least two independent sources.
- Do not use Wikipedia entries or similar sources. This is not necessarily a question of quality; the reason is rather that entries are the product of collaborative work and do not specify their author(s). If you cannot name an author, this responsibility shifts to you.
- Avoid indirect quotations: Only quote texts that you have read yourself. Indirect quotations (i.e., quoting somebody else's quotation of a text) should be avoided as far as possible. They are only admissible if a primary source is permanently unavailable.
- Only quote longer passages if you analyze or discuss them in detail, and do not paraphrase a passage that you just quoted.
- Do not forget to thoroughly proofread your paper after finalizing it. Pay attention to correct spelling; noticeable deficiencies in this area will influence the assessment of your work and, in extreme cases, can lead to it being rejected.

4.2 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. **Changing a few words in an otherwise unmodified quote does not constitute paraphrasing.** In order to paraphrase effectively, the information must be re-stated in a new way. Therefore, successful paraphrasing occurs when you are able to maintain the intended meaning of the original source without copying the words or sentence structure. Paraphrases must be cited with the name of the author and the year of publication of the original source. Citing the page number is optional. The following information is taken from APA Manual (p. 10).

Tip: Read the information to be paraphrased, then close the book/ turn off the computer. Make sure you understood the information; then, rewrite it in your own words. Go back and check for accuracy. Doing this helps prevent you from copying words or sentence structure, which may constitute plagiarism.

Example: Read the original passage below and compare it with the paraphrased versions.

Original Passage
"Adult learning research helps to explain why immersion is so important" (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004, p. 11).

Unacceptable Paraphrasing
Research in adult learning assists us in explaining why immersion is so important.

Acceptable Paraphrasing
According to Hewett and Ehmann (2004), current research gives insight into why immersion is a valuable aspect of adult learning.

4.3. Computer-Assisted Work and the Use of Artificial Intelligence

As computer or online programs that assist academic work and AI technologies continue to advance, softwares such as ChatGPT (and others such as Google Bard, ChatSonic, Grammarly AI, etc.) have sparked many questions related to academic integrity. The entire teaching staff of SDAC has agreed that the use of language editing programs like Grammarly to help language edit a text written by yourself in English language is permitted in a conservative way. However, translating a text written by yourself in another language and using online or computer tools to translate the text into English is **NOT** permitted, since SDAC wants to teach you to write academic English-language texts as is standard in international academia. The teaching staff at SDAC also agree not to accept the use of AI technologies for writing term papers and other works related to the study program in any way. This includes the use of specialized AI programs such as ChatGPT or programs that only have an AI component.

The use of translation programs and AI technology undermines the true values of originality, honesty and trust that we advocate as an academic community. It also raises risks of technical dependence, privacy leakage, lack of data accuracy and reliability, scholarly deskilling and unchecked bias. Last but not least, it may exacerbate ethical issues. It remains utmost important for you as students to maintain academic integrity so that you can be evaluated based on your own merit and not on dishonest or unethical behavior. The use of translation or AI tools in any of your term papers and other course work without explicit permission from your course instructor/ lecturer is strictly prohibited.

5. Term Paper Assessment Criteria

Your term paper will be assessed based on the following criteria:

5.1 Content

- Introduction & Conclusion
    - topic stated clearly, question clear, situated within "big think"
    - strong introduction of topic's key question(s), terms. Clearly delineates subtopics to be reviewed. Specific thesis statement.
    - conclusion clearly sums up results
    - conclusion points to further research and/or policy implications
- Literature review
    - lit review is organized well, focuses on questions
    - relevance of literature to the question is clear
    - adequate use of secondary literature
    - in-depth and clear presentation of theoretical background
    - explanation of research method
- Analysis & Argumentation
    - Information or data clearly spelled out and described well
    - analysis done properly
    - writeup of analysis makes it clear what was done
    - clear argumentative structure in a logic way
    - discussion arranged with smooth transitions and a "golden thread" through the whole paper
    - discuss results in a clear & compelling way

5.2 Form

- Language:
    - Scholarly style. Writing is flowing and easy to follow.

    - Language is highly polished; no grammar or spelling errors.
    - Accurate application of specific terminologies
- Correct formatting and citations
    - Bibliography is complete. No errors in APA style
    - In-text citations and references are done correctly with accuracy in a consistent style.

