

Academic Writing

Examples from BUV

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Manual
Child and Youth Sciences
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Stockholms
universitet

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Abstract

This guide is an introduction to academic writing that describes features of scientific writing that are recommended for students in Teacher Education Programmes and in Child and Youth Studies.

It includes a style guide, how to structure your text, and an APA Publication Manual for referencing, as well as guides for writing an outline for a study, advice for serving as opponent(s) and respondent(s) and an agenda for a thesis/examining seminar.

Keywords

Academic writing, thesis, reviews, scientific reports, structure, references, opponent, APA Publication Manual

Preface

There are a number of manuals on academic writing. I recommend the classic book *The elements of style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, in its 2005 third edition, illustrated by Maira Kalman. In Swedish, I recommend *Rapporter och uppsatser* by Jarl Backman and *Skrivhandledning* by Sven Hartman. There is a range of different conventions about how to reference other researchers' work. In this guide, we follow the 6th edition of the APA Publication Manual (American Psychological Association), which is usually used for academic writing in Pedagogy and Psychology in the United States.

Thanks to all students and colleagues for helping me in sorting out what can be a useful first guide to academic writing. I would also like to thank my research colleague Donna Berthelsen, QUT, Australia, for sharing her vast knowledge in this field.

Stockholm in June 2016,
Good luck!

Ingrid Engdahl

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1. Academic Writing

During your studies at the Department of Child and Youth Studies, you will be writing different types of texts. You will be asked to hand in different kinds of papers, reports, reviews, make-up assignments and exam papers. In some courses you will write scientific texts like a thesis. In others you may be writing reports on projects carried out during the course. Quite often, you will have the possibility to choose your own topic within a field of study but sometimes the topics for exam papers are decided by the course team lecturers. Sometimes you will be the single author, at other times, you will work with other students, for example with power point presentations and written reports from group assignments as a complement to an oral presentation.

Writing an academic text is a major task which requires quite a lot of thinking and practice. A critical and scientific approach is necessary. This means that the students should be curious, open and creative in their choice of topic and study. In academic reports, you are required to search for new knowledge, systematically and methodically. This requires a critical attitude, abilities to raise questions, and to reflect on and analyse different ideas. Academic work usually starts by reviewing existing research and framework in the field of study. The presentation of findings from reading and research usually requires an organised structure with relevant headings. Attention to ethics, as well as the trustworthiness and quality of the information presented in academic work should always be considered and discussed.

In the end, the text will be judged on the quality of both content and presentation. The assessment criteria are found in the Study guide for the course. They address the following issues:

- Coverage of a topic with adequate depth;
- Understanding of key issues, debates, and current theory;
- Innovation in the approach;
- Strength of the organisational framework that enables the reader to follow the issues and the logic of arguments that are being made;
- Thoroughness with regards to vocabulary, grammar, spelling, referencing et cetera.

1.2 Help from peers and lecturers

When writing a paper, report or a thesis, students will be given advice by lecturers in the department. The assignment tasks will be described in the Study Guide for the course that you are taking. Lecturers will serve as mentors or supervisors during your writing process.

An energising way to start your writing is to make preliminary notes about the nature of the topic, any background information, identify the specific aim and possible methods. With such preparation, you can then discuss your ideas with your student peers and receive help in framing your point of interests. Peer reading and discussions are important parts of the writing process and are recommended throughout the writing journey, both within and outside any formal classes.

Most courses at the department include group assignments. Studying and learning together activates multiple ways for communication; reading, thinking, writing, talking, discussing, and giving feed-

forward and feedback. In this way the learning process is strengthened, which has been shown to promote students' learning. Group work helps students to:

- be active writers and readers;
- recognise the role of language in learning;
- understand the importance of study groups in learning.

If you are asked to provide feed-forward and/or feedback to peers, it is important to focus on collaborative interactions and a constructive approach. The intention is collaborative refinement of ideas through peer collaboration and communication. By adding another person's perspectives on your written text, the text may talk back to you in new ways about how the text can be developed for clarity and coherence. Therefore, take the opportunity to reflect carefully on any feedback that you receive from peers and the lecturer and incorporate such feedback into future efforts.

1.3 The topic

The topic is either given to you by the lecturers or, quite often, you have opportunities to choose your own topic to address the learning outcomes and the content of the course. In both cases, it is good to start with a brainstorming session. The preparation of a plan for the text/study/project provides the foundation on which you can subsequently build your text. Sometimes, as when writing a thesis, you start by writing an Outline, 3–5 pages in length, to specify your ideas about the different parts of the project (see Appendix 1).

