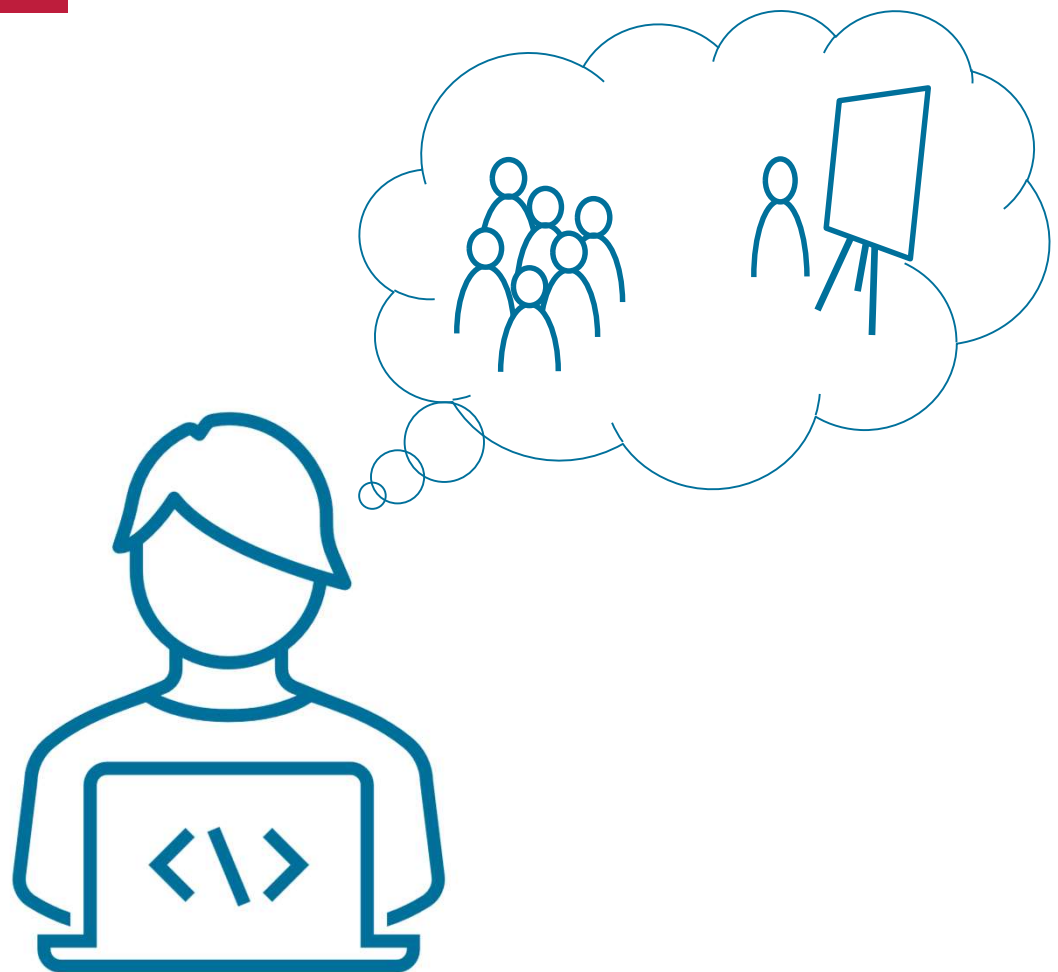




Technische  
Universität  
Braunschweig



# How to Write an Essay

**A Guideline for Writing an *Ausarbeitung*  
in English Linguistics**

**Technische Universität Braunschweig**

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik  
Sprachwissenschaft

# **How to Write an Essay (*Ausarbeitung*)**

**Manual for Linguistics**

Holger Hopp  
Henrike Comes-Koch

January 2023, updated Sep 2023

**Contents**

- 1 Introduction ..... 1**
- 2 Manual of Style..... 1**
- 3 Before you start ..... 1**
- 4 Structure ..... 1**
  - 4.1 Contextualisation into current research contexts..... 1
  - 4.2 Comparison of two studies..... 2
- 5 Content ..... 2**
  - 5.1 Title Page ..... 2
  - 5.2 Introduction..... 2
  - 5.3 Review of Background..... 2
  - 5.4 Summary of study/text presented orally ..... 3
  - 5.5 Placing a study/test within the research context (see 4.1)..... 3
  - 5.6 Comparison of two studies (see 4.2)..... 3
    - 5.6.1 More detailed description of the study/text for comparison ..... 3
    - 5.6.2 Comparison ..... 3
  - 5.7 Conclusion and Outlook ..... 4
  - 5.8 References ..... 4
  - 5.9 Appendices ..... 4
- 6 General Advice..... 4**
  - 6.1 Audience..... 4
  - 6.2 Style ..... 4
  - 6.3 References and Quotations ..... 4
  - 6.4 Consult Research Papers ..... 4
  - 6.5 Plagiarism ..... 5
  - 6.6 Final Words of Advice..... 5
- 7 Submission ..... 5**
- 8 Selected References ..... 5**

## 1 Introduction

To earn credits in a seminar in the module E2, you give a 30-minute presentation in class, typically on a research paper or course-specific topic provided by the instructor. Afterwards, you contextualise the paper/topic presented in a short essay (*Ausarbeitung*) by embedding it into current research contexts and/or by comparing it to one other relevant study. The length of your essay should be approximately 4-6 pages (1,200 - 1,800 words).

This guideline aims at giving you general advice on the structure for the essay (*Ausarbeitung*) and will help you organize your ideas. Depending on the topic of your seminar or your presentation, your supervisor may favour different ways for you to structure your essay. If you are not sure whether the following guidelines fit your essay, contact your supervisor.

## 2 Manual of Style

For detailed information concerning the sections

- Title Page
- References
- Quotations
- References in Text
- Examples and Data
- Orthographic and Formal Conventions

refer to the 'Manual of Style' (see departmental website). It has additional important information that complements this guideline and that you need to pay heed to.