5.3 Others

- Effort: Exceeds the requirements of the assignment and has put care and effort into the process.
- Plagiarism results in a 4.0 on the entire paper

6. Late submission of term paper

The official deadline for all term paper is always at the end of every semester (FAU calendar: https://www.fau.eu/education/study-organisation/semester-dates/) Please check with your individual lecturer again in case each of them comes up other requirements.

Acceptable reasons for requesting an extension include medical problems, bereavement, severe family problems and sudden events or emergencies that have a negative impact on students' ability to study. Your request must be supported by supplementary documentary evidence. For example, all extension requests on the grounds of ill-health must be accompanied by a doctor's note. Requesting an extension does not guarantee that one will be granted. If an extension is granted, this will normally be for 1 week in the first instance, and 2 weeks under extreme circumstances. Longer extension requests may be approved in exceptional circumstances with agreement. You will be informed whether you have been granted an extension, and about your new deadline date.

Unacceptable reasons for requesting an extension include poor time management, holiday plans, being required to complete a number of assignments at the same time and not seeking appropriate clarification about the assignment in time.

Grade will be deducted for every late submitted assignment without a valid reason. A one-week grace period will be given to students; assignment submitted within the grace period will be penalized by grade deduction up to 0,3 point for every 2 days; for those submitted after the grace period (i.e. the 8th day onwards), no marks will be given and a fail grade (grade 4,0) will be accorded.

7. Exam Withdrawal

Students at FAU can withdraw from any class if they decide they would not like to receive a grade or credit for the class. At SDAC, we have decided upon the following withdrawal deadlines.

For term papers, students must withdraw before September 1st for winter semester courses and before March 1st for summer semester courses.

For oral and written exams, students must withdraw two weeks before the exam date. A withdrawal will not be accepted after these deadlines.

Essay Format

Different from a term paper or a thesis, essays are shorter writing assignments which will often be given during the semester. Essays typically range from 3-5pgs, but this can vary based on the course and objective of the assignment. Here are some important things to keep in mind when writing your essays:

- Remember to use proper citations!
    - If you use any outside sources, be sure to use the APA citation style. You will need to include in-text citations and a reference list.
- Use consistent formatting.
    - Justified type alignment, a line spacing of 1.5 lines and either Times New Roman (font size 12 pt) or Arial (11 pt). Top and bottom margins should be 2 cm, left margins 2.5 cm and right margins 3.5 cm in order to leave space for corrections.
- Stay focused.
    - Since essays are shorter pieces of writing, it is imperative that you have a clear objective and do not lose sight of this. The reader should always understand why information is given and how it relates to the main theme of the essay.
- Introduce and conclude the essay.
    - Do not forget to include an introduction and a conclusion. For essays, one paragraph for each should be enough. This will help guide the reader and keep the focus.
- Structure:
    - Introduction (1 paragraph)
    - Body (3-5 paragraphs)
    - Conclusion (1 paragraph)
- Enjoy the process!!
    - Essays are often assigned for students to personally reflect on the class content. Lecturers want to see how the students understood readings or themes of the class. Therefore, do not shy away from sharing your own thoughts and feelings toward the subject. We do not want summaries, we want to learn from your unique understanding.

Tips on how to write a literature review

Introduction

1. **Introduce the Topic:** Begin with a broad overview of the subject area. Clearly define the topic and explain its relevance to your field, setting up the foundation for your review.
2. **Highlight the Problem:** Provide background on the key issues the topic addresses. Explain why the topic matters and outline the core problem that the literature tackles, framing its importance.
3. **Identify the Gap:** Pinpoint what is missing or underexplored in the current literature. This gap justifies the need for your review and highlights its academic contribution.
4. **Keep It Accessible:** While introducing the topic, use clear and engaging language. Avoid technical jargon early on, making the introduction broad enough for a diverse readership.

