

# STYLE GUIDE

## HOW TO WRITE A PAPER OR THESIS



VRIJE  
UNIVERSITEIT  
AMSTERDAM

Faculteit  
der Sociale  
Wetenschappen

# STYLE GUIDE

A GUIDE AND REFERENCE FOR WRITING PAPERS AND THESES.

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Faculty of  
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## INTRODUCTION

This style guide is intended for students of all programmes offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences. It is meant to be used as a guide and reference for writing papers and theses.

This style guide contains information that will be relevant at various points during your degree programme. This starts with your Bachelor's tutorial, and you will continue to benefit from this information while writing your Bachelor's and Master's theses. In your theses, you will need to demonstrate that you are conversant with the rules and guidelines for scientific writing and that you are able to apply them proficiently. But it doesn't stop there: in your future professional career you will also need to be able to produce solid pieces of writing. This is why we place so much emphasis on being able to produce good, balanced, critical scientific writing. This style guide is an invaluable asset that will help you to learn these skills. Your lecturers will regularly refer to this style guide. You should take the time to study the instructions and tips contained in this guide and structure your writing assignments in accordance with the guidelines that are detailed in the various chapters. You will find this to be of tremendous benefit during your writing.

The papers you will be submitting during your degree programme must comply with the guidelines listed in Appendix 1. If a paper you submit does not meet these guidelines, you may get it back ungraded and you will forfeit your first chance for a mark.

This style guide has ten chapters. Chapter 1 describes the characteristics of the most common types of scientific texts. Chapter 2 contains a detailed description of the various parts that make up a paper. Chapter 3 is about how to argue persuasively and effectively. Chapter 4 deals with the style and tone that you are expected to use in scientific papers. Chapter 5 discusses the process of writing, which can be lengthy and intensive. Chapter 6 contains guidelines for references. These guidelines must be followed scrupulously. Chapter 7 deals with figures and tables, and in Chapter 8 we dot the i's and cross the t's in terms of language and spelling. Finally, Chapter 9 deals with the presentation and layout of your papers.

# 1 TYPES OF PAPERS

The types of papers that you are most likely to write during your programme include a research report (which may be a paper or a thesis), an essay and a research proposal. You may also have other types of writing assignments, such as 'paraphrasing' or a 'KAVV' paper (key citation, argument, context, query). These kinds of assignments serve to help you develop a scientific writing style and they form the basis for larger assignments. Your lecturer will give you instructions for paraphrasing or writing a 'KAVV' paper, which is why these types of assignments are not discussed in this style guide. The same applies to literature surveys, that often serve as a building block for a more extensive paper or thesis. Here we only discuss the research report, the essay and the research proposal. These different types of texts are explained in more detail below.

## 1.1 RESEARCH REPORT

Research reports are one of the most common writing assignments. Research reports (also known as research papers) are written to report on research that you yourself have conducted, either individually or as part of a group. As part of your university studies, this research will often be rather limited in scope: a systematic review and study of existing scientific literature (literature survey), other research reports (desk study), or an analysis of empirical data (empirical research report). Your Bachelor's and Master's theses are also examples of research reports.

A research report has the following general structure:

- The introduction explains the subject of the research and its relevance. This is where you define your research problem and outline your theoretical framework. Sometimes a separate chapter may be devoted to the theoretical framework.
- In the section on method, you explain how you have gone about investigating your research problem.
- The results section is devoted to presenting your research results.
- You expound on your findings in the discussion section and draw conclusions in the light of your research problem.
- Finally, you list the literature you have consulted in your reference list.

### 1.1.1 PAPER STYLE AND THESIS STYLE

Depending on the assignment, you can use two styles as the basis for your research report: the paper style and the thesis style. The main differences between these two styles are length and arrangement.

With regard to length and layout, papers most closely resemble scientific articles. This implies that there is no table of contents. The chapters (sections) of a research report written in paper style are not numbered. In a paper the theoretical framework is often included in the introduction, but exceptions can be made. The conclusion is usually included in the discussion section.

In thesis style, the chapters and sections are numbered and listed in the table of contents. Thesis-style research reports tend to be considerably lengthier than reports written in paper style.

The structure of research reports written in paper style and in thesis style are shown in Box 1.1.

*Box 1.1 Differences in structure between a research report in paper style and thesis style*

Paper style	Thesis style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Title page</li> <li>▪ Summary</li> <li>▪ Introduction (including a theoretical framework)</li> <li>▪ Method</li> <li>▪ Results</li> <li>▪ Discussion (and conclusion)</li> <li>▪ Reference list</li> <li>▪ Appendices (if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Title page</li> <li>▪ Table of contents</li> <li>▪ Introduction</li> <li>▪ Definition of research problem</li> <li>▪ Theoretical framework</li> <li>▪ Method</li> <li>▪ Research results</li> <li>▪ Discussion</li> <li>▪ Conclusions</li> <li>▪ Summary (if applicable)</li> <li>▪ Reference list</li> <li>▪ Appendices (if applicable)</li> </ul>

## 1.2 ESSAY

An essay is an argument about a proposition (or claim, statement, position, opinion) that is debatable. The purpose of an essay is to make the proposition more plausible or acceptable by providing supporting arguments. These arguments may rely on empirical data or consist of logical reasoning.

Essays are intended for a wider audience than just fellow scholars. They bridge the gap between the world of science and the general public. Essays may have a personal bias, but they must also meet high scholarly standards. Newspaper columns can seldom be classified as essays. Finally, essays generally have a normative aspect: they provide readers with some kind of standard of correctness.

## 1.3 RESEARCH PROPOSAL

You write a research proposal to convince others that the research that you wish to conduct is worthwhile. You will occasionally have to submit research proposals during your degree programme, for example before embarking on a research internship or for your Bachelor's and Master's theses.

The requirements for your research proposal will depend to a degree on the lecturer or the course. You engage in writing a research proposal first and foremost for yourself. How much do I already know about my subject? What is the exact definition of my research problem? What question or questions do I wish to answer? How do I want to go about answering them?

How much time, and what resources will I need? It is very important that you answer these questions to your satisfaction before you start conducting the actual research. A good research plan or proposal is the engine that drives the research project.

Box 1.2 lists the core elements of a good research proposal.

*Box 1.2 Elements of a research proposal*

- Background
- Definition of research problem
- Research design
- Relevance of the results

## 2 PARTS OF A PAPER

Academic writing is about defining problems and then endeavouring to solve them. You need to be able to formulate a balanced research question, maintain a critical stance toward the relevant literature and research material, and you must reflect on this in your argumentation in order to arrive at an answer to your research question. Answering the research question (or sub-questions) requires several steps: it all starts with a well-considered and detailed question, followed by rigorously formulated arguments based on theory and/or (empirical) research, and finally a conclusion. A conclusion is literally an aggregate of the partial answers to the original question that have been found during the course of the research. These answers often give rise to new questions or critical comments.

In this section of the style guide we describe a number of specific details related to each part of the paper. Please keep in mind that these are general descriptions. The parts you need, and whether your text must meet any additional requirements, will depend on the specific type of assignment (e.g. a research proposal, a paper or a thesis).

Most include the following:

- title page;
- contents;
- introduction (including a theoretical framework)<sup>1</sup>;
- body (essay: the argument; research report: method and results);
- conclusion;
- reference list.

In addition, you might wish to include a number of other components. Whether you use them or not depends on the length and nature of the text. Generally, you will *not* use these components. You might use them as part of a Bachelor's or Master's thesis, but not always.

These might include:

- a list of abbreviations and/or list of tables and graphs;
- a preface;
- appendices;
- an abstract (summary).

The following sections discuss specific points related to each component.

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<sup>1</sup> The theoretical framework forms a separate chapter in a thesis.

## 2.1 THE TITLE PAGE

Box 2.1 shows the information that must be included on the title page of your paper or thesis.

### *Box 2.1 The title page*

Your title page must include:

- your name;
- your student number;
- place and date of writing;
- name of the institution and the programme (and/or the teaching block) for which you have written the paper or thesis;
- name of your lecturer / supervisor;
- a clear and informative title, if necessary with a subtitle. The title plus subtitle should be no longer than ten to fifteen words.

You should see the title as the most concise summary of your paper. The title conveys what the piece is about in a nutshell. You may certainly opt for a playful or catchy title, as long as you combine it with a subtitle that *does* clearly indicate what your paper is about. In addition, the text must clearly and explicitly reveal the hidden meaning of your playful title if you choose to go this route. The title must convey the content of the paper reliably to appeal to the right readership. If you opt for an informative title, then you do not need a subtitle, although you may supply one; the informative main title is then supplemented with a more specific subtitle.