## 3 Before you start

In preparation for your essay, you should formulate a title (topic), the aim of your essay, and, ideally, research question that you are going to address. Both the topic and the aim or research question will be rather closely related to the study or text that you have presented orally in class. Next, you should decide which type of essay you want to write:

1. You contextualise the paper/topic presented orally by embedding it into current research contexts (see 4.1);
2. You compare the paper/topic presented orally to one other relevant study (see 4.2).

Once you have made up your mind about the general set-up of your essay, you should talk to your supervisor to get their go-ahead and/or further advice.

In the next section, you can find exemplary structures for each version of the essay.

## 4 Structure

### 4.1 Contextualisation into current research contexts

If you opt for the option to contextualise your presentation topic into current research contexts, your essay should contain the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Review of background
3. Summary of the study presented orally
4. Placing the study within the research context
5. Conclusion

6. References
7. Statement of non-plagiarism

#### 4.2 Comparison of two studies

If you opt for the option to compare the study you presented orally to another relevant study, your essay should contain the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Review of background
3. Summary of study presented orally
4. Comparison of two studies
  - 4.1. More detailed summary of 'new' text or study (IMRaD structure)
  - 4.2. Comparison
5. Conclusion
6. References
7. Statement of non-plagiarism

In the following, you find information about some of the sections listed above.

## 5 Content

### 5.1 Title Page

Make sure you choose an appropriate title for your essay. The title should go beyond listing the paper(s) you discuss. You should choose a title that gives an overview of the (larger) topic you cover. One option is to use the research question as the title or you include the variables investigated in the title (e.g., "Effects of input quantity on grammatical development"). For details about how to design the title page, consult the 'Manual of Style'.

### 5.2 Introduction

The introduction has two parts. First, a thematic introduction and second an overview of the essay.

In the thematic introduction, you present the area of investigation, the topic and the research question. Start out broad, though focussed, and become more specific. You may also define some key terms in the introduction, and explicitly state the purpose of your essay (e.g., "The present essay investigates ....").