Body

1. **Prioritize Key Factors:** Organize the literature by importance or themes, ensuring the most significant factors are addressed first to create a logical progression.
2. **Discuss Factors in Depth:** Expand on each key factor with dedicated paragraphs, explaining its relevance and contribution to your overarching argument.
3. **Support with Evidence:** Integrate evidence from existing studies, using quotes, data, or case studies to substantiate your points and add depth.
4. **Synthesize Similar Findings:** Identify and discuss common themes across studies to show where there is consensus in the literature, helping to build a cohesive narrative.
5. **Compare Conflicting Findings:** Highlight differing perspectives or findings in the literature, offering analysis that deepens your review and demonstrates critical engagement.
6. **Evaluate and Interpret:** Move beyond summarizing; evaluate the implications of the studies you review. Discuss how these findings inform or challenge existing knowledge.
7. **Paraphrase, Summarize, and Quote:** Vary your writing style by paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting to keep your discussion dynamic and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the literature.
8. **Maintain a Coherent Narrative:** Ensure the review flows logically, weaving together the factors to build a unified narrative. Highlight connections between studies and transitions between sections.
9. **Express Your Voice:** Make sure your interpretation and insights are clear throughout. Your critical analysis should guide the review and offer a unique perspective on the topic.
10. **Allocate Paragraphs Thoughtfully:** Distribute your focus evenly across the factors, ensuring each point is fully developed and contributes to a well-structured narrative.

Conclusion

11. **Summarize Key Points:** Recap the main themes and findings discussed in the

literature review, emphasizing their significance to your topic.

12. **Identify Future Research Areas:** Suggest gaps that remain in the literature or propose areas for further investigation.
13. **Avoid Introducing New Information:** Keep the conclusion focused on summarizing and interpreting existing content, without adding new points or evidence.

Note: By the end of the third semester, you are expected to submit a 15-page literature review, inclusive of references.

Writing is rewriting

The production of rigorous and original scientific work takes time and is often collaborative.

The (academic) texts you read have never been produced in one single effort. Writing outcomes are the result of rereading and rewriting texts, often with the help of others. A text will almost never be satisfactory after a single round of writing. Even for experienced writers it is common to revise a text several times. With all text on paper, and (deadlines permitting) a few days' before you submit, you can read through to see whether your argument is clear and coherent, and whether your conclusion is justified and based on the evidence that you have presented.

In the revision phase use the topics explained above to check if improvement is possible. Assess whether or not the structure of your text is logical, and if necessary, move your sections or sentences accordingly. Avoid abrupt changes in topics. Correct poorly written sentences. Turn passive sentence constructions into active ones. Delete unnecessary words and phrases. Delete passages you are attached to, if after reconsideration you realise that actually they do not add much to your overall argument.

To improve your texts, it can be very useful to ask someone else to read and comment on a first draft of your work, too. After an extensive (re)writing process, you do not always clearly see what is good about your argumentation and what can be improved. An external reader, for example a fellow student, will look at it afresh and potentially identify the strengths and weaknesses in your text - in a similar vein, you may identify the strengths and weaknesses in their texts and help them to improve these. When the reader has criticisms, do not worry (it is just a first draft) and use their comments to your advantage in revising the paper. Train yourself to read your comrades' work and help them to improve it, and ask them or others to do the same for you, so to speak (see here for more discussion on collaborative writing/learning).

Email writing

In many contexts, sending an email will be the first contact point between you and the person you want to get in touch with, obtain information from, or from whom you may hope to obtain an apartment or a job. This first email will give a first impression about you to the person you are writing to, and it will have an impact on whether they decide to answer you or not, and in which way. The person you are writing to has a limited amount of time and may be very solicited. Hence, they may decide very quickly if they should answer you or not, and how. Even the best email may remain without an answer. **However, you can increase the chances of receiving an answer, possibly positive, by trying to fit into the expectations that your interlocutor may have**. These expectations may be partly individual and unpredictable, but in many respects, they are determined by local circumstances and culture. In some contexts, a certain level of formalism will be expected. In others, excessive formalism will rather signal you as an outsider. Politeness is expected in every context but may differ significantly depending on the type of relationship, and some people will feel offended if you did not use the appropriate tone even if you had considered your message as polite otherwise. In other languages than English, one additional level of complication comes from the distinction between the normal 'you' and the formal one.

German: du / Sie
French: tu / vous
Chinese: 你 / 您

It is impossible for you to 'guess' what the appropriate form for contacting a person is. Even if you know how to do this in your own social milieu and culture, this will change once you go somewhere else. Unfortunately, ignoring the local rule may have negative consequences for you, by discouraging people from answering you or keeping them from giving you a positive answer.