Such an outline or brief plan serves to clarify your thinking about a problem, and to identify relevant terms and concepts. It is also important to clarify the different aspects of the topic that is to be addressed.

- In what field of study is your proposed project situated?
- What is the specific issue that you wish to investigate?
- Why is your investigation worth doing?
- What are the outcomes that you would like to achieve?
- Who (individuals or groups) can use this information to change or improve the present situation?
- How will the study contribute to our understanding of this area?

Writing answers and discussing these kinds of questions will also raise some insights into potential difficulties. A common mistake in the early stages of preparation for a project is to make the chosen topic too broad to be addressed in a single paper. It is often necessary to refine and narrow the focus of a project as you proceed.

2. The structure of a thesis

The report should follow a specific structure, and be written using the Stockholm University template and graphic profile. This style guide is written within the recommended format, which will automatically include page numbers and updating of the table of contents. This chapter suggests a structure for the different parts in a report.

2.1 The first pages

The first page contains specific required information. The front page design is important because it tells the reader a lot about the document. Write the title of your work and your name. Please make sure to include the following information in the lower left corner, choosing the relevant options.

Department of Child and Youth Studies
Paper/Report/Degree paper, x cr, First/Second cycle
Child and Youth Sciences
Course title x cr
Spring/Autumn semester 20XX
Course leader: NN

If you are writing a thesis, next follows a title page with the Abstract (around 200 words) and a list of keywords. Keywords (4–8) are words/phrases that are indexed in online databases and help others to find to find your text. The abstract is a summary of your thesis. It is not an introduction to the thesis. In the abstract, you state the central aims and research questions of your report. The theoretical perspectives should be noted and brief information about the methodology should be included. The abstract ends by summarising of the findings and conclusions.

For longer texts, more than five pages, the next page may contain a Table of contents. All major headings and corresponding page numbers should be included. The page numbers should be positioned so the report can be copied on both sides of the paper, e.g. in the middle of the page, top or bottom. References and Appendices are included in the Contents page but, in the case of a thesis, are not given a chapter number.

2.2 Introduction

In the Introduction, the chosen topic or theme is clearly introduced and motivated and placed within a general context. A broad overview of the background and setting of the problem lays the groundwork. It establishes the need for the research by relating factors creating the problem.

Is this a report or an exam paper? What are the instructions? Check the information in the Study guide for the course!

2.2.1 Background

In the background, you present the topic and place it in context. This is the place where you frame the problem and address why the topic is important in relation to public debate, laws and regulations, or everyday knowledge. In this way you show your understanding of the broad field of knowledge. It is

important to make clear that the opinions of the author are clearly distinguished from the ideas presented in the referred literature.

It is often useful to use sub-headings to present information sorted under themes or categories. Make sure that previous research is referenced correctly. You may also highlight any agreements and disagreements in the area, and identify any unanswered questions or gaps in what is known about the topic.

2.3 Previous Research

You should look for published information from national and international sources on the project topic. Through Stockholm University Library, students have access to multiple data bases, scientific journals and literature, both in electronic forms and in hard copy. Relevant literature must be mentioned, as well as how the search for relevant literature was carried out. Try to present unanswered questions as clearly as possible and identify gaps in what is known.

The selected literature should be presented as a scholarly review that demonstrates your understanding about the topic and provides different perspectives about the issue or problem. This section should pertain to and have relevance to the aims and implications for the study. References and quotations should follow the referencing system identified in the Study Guide for the course.

2.4 Aim and Research Questions

In this section the overall aim is presented. This is a purpose statement that captures the essence of your project. The aim and corresponding research questions (or hypotheses) must initially be clearly presented.

In a paragraph present the central controlling idea. It should be clear and concise. For example:

“The purpose of this study is to ... [central idea].

“The research will investigate ... [explain the central idea and/or research questions]

Although it is common to revise your aim once or twice during the overall process, it is very important to initially ensure that the aim of the proposed study is described within the limits and range of the resource and time constraints of your course in order to be manageable.

In this section, you may also clarify and *define important concepts* used in the work as well as *limitations* for the study.

It is also acceptable to place the aim of the study after the section 2.2 Introduction, depending on the nature of the topic and the knowledge base to be explored.