In the overview, you give an overview of the structure of the essay, that means you tell the reader how many sections there are and what each section deals with.

### 5.3 Review of Background

The aim of this section is to contextualize the study or text you presented in the context of theories, models or key previous research findings; it is **not** to give exhaustive overviews of previous research; rather, you use previous research in your argumentation and for your purposes. In other words, you write this section in a goal-directed manner. Hence, you provide a comparative and concise review of the relevant theoretical background, potentially including some key studies. Make sure that this section is directly relevant for your research question. Always ask yourself whether your review is clearly related to your research question and make sure you do not go off on tangents.

Use present tense to report opinions and past tense to report findings by others. For example: "X and Y (year) *argue* that semantic priming affects word recognition. They *designed* an experiment in which the participants *had* to..."

## 5.4 Summary of study/text presented orally

The study or text that you have presented orally should be summarised relatively briefly. The aim of the summary is to introduce the study or text briefly to have a point of departure for embedding it into the research context and/or for comparing it to other studies. The form of the summary is comparable to an abstract. The purpose of the abstract is to give the reader a brief overview and summary of a study or text, and it address the following questions:

- What is the topic of research?
- What is the research question?
- How did the authors address/investigate the topic and research question?
- What are the results?
- What are the main conclusions?

Depending on whether you place the study or text in its research context (4.1) or compare it to another study or text (4.2), the length of the summary of the study varies. It is typically between 300 and 500 words, so that you devote most of the space in your essay on the research context or other studies.

## 5.5 Placing a study/test within the research context (see 4.1)

In this part, you refer to (a) the review of the background in the beginning of your essay and (b) other studies or research. You assess how the study or text contributes to research in the field and theories and how it relates to other studies or research in the field. You also critically evaluate possible limitations of it. In particular if there have been advances in research or theory since, you discuss how some aspects of the study or text may need to be reinterpreted or reconsidered.

It may be useful to find ways to group and compare research, studies and other types of literature (reviews, theoretical articles, etc.): for example, experiments vs. survey studies, theoretical frameworks, languages, participants, methods, findings, etc. Note that when you summarize other studies or texts, the more space you attribute to them, the more relevant or important they should be. Make sure you structure this section well: Provide the reader with pointers and short summaries throughout, so that it is always clear as to WHY you are writing about a particular aspect. Make sure that a reader who is not familiar with these studies or texts can understand what they were about.

## 5.6 Comparison of two studies (see 4.2)

### 5.6.1 More detailed description of the study/text for comparison

Typically, you describe this study or text in more detail than the one you presented, but you make sure that your comparative discussion provides sufficient information about both to enable the reader to follow your comparison and to evaluate your claims.

Typically, you would follow the set-up of the study or text you describe. For instance, when describing a study, you cover the following subsections (IMRaD structure):

1. Introduction (aim, research questions)
2. Method (participants (or corpus, data), materials, procedure, and analysis)
3. Results and
4. Discussion

### 5.6.2 Comparison

The two studies or texts that you compare should ideally have similar research questions or topics. Typically, you can formulate a common research question/topic they address. However, they might differ in focus, perspective or in the method they use to investigate the research question (e.g., comprehension vs. production methods), in the participants (age, languages) or the linguistic domain they investigate (e.g., past tense versus passive voice). Importantly, they might even differ in their results and conclusions and thus in the way they speak to your research question. The aim of the

comparison section is to address these differences and discuss in which way they are relevant for answering your overall research question.

### **5.7 Conclusion and Outlook**

In the conclusion, you readdress the research question laid out in the introduction. State briefly how you approached this question, and answer it by way of a brief, non-technical summary of the results and your interpretation of them. Make a final summary statement of the conclusions you have drawn. When appropriate, comment on the importance and relevance of your findings and give an outlook and suggestions for further research.

### **5.8 References**

Make sure you list all references cited in your essay in accordance with the conventions laid down in the “Manual of Style”.