## 2.2 THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

The table of contents should appear immediately after the title page. The purpose of a table of contents is to give the reader an immediate, general overview of the substance of the paper. You might wish to emphasize the paper's structure by using different fonts and indentations. In addition to the chapter numbers (or section numbers), include the headings used in the text and the corresponding pagination. Also, you should limit the structure of your text to two (or a maximum of three) levels so you can avoid numbering of more than three digits (i.e. up to 1.1.1). The reference list and appendices (if applicable) are not given a separate chapter number.

The title page is not listed in the table of contents and does not count as a page (it also does not display a page number). The table of contents and preface (if applicable) also do not get a page number.

The table of contents should be prepared last; it serves as a kind of final check on your work. You'll be able to check whether all contents are present, whether the chapters are arranged

logically, the page references are correct and that all headings and subheadings are correct. Box 2.2 shows the general layout of the table of contents.

*Box 2.2 The table of contents*

Introduction .....	1
(section title) .....	2
(sub-section title) .....	3
1 (chapter title) .....	4
1.1 (section title) .....	5
1.1.1 (sub-section title) .....	6
1.1.2 (sub-section title) .....	7
1.2 (section title) .....	8
reference list .....	10

**2.3 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND/OR LIST OF TABLES AND GRAPHS**

A list of illustrations and/or a list of tables is only useful if there are many figures and/or tables in the paper that are crucial to the argument. Readers will appreciate a list of abbreviations if there are many of them in the text. Both lists should immediately follow the table of contents.

**2.4 THE PREFACE**

A preface is not required in a paper or thesis. If you insist on including a preface, then keep it short and personal. Do not use the preface to discuss the contents of your paper. Use the first-person singular form ('I') and focus on things like your personal interest in the subject or reason for involvement this line of research, and for thanking people and institutions who assisted you in your work. Close with your name, the city and date. If you include a preface, it should come after the table of contents and before the introduction.

**2.5 THE INTRODUCTION**

You use the introduction to acquaint your readers with the subject of your paper, your reasons for writing it, to introduce the research question and to provide background on the subject. You also provide a general description of the structure of your paper.

Scientific writing often starts with a puzzle (a problem). The background to the research consists of a problem that hitherto has not been satisfactorily resolved. The following combinations may be at the heart of the puzzle: theory versus theory, theory versus empiricism or empiricism versus empiricism. The approach in the *theory versus theory* puzzle focuses on the differences between theories that attempt to explain the same phenomenon. The *theory versus empiricism* approach involves an empirical phenomenon that established theories have thus far been unable to explain satisfactorily. The third type of puzzle, *empiricism versus empiricism*, focuses on the question: 'why here and not there?'

The subject of a paper never simply comes out of the blue. You will find that you already have certain preconceived ideas and perhaps some experience with the subject. These ideas and assumptions therefore need to be made explicit. Eventually, these ideas turn into a research problem (see next section). Immediately before or after you formulate your research problem, you need to explain your definitions and discuss your motivation and relevance of the research (why is your problem useful or interesting? In what way or ways will this research contribute to professional practice and the scientific community?) In short, you make your assumptions as explicit as possible. You should also indicate the literature you plan to use. This is also the place to list the various sub-questions that make up your research problem. You should then endeavour to answer these sub-questions in the various chapters (or sections). At the end of the introduction, provide your reader with information on how your paper is structured: what you will be covering in the various chapters or sections.

Box 2.3 shows the components that absolutely must be included in your introduction.

*Box 2.3 Components of the introduction of your paper*

Your introduction must at the very least include the following:

- your starting point, the context or background of the research problem;
- the research problem consisting of a clear, defined objective and research question, supplemented with potential sub-questions;
- explicit assumptions;
- introduction and explanation of key terms and concepts;
- a scientific and societal justification for the research question (relevance);
- the structure of your paper / thesis.

### 2.5.1 THE OPENING

As an opening sentence, 'This paper has been written in the context of the XXX programme', is not only overly general in nature, but also unnecessary and insipid. What you want to achieve, after all, is to get your reader involved in your interests, experiences and theoretical insights. You want to present something to which you have given considerable thought, something you feel involved in and that you feel is important. To get your reader interested in your topic, you will need to be creative and you will need to express your enthusiasm.

Box 2.4 offers some suggestions for formulating your opening.

### Box 2.4 Suggestions for the opening of your paper

Consider using one of the following for your opening:

- current event taken from news sources related to your subject;
- a memory or personal experience;
- an observation that has to do with your subject;
- a surprising fact or unexpected statistical data;
- a quote or saying;
- scientific debate.

### 2.5.2 DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem is the basis of your research, which is why we will now discuss this component more extensively. A good research problem not only serves as a guide for the research itself, but it also provides a clear rationalization for why the subject is both important and interesting. The research problem consists of an objective and a question.

The research question indicates the target of the research: what exactly will you be investigating? Once you have set your objective, you need to decide what you need to research to reach this goal. The process of answering the research question will generate the knowledge you need to be able to make a valuable and judicious contribution to the body of scientific theory and/or to formulate policy recommendations. A well-considered research question indicates precisely what you are going to investigate and the answers you hope to find. Your question might be formulated like this: 'How do friendship networks develop among children in culturally diverse primary school classes?'

The methodologist Peter Swanborn (1981) pointed out that three types of questions occur in the social sciences: *descriptive* (e.g. 'what are the eating habits of the elderly?'), *explanatory* (e.g. 'what is the reason that the elderly eat less and less as they age?') and *exploratory* (e.g. 'what can we do to improve the diet of the elderly?')

You generally need descriptive information to be able to answer explanatory questions. You generally need explanatory insights to be able to answer exploratory questions. This relationship is clearly shown in the example on the dietary habits of the elderly.

### 2.5.3 UNRAVELLING THE RESEARCH QUESTION: FORMULATING SUB-QUESTIONS

In long papers, such as Bachelor's or Master's theses, it is common to divide the question into sub-questions. A well-formulated research question is brief and as specific as possible. This generally gives rise to quite a few issues that require elaboration. Unravelling a question presents you with an opportunity to test it for completeness. Sub-questions force the writer to systematically readdress the research problem. Sometimes the sub-questions end up covering more than expected when the initial research question was formulated. It is

then either a matter of redefining the question more precisely, or of rephrasing the question altogether. The research question and the sub-questions must cover each other completely.

We can distinguish between theoretical and empirical sub-questions. Theoretical sub-questions are questions that need to be answered in order to make your research question researchable. Empirical sub-questions are questions that need to be answered before you actually go about answering your research question. Below is an example of a research question that has been divided into sub-questions. The central theoretical and empirical elements from the main research question are present in the sub-questions.

*Box 2.5 Example of a main research question and sub-questions*

**Main research question**

To what extent have authoritarian regimes influenced the success of democratic transitions in post-communist Central Europe?

**Sub-questions**

1. What factors are mentioned in transition literature as being associated with the success of processes of democratization?
2. What types of authoritarian regimes were present in communist Central Europe?
3. How successful have democratic transitions been in post-communist Central Europe?
4. When compared to other factors, what is the relative importance of the type of authoritarian regime when it comes to the success of transitions in Central Europe?

Formulating sub-questions provides structure for the development of your argument. Sub-questions facilitate the transition from the introduction to the first chapter (or the first section). They also promote smooth and logical transitions from one chapter (or section) to another. Sub-questions provide the basic structure for your chapters or sections.

Tip: in preparation for your Bachelor's or Master's thesis, go to the library and have a look at a few Master's theses from previous years to get an idea of the various ways you can go about structuring this part of your paper.

## 2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

You must first give some thought to the presuppositions on your subject before you can investigate it thoroughly. This applies to your own presuppositions and to the presuppositions harboured by the authors you have used. First of all, you are dealing with your own personal motivation for choosing this subject and a certain preconceived image of the field or subject you will be researching. The following applies both to the actual research and to the research report: the researcher is never a truly blank slate; he or she always starts a research project with some preconceived notions. As a researcher you will always have presuppositions about the subject you are researching. This may be the result of your own

experiences, and your presuppositions may also be fed by the inspiration or the influence of others' theoretical concepts. It should come as no surprise that your own perspective is key when it comes to the expectations you have about the subject of your research. This is why it is important not only to indicate your direct involvement with the subject, but also to be very explicit about your scientific presuppositions. It is these presuppositions that then lead you to what we generally refer to as the 'theoretical framework'. You put your own subject into a theoretical flow of scientific discussion, and you explain to the reader basically how you intend to go about solving the problem.