2.5 Theoretical Perspective

Depending on the kind of paper you are writing, clarify if there is a need to identify a theoretical framework. A theoretical perspective may provide a means for critically understanding and explaining the phenomena you are investigating. An important part of research is to identify the key perspectives which will inform how the study will be carried out. There needs to be a constructive alignment between the aim, theoretical perspective used, the method and the discussion.

In this section, the chosen theoretical perspective should be clearly defined, including any theoretical concepts and specific terms that will be used when handling and analysing data

2.6 Methods and Ethics

The design of the study and the procedure shall be approved by the supervisor before any data collection is made. Initially, ethical considerations should be addressed and clarified, in relation to the setting for the research, nature of sample, age of participants et cetera. Ethical considerations on anonymity, consent and information provided to the participants and other involved persons should be discussed. This is of particular importance if children are involved in the project/study, and especially for studies with a child-oriented perspective. Here, we are guided by the guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council (2011).

The design and type of study should be initially described in this section, whether it is an empirical study, a study of literature or a comparative study. This should be described clearly and related, with references, to the specific methodology. You should explain how the study was carried out by outlining step by step the processes followed. Methodological considerations concerning ethics, observation methods, interview questions, selection, sample and proceedings are presented in detail. It is sometimes useful to put some of this information in appendices (e.g., the letter of consent provided to the informants).

The methods section of the report should answer questions like: How was data and other information collected? How were persons identified and recruited for the study? What considerations were taken into account in planning for observations or in creating questions for interviews/observational protocols/questionnaires?

The data analysis process should be fully described including the processes involved in preparing the transcriptions of visual or audio data and the analytic steps and interpretative processes. The description should be quite specific in how analyses were completed (e.g., use of data analytic tools, systems, and programmes). The steps through the data analyses to the interpretation of the results should be clearly evident.

A section on the quality, trustworthiness of the analyses, thoroughness, and/or validity and reliability concerns for the study can complete this section of the report. Considerations of ethics, as well as of the generalisability and representativeness of the findings and possible limitations of the research should be discussed.

2.7 Results (or Findings) and Analysis

The findings should be presented in a straightforward way, following a description of the structure of categories or themes identified, including illustrative quotes, tables, diagrams, figures etc. If necessary, detailed data or transcriptions of interviews can be added in an appendix. You should analyse the results in relation to the theoretical concepts previously identified, but not at this point add your own comments to the results.

Sometimes it is useful to put this discussion under a separate heading *Analysis* (e.g. when the analysis is closely linked to theoretical perspectives).

2.8 Discussions and/or Conclusions

In the final chapter, the results/findings are reviewed and summarised in relation to the aims of the study, previously referred research and other literature and related to the specific educational or social context. How the research questions (or hypotheses) have been answered by the study should be quite clear. In this section, it is also common to address questions on ethics and methodology raised by your study, and to assess the meaning of the results in the wider context. In this chapter, personal standpoints and opinions can be made clear about the results/findings. What contributions does your study provide to the field of study? Finally, you can write about the implications and recommendations that stem from the findings of the study and point out possible directions for future research.

2.9 References

A list of all the sources referred to in the report should be included (i.e., references and quotes). References and quotations should be presented in the style system identified the Study Guide for the course.

In Chapter 3, the referencing style conventions for the APA Publication Manual, which is used throughout this guide, are outlined.

2.10 Appendices

Detailed information, letters to informants, interview guides et cetera are best placed in appendices. Enumerate each Appendix, (Appendix 1, Appendix 2 etc.) and give each appendix a specific, descriptive title and their own side numbers.

3. References and quotations

3.1 Introducing referencing

The APA Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association provides specific guidelines for scientific writing in psychology. It is often also used in other social sciences disciplines, including education. When writing a paper or scientific text, you must identify the sources for the ideas you use in your text. How did you get to know this? Is it based on public knowledge, research, gossip or prejudices? The quality of your text depends on whether the statements and the findings reported stem from trustworthy by reference sources, and that others to relevant and available sources. These are to be presented directly in the text and are collected into a list of references at the end of your paper.

In order to give credit to the contributions of previous researchers and authors, the original or primary source of any ideas should be identified. If you read about interesting findings in a textbook, and you want to include these in your review, you should look up the article or research where the finding were presented first (i.e., the original source). It is also advisable to search for recent international and national studies on your topic. This provides context and currency about your topic for the reader.