### **5.9 Appendices**

Appendices are for including materials which you cannot put into the main sections. Typically, you do not need an appendix in an essay. However, you could add more detailed results or additional statistical comparisons of the results in appendices if these are necessary.

## **6 General Advice**

### **6.1 Audience**

When writing the essay, always keep in mind the target audience. You should write your essay for a hypothetical audience of fellow students who have basic knowledge of linguistics, yet no specialist knowledge of the subject matter at issue. In other words, you can assume knowledge of basic concepts in linguistics, but you still need to explain the particular terms, concepts, approaches, theories and previous studies relevant for the topic of your paper.

### **6.2 Style**

The writing style in linguistics is straightforward, that means clarity is its priority. It is perfectly acceptable to use first-person pronouns (‘I, we’) and active verbs and to have short sentences. Clarity always wins over verbosity! Avoid expressing your personal or emotional involvement with the topic. Stay on topic!

### **6.3 References and Quotations**

Generally, papers in linguistics do not contain verbatim quotations; rather, ideas taken from other sources are paraphrased. This means you need to find your own words for expressing these ideas. As a guideline, your essay should not contain any – or, maximally, one or two – direct quotations. Only quote verbatim if it is virtually impossible to say the same thing in your own words. When referring to previous work, cite the name of the author(s) and the year of publication (e.g., White, 2003). When you refer to a specific idea or aspect, include the page number from the source (e.g., White, 2003, p. 42). For details, see the “Manual of Style”.

### **6.4 Consult Research Papers**

Consult published research papers for inspiration. Do not copy from them (see following section), but learn from them about structure, organisation and style of your essay.

## 6.5 Plagiarism

In your essay, you must absolutely avoid any form of plagiarism. Consult the guideline “How to Avoid Plagiarism” for details and examples. You are required to append the following statement of non-plagiarism (TU Braunschweig, 2023) at the end of your essay:

"Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Prüfungsarbeit [„Titel der Arbeit“] selbstständig und ohne unzulässige fremde Hilfe sowie nur mit den von der Lehrperson zuvor bekannt gegebenen zulässigen Hilfsmitteln bearbeitet habe und dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit noch nicht für diese oder eine andere Prüfung eingereicht habe. Alle benutzten Quellen und Hilfsmittel habe ich vollständig angegeben.

Mir ist bekannt, dass Täuschungsversuche –insbesondere nachgewiesene Plagiate sowie unvollständige Quellen- und Hilfsmittelangaben –nach §11, Abs. 4 der Allgemeinen Prüfungsordnung zum endgültigen Nichtbestehen einer Prüfung und somit zum Scheitern im Studiengang führen können.“ Add date, place and your signature.

You are also required to submit the checklist (including the list of resources) along with your essay.

## 6.6 Final Words of Advice

You cannot write a good essay in one go – you *re-write* a good essay. In other words, do not attempt to produce a polished version from the start; rather, you will write, rewrite and rewrite your essay, until you produce a final version.

Read through what you have written after a break (ideally on a different day), looking at it as if someone else had written it. Keep in mind that if what you have written seems unclear to you now, it is unlikely your readers will understand it later. Rewrite these sections.

## 7 Submission

Before you submit the essay, make sure you go through the checklist for submitting written work in English linguistics. You will need to submit the checklist along with your essay. Check with your supervisor whether you need to submit both a paper and a digital version of the essay or only one of them.

## 8 Selected References

This is a non-exhaustive list of references with more information on how to write term papers or theses.

Franck, N. (2002). *Fit fürs Studium: Erfolgreich reden, lesen, schreiben*. DTV.

Michael, M., & Felicity, O. D. (2008). *Academic vocabulary in use*. Cambridge University Press.

Kruse, O. (2000). *Keine Angst vor dem leeren Blatt: Ohne Schreibblockaden durchs Studium*. Campus.

Siepmann, D., Gallagher, J. D., Hannay, M., & Mackenzie, L. (2011). *Writing in English: A guide for advanced learners* (2nd ed.). UTB / Francke.