The theoretical framework of a research project is the coherent set of concepts and the perceived relationships between them; this is the framework for your research activities. The main concepts have already been addressed in the introduction; you interpret and specify these concepts further in the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is the filter you and your readers will look through. As mentioned previously, the theoretical framework is sometimes included in the introduction.

## 2.7 BODY

The structure of the main body of your text varies depending on the type of paper you are writing: research report, essay or research proposal. The body structure of these three types of papers is discussed below.

### 2.7.1 RESEARCH REPORT

In a research report, the body consists of the method and results. In the section on *method* you discuss how you went about carrying out the research and the methods and techniques you used (and why you chose them). The extent to which your method needs to be discussed depends on the type of research and may vary by discipline. The section on method most commonly includes the following:

- data collection method (e.g. interviews, surveys, textual analysis, ethnographic observations or document analysis);
- the object of the research;
- a discussion of the field that is being researched and the means of access (respondents, participation of organizations, agencies, etc.);
- data-analysis strategy.

The chapter on *results* is primarily - and appropriately - used for describing your research results (empiricism). In a subsequent chapter (or in the next section) you compare theory and your research results. You list and discuss similarities and differences between theory and your research results, and you then seek to explain these similarities or differences, or to put them in a meaningful context. This approach makes it possible to develop insightful remarks both on theory and on the research results. By choosing a logical structure like this, you will serve your readers by discussing the very points that make up the essential thrust of your text. You need to take your readers by the hand. You are the author and guide: you take

your audience on a systematic journey along the various theoretical and empirical highlights and vistas to arrive at a thorough, potentially new overall impression.

### 2.7.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a specific type of research report. This type of report is not based on empirical data, but on existing literature. A literature review is more than just a critical discussion of existing theories and studies. Literature reviews are used to study a research problem based on existing literature. It is more difficult to conduct a worthwhile literature review than it seems on the surface. Literature reviews have a less uniform structure than research reports because they are not based on empirical research, but on the reports of studies conducted by other researchers. You will in any case need to include a section on method indicating how the literature review was conducted (your system for searching and analysing the literature). The literature researcher will need to develop his or her own structure and plan for discussing the results of the various studies. This is why it is essential to formulate a clear research question as the basis for the literature review. An important feature of a literature review is that you do not discuss the literature in chronological order. Instead, you write a coherent argument that consists of various topics which help you to identify and highlight crucial aspects taken from the literature, ultimately leading to an answer to your research question.

### 2.7.3 ESSAY

An essay is a discourse about a proposition or statement that is supported by arguments. The body of an essay consists of a discussion on these arguments. The arguments may be based on empirical data, or they may be the result of logical reasoning. An essay should be specifically constructed to convince the reader of the accuracy or truth of the proposition or statement. Readers must be able to follow the reasoning in the essay and accept it as logical, whether or not they agree with the proposition and the supporting argumentation. Upon reading the essay, the reader might think: 'this makes sense, I agree with this'. Or: 'I see your point, but I disagree.'

### 2.7.4 RESEARCH PROPOSAL

In a research proposal, the body consists of the research design. You need to address the following questions in the body of your proposal:

How can you reformulate your research problem into empirically researchable questions?

What research design, methods and techniques will you need to answer these questions?

Can you identify any potential problems related to the execution of the research or perhaps of an ethical nature? How do you intend to solve them?

What is your timetable?

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

Every paper has a conclusion at the end. Experienced readers primarily read only the paper's introduction and conclusions. They then decide whether they wish to read the full text. You should keep this in mind while writing your paper. This means that the conclusion and the introduction are critical components of every paper.

Once you have systematically dealt with all the arguments, you need to link them all together again in the conclusion. This is where you summarize your findings after restating the paper's research question. You should not recapitulate the entire argument in the conclusion. You should, however, briefly discuss your interim conclusions, which are the answers you have found to your sub-questions, and you should do so without presenting any new information. This summary of the individual arguments provides an answer to the research question posed in the introduction. Looking back, you will sometimes notice that your argument has taken an unexpected turn and that things have turned out differently than you had planned in the introduction. If this is the case, then you will need to investigate the cause of this variation. You may even need to adjust your research question.

The conclusion is the reverse of the introduction, schematically speaking: you go from specific to general. A good conclusion not only provides an answer to the central question, but also puts that answer into a wider (different) context. You might draw your research results into the wider scientific discussion on the subject, for example, or you might suggest new, substantiated questions for further research. You must also reiterate the relevance of your subject in your conclusion: what is the added value of your research both from a theoretical perspective (theory development) and from a practical point of view (societal relevance, or in terms of the recommendations you propose in the area of policy or otherwise)? You must adopt a critical attitude here, too: you must reflect on your subject and the final product of your research efforts. You need to be critical when consulting literature, and you should be no less critical when reviewing your own work. You can use your reflection to identify the elements in your argument that are candidates for further research. In doing so, you place your entire research project back in the same framework that you formulated in your introduction. A well written conclusion not only summarizes your argument, but it also gives the reader food for thought.

Tip: take a break from your paper for a while before starting on your critical reflection. This will help you to form a more honest opinion about the quality of your work. You will then be better able to identify weak elements in your argument, and elements that are candidates for further research. It's difficult to be objective if you engage in reflection immediately following weeks and weeks of argumentation.

Box 2.6 gives an overview of what can - and must - be included in your conclusion.

### *Box 2.6 Conclusion*

In your conclusion:

- you answer the central question and sub-questions;
- you reiterate the main line of argument in summary form, while maintaining accuracy and subtle distinctions;
- you do not introduce new elements;
- you revisit your study's relevance by addressing the implications of the research for theory (theory development) and practice (e.g. by providing recommendations);
- you may choose to discuss the limitations and weaknesses of the study and any implications this may have for the validity, reliability and scope of the conclusions;
- you *may* discuss plans for follow-up research.

## **2.9 REFERENCES**

Papers are generally based on other authors' data, material, ideas and theories. Your own contribution is actually rather limited. There is nothing wrong with using others' ideas. Scholars do this all the time. Using sources without proper references is a mortal sin in academia, however. This is why every paper must have references in the text and a reliable and complete reference list. This gives your readers the opportunity to confirm your argumentation. They can also use your source references and the reference list for further exploration of the topics that you, the author, deal with in the paper. Your references in the text and your reference list must therefore be structured so that your readers can locate the sources themselves in (academic) libraries, documentation centres or on the Internet. We will elaborate on references in Chapter 7.

## **2.10 APPENDICES**

It may be necessary to include appendices in some papers, primarily in lengthy ones. However, you must have a very good reason to do so. Appendices are used to present detailed information that simply does not fit in with the body of the paper, but that is nevertheless relevant for at least some of your readers, and that is too extensive to be included in a footnote or endnote (e.g. a list of interview questions). The body of your paper must always make mention of the main thrust of the information contained in the appendices. This also applies to summaries of research data.

## **2.11 ABSTRACT**

An abstract of about 150 words is required for most papers. An abstract gives the reader insight into the key aspects of the text. Also, the reader should generally be able to rely on the abstract to help him or her decide whether to read the text. Depending on the type of text (paper style or thesis style), the abstract may be placed either at the beginning or the end of the document.

Do not copy and paste sentences from your paper to create your abstract. Instead, formulate concise, meaningful sentences. The abstract is an important part of your paper; do not underestimate its value. Budget plenty of time for your abstract and do your best to identify the most essential elements in your paper for inclusion in it. Your abstract should be the last thing you write. It must convey the following very precisely: your research problem, the relevance, methods, results and conclusions. You might try writing a sentence to cover each of these components. Avoid meaningless phrases like 'the results will be discussed,' or 'the relationship between the results and previous theory will be discussed.'

### 3 STRUCTURING A TEXT:

#### SCIENTIFIC WRITING MEANS CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

The arrangement and structure of your argument are just as important as its content. It is crucial that you do not deviate from the structure described in your introduction, which could confuse your readers. The structure of your argument must also be suited to your research question and to your sub-questions. All chapters, sections and paragraphs must have a link to the research question. You should therefore stop and consider the link to the research question as you work on each chapter. This will help you avoid digressing and it will make it easier for you to distinguish clearly between main issues and side issues. In short, all information that you present must be relevant in the context of the research question. Refrain from padding your text or including any meaningless chit chat or twaddle.

You fill your chapters systematically by elaborating on your arguments one by one, e.g. by developing answers to your sub-questions. These answers are introduced and substantiated, objections are mentioned and qualifications are given, all of which leads to a conclusion (the answer). An argument must develop smoothly: ensure logical transitions between questions and arguments. If you leap from one idea to another, you must provide your readers with an explanation, no matter how obvious the link seems to you. You can maintain continuity in your paper by summarizing the contents of each chapter in your concluding paragraph(s) and announcing the topic of the next chapter.