There are different reference styles that are used for citing sources of ideas. The most well-known of in-text citation systems are APA, Harvard and Oxford. APA and Harvard use a system with an author/date reference provided in the parentheses. The Oxford system uses a citation system with foot-notes or end-notes. Many scientific journals have developed their own reference system which needs to be followed when journal articles are submitted. It is most important to be accurate and consistent in following one system within any report, and not mix the reference style systems.

In historic and literary research, it is common to distinguish between Literature and Sources, in which Literature is other scholarly work, and Sources (källor) are things like private letters, deeds or other written material that throw light or provide facts on your topic. It is not common to make this distinction in psychology or social sciences, but it is applicable in some educational research, perhaps under separate headings (e.g. Literature, Videos, Interviewees). The APA system for the reference list at the end of the report presents all sources in alphabetical order. It does not make separate listings of different kinds of texts/sources.

3.2 The APA Publication Manual: An introduction

In the reference list, the basic format for a book in the APA reference style is:

Author's Last name, Initials. (Year). *Title in italics*. City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

Of importance are specific usages of upper or lower case letters, normal font or italics, full stops, commas and semi-colons. Details about the reference list are described in section 3.4.

In text citations: References are written in one of the following ways, page number should be included in exam papers and always when quoting directly from the original sources.

Format for **single author** referencing:

- a) Andersson (1994, p. X) has described the Swedish family support system as being one of ...

- b) The Swedish family support system is one of ... (Andersson, 1994, p. X).
- c) The Swedish family support system can, according to Andersson (1994, p. X), be described as one of

Format for **two authors** is as following:

- a) Doverborg and Pramling (1996) point out that children and teachers are both active agents in children's learning and development which lead to a methodology based on the children's experiences.
- b) Children and teachers are both active agents in children's learning and development which lead to a methodology based on the children's experiences (Doverborg & Pramling, 1996).

You should strive to use **primary sources**. This means that you reference the original text for instance access the original writings of Deleuze and Guattari in a book that the author has written not as described by others. However, sometimes you need to use **secondary sources** and then you reference the ideas in the following way, if you read their ideas in a text book written by Smith.

Multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature.
(Deleuze & Guattari in Smith, 2015, p. 26)

For **references articles in scientific journals**, you also use an author / date system and in the usual way in the text state author, year in parentheses and, when relevant, a page number for a direct quotation. In the reference list the format is:

Author's Last name, Initials. (Year). Title of article. *Title of Journal in Italics*, Volume(Nr), XX-YY.

If you use **Internet sources**, you reference these in the usual way in the text by stating the author, year and, when relevant, the page number. See how to cite online references in the reference list in Section 3.4.

The use of **footnotes** is more common today. However, within the APA referencing system footnotes are only used for additional information, not for references. Thus, we recommend footnotes only for specific information (e.g. translation or definition of a word, or for additional information that takes the reader a bit further or beyond the focus topic).

References to oral sources of information received in lectures and interviews are not recommended. The reason for this is that the source cannot be independently confirmed by a reader. If you want to refer to a lecturer or an interviewee, these should be referenced in the text by: Initial, Last name (lecture/interview, month day, year). Such references to oral sources should not be included in the final list of references.

3.3 Quotations

Quotations can be used when you have found something of fundamental interest or when the wording of the writer is significantly important and cannot be described in a better way. The use of long quotes, such as paragraphs from other texts is not recommended. Try to describe the important knowledge in your own words and just reference the source book or article as described above.

If you choose to use a quote from another published text, you must quote the words exactly as the author has written, even if you think there are linguistic errors in the text. When you quote a whole

paragraph, more than 40 words, the quote is distinguished from other text by **smaller font size, indented margins on either side of the paper, and the name of the author, year, and page noted:**

I consider this magazine a very important instrument for the communication of unity, knowledge, and ideology. It had, together with very well-attended both Swedish and Nordic meetings, a great influence on the modelling of the new profession.

(Tallberg-Broman, 1991, p. 261)

You can also choose to quote one short sentence or part of a sentence in the following way, where **p.** refers to one page and **pp.** to a page span:

Going through the history of the Swedish preschool teachers, it is apparent that the reason for the new profession was due to 'the new circumstances, work and the home/household were separated' (Tallberg-Broman, 1991, p. 257).

If you refer to a certain section in a book, you can choose between the following ways as an indicator for the reader:

- Tallberg-Broman (1991, Chapter 7) or
- (Tallberg-Broman, 1991, p. 261) or
- (Tallberg-Broman, 1991, pp. 261–263) or
- (Tallberg-Broman, 1991, Chapter 7).