How to avoid this? Everyone makes mistakes and you will too. However, you can avoid many of them by **informing yourself/asking someone who already knows this milieu/check if an appropriate model of email corresponding to your situation already exists on the internet.** Double-checking twice that you did not misspell your correspondent's name is also a good idea.

At SDAC, students, lecturers and professors have a semi-formal standard of communication. Typical rules of writing and exchange apply, but **everyone communicates on the base of first names and uses the non-formal 'you.' No one uses formal titles like 'Doctor' or 'Professor' in everyday communication within SDAC.** Please, do so too. However, remember that this is specific to SDAC. If you write to someone else within German academia, you should usually do the opposite.

Time management and... procrastination

As you will soon learn, you have entered a very demanding Master's program. You will have dozens of pages to read every week, many papers to write every semester, a lot of other activities to do, and, last but not least, a thesis to submit by the end of the second year. It will be a challenging period and you should not waste any moment. Sounds quite frightening? Don't worry, you can all do it. How? By using time in the most meaningful way!

Effective time management is the key to a successful academic life and professional career. Unfortunately, there is no perfect formula that we can give you. You will have to go through your own process of trial and error to find what is the best for you. Time Blocking, for example, is a rather easy method to implement: take a weekly calendar (it doesn't need to be a paper one, Apple or Google Calendar works just fine) and for every class, allocate a few hours for study and reading. The tricky part is that you have to stick to this schedule as strictly as possible! Of course, you will have to periodically adapt it to accommodate any new task or any change in your life. In the long run, the method will help you build solid studying habits and acquire a work ethic. And if it is not working properly for you, there are many other productivity setups like Getting Things Done or the Kanban method. Just search for them online.

That being said, a few basic things to keep in mind:

First of all, **know your body**. Are you an early bird or a night owl? Do you feel like the day really starts after lunch or do you feel exhausted after 3 pm? Try to better understand your own biorhythm by looking at the times of day when you are full of energy or on the contrary completely tired. Then, plan your work accordingly and study intensively in your optimum periods.

Some rules of thumb about us, humans, and work:

Parkinson's Law: "The work to be done always fills up all the time available". You therefore need to determine the optimum duration needed to accomplish a task and avoid spending too much time on one thing. Otherwise you may find yourself coming short of what is expected from you.

Hofstadter's law: "A project always takes longer than expected". This law complements the previous one. Don't be overly optimistic about what you can accomplish in a period of time. You should always allow yourself some leeway. Why? Because of what the following law tells us:

Murphy's law: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Ok, things are not always so grim but it's better to be prepared than sorry. If you have a task to accomplish, don't wait for the last minute!

Laborit's law: "Difficult tasks are always put off until the very end". You have to take this into account when managing your time and fatigue. Sometimes, you will need to force yourself to do the most difficult tasks at the beginning of your studying hours in order to optimize your work.

Illich's law: "Productivity goes down beyond a certain point". After two hours, there is a good chance that your brain stops working properly (except when writing, which requires long periods of concentration). Always set aside some rest between two periods of intense work.

Carlson's law: "All interrupted work is far less effective and takes longer than uninterrupted work" During your studying hours, focus on your work and only on your work. Don't get distracted by your phone, Netflix, the weather or your friends.

Fraisse's Law: "Adding personal interest to a task makes it easier to do". You should always try to find an interest - however minor - in your study activities. Don't stay passive; be active, both in class and outside.

Finally, a few tips for humanity's never-ending fight against the greatest enemy of productivity: **procrastination** or the art of not doing what we should be doing.

The 5 seconds rule: Do you suddenly feel like studying? Don't miss this opportunity! In the following few seconds, try to do something meaningful, even if it's just scribbling a few thoughts about a class reading on a piece of paper! In many cases, it will lead you to do even more and to stop wasting so much time.

The 2 minutes rule: Do you need to add something on your agenda or write a short, but polite, reply to a professor's email? If a task takes less than a few minutes, try to do it right away. Don't let them accumulate and overflow your schedule.

