

Guide for writing term papers and final theses in Digital Humanities at Trier University

Note: Translated in July 2026. – The reference version of this guide is available online, in German, [on the pages of the study programme](#).

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Introduction

This guide provides hints on how to format written assignments of different formats in the study programs of the "Digital Humanities" department at the University of Trier.

First, specific instructions related to individual types of assignments (term papers and final theses) are provided. This is followed by general guidelines for formatting written assignments that apply to all types of assignments.

This document is continuously updated; the last update was in September 2025. For any questions, please contact Prof. Dr. Christof Schöch and Dr. Élodie Ripoll.

1. Written Term Papers

Within various modules, a graded written term paper needs to be submitted to obtain credits. The written term paper is an independent application of what has been learned in the seminar to a self-chosen problem or issue.

1.1 Basics

Term papers must meet academic standards, i.e., careful and methodical reflection on the topic, clear argumentation and terminology, critical engagement with relevant research literature, carefully conducted analyses, as well as formally correct and easily comprehensible papers are expected.

In addition, it is necessary to adhere to the rules of good scientific practice (particularly regarding citation style and independent preparation of the work).

1.2 Topic Selection

The selection of the topic is free, as long as it fits within the framework of the respective seminar and has a clear connection to the field of Digital Humanities. Please choose and delimit the topic in such a way that it can be meaningfully addressed within a term paper.

The division and sequence of individual analysis steps depend on the specific topic. The topic and further questions should be clarified in advance during the office hours of the respective lecturer, or via email.

A project outline may be required, in which you define the topic, formulate a question and/or thesis, name the methodological approach, describe the data basis of the work, sketch the structure of the work, and name particularly relevant research literature. This outline, supplemented by a first proposal for a table of contents, may serve as the basis for a preliminary discussion of the work.

1.3 Scope of Term Papers

Term papers should have a text length of approximately 3,000 words in a Bachelor's program and approximately 5,000 words in a Master's program, based on the actual text, i.e., excluding the title page, table of contents, bibliography, and appendices such as source code, figures, or additional tables.

1.4 Time Spent Writing the Paper

The topic should be chosen and delimited in such a way that it can be completed within an effective processing time of approximately 2 weeks for a Bachelor's program and approximately 4 weeks for a Master's program.

Work begins once the topic has been set. The submission deadline will be determined by the lecturer.

2. Final Theses (Bachelor's / Master's)

You complete your degree program with a final thesis.

2.1 Basics

The final thesis must meet academic standards, i.e., careful and methodical reflection on the topic, clearly understandable argumentation and terminology, critical engagement with relevant research literature, carefully conducted analyses, as well as formally correct and linguistically flawless design are expected.

In addition, it is necessary to consider intersubjective traceability and adhere to the rules of good scientific practice (particularly regarding citation style and independent preparation of the work).

The thesis represents the conclusion of your studies. Accordingly, it should be reflective, careful, and demanding in its execution.

2.2 Topic Selection

The selection of the topic is free, as long as it can clearly be assigned to the field of "Digital Humanities."

Please choose and delimit the topic in consultation with your supervisor(s) so that it can be meaningfully addressed within the scope of a written Master's thesis (see below; excluding title page, table of contents, bibliography, and appendices such as source code).

Before registering for the thesis, you are expected to submit a project outline, in which you propose a descriptive title, define the topic, formulate a question and/or thesis, name the methodological approach, describe the data basis of the work, sketch the structure of the work, and name particularly relevant research literature. This outline, supplemented by a first proposal for a table of contents, may serve as the basis for a preliminary discussion of the work.

The division and sequence of individual analysis steps depend on the specific topic. The topic and further questions should be clarified during the office hours of the respective supervisor(s).

2.3 Formalities

The timeframe for completing a Bachelor's thesis is 4 months, and for a Master's thesis, it is 6 months.

The processing time begins with the issuance of the topic; this point in time and thus also the submission deadline will be determined by the examination office (HPA).