3.4 Reference list

All references in the list are alphabetically ordered by authors' last (family) name. If an author has multiple references to be listed, the references are ordered by year of publication with the earliest publication listed first. If the texts are published the same year, they are distinguished by adding a, b, c ... after the year in each reference (2012a, 2012b, 2012c ...) and ordered alphabetically by the first word in the title of the article (excluding *A* or *The*).

The list of references is often written with smaller font (10 pt) and with lines 2 and 3 indented. Here follow specific descriptions and examples of the APA Publication Manual.

Book with one author

Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). *Title in italics: Subtitle* (x ed.). City of Publisher: Name of Publisher. Two examples:

Clark, A. (2010). *Transforming children's spaces: Children's and adults' participation in designing learning environments*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

National Agency for Education. (2011). *Curriculum for the pre-school: Lpfö98*. Stockholm: Skolverket.

Please note: Capital letters are only used in the first word in the book title and subtitle. Title and subtitle are separated with a semi-colon. Abbreviations in the publisher's name are not included, and if multiple cities are named, choose one of them.

Degree papers are identified by (Doctoral thesis), (Master's thesis) and so on after the title. Numbers in series are also added after the title:

Johansson, E. (1999). *Etik i små barns värld: Om värden och normer bland de yngsta barnen i förskolan* [Ethics in the world of small children: About values and norms among the youngest

children in preschool]. (Doctoral thesis, Gothenburg Studies in Educational Sciences 141).
Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Book with more than one author

Last name, Initial/Initials., Last name, Initial/Initials., & Last name, C. (Year). *Title in italics: Subtitle* (x ed.). City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

Sommer, D., Pramling-Samuelsson, I., & Hundeide, K. (2010). *Child perspectives and children's perspectives in theory and practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Book (anthology) with editor

Editors' Last name, Initial/Initials. (Ed.). (Year). *Title in italics: Subtitle* (x ed.). City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

Engdahl, I. (Ed.). (1990). *Barnet saken kallet* [The child, the cause, the call]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Chapter or article in an anthology

Author's Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). Title in normal font. In Editors' Initial/Initials. Last name (Ed.), *Title of anthology in italics: Subtitle* (pp. XX–YY). City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

Penn, H. (2009). International perspectives on participatory learning: Young children's perspectives among rich and poor countries. In D. Berthelsen, J. Brownlee, & E. Johansson (Eds.), *Participatory learning in the early years: Research and pedagogy* (pp. 12–25). Abingdon Oxon: Routledge.

Article in a scientific journal

Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). Title of article in normal font. *Title of Journal in Italics*, Vol(Nr), XX–YY.

Elliott, S., & Davis, J. (2009). Exploring the resistance: An Australian perspective on educating for sustainability in early childhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 41(2), 65–78.
Marton, F. (1981). Phenomenography: Describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science*, 10, 177–200.

Please note: For journal articles, the main words in the journal title (i.e., name of the journal) are presented in capital letters; only the year, not the month and day, are specified. When listing the page numbers for a journal article, the **p. or pp. are not included in the reference list** (and you do not write Vol. or Nr), only the relevant page numbers are included. If the journal uses continued page numbers all through the editing year, you do not give the number of the issue (Nr), only of the volume and the relevant page numbers.

With Digital Object Identifier number – DOI-number

Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). Title of article in normal font. *Title of Journal in Italics*, Vol(Nr), XX–YY. doi:the number (Please note – there should be no full stop after the doi-number)

Engdahl, I. (2012). Doing friendship during the second year of life in a Swedish preschool. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 20(1), 83–98.
doi:10.1080/1350293X.2012.650013

Engdahl, I. (2015). Early childhood education for sustainability: The OMEP world project. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 47, 347–366. doi:10.1007/s13158-015-0149-6

On-line article without a DOI-number

Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). Title of article in normal font. *Title of Journal in Italics*, Vol(Nr), XX-YY. Retrieved from URL for the Journal's web page

Cobb-Moore, C., Danby, S., & Farrell, A. (2009). Young children as rule makers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 1477-1492. Retrieved from <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-pragmatics>

Please note! The retrieval date is not included because it is a confirmed text, not to be altered.