The Pomodoro method: Pom...what? *Pomodoro*, or tomato in italian. A rather strange name for a productivity technique, isn't it? In fact it comes from the popular tomato-shaped cooking timer that is being sold all over the world. So you can call this technique the timer method if you prefer. The idea behind it is quite simple. We often feel overwhelmed when we think about the number of hours that we need to spend on a specific task. It's also very hard to stay focused for a long period of time. But what if we lower our initial goal? Maybe we can start our day by taking it slowly and working only 10, 15 or 25 minutes: enough to make some progress but not too much to have our mind wandering away. We just have to set up a timer, the one on our phone for example, to 25 minutes and we begin to work in a very focused way, allowing no distraction during that period of time. When the timer rings, we take a short break. Then we do it again. By repeating this process until the end of the day, a lot is going to be done. It's probably not the best working method (especially for writing) but it may be useful to get you out of a slump.

A small personal advice: you don't have to stop at the 25-minute mark if you are able to study longer. Just work at least 25 min and then take a (short) break when you feel too tired.

Can I take a break from my studies?

At SDAC, we try to be as responsive as possible to the individual needs of our students and the unique circumstances that each of you brings with you, especially when it comes to your time studying with us.

Typically, we expect students to finish within four semesters (two years). But of course, we understand if you want to do an internship or another stay abroad. For this purpose, FAU has the "Urlaubssemesterregelung", which stipulates that you can take up to two semesters off.

You can read the exact regulations here: https://www.fau.de/files/2017/05/Richtlinien-Beurlaubung-Studium_Englisch.pdf

You can find the application form here: https://www.fau.de/files/2013/10/Beurlaubung.pdf

Please contact the coordinator first if you plan to take a semester off.

Quality criteria for term papers and MA-theses

1. Development of the topic / research question

- The choice of topic is up to you. It is important that you enjoy your topic and that it is part of the seminar topic (in case of a seminar paper).
- The paper should have a meaningful title.
- The topic is placed in a larger context, and the choice of topic and its classification or delimitation is justified.
- The relevance of the topic and the research question is explained: Emphasize the theoretical or practical gain associated with answering the question/testing the thesis.
- The thesis is based on a clear question or hypothesis.
- This serves as the common thread of the paper; it is addressed systematically throughout the paper.
- The question is dealt with within the given framework (time and number of pages).
- At the same time, it is sufficiently complex/controversial and appropriate to the subject.

2. Structure of the paper

- The structure of the paper is logical.
- It is suitable for dealing with the research question.
- The weighting and order of the (sub)chapters correspond to the objective of the thesis.
- The introduction offers orientation: topic, relevance and placement in a larger context, question, approach.
- The conclusion summarizes and discusses the results/hypotheses/evidence (possibly followed by an outlook).
- Introduction and conclusion correspond with each other.

3. Argumentation / Analysis

- The paper goes beyond the mere presentation and description of the literature used.

- In independent discussion of the literature/source material, an own position is formulated and comprehensibly justified.
- For this purpose, a coherent argumentation is built up, which aims at answering the research question.
- All relevant aspects of the topic are taken into account, and emphasis and omissions are justified if necessary.
- Argumentative relationships are established between different sections of the text, content, and positions.
- The theoretical concepts selected for the paper are appropriate to the topic/subject, are reproduced correctly and comprehensibly, and are applied meaningfully to the student's own question/subject.
- Key terms are clarified and defined with regard to the work.
- Statements/theses are sufficiently substantiated.
- Pre-assumptions are sufficiently explicated.
- Contradictions in or between the terms/models/theories used, or between theory and empiricism, are identified and analyzed as appropriate.
- Controversies are reflected as such the respective positions are weighed against each other.
- If the work contains an empirical component: Material helps to illustrate particular aspects of the topic.
- Empirical findings are adequately described, contextualized, and embedded in the scientific discussion.

4. Location in scientific discourse / handling of sources

- The literature used is appropriate to the type and scope of the assignment.
- For seminar papers: sufficient reference to the course and its literature.
- The selection or reduction of the literature used is justified.
- Central works/authors are taken into account, appropriately classified and reflected upon in terms of source criticism (e.g. historically, geographically, theoretically, methodologically, research ethically).
- Literature from other disciplines is reflected with regard to its social and cultural anthropological relevance.

- The use of evidence is careful: data are substantiated by references; thoughts, systematizations or formulations of others are identified as such.
- The statements of other authors are mainly reproduced in their own words (indirect quotation).
- The number and extent of literal / direct quotations are appropriate; they are integrated into the flow of the text in a meaningful way, both in terms of content and language.
- The citation method is comprehensible, consistent and precise.
- The bibliography is complete: All sources used are cited - and only these!