The scope of a Bachelor's thesis should be approximately 10,000-12,000 words (which corresponds to about 40-50 pages depending on formatting). The scope of a Master's thesis should be approximately 20,000-25,000 words (which corresponds to about 80-100 pages depending on formatting). These figures refer to the actual main text, i.e., table of contents, bibliography, and appendices do not count towards this.

Depending on the extent of practical components (programming code, edited texts, created datasets), it may be fine to deviate moderately from this target size in consultation with the supervisor(s).

The regulations in the relevant study orders (General Examination Regulations for Bachelor's and Master's degree programs at the University of Trier and Subject-Specific Examination Regulations for Digital Humanities, PO) regarding topic assignment, registration, deadlines, submission modalities, grading must be strictly adhered to.

2.4 Colloquium for Master's Thesis

After submitting and reviewing the Master's thesis, a colloquium will take place.

The colloquium lasts a total of 30 minutes: 8-10 minutes for a brief presentation of the most important aspects of the Master's thesis (e.g., goals, approach, results). Following the presentation, there will be a discussion about the topic of the thesis, during which certain points from the work will be discussed again. This discussion lasts approximately 20 minutes.

A protocol will be made of the colloquium. The colloquium will be evaluated and a grade will be awarded.

3. Formatting Written Assignments

The following sections contain hints for formatting written assignments that apply to term papers and final theses. Only brief hints are provided, so please consult the literature mentioned in the last section as well.

3.1 Formal Aspects

Please note the formal guidelines of the university examination office and the relevant information in the examination regulations.

Among other things, the university examination office provides an example for designing the title page. Please follow this example, especially for final theses.

At an appropriate place, for example on a separate page directly after the title page, you should insert the declaration of independence („Eigenständigkeitserklärung“). The appropriate declaration for the field of Digital Humanities is available in the appendix to this document. Please note that for the final thesis, the declaration must be signed in the original.

The use of artificial intelligence (particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or Copilot) must be disclosed, meaning you must document which tools or procedures were used for which parts of the work - whether text, data, or code - and in what way (generating, editing, translating, etc.). This can be done in a footnote in the introduction or at another suitable place. Please also refer to the declaration regarding this topic.

3.2 Content Design of the Work

Come quickly and directly to the topic. Be ready to discuss and use clear arguments where it is appropriate, but do not digress.

A term paper or Master's thesis should not be dominated by purely descriptive, narrative, or explanatory information or content summaries; rather, methodical and analytical considerations and argumentative text passages should clearly be in the foreground.

Of central importance for a written work is the concise and careful formulation of clear research questions or hypotheses (often in the introduction, or also in a separate chapter). These questions or hypotheses should then be answered as precisely and differentiated as possible at the end of the work, based on the information or results worked out in the main part.

It is equally important for every written work that the research questions or hypotheses, the data or sources used, and the research methods employed fit well together.

All essential information, arguments, ideas, data, and/or results for the chosen topic must be present. (Conversely, as few non-relevant information, arguments, ideas, data, and/or results for the topic should be included in the work.) All information, arguments, ideas, data, and/or results must be brought into a clear argumentative context, i.e., explicitly connected with the topic, research question, or thesis of the work.

These pieces of information, arguments, ideas, data, and/or results must also be substantiated in the work, for example by referring to relevant research literature, suitable and relevant sources, or analyses performed by others or by yourself (for handling research literature and sources: see below).

Please also ensure that technical terms or other terms important for your argumentation are correctly defined, used appropriately, and critically discussed if necessary, with reference to suitable academic sources.

Rank different pieces of information according to their importance for your argumentation. Particularly important statements can sometimes be placed at the beginning or end of a paragraph. Background information or target group-specific information can also be placed in parentheses or in a footnote.

3.3 Structure

The work should include a table of contents with the individual headings and corresponding page numbers.

The text part consists of an introduction, main text body, conclusion, bibliography, and if necessary appendices such as larger source code listings, supplementary visualizations, or tables.

In the introduction, the topic should be presented and delimited, the relevance of the topic or motivation for the work should be explained, the approach or method should be outlined, the goal/knowledge interest or research question(s) or thesis(es) should be defined, and the structure of the work should be explained. Make sure to clearly define the topic and carefully formulate the thesis(es) or research question(s).