To maintain a persuasive argument, it is essential that you do not digress from the thrust of your paper, even while making use of a variety of materials: empirical observations and theoretical concepts. In scientific writing one needs to be able to juggle all of this material with great skill. This involves the realization that your task is to interpret results and observations. This is rather obvious when you are reporting on empirical observations. But you also need to realize that you have your own perspective vis-a-vis other scholars' theories. As mentioned earlier, the researcher is never a truly blank slate: it's up to you to pick and choose bits of theories to support your argument as you see fit. You might do so through citations or by paraphrasing (see Chapter 7). Your readers will appreciate it if you expound on these citations, otherwise they might be better off simply reading the original text. By making clear why you have adopted others' arguments or positions to help answer your question, you lend your support to that view or you put it into perspective. In other words, you add something to the theory.

Beware of the 'theory-is-sacred syndrome'. This refers to the tendency of many people to present a theory as the truth. They then endeavour to determine in their argument whether the theory is correct in practice. That is not to say that comparing theory with practice will not produce a reasonable discourse, but the purpose of scientific writing is to promote the development of theoretical insights. This involves dealing critically with current theory. Empirical research is intended to accentuate or improve theory (theory development based on theory versus empiricism, or empiricism versus empiricism; see Chapter 3). Problems can also be defined based on theory. This means that existing theories are processed

critically and that they are subject to a comparison with an aim to improving them (theory development based on theory versus theory).

### **3.1 'PROBLEMATIZING'**

'Problematizing' is part of conducting research. It's all about not accepting social realities at face value, but rather attempting to unravel their secrets. You need to search for the underlying, deeper meanings that you and others ascribe to reality. You might formulate a proposition such as 'political parties aim to win as many votes as they can in elections.' In itself, this is a proposition that many will confirm. But if you 'problematize' this proposition, all sorts of unanswered questions suddenly crop up. What is the objective of winning as many votes as possible? Is it so the party can govern? Or be in the opposition? Are parties prepared to adjust their stance on the issues to win more votes? When you 'problematize' you effectively put a question mark behind every statement or concept. You reflect on the statements independently and critically. A notion that at first seems completely logical and self-evident can be turned into a problem worthy of academic scrutiny by subjecting it to a systematic and penetrating examination.

### **3.2 THE ARRANGEMENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT**

The body of a short paper (e.g. a literature review of five pages or a paper of ten to fifteen pages) will only need to be divided into sections. The body of a long paper such as a Bachelor's thesis of more than 25 pages will have to be divided into chapters. These chapters are then usually divided into sections and sub-sections. The reader can use the titles of the chapters, sections and sub-sections to follow the author's argument. This is why these titles are so important.

To guide the reader through the argument, the argument needs to have a logical structure and smooth transitions between the various components. Divisions are made through the use of chapters, sections and sub-sections. Each chapter covers one part of the argument. Each chapter must have a title that is clear and that conveys its content. Chapters open with a clear formulation of the subject covered. You must ensure that the link to your central research question is explicit. The arrangement of your chapters must be consistent. If an individual chapter is devoted to your first sub-question, then each subsequent sub-question must have its own chapter as well. Each chapter must end with a conclusion in which the main issues addressed in the chapter are summarized. The conclusion may not contain new information. However, you should offer a clear transition to the next chapter.

A section consists of a number of coherent paragraphs that cover a single theme, sub-question or aspect of your research project. Try to be consistent in your use of sections: if you devote a section to your first sub-question, then your other sub-questions should also have their own sections. Sections must open with a clear formulation of the theme or sub-question that will be covered. Sections must also end with a conclusion and a transition to the next section. Sections are separated by a blank line.

Paragraphs are micro-arguments in a section; they cover a single topic, thought or sub-question, and they should have a clear connection to the information preceding them and following them. In a typical paragraph, the central idea is mentioned first in the topic sentence. This is followed by the elaboration or explanation of the topic and a transitional sentence to the next idea (and paragraph). Paragraphs always consist of multiple sentences.

It is important to bear in mind that a different layout is used for paragraphs in English compared to Dutch. In English writing, the purpose of a paragraph is to contain everything you want to say about a single thought. When you come to a new thought, you need to start a new paragraph. In Dutch writing, on the other hand, it is possible to use what we might call 'subparagraphs' within one main paragraph. A main paragraph can thus contain a succession of related points which, though distinct to a certain extent, still belong within the same overall idea. This kind of paragraphing structure (with subparagraphs) is not used in English. English, like Dutch, uses indenting or white space to denote paragraph boundaries.

Box 3.1 recapitulates a paper's layout and structure

*Box 3.1 The layout and structure of a paper*

- Individual chapters cover the major themes in your paper, such as sub-questions.
- Each chapter is numbered and has a title that is clear and that conveys its content.
- Each chapter contains an introduction and conclusion.
- Sections are made up of paragraphs and cover one aspect of a chapter's theme.
- Paragraphs are indented.
- Paragraphs are not numbered.

## 4 STYLE: WRITING FOR AN ACADEMIC AUDIENCE

With any text you write, it is important to take into account the audience you have in mind and the message you want to convey. If you are trying to convince the reader of something, then you will need to use a different style of writing than you would for an informative piece. There may even be style differences in one and the same paper: you may wish to use the opening of your paper to make the reader curious about the rest. In this case, your opening section might contain surprising elements like a remarkable quote or an unexpected example. If the rest of the text is devoted to effectively and expeditiously explaining something, then you will probably opt for a more concise and precise writing style. In short, good writers give thought to what they want to achieve with their texts and adjust their style accordingly.

### 4.1 WRITING FOR AN ACADEMIC AUDIENCE

Most of the writing you will do during your degree programme will be for an academic audience: fellow researchers and students. Your papers are expected to reflect an academic writing style. Oost (2002) characterizes an academic writing style as:

1. objective;
2. precise;
3. logical;
4. diligent;
5. clear.

We look at these five characteristics in the sub-sections below.

#### 4.1.1 OBJECTIVE

When we speak of an objective writing style, we mean one that is impersonal and distant. In scientific writing, we do not address the reader directly and we avoid the first person ('I' or 'we'). Scientific texts are also generally devoid of personal opinions. You should choose vocabulary that allows you to maintain a certain degree of detachment and objectivity toward the subject of your research. Not like this:

As you can see in the diagram, things are looking pretty bleak for the residents of this deprived area of Amsterdam.

But like this:

The diagram shows an increase both in unemployment and crime in the last five years in this deprived area of Amsterdam.

#### 4.1.2 PRECISE

Scholarly works must be precise. In science, you need to be very careful when it comes to choosing your words. Define important terms and indicate the sources on which you base these definitions. Be precise when indicating relationships. If you write "A has something to do with B", for example, then you are not being precise. Better expressions include: 'Does A result from B?', 'Is B is an element of A?' and 'Does A frequently occur together with B?'

Furthermore, when writing research reports it is very important that you provide precise information about your research project. Be as exact as possible (not 'quite a bit', but '31 percent'), but be sure to provide only information that is relevant to the reader. In a research report on the organizational dynamic between staff members of Greenpeace, the average age of the employees would be very relevant. In a study on recent Greenpeace advertising campaigns, however, this information would be completely irrelevant. In other words: be precise, but give only relevant information. The criterion that you must keep in mind is that your readers need to obtain all information necessary to appraise the conclusions of your research properly and to reproduce your research if needed.

#### 4.1.3 LOGICAL

A logical text is a well-structured text in which the line of reasoning is clear and the different steps follow in sequence. Effectively dividing a text into chapters and sections helps to create a logical structure. We discussed this extensively in Chapter 4.

#### 4.1.4 DILIGENT

A diligent writing style is first and foremost a precise writing style, which we have discussed above. A diligent style also means that you cite your sources properly and that you formulate with care. If an author claims something, but does not prove it, then write: 'X says ...' or 'X suggests that ...' If author Y reaches a conclusion based on empirical research, opt for phrases such as 'In her study, Y shows that ...' or 'Y's research indicates that ...'

#### 4.1.5 CLEAR

Finally, a clear writing style is often a function of lexical choice. Many students make the mistake of choosing words that are too difficult. Students' style can often be too verbose and pompous. This makes a text unnecessarily difficult to read. For example, do not use 'plethora' but 'many'. Words like 'erstwhile' and 'turgid' also tend to make a text less readable. As a general rule, the simpler the better.