Steering documents, national curriculum et cetera

The official list and number:year. *Title in italics: Subtitle*. City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

SFS 2010:800. *Skollagen* [The education act]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

SOU [Government Official Report] 2006:75. *Jämställdhet i förskolan: Om betydelsen av jämställdhet och genus i förskolans pedagogiska arbete* [Gender Equity in the Preschool]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

National curricula follows the same formula as a book with one author: Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). *Title in italics: Subtitle* (x ed.). City of Publisher: Name of Publisher.

Please note! The retrieval date shall not be given because it is a confirmed text, not to be altered.

Documents from a web page from an organisation or authority

Authority/Organisation. (Year). *Title of document in italics*. Retrieved from the URL address

Swedish Research Council. (2011). *Good research practice*. Retrieved from <https://publikationer.vr.se/en/product/good-research-practice/>

Author's Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year). *Title of document in italics*. Retrieved from the URL address

United Nations. (2015). *Sustainable development goals*. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>

Please note! The retrieval date shall not be given because it is a confirmed text, not to be altered.

Information from an organisation or an agency

When your source information is on a website and the information is likely to change over time, then it is important to identify that this information has a temporary status and may be of limited scientific value. To identify the temporary nature of the information, you must provide the date on which you retrieved the information.

Author's Last name, Initial/Initials. (Date for publication, if given, or date for latest up-date). *Title of document in italics*. Retrieved month day, year, from URL address

Barnombudsmannen. (2015, January 20). *About the ombudsman for children in Sweden*. Retrieved May 23, 2016, from <https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/om-webbplatsen/english/>

Article in a newspaper, printed or published on-line

If the paper is printed: Author's Last name,. (Year, month day). Title of article in normal font. *Title of Paper in Italics*, p. X.

Andersson, M., Bolund, P., & Andersson, U. (2014, 23 oktober). Vi satsar en extra miljard 2015 på förbättrad sjukvård [We give an extra billion to improve health care]. *Dagens Nyheter*, p. A4.

If the paper is read on-line: Author's Last name, Initial/Initials. (Year, month day). Title of article in normal font. *Title of Paper in Italics*. Retrieved from URL address of the paper

Jha, A. (2012, August 14). Study casts doubt on human-Neanderthal interbreeding theory. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

4. Getting your credits

4.1 Requirements during the course

The Study Guide details the requirements for the course, linked to presence/absence, participation, tasks and assignments. The syllabus shows for example how many credits your paper/report/thesis is worth. There is no general rule about the number of pages to write. The following are our recommendations: for a Paper, 5–8 pages, a Project Report, 15–30 pages and for a Thesis 25–40, but look this up in your Study Guide.

After having reviewed your written text thoroughly, preferably with the help of friendly peers, the written text will be most often put in Mondo, where it goes through *Urkund*, an anti-plagiarism tool. For larger projects, you may need approval from your advisor before submitting your work.

Plagiarism and regulations for disciplinary matters

As a student you have to be conscientious about accounting in a correct way for the material used in all written texts submitted for examination. To use other people's expressions or ideas without stating from where the ideas have been sourced is plagiarism. To translate and/or change some words in someone else's text and present them as one's own is obviously also a form of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is considered to be cheating and if discovered in an exam or paper, the exam or paper will be immediately failed and disciplinary measures may be taken. Any student who is caught cheating or disrupting academic activities can be suspended from lectures and exams for a period of up to six months. The Vice-Chancellor or the Disciplinary Council decides whether a student is to be subject to disciplinary measures.

4.2 Examination seminars

Most often, the final seminar of a course also serves as part of the assessment process. Individually or in groups, students are asked to present their work, and/or to serve as opponents on other students' work. This is explained in Chapter 5 and you are advised to look up what is required in your course in the Study Guide.

Sometimes you will be asked to be a peer reader and discussant for other students during the writing process. This involves participating in the other students' seminars for their presentations and/or serve as an opponent once or twice during a seminar. Please see Appendices 2 and 3 for more information about such tasks.

When you partake in a seminar, you should, if possible, read the text in advance and prepare questions about the content and the structure. The seminar is a meeting place for discussion and learning, so everyone present should read the paper and prepare some questions for the general discussion.

4.3 Assessment

Papers, reports and degree papers are assessed in relation to certain criteria. These criteria are linked to the Learning Outcomes for the course and will vary somewhat between courses. The *assessment criteria* are included in the Study Guide and can be discussed with your course leader and supervisor. For minor texts, a two-graded Pass/fail scale is used. For larger projects your work is assessed with the help of a criteria based scale of seven steps (A-F). Please consult the Study Guide for the specific instructions of your course.