In the main text body, the actual investigation takes place, divided into meaningful chapters that correspond to the topic. Within the chapters, new lines of thought should be marked by paragraphs. The main body can optionally be divided into a theoretical and/or methodological part and an analysis part, but both must be closely related. Each chapter begins with a brief orienting section and is concluded with a summary of intermediate results and/or a transition to the next chapter.

The conclusion provides a concise summary of the results (without extensive repetition of details), answers the research question(s) from the introduction or evaluates the hypothesis or hypotheses, and optionally provides an outlook on further research questions that could follow this study.

The work ends with a bibliography and, if necessary, an appendix in which longer source code examples, data tables, additional images, or other materials can be listed.

3.4 Handling Datasets or Programming Code

If you have prepared or processed data for the implementation of the work (e.g., in XML, CSV, or JSON) or if you have developed programming code (e.g., in Python or R), you can cite and comment on smaller excerpts from the dataset or programming code in the work. This is particularly useful for code passages that are crucial to the work, where you have overcome particular challenges, or where you have developed a particularly elegant solution.

If you have worked with a specially compiled corpus of sources or a specially created dataset in your work, the structure, scope, and contents of the corpus should be documented separately in detail. For example, a table should document the number of texts and tokens per text type, author(s), and/or decade, etc.

Longer code examples or more extensive excerpts from a dataset should be moved to the appendix of the work.

If significant amounts of programming code or substantial data sets were used for the work, these should be attached to the work in electronic form and made available online - considering legal frameworks and regulations, particularly with regard to copyright law and the protection of personal data. This can be done on suitable repositories such as GitHub, GitLab, and Codeberg (versioned repositories) or Zenodo and Figshare (long-term stable data storage). In this case, a link to this repository must be inserted in the work.

If you have used one or more relevant programming libraries that can be clearly distinguished from the main programming language, you should cite the corresponding reference publications for these libraries. For example, spaCy, stanza, requests, seaborn, or scikit-learn are separate libraries in Python. The modules math, random, os, or re in Python, on the other hand, are not. If a reference publication cannot be determined, a relevant URL should be provided where the package is made available and/or documented.

If it promotes understanding, datasets, methods, and results can be illustrated through tables, visualizations, or diagrams. In addition to tables, visualizations such as bar charts, scatter plots, box plots, and line plots are suitable for data. The selection of an appropriate visualization form for the respective information is important. The tables, visualizations, or diagrams must be integrated into the work and commented on. Good readability of axis labels and labels as well as the visualization itself should also be ensured.

The student council CoDiPho has developed a citation guide for programming with examples, helpful links, and more detailed explanations. The consideration of the citation guide for creating (programming) term papers is not mandatory. The guide serves as a supplementary aid and can be consulted voluntarily.

3.5 Engagement with Research Literature

Relevant research contributions must be acknowledged and their results processed, and if suitable, critically discussed. The engagement with research must be precisely documented at every point, meaning it must be traceable where you align with others' opinions, where you argue independently, and where you distance yourself from research positions.

Verbatim quotes should be explicitly integrated into the argumentative context. Also engage critically with positions you find in earlier research. Have the courage to distance yourself from research opinion if you can convincingly justify and substantiate it.

Document both verbatim and paraphrased references to research literature through bibliographic citations. Proceed uniformly and clearly in designing citation notes so that the cited work and relevant passage can be identified by your readers without problems.

3.6 Citation Style and Bibliography

All quotations, paraphrases, and meaningful adaptations from foreign texts must be clearly marked. Even used programming libraries should be referenced if they are clearly distinguishable from the

programming language used. If there is a reference publication, it should be cited. All mentioned sources or all mentioned research literature, but only these, must be listed.

The use of a program to manage bibliographic information is highly recommended. Examples of suitable programs are Zotero (free) and Citavi (campus license). Such programs not only facilitate the entry of bibliographic information and the management of notes and excerpts but also support the insertion of correct literature references in the text and the creation of complete and uniformly formatted bibliographies.