### 4.2 SENTENCE LENGTH

#### 4.2.1 EXCESSIVELY LONG COMPLEX SENTENCES

Another common mistake is using sentences that are too long or unnecessarily complicated. Overcomplicated sentences can be difficult to read and confusing for the reader. We found the following example in Matthews, Bowen & Matthews (2002):

Two canine cadavers with orthopaedic abnormalities were identified which included a first dog that had an unusual deformity secondary to premature closure of the distal ulnar physis and a second dog that had a hypertrophic nonunion of the femur, and the radius and femur of both dogs were harvested and cleaned of soft tissues.

The problem with this sentence is that it contains several main ideas. Generally, sentences should contain only one main idea. In this case, it would be wise to split the sentence into

several shorter sentences. This will keep your message clear, as the following example in Matthews et al. (2002) shows:

Two canine cadavers with orthopaedic abnormalities were identified. The first dog had an unusual deformity secondary to premature closure of the distal ulnar physis; the second, a hypertrophic nonunion of the femur. The radius and femur of both dogs were harvested and cleaned of soft tissues.

#### 4.2.2 CHOPPY PROSE

Although excessively long sentences should be avoided, another common mistake is to use a succession of short, simple sentences, which results in a choppy style. The main reason why you should avoid choppy prose is that each sentence can seem equally important, and it is not clear how the sentences relate to one another or which information is more important than the rest. In order to avoid a choppy style and to emphasize certain information over other information, you will need to have a command of the various clause-combining techniques that are used in English. Clause-combining allows you to gather related information together into one sentence, while also adding extra dimensions of meaning and emphasis to the text - by subtly distinguishing important from less important information, for example. When writing or revising a paragraph, you have to decide whether particular clauses should be combined or whether a particular message is so important that it merits a separate sentence all of its own.

Variety is also essential. A mixture of longer and shorter sentences will hold your reader's interest, make your work more readable and compelling, and convey emphasis more accurately. Using a shorter sentence after a long one creates impact. It attracts the reader's attention and emphasizes the importance of the information conveyed in the short sentence.

## 5 WRITING IS REWRITING

Writing is a time consuming and occasionally frustrating process. It is virtually impossible to write the final version of a text in one go. Most people go through several drafts before they arrive at a finished product. You should keep in mind that a text is never truly finished. You can continue indefinitely with rewrites and new drafts. The trick is knowing when enough is enough.

Writing is a highly individual process. Some people take a seat at their computer and start banging away at the keys like mad, only to spend hours deleting and reformulating text just as enthusiastically. Others stare at a blank page for hours and find it particularly difficult just to get started. You'll have to discover for yourself what works best for you. It often helps to develop a preliminary outline with chapters and sections that you then fill in (and re-adjust as needed). You might find it more comfortable to start by writing individual pieces before you decide on your final structure. Whichever way works best for you, keep in mind that some people are simply more gifted writers than others.

If you have trouble writing or if you want to improve your writing skills, then you might want to consider taking a course in academic writing. For more information: [www.vu.nl/cursussen](http://www.vu.nl/cursussen)  
Also see: [www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/trainingen.html](http://www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/trainingen.html). There are also plenty of books and websites devoted to the process of writing. You will find some suggestions for further reading in Appendix 2.

## 6 LITERATURE REFERENCES

### 6.1 LITERATURE REFERENCES: WHY AND WHEN

You will make use of ideas, theories or the research of others in almost every scientific paper you write. This is very common practice in science: we can only move forward and grow by standing on the shoulders of giants. As an author, however, you must always clearly indicate which ideas are your own and which are based on the work of others. You use references to make this distinction.

Each time you use another's idea in your text you must add a reference. This makes it possible to check whether you have cited the sources properly and whether you have given your fellow scholars the acknowledgment and recognition they deserve. If you use someone else's work without naming the source, you are wrongly implying that the words or thoughts are your own, which is an act of plagiarism.

'Researchers do not claim the words and ideas of another as their own; they give credit when credit is due (APA Ethics Code Standard 8.11, Plagiarism).' (APA, 2010)

#### 6.1.1 PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a very serious matter in science, and the Faculty of Social Sciences is no exception. VU University Amsterdam uses a plagiarism scanner to combat the scourge of plagiarism. The scanner uses a digital algorithm to compare all submitted texts to all material on the faculty servers and on publicly accessible websites. The scanner gives a percentage score for each text (the higher the score, the greater the chance of plagiarism), highlights the text segments that have been found elsewhere, and provides links to the relevant sources. A high score does not necessarily mean that the paper (or parts of it) has been plagiarized. For example, students often use the same sources or copy parts of the assignment text. The scan results must therefore be analysed further by the lecturer.

If there is a real suspicion of cheating or plagiarism, then this will be reported to the examination board of your degree programme. If the suspicion appears justified, the examination board may impose severe penalties. Please see the faculty website for more information (in Dutch): <http://www.fsw.vu.nl/nl/studenten/regelingen/fraude>.

#### 6.1.2 GUIDELINES FOR REFERENCES

If you use someone else's work, you must reference the source. The Faculty of Social Sciences adheres to the referral system of the American Psychological Association (APA). The APA guidelines offer very comprehensive and specific guidelines for references. This style guide contains a summary of these guidelines. Please read the APA Publication Manual (2010) and consult the APA style website for a complete discussion of conventions for referencing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [www.apastyle.org/index.aspx](http://www.apastyle.org/index.aspx)

There are other sets of guidelines in addition to those prescribed by the APA. These include Vancouver Style and Chicago Style. Conventions for references may be different depending on the scientific discipline or the journal in question. We expect the papers you submit as part of your degree programme at VU University Amsterdam to adhere to the APA guidelines.

The APA works according to the author-year system: you refer to a specific source in the text by the indicating the author's/authors' surname(s) and the year of publication. Based on this brief reference, the reader can find the source in the reference list at the end of the paper, where you include a comprehensive record. Section 6.2 describes how to refer to a source in the text and Section 6.3 describes the structure for your reference.

## **6.2 REFERRING TO LITERATURE IN THE TEXT**

This section tells you how to refer to literature in your text. You will also find information on quotations and other topics.

### **6.2.1 REFERENCES: THREE POSSIBILITIES**

You must include a reference in your paper if you:

- a) quote someone. Quoting means literally citing an author;
- b) summarize or paraphrase someone's work. Paraphrasing means conveying the essence of what someone else has said, but in your own words;
- c) present ideas or information that are not generally known;
- d) use other material that that you have taken from someone else's work and that the reader might otherwise wrongly believe to be your own.

If you quote or paraphrase a source, you are implying that you have read the work yourself. You must not indiscriminately copy references from other papers.

You have three different means at your disposal for referring to other people's work in your paper. These three possibilities are shown below.

1. By mentioning the author/authors and the year of publication in brackets (parentheses) at an appropriate place in your text:

'As noted previously (Sengers, 2003) secularization does not necessarily mean atheism.'  
Or: 'Secularization does not necessarily mean atheism (Sengers, 2003).'

2. If you mention the author's/authors' name(s), then put the year of publication in brackets:

'According to Sengers (2003) secularization does not necessarily mean atheism.'

3. By mentioning the author(s) and year of publication in the text:

'In 2003, Sengers reported that secularization does not necessarily mean atheism.'

### 6.2.2 DIRECT QUOTE

If you quote a source verbatim, you must include the page number(s) where the quotation can be found along with the author's name and publication date. If you do not have a page number, then indicate the paragraph or section where the quote can be found.

Quotes of less than forty words can simply be placed in the text in inverted commas (quotation marks). Finish the quote with the reference, and only then use punctuation:

'Rogoff aims to understand " *how* culture matters in human development. What regularities can help us make sense of the cultural aspects of human development?" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 7).'

A quote of more than forty words can be placed in its own independent text block, which should be indented. You do not need to use inverted commas in this case. Insert the reference after the quotation's final punctuation. Do not put a full stop (period) after the reference.

Others have contradicted this view:

Co-presence does not ensure intimate interaction among all group members. Consider large-scale social gatherings in which hundreds or thousands of people gather in a location to perform a ritual or celebrate an event. In these instances, participants are able to see the visible manifestation of the group, the physical gathering, yet their ability to make direct, intimate connections with those around them is limited by the sheer magnitude of the assembly. (Purcell, 1997, p.111-112)

### 6.2.3 TWO OR MORE AUTHORS

To maintain the readability of your text, you do not need to mention each author's name when citing sources written by multiple authors. Box 6.1 contains instructions for referring to sources with multiple authors.