5. Thesis seminar

The system we maintain at the Department of Child and Youth Studies for thesis seminars is modelled upon the Swedish ‘disputation’ for a doctoral thesis. This way of discussing an academic text in public has medieval roots. Other countries have variations on a similar theme, although quite a few have diverted from the practice of making it a public occasion.

The word seminar is built on the Latin word stem for “seed”. Thus, it is a sort of intellectual nursery where seeds of thought are spread, hundreds of flowers flower, and where you train and retrain the flowers of your thoughts. (Hartman, 1990, p.115, my translation)

The seminars are open, thus, you may invite students, colleagues, lecturers and friends to your seminar.

The examiner, or the advisor, acts as a chairperson of the seminar. The chairperson does not normally take an active part in the discussion during the opposition, but leads the proceedings and takes notes of criticism and praise.

After the seminar, the examiner, supervisor and the author(s) discuss what changes are to be made in the text.

5.1 The role of the opponents

Students who act as opponents play a very important part during the seminars. Although the authors have done their very best, it is satisfying when others show that your work is interesting, important or thought provoking.

Serving as an opponent is an important responsibility and it is not easy to do it well. As most of you will be beginners in this task, we feel it preferable that you share the responsibility with another student. Thus, there will be two students per thesis/report. Agree on some principles and divide the tasks between you.

The main task of the opponents is not to find faults with the work. It is to:

- present the thesis/report after a critical reading,
- give some ideas about how others perceive the work,
- contribute new ideas and perspectives and
- stimulate reflection and discussion in the larger group at the seminar

Prepare well for the oral presentation. You probably have to read the text several times (See Appendix 2). How can your presentation contribute to learning? Plan for a friendly atmosphere, balancing praise and criticism. Strive to give and ask for information, and do not try 'to get them'. A good climate for discussion is created when nobody feels attacked.

5.2 The procedure at the seminar

The chairperson welcomes everybody followed by introductions. A short presentation about the procedure is done (See Appendix 3).

First, the respondent (i.e. the author(s) of the work under discussion) is given a chance to correct mistakes in the work that has been discovered after sending it out. If there are important mistakes which will change the meaning, like a missing 'not' in the text, or labels in diagrams which are wrong, the respondent should make such corrections at this time. Smaller mistakes, typos and spelling, can be acknowledged more generally by a statement like; 'There are some other smaller mistakes, but I will leave those without comment'. The respondent could also make an errata-list of any mistakes and hand it over to the respondent.

Next, it is time for the opponents. If you serve as an opponent, you start by making a short review or summary of the whole study. Make your own summary – do not rely on the abstract. Concentrate on and explain what the author did. The summary provides the audience with an orientation of the work. Overheads of the outline or structure might be particularly helpful. This short presentation of the paper should be in a neutral tone – it should not be readily apparent what you think is good or not so good.

The summary should take around 5–10 minutes, no more. A common mistake is to make it too short. The purpose of this part is to show the respondent that the opponents have understood his/her work. Criticism from a person who 'just doesn't get it' cannot be taken very seriously. The opponents end this part of the procedure by asking: 'Do you accept this account of your work as an adequate representation of its content?' The respondent might well have some minor additions or corrections, but will generally accept the summary.

Then, the main part of the seminar starts. The opponents are free to give their opinions about different aspects about the work. Generally, there should be both praise and criticism, taking into consideration individual differences and different cultural norms on how to express criticism and praise. Mostly there should be an informed and competent analysis of the thesis as a research endeavour, with its strengths and weaknesses. If you have very serious criticism, you should tell the advisor and perhaps the respondent ahead of time. You should not let the seminar be the occasion for a total disparagement of the work.

Important things to look at and, to ask questions about are:

- Is the aim clearly expressed?
- Is the review of the research and other literature relevant for the research questions?
- Do you get a clear picture of the design of the study, and are the methods used appropriate to address the problem?
- Do the results answer the research questions?
- Are the conclusions drawn about the results accurate and relevant? Are these the only possible conclusions, or could there be other interpretations?
- Do the different parts of the paper follow a logical structure?

- What is the value of the work?
- What new knowledge is gained?

Let the respondent talk, elaborate on the work done and answer your questions and objections. Of course, if there are things which you do not understand in the paper, you should ask for clarifications. If you run out of things to ask, you can always ask what the respondent found most interesting, would like to have done differently, or how she/he wants to continue researching the topic. And, of course, what can you suggest concerning new ideas, literature etc.?