5. (Technical) Linguistic Expression

- The paper is written in a clear, understandable language.
- The linguistic expression is appropriate for a scientific discussion: Avoidance of colloquial phrases and (unreflective) judgmental expressions.
- Technical terms are used in an appropriate form.
- (Historical) ethnographic data are linguistically classified by using the appropriate tense.
- The work demonstrates a reflective use of terminology
- Terms are used consistently.
- Spelling and grammar are correct.

Grading scale

German universities use a specific grading scale going from 1.0 to 5.0. The information below is meant to help you to understand the meaning of the grades that you receive.

1.0: Not only excellent in form and content, but also original and creative.

1.3: Excellent in both form and content.

1.7: Not perfect, but still overall very good in form and/or content.

2.0-2.3: Deficient in either form or content, while staying overall good.

2.7-3.0: Mostly satisfying but can be significantly improved in terms of form or content.

3.3-3.7: Sufficient to pass, but with a lot of room for improvement.

4.0-5.0: Fail. One major issue in either ethics, content or format, or the general weakness of the work, makes it insufficient to pass.

Understanding your modules

Understanding your modules (and consequently which courses you need to take) is crucial for the whole duration of your studies. You can find the required modules in your FPO (in German: Prüfungsordnung). It's the legal guideline of the program and you can find it under this link: https://www.sdac.studium.fau.de/teaching/examinations-and-assignments/. If you want to read more information about each module, please read the Modulhandbuch on the same page. Here is a simplified explanation of your modules and what they consist of:

First Semester

No.	Module Name	Courses	ECTS	Semester	Exam
1	Interdisciplinary Studies of Decision-Making I	Workshop Series I + CAS Colloquium/Guest Lecture + Lecture "Is It Already Decided?" + Seminar "Interdisciplinary Methodologies"	10	Winter Semester	Oral Exam (20 min.) + Handout (2 pages)
2	Transregional Competences	1 – 3 Courses	5 – 15	Winter Semester	Term paper (10 pages) per each course
3	Research Issues	1 – 3 Courses	5 – 15	Winter Semester	Written Exam (90 min.)

You can distribute your courses between the second and third module freely, but you need to take at least one course per module. In the end your first semester needs to consist of 30 ECTS in total.

Second Semester

No.	Module Name	Course	ECTS	Semester	Exam
1	Interdisciplinary Studies of Decision-Making II	Workshop Series II + CAS Colloquium/Guest Lecture	5	Summer Semester	Handout (2 pages)
2	Advanced Disciplinary Competences	1 – 2 Courses	5 – 10	Summer Semester	Written Exam (90 min.)
3	Advanced Regional Competences	1 – 2 Courses	5 – 10	Summer Semester	Term paper (12-15 pages)

4	Advanced Research Issues	1 – 2 Courses	5 - 10	Summer Semester	Oral Exam (20 min.)

In modules 2 to 4 you have to take one course each. Then you have 15 ECTS. Plus the 5 ECTS from module 1, you will have 20 ECTS. The remaining 10 ECTS can be distributed between modules 2 to 4 freely by choosing 2 courses. In the end your first semester needs to consist of 30 ECTS in total.

Third Semester

No.	Module Name	Course	ECTS	Semester	Exam
1	Praxis	Fieldwork or Internship	10	Winter Semester	Report (20-25 pages)
2	Theory (Literature Review)		5	Winter Semester	Report (15 pages)
3	Exchange Semester	3 Courses (1 can be a language course)	15	Winter Semester	Exam mode is determined by each course lecturer
OR	Semester in Germany I + II	3 Courses (from SDAC or FAU, 1 of them must be the Advanced Research Seminar)	15	Winter Semester	Exam mode is determined by each course lecturer

In your third semester you have to write two reports as preparation for your Master's thesis. For the Praxis module you have to conduct fieldwork independently. You can also get credit for an internship, but you are still required to collect data for your thesis while doing it. For the Theory module you have to write a Literature Review (you can find tips how to write one in this handbook). With these two reports you acquire 15 ECTS. Additionally, you have to take 3 courses (they can be chosen freely). We highly encourage you to do a semester abroad in this semester.

Forth Semester

Your Master's Thesis (25 ECTS) consists of 80 pages (70 % of the grade) plus an oral defense (30%).
Additionally, you have to attend the Advanced Research Seminar (5 ECTS).