*Box 6.1 Referring to sources with multiple authors*

Instructions	Examples
<p><b>Two authors</b></p> <p>Cite authors' names in all references.</p> <p>Note: If a text has two or more authors, use an ampersand (&amp;) before the name of the last author between brackets. If you mention the authors' names in your text, then just use 'and'.</p>	<p>(Jansen &amp; Veenstra, 2003)</p> <p>Jansen and Veenstra (2003) describe...</p>

<p><b>Three to five authors</b></p> <p>Cite all authors the first time you refer to the source. Thereafter, you can use the name of the first author, followed by 'et al.'.</p>	<p>Initial reference: Alibali, Phillips and Fischer (2009) researched how children represent mathematical problems.</p> <p>All subsequent references: Alibali et al. (2009) ...</p>
<p><b>Six or more authors</b></p> <p>In all references, cite the name of the first author, followed by 'et al.'.</p>	<p>Bonte et al. (2009) indicate that the role of the state is increasingly divergent.</p>
<p><b>Organization as author</b></p> <p>Some sources are not published by a person but by an institution or organization. In these cases, the name of the institution takes the place of the author's name.</p>	<p>As stated in the most recent <i>Social and Cultural Report</i> (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 2008), Dutch people continue to be more and more dissatisfied.</p>
<p><b>No author</b></p> <p>If a publication has no author and has not been published by a single institution or organization, then use the title in the reference.</p>	<p>The first known survey of workers in the Netherlands was held in the 1880s (<i>Enquête</i>, 1887).</p>

#### 6.2.4 SECONDARY REFERENCES

Occasionally you will find an interesting reference in a source, but the primary source is unavailable to you. This might be a book that is not in the collection of any Dutch library or a text in a language that you cannot read. In these cases you can refer to secondary sources: the text that you have read and that refers to the primary source. You must then include only the secondary source in your reference list (you have not read the primary source, after all). For example, if you have read something in a text by Bourdieu about the work of Mauss, then you should cite as follows:

According to Bourdieu, Marcel Mauss wonders where magic's equivalent is to be found in our own society, (as cited in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 14).

#### 6.2.5 DATE OF PUBLICATION

You need to mention the year of publication only once in the same section, unless this will cause confusion with other publications:

Alibali, Phillips and Fischer (2009) administered a post-test ... Alibali et al. determined based on the results that ...

If you use two or more sources by the same author from the same year, you distinguish them with a letter (a, b, c, etc.):

De Vries (2000a) described ...

De Vries (2000b) showed that ...

#### 6.2.6 MULTIPLE REFERENCES

If you refer to multiple sources in a single passage, then you should group them together in brackets, separated by a semicolon. List them alphabetically, by surname of first author, just as in your reference list:

(Sengers, 2003; *Social and Cultural Report*, 2008)

If you refer to two works by the same author/authors in a single passage, then you do not need to repeat the author's name.

#### 6.2.7 PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

If you are referring to personal communications (non-recoverable data such as an email, interview or a conversation), you should cite in accordance with the following example:

(R. Groot, personal communication, 21 June 2010)

R. Groot (personal communication, 21 June 2010) explains that...

If you use personal communication as a source for your paper, you will need to consider potential privacy issues. Do you have permission to use the individual's name when citing or quoting him or her? When using people's names and attributing statements or opinions to them, it is recommended that you submit a draft text to them so they can remove or correct any inaccuracies. You do not need to include personal communication in your reference list.

### 6.3 REFERENCE LIST

All information needed to find your sources should be included in your reference list as a matter of principle. The exact details will depend on the type of publication. The precise details are discussed starting in Section 7.3.3. Here we will first discuss some general issues regarding the reference list, such as the order and layout.

#### 6.3.1 ORDER

The reference list is arranged alphabetically, by surname of first author. Box 6.2 contains a number of instructions relating to the order of the reference list.

*Box 6.2 Order of reference list (with examples)*

Instructions	Examples
Shorter first, longer later.	Brown, Y. comes before Browning, A.
If you have multiple publications by the same author, mention the oldest publication first.	De Vries, A. (2003) goes before De Vries, A. (2005).
Publications by a single author go before publications by multiple authors.	Alleyne, R.L. (2001) goes before Alleyne, R.L., & Evans, A.J. (1999).
For publications whose first author is the same, while other authors are different, you should alphabetize according to the first of the other authors' names.	Olupona & Westerlund (2005) goes before Olupona & Zenawi (2003).
Use the first initial if you are referencing publications by two authors who share the same surname.	Johnson, F.Z. goes before Johnson, H.M.
When referencing publications published by institutions where no author's name is mentioned, use the name of the organization as the author's name.	Social and Cultural Planning Office (2008). <i>Social and Cultural Report 2008</i> The Hague: SCP.
When referencing publications that do not mention an author or organization, use the title in place of the author's name.	<i>Enquête betreffende werking en uitbreiding der Wet van 19 september 1874 en naar de toestand van fabrieken en werkplaatsen</i> (1887). Sneek: H. Pyttersen Tz.

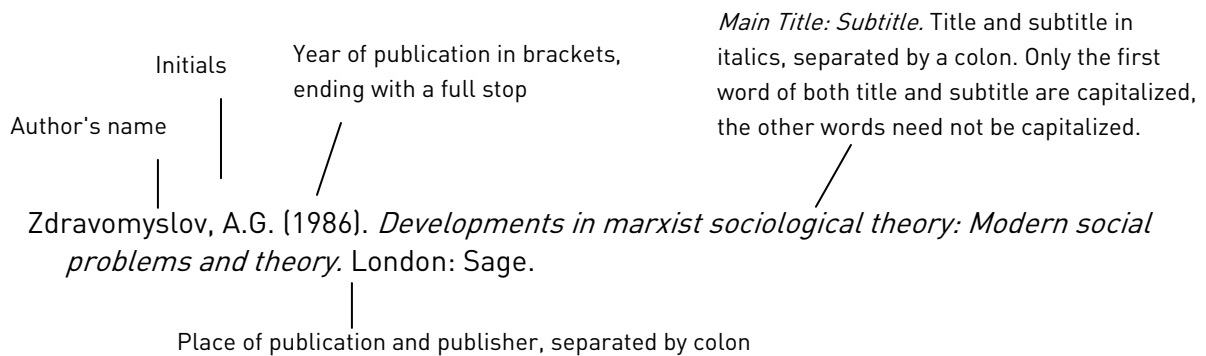
### 6.3.2 LAYOUT

Use a hanging indent for each reference. This means that all lines are indented after the first line of the reference:

Light, I. (2006). *Deflecting immigration: Networks, markets, and regulation in Los Angeles*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

### 6.3.3 BOOK

Books should be included in your reference list according to the following format:



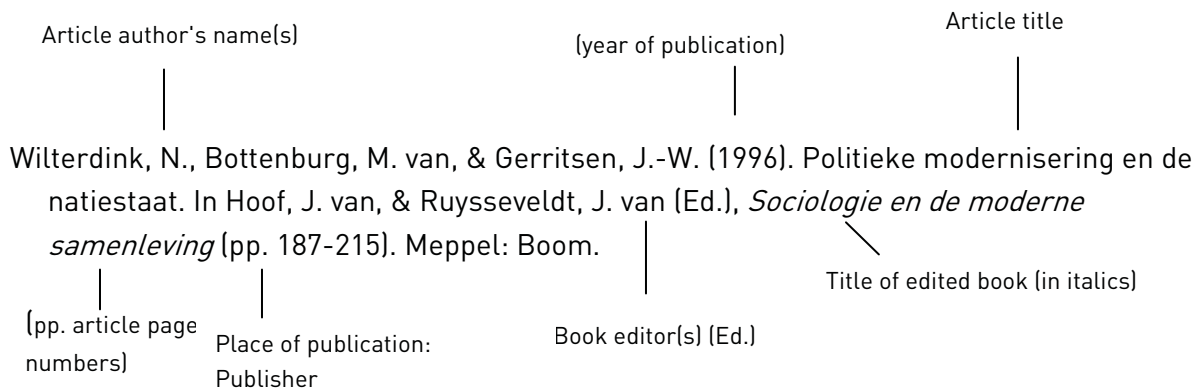
Box 6.3 shows a number of ways of referencing books.