You are free to implement the design of references in the text as you wish, as long as you consistently follow a common procedure. This includes, among others, the so-called Harvard system, where references are inserted in parentheses in the text itself and follow the form "Author Year, Page Number," as well as the footnote system, where a complete (or abbreviated when mentioning an entry repeatedly) references are provided in a footnote.

The mentioned tools allow you to use one of the relevant citation styles for formatting bibliographic information. It is important that the entries in your bibliographic database are complete and consistent. Recommended citation styles include, among others: Modern Language Association (MLA), Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA), Chicago Manual of Style (CMoS), or American Psychological Association (APA).

The citation system must ensure completeness, clarity, and uniformity and thus verifiability. It is expected that you briefly state in a footnote in the introduction which software, which citation system (footnotes or in the running text) and which citation style (MLA, MHRA, Chicago, APA, etc.) are used.

If you have used a corpus or dataset published by third parties, it should be listed in the bibliography, possibly along with an associated reference publication. If you have analyzed a small number of specific primary sources, these should be listed separately from research literature and other bibliographic entries. Otherwise, the bibliography does not need to be further subdivided.

3.7 Language

Pay attention to clear expression and adhere to the rules for spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Furthermore, consistently value precision of expression, clarity of argumentation, and logical connection of individual statements. Avoid irony or polemics.

A consistent argumentation, chapter endings with transitions, and meaningful division of your work not only facilitate intersubjective communication of your statement but may also enable the best possible comprehensibility of your text for others.

Use formal, academic language to adequately represent your subject and argumentation.

You are generally allowed to formulate statements in the first person. Avoid cumbersome constructs in the passive voice (e.g., "it was decided to...") that aim to avoid formulations in the first person. This applies especially when you explain your own decisions on data or methods or your classification of research positions.

Regarding so-called gender-sensitive language, there are no prescriptions for the chosen strategy. In the introduction, the chosen strategy should be formulated in a footnote and implemented as consistently as possible throughout the work.

Foreign language quotations: Quotations in German and English do not need to be translated.

Quotations in other languages, on the other hand, should be translated into the language of the work (German or English), preferably in a footnote.

3.8 Layout and Typography

All written assignments must be uniformly formatted, with particular attention to clarity and good readability. The general rule is: Keep it simple!

If you are working with Microsoft Word or Libre Office, use templates to ensure uniform design of the work. If you are using LaTeX or Markdown, use semantic markup and a template for conversion to PDF. (You can use the Typst template for Quarto in the field of Digital Humanities. Contact Christof Schöch if you plan to do this.)

All written works need to be paginated. Title page, Eigenständigkeitserklärung, and table of contents do not have page numbers and are not counted towards the total extent. Introduction, conclusion, and main chapters each begin on a new page.

Paragraph design, hyphenation, integration of images, table of contents should correspond to common guidelines. The margins should be set as follows: left 2.5cm, right 3cm, top 2cm, bottom 2cm.

The font size is 11 or 12 points depending on the chosen font size, in black color, with a line spacing of 1.5. Recommended for the main text are serif fonts like Times New Roman or Free Serif; for headings, sans-serif fonts like Arial or Calibri/Carlito can also be used. In footnotes, the font size is one point smaller, and the line spacing is 1.0.

Images (e.g., overview graphics, schematic representations) or tables must be numbered (separate count per category, e.g., images and tables have a separate count) and each have a caption (i.e., a brief explanation of the content shown). Each image and table must be referenced in the text at least once.

If the work contains a large number of tables and/or images (more than three each), you should create corresponding table, figure, etc. lists and insert them immediately after the table of contents but on a separate page.

Source code, HTML/XML snippets, etc. are formatted in a monospace font like Courier New or Free Mono.

Pay attention to the use of correct typographic characters (quotation marks, apostrophe, hyphen vs. parenthesis dash).

For emphasis, only italics should be used.

Each footnote forms a complete sentence, i.e., it starts with a capital letter and ends with a period. This also applies to links and bibliographic references, where for links it is advisable to write at least "See: <https://examplepage.org/page>".