MA Thesis Requirements, Registration, Oral Defense

How many pages does my MA Thesis need to have?

While anyone who has worked on such a comprehensive and long-term project can appreciate that one could write hundreds of pages, a very important quality characteristic of any academic paper is the ability to fit the large amount of data, information, analysis, and interpretation into a specific length. For the master's thesis at SDAC, that's 80 pages, of written text. This means that the title page, table of contents, list of images, references and all other appendices are not counted here. Of course, it goes without saying that it is extremely difficult to get to exactly 80 pages for such work, so we have a '+/- 10% rule'. This means that the thesis can be anywhere between 72 - 88 pages without the examiners giving minus points in the evaluation of the work.

Please note, however, that if you exceed or fall below this '10% rule', you will automatically receive a lower grade for your work. If your paper is significantly outside the mentioned page range, it is also possible that in extreme cases the examiner will not accept your thesis and it will be graded as 'failed'.

Can I write a longer or shorter thesis, than the 72-88 page range?

The simple answer here: no! While we understand that it can be challenging to stay within the required page length, it is part of the 'exam' you are taking with the MA Thesis. It trains you to articulate a highly complex and wide-ranging issue into a condensed form, to analyze it and to formulate your thoughts in a structured and clear way.

Do images in the text count towards the official page length?

It depends! Of course, graphics, tables, images and the like count towards the official page length if they are relevant to your thesis. They should relate directly to your written text and reinforce/underline/describe your arguments. But always keep in mind that you are writing an academic paper and not a non-fiction book. If you have a large number of images that you consider important, you can also place them in your appendix and refer to them in the text. If you have any doubts, please contact your supervisors directly and discuss it with them.

How long do I have to finish my master thesis?

There are two answers to this question.

Unofficially: You are encouraged to start working on your thesis as early as possible. This can start as early as your first semester when you start looking at different possible topics. It continues in the second semester when you begin to look at relevant literature and prepare a preliminary project description for the thesis. Then in the third semester when you go into

the field and collect your data. Which then leads into the fourth semester, which should be dedicated to writing the thesis.

Officially: According to FAU's central regulations, you have exactly 6 months after your official registration (see "How do I register my thesis?") to submit your thesis. This period is set centrally and cannot be changed by the SDAC or your supervisor. We encourage all of you to register your thesis at the beginning of the fourth semester (early April), which gives you until the end of March of the following year to officially submit your thesis.

What if I get sick during the official processing time or do not manage to finish my work within the 6 months due to other reasons?

First of all, don't get sick and please make it in regular time!!!

The extension of the processing time is something that has to be approved by the examination office of FAU. This means that your supervisors/examiners have no decision-making power here. The examination office of the FAU only approves the extension of the processing time in extremely exceptional cases and usually only for a few weeks. You must be able to prove that a truly exceptional situation has influenced your processing time. It is always decided on a case-by-case basis and our experience has not shown a clear pattern where we can tell you when the examination office will be gracious and when it will not. Therefore, once again, try everything possible to complete your work within the official processing time.

What happens if I submit my thesis too late?

The thesis will be graded as "not passed". You will then have one more attempt to resubmit the thesis.

How do I register the MA thesis?

To officially begin the work on your thesis, you first must register it with the examination office of the FAU. Please use the following form:
https://www.fau.de/files/2021/10/masterarbeit-anmeldung-philosophische-fakultaet.pdf

1. The first page needs to be filled out by you and your main supervisor/examiner:

Prüfungsamt der Philosophischen Fakultät
und Fachbereich Theologie (M.A.)
Halbmondstraße 6
91054 Erlangen

Mitteilung über die Vergabe eines Themas für die Masterarbeit

Ich, Name of your main supervisor/examiner
Titel Vorname Name des Themenstellers

habe am starting date processing perioc (= Beginn der Bearbeitungsfrist)

an Frau/Herrn student name Matrikelnummer: student id nr

Anschrift: student residential address

E-Mail: student email Telefonnummer: studend phone nr

Studiengang: Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures

eine Masterarbeit mit dem Thema (bitte in Druckschrift ausfüllen)

MA Thesis topic name (needs to match exactly the topic name on your thesis)

ausgegeben.