Box 6.3 Book reference variants

Variants	Examples
<b>One author</b>	Piercon, C. (1986). <i>Marxist theory and democratic politics</i> . Cambridge: Polity Press.
<b>Two or more authors</b> If there are multiple authors, separate their names with a comma and an ampersand (&). In general, you should list the names of all authors. If there are more than eight authors, however, list the first six names, followed by an ellipsis (...) and the name of the final author.	Scott Jones, J., & Watt, S. (2010). <i>Ethnography in social science practice</i> . London: Routledge. Sieben, A., Zwitser, G., Stoops, S.T., Waterman, L., Sins, J.W.R., Scheerman, N., ... Beentjes, A. (2010). <i>De vergrijzing ontleed</i> . Amsterdam: SU Press.
<b>Revised edition</b> For revised editions, mention the edition number in brackets after the title.	Mok, A.L. (2007). <i>Arbeid, bedrijf en maatschappij</i> (5th edition). Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff.
<b>Edited book</b> When citing a book that contains several articles, you should mention the editor's name, followed by (Ed.). If there is more than one editor, use (Eds.).	Bos, J. (Ed.). (2007). <i>Discoursanalyse: Communicatie op de werkvloer</i> . Bussum: Coutinho.

#### 6.3.4 ARTICLE IN AN EDITED BOOK

An edited book is a collection of articles that have been published in a single volume by one or more editors. If you are referencing an article from this kind of book, you should cite the article and not the editors of the book as a whole. If you are referencing the article by Wilterdink, Bottenburg and Gerritsen in the book published by Van Hoof and Ruysseveldt in 1996, then your reference should look like this:



#### 6.3.5 PHD DISSERTATION OR MASTER'S THESIS

PhD dissertations and Master's theses that have not been published in book form should be listed as books in your reference list, but then you need to replace the publisher's name and location with the following:

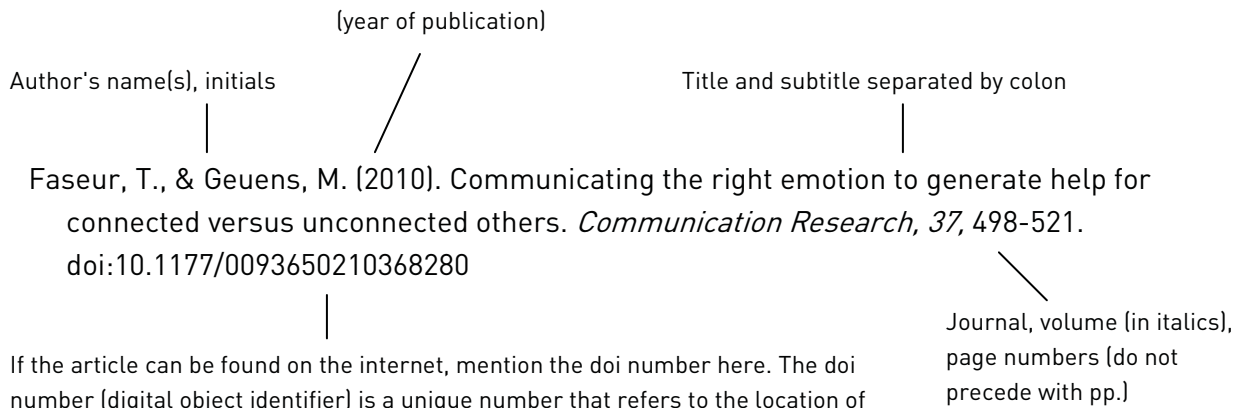
- PhD dissertation: (PhD dissertation, university name, location);
- Master's thesis: (Master's thesis, university name, location).

Duijnhoven, H.L. (2010). *For security reasons: Narratives about security practices and organizational change in the Dutch and Spanish railway sector*. (dissertation, VU University, Amsterdam).

Lee, E.H.W. (2009). *Tutoring in higher education: A community developed practice at VU University Medical Center*. (Master's thesis, VU University, Amsterdam).

#### 6.3.6 ARTICLE IN A SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

An article in a scientific journal should be referenced as follows:



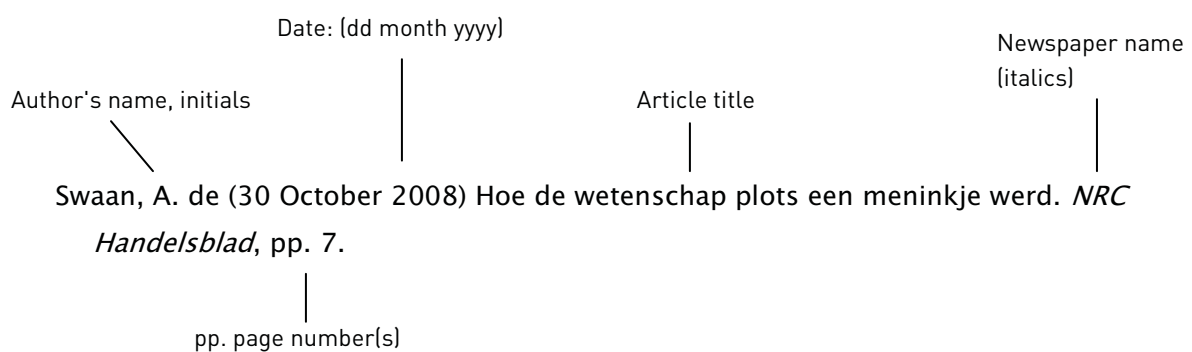
If the article can be found on the internet, mention the doi number here. The doi number (digital object identifier) is a unique number that refers to the location of the article on the internet. You need to mention this number, so the reader can find the article on the internet. Many journal articles mention the doi number at the top right of the first page. Bibliographical sources such as Web of Science and PsychINFO provide the doi number.

If every issue of a journal starts paginating with 1, then you should mention the volume number in brackets, as in the following example:

Alban-Metcalf, J., Alimo-Metcalf, B., & Hughes, M. (2010). Selection of chairs of primary care trusts: Evidence of reliability and validity. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 24 (1), 57-99. doi: 10.1108/14777261011029570

### 6.3.7 ARTICLE IN A NEWSPAPER OR NON-SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OR MAGAZINE

If you wish to reference an article from a newspaper or non-scientific journal or magazine, you should include it in your reference list as follows:



### 6.3.8 ONLINE SOURCES

When using online sources, you must keep in mind (even more so than with printed sources) that not all sources meet academic standards in terms of quality, reliability and verifiability of the information they present. As the author of your paper, you are responsible for your use of sources, and you must therefore continually monitor whether the information that you find can withstand the test of academic quality.

If you wish to refer to an article or report that has been published on the Internet, then you should indicate its location as specifically as possible by giving the URL. A DOI number (digital object identifier), if available, is even better.

Notenboom, A., Schrijvershof, C., & Goudriaan, R. (2009). *Evaluatie van de wet op de vaste boekenprijs: Een kwantitatieve analyse*. Retrieved from <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/letteren-en-bibliotheken/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2010/09/08/rapport-evaluatie-van-de-wet-op-de-vaste-boekenprijs-een-kwantitatieve-analyse.html>

Do not add a full stop (period) after the URL, because it could be confused as being part of the URL. Also include the date on which you consulted the site, since the source material you refer to may change over time. This is often the case with wikis by their very nature.

Check your website references before you hand in your paper. If the source you are citing has moved, then you should revise the URL accordingly.

## 7 A FIGURE OFTEN SAYS MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS

A figure or table can really illuminate a paper. You should give some thought to whether tables, figures or diagrams will enhance the contents of your paper. An informative table or figure complements the text. Refer to your table or figure in the text and tell your reader what to look for. Mention the most important data, but do not go into too much detail (because then you would simply be repeating the information contained in the table or figure, which would be superfluous).

Give each table, diagram or figure a number and a title. Place the title above the table or figure. The title should be succinct and it should cover the content of the table or diagram. It must also be clear to the reader what the information or the units in the figure refer to. This information should preferably be included in the title.

The following title is too broad:

Relationship between the leadership styles of managers and organizational performance.

The following title is too detailed:

Average organizational performance scores on tests A, B and C under managers with leadership styles X, Y and Z.

A good title would be:

Average organizational performance scores under managers with various leadership styles.

Use Arabic numbers and number tables and figures in the order they appear in the text (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, ... etc. and Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, ... etc.).

Clearly indicate the source of the data. If you are including someone else's data, you must include a reference below the table or figure. This also applies to notes or a legend related to the table or figure.

If you refer to the table or figure in your text, do not refer to 'the figure below,' but to 'Figure 1'.

## 8 DOTTING THE I'S AND CROSSING THE T'S: LANGUAGE AND SPELLING

### 8.1 CONSISTENCY IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE

Make sure you use terms and concepts consistently. You need to be precise to avoid confusion. Concepts such as 'government' and 'state', for example, are often confused in everyday speech. Be aware that these terms have different meanings. Using synonyms interchangeably to break up monotony can make your written language come alive. It can also lead to confusion if you do not use key concepts consistently. Avoid ambiguities. You can clarify potential ambiguities by adding a footnote explaining, for example, that two terms are used interchangeably.

### 8.2 GRAMMATICAL INCONSISTENCIES

The writing process involves polishing and adjusting sections that you've already written. This generally leads to improvements, but changes can also result in inconsistencies. Your verb tenses may no longer be in agreement or you might end up with a sentence that lacks a predicator (verb) altogether. You might also end up with singular/plural irregularities ('we has'). Sloppiness like this not only makes a text unpleasant to read, it also distracts from the content. You will be able to catch many of these errors yourself if you sleep on the text for a few days and then have another look at, or by engaging a second reader.

Box 8.1 contains a number of tips for a readable paper.

#### *Box 8.1 Suggestions for a readable paper*

- Avoid overly informal or colloquial language.
- Avoid overly long sentences and wordiness.
- Avoid a choppy style
- Mix longer and shorter sentences
- Avoid using exclamation marks. The strength of your paper must come from within.
- Use colons and semicolons correctly.
- Use demonstrative determiners and relative pronouns correctly.

### 8.3 SPELLING

Language errors and sloppiness can detract from the content of your paper. Moreover, examiners who assess your paper find this to be very annoying, which will be of no benefit to your paper's final grade. Use your word processor's spell-check function, but make sure you read your text critically yourself, since the computer will not pick up all errors.

Consult a style guide for advice on spelling and punctuation.

- <http://www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/taaltips/tips-tricks-for-english/writing.html>
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01/>
- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/02/>

Use a dictionary to check spellings.

- <http://www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/taaltips/tips-tricks-for-english/online-dictionaries.html>
- <http://www.dictionary.com>
- <http://www.learnersdictionary.com>

#### **8.4 ABBREVIATIONS**

Avoid using abbreviations if at all possible. Abbreviations of proper nouns such as OECD and NATO are allowed as long as they are introduced the first time they are mentioned.

Lists of abbreviations can usually be omitted in papers and theses. If your paper contains a high frequency of abbreviations, however, then you should include a list of abbreviations before the introduction.

#### **8.5 USE OF TERMS FROM ANOTHER LANGUAGE**

Try to avoid the use of foreign words if there is a reasonable translation available. Do not write '*Weltanschauung*', write 'world view'. If you absolutely, positively must use a foreign word, then you should make sure it appears in italics and that it is spelled correctly.

#### **8.6 NUMERALS AND NUMBERS**

The rule of thumb is that numbers up to ten should be written out in full, as should larger round numbers. '5' and '10,000' should be written out as 'five' and 'ten thousand', whereas 478 should remain as it is in numerals.

In numbers, English has a decimal point where Dutch has a decimal comma, and English uses a comma as thousands separator where Dutch uses a full stop. Thus, in English 4.057 (read 'four point nought seven five') means four and 57 thousandths, while 4,057 means 'four thousand and fifty-seven'.

#### **8.7 FOOTNOTES AND ENDNOTES**

Occasionally you might want to include information in your paper that is not essential to the argument, but that you do consider important for the reader's understanding of the subject matter. You might consider including this information in a footnote or endnote. Use notes sparingly; use them only for explaining something or providing information that you feel is really necessary, but that you cannot logically fit into your main text. Your main text must remain a coherent, independent product.

In his study on perceptions of party positions among voters, Van der Brug (1996) uses data taken from the National Election Survey (NKO).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The National Election Survey was established in 1971. It is used to research Lower House elections by mapping the political attitudes and voting behaviour of the Dutch electorate, among other things.

There are two types of notes: footnotes (bottom of page) or endnotes (at the end of a chapter or paper). There is no particular preference for one style or the other, as long as you are consistent in their use.

## **8.8 LECTURERS AND LANGUAGE**

Lecturers and examiners who assess your papers have the right to return your work to you ungraded if it contains too many unnecessary and sloppy errors. So mind your Ps and Qs when it comes to spelling, grammar and style.

## 9 THE FINISHING TOUCH: PRESENTATION AND LAYOUT

Your paper needs to look professional. Box 9.1 shows the minimum technical requirements for papers:

### *Box 9.1 Your paper's layout and appearance*

- Print your paper in A4 format.
- Use 10pt Tahoma or Arial font, or 12pt Times New Roman (if you choose a different font, make sure the size is equivalent to 12 pt Times New Roman).
- Use line spacing of 1.5.
- All margins must be 2.5 cm (top / bottom / left / right).
- Make chapters and sections stand out with headings or titles in a bold, italic or different font.
- Underline headings and use no closing punctuation.

Word processors allow you to set your font and page layout after finishing your writing. Your paper does have to look like it just came off a slick printing press, but it should still be attractive. Plastic covers are unnecessary (and bad for the environment). Master's theses must be bound, and they need a thicker cover. You also need to upload your Master's thesis to SafeAssignment and to the university library (ask your supervisor for further instructions).

## REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington DC: APA.
- Matthews, J.R., Bowen, J.M. & Matthews, R.W. (2002). *Successful Scientific Writing*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Oost, H. (2002). *Een onderzoek rapporteren*. Baarn: HB uitgevers.
- Renkema, J. (2005). *Schrijfwijzer*. The Hague: SDU Uitgevers.
- Soudijn, K. (2005). *Onderzoeksverslagen schrijven: Praktische handleiding bij het schrijven van scripties en andere werkstukken voor HBO en WO*. Houten: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum.
- Swanborn, P. G. (1981). *Methoden van sociaal wetenschappelijk onderzoek*. Meppel: Boom.

## APPENDIX 1: CHECK LIST

- Does the title page include your name, your student number, your lecturer's name and the date?
- Does the title or subtitle cover the content of your paper?
- Is the research question clear?
- Does your paper answer the research question?
- Have you provided a reference for every citation of the work of others?
- Are all references from the text included in your reference list and vice versa?
- Have you actually read all publications to which you refer?
- Are the references in alphabetical order?
- Do all items in your reference list meet APA standards?
- Are tables and figures (if applicable) numbered and do they all have a good title?
- Is the writing style appropriate for your target audience?
- Are spelling and grammar good and consistent?
- Are the pages numbered?

## APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### WEBSITES

- [www.rug.nl/noordster/schriftelijkevaardigheden/voorstudenten/index](http://www.rug.nl/noordster/schriftelijkevaardigheden/voorstudenten/index)
- [www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts)
- [www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes](http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes)
- [www.onzetaal.nl/advies/ouderwets.php](http://www.onzetaal.nl/advies/ouderwets.php)
- [www.taalunieversum.org](http://www.taalunieversum.org)
- [www.taaladvies.net](http://www.taaladvies.net)
- [www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/taaltips/useful-websites-for-english.html](http://www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/taaltips/useful-websites-for-english.html)
  
- [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)  
Online Writing Lab: very good website on academic writing.
- [www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html)  
Advice on academic writing by the University of Toronto.
- [elc.polyu.edu.hk/CiLL/eap/](http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/CiLL/eap/)  
Centre for Independent Language Learning: English for Academic Purposes
- [www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/)  
A very useful resource for academic writers. It contains many useful phrases organized under headings such as “being critical”, “describing methods” and “discussing findings”.
- [www.usingenglish.com/](http://www.usingenglish.com/)  
UsingEnglish.com provides a large collection of English as a Second Language (ESL) tools & resources for students, teachers, learners and academics.
- [www.esl.about.com](http://www.esl.about.com)  
On anything related to English as a second language (grammar, vocabulary, quizzes, exercises).

## BOOKS

- Becker, H.S. (1986). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brungs, E. (2008). *Zinvol zoeken, stijlvol schrijven. Handleiding voor het schrijven van wetenschappelijke teksten in de Sociale Wetenschappen*. Leuven: Acco.
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- Soudijn, K. (2005). *Onderzoeksverslagen schrijven: Praktische handleiding bij het schrijven van scripties en andere werkstukken voor HBO en WO*. Houten: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum.
- Steehouder, M., Jansen, C., Maat, K., Staak, J. van der, Vet, D. de, Witteveen, M. & Woudstra, E. (2006). *Leren communiceren. Handboek voor mondelinge en schriftelijke communicatie*. 5th revised edition. Groningen: Noordhoff.
- Verschuren, P.J.M. (2011). *De probleemstelling voor een onderzoek: met ondersteuning van analytische en denktechnische hulpmiddelen*. 14th fully revised edition. Houten: Spectrum.
- Wagenaar, P. (2008). *Voor de vorm: Taalvraagbaak voor schrijvers*. Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Augustus.

## COURSES

VU University Amsterdam offers affordable courses for those who would like to learn more about writing papers. For more information: [www.vu.nl/cursussen](http://www.vu.nl/cursussen). Also see: [www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/trainingen.html](http://www.taalcentrum-vu.nl/trainingen.html)