Als **Zweitgutachter** schlage ich vor: second examiner name

Soweit in der einschlägigen FPO vorgesehen:

Die im Rahmen des Mastermoduls vorgesehene **mündliche Prüfung** wird bei

name of main supervisor/examiner
(Titel Vorname Name)

2. On the second page you need to provide your personal data and address, where your final certificate will be sent to. Please make sure, that you can actually receive mail to the address you provide 6-8 weeks after you finished your oral exam. If by that time you´ve already returned to your home country, then you need to provide that address.

Angaben für die Ausstellung des Zeugnisses

Dieses Formular ist der Mitteilung über die Vergabe eines Themas für die Masterarbeit beizulegen.

I. Angaben für die Ausstellung des Zeugnisses

Familienname: Student last name Geburtsname: birth name (in case you´re married)

Vornamen: Student first name Matrikelnummer: student id nr

(bitte sämtliche Vornamen angeben, Rufnamen unterstreichen)

Studiengang: Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures

Geburtsort: Birthplace (City) Geburtsland: Birthplace (Country)

II. Anschrift, an die die Abschlussdokumente geschickt werden sollen

Name: Student last name Vorname: Student first name

Straße: Residential address Hausnummer: Zusatz:

Postleitzahl: zip code Ort: city Land: country

3. Please make sure that both pages are signed properly (first page: supervisor/examiner, second page: student).

4. After filling out this form, please send it to the examination office of the FAU via physical mail (address is provided on both pages of the form).

5. As soon as the examination office registers your thesis, you will receive an email to your FAU mailing address, which states that your thesis was registered to the date that you provided on the first page. From that day on you have exactly 6 months to hand in your thesis at the examination office.

How do I hand in my thesis at the examination office?

You need to hand in your thesis at the FAU examination office (address provided on the form) either by physical mail or you bring it yourself to the office. You need to hand in:

- Two physical, bound, copies of your MA thesis

- One digital storage medium (USB drive, SD card, CD) with a digital copy (PDF) of your MA Thesis

The two bound copies and the digital storage medium must be received in a sealed envelope by the Examination Office, either by mail or in person, before the end of your official processing time. If the envelope reaches the examination office later, the master's thesis will be considered failed.

When does my oral defense take place?

After the examination office received the envelope with your thesis, it will forward it to your main and second examiner. Within 6 weeks after receiving the copies, the main examiners need to commence with the oral examination of your thesis. Please reach out to your supervisor/examiner to schedule a date for your oral defense.

What is the oral defense of the thesis and how is it evaluated?

After you submit your thesis, it will be evaluated by two reviewers. One will be your thesis advisor.

Each evaluator will assign a grade to your thesis and write a report on it. These reports and grades are then submitted to the administration. If your grades are satisfactory, the oral defense of your thesis will be scheduled.

The Thesis Defense is a one-hour examination, organized as described below:

Oral defense of the thesis (15 minutes): The candidate briefly summarizes the research conducted, the major conclusions of the thesis, and any difficulties or limitations of the work presented.

Question and answer session with the committee (30 minutes): The two evaluators discuss the thesis with the candidate, particularly its positive and negative aspects from their point of view, and put questions to the candidate. The candidate may respond and provide additional information.

Committee deliberation (10 minutes): The candidate leaves the room and the committee members discuss the oral defense and assign a grade.

Results (5 minutes): The candidate returns to the room as soon as the committee members allow. The committee members inform the candidate of the three grades they have received (the two individual grades for the evaluation of the dissertation + the grade for the oral defense).

The grades and final reports are then submitted to the administration, which calculates the final grade for the Master's degree and informs the candidate.

When do I receive the grade for my thesis?

After you have completed the oral defense, both examiners will discuss your performance and then tell you the grades for the written part of your thesis, the oral defense, and the final grade for your MA thesis. Both examiners then write a report that is send by them to the FAU examination office, who in turn books your grade on CAMPO.

When do I receive my final certificate?

As soon as the examination office books your grade on CAMPO, they will simultaneously prepare the paperwork for your final certificate. It will be sent to your examiner and the program director, who need to sign the certificates and send it back to the examination office. After the examination office received the signed documents, they will send it to the address that you have provided on the second page of the registration form. This whole process takes between 4-8 weeks.

This means that after you have submitted the written part of your thesis, it will take between 8-12 weeks until you receive your final certificate.