Furthermore, some comments should be made about the formal aspects of writing in an academic context; for example if the title is appropriate, if important concepts are defined clearly, or if the general style (spelling, punctuation, or references) is correct and clear.

At this point, ideally about 30 minutes have passed, (not more than 40). The chairperson opens up the presentation for questions from the other participants. Usually, this is a free discussion, and, with a well prepared audience, often, it turns out to be very interesting. There will also usually be some comments from the chairperson, examiner and supervisor - and some applause from the participants.

Finally, after the seminar, the examiner, the supervisor and the authors briefly evaluate the seminar and discuss whether there are compelling reasons to change or to add anything to the thesis. One copy of the final edition of the thesis should be handed in and also e-mailed to the course leader.

After the seminar, the chairperson gives a short evaluation to the opponents about their part in the seminar.

5.3 A final word

This guide served to introduce the main tasks on preparing and writing reports in an accepted format. Although, there are different ways of writing, not every one of them is suitable for an academic report. I have tried to elaborate somewhat around the system recommended by using examples from the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University.

It is not easy to write a report or a thesis, as many have discovered. I conclude with some words, ascribed to Winston Churchill:

“I hate writing. I love having written.”

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Appendix 1

Outline of the Paper

Name(s), address, phone, e-mail address:

Topic and preliminary title:

Background (Why is this topic interesting?)

Aim, Research questions (What do I want to find out?)

Theoretical perspective (Only needed when you do a research study)

Research and Literature: (What data bases and journals will you search for previous research? What literature from the course can be useful?)

Data collection, method and procedure: (What will I *do* to find answers? Interviews? Observations? "Tests"? How many persons? What sort of persons? Where? Ethical issues)

Questions I have at this stage?

I have already written a degree paper in _____ (Subject)

At _____ University in _____.

Appendix 2

Serving as an opponent

If there are two students working together, then make a plan about how you will prepare and divide the work.

- **Browse through the text, get acquainted with it**

Make notes of interesting parts!

How is the structure, the aim, the headings?

- **Read the text thoroughly**

Make notes of things that are of interest, unclear et cetera

Start a list of mistakes and misprints (Errata)!

- **Aim and research question**

Is the problem well presented?

Why is this research important?

Is the aim clearly put and aligned with the proposed theory and methods?

Are the research questions relevant for meeting the aim?

Is the purpose described within the limits and range of resource and time constraints to be manageable?

- **Theoretical perspective and previous research**

What research and other literature is presented? Is it relevant? National? International? Up to date?

Is there a section on theory? Is it relevant and well-written?

- **Methodology**

Is the chosen method suitable for the aim and problem addressed and well-motivated?

Is there a clear presentation of research ethics, sample, setting, procedure and the processing and analysis of data?

Are pros and cons and any difficulties with the methods raised and discussed?

- **Findings**

Are the result and findings clearly presented?

Do they follow from a clear analysis with the use of the theory?

- **Discussion**

Do the major parts, aim, research questions, findings and previous research, meet in the discussion?

What conclusions are drawn? Are they relevant and under-pinned?

Who (what individuals or groups) can use this information to change or improve the present situation?

How will the study contribute to new knowledge?

- **Accuracy** (thoroughness in the academic writing)

Minor mistakes are to be handed over in writing (Errata list).

Is there a good structure? Number of headings and sub-headings

Is the referencing to research and other literature made correctly?

Are the quotes correct and correctly cited?

Is it a good title, covering the results?

Does the Abstract cover the study?

Is the list of references well presented in following APA style? Are all references used in the text?

Is the language correct? Are page numbers included?

Are diagrams and tables, if any, easy to understand, if any?

Appendix 3

Agenda for a Thesis Seminar (45 minutes)

The Seminar is the time for an open and critical examination of a presented text. Phrase your feedback in a way that gives the other person freedom to decide for her/him self how to use the ideas and information. Focus your feedback on providing possible alternatives, rather than implying that you have the answers or solutions. Focus on description, rather than on judgement!

1. Opening, usually the examiner or the advisor serves as chair-person

The respondent(s) have the floor to correct minor mistakes

2. The opponent(s) gives a summary of the work (5–10 minutes)

The focus lies on what the respondents have done and the findings. Go through:

- Title and problem studies, aim and research questions
- What was already known from research, briefly
- Theory and methodology
- Findings and conclusions

The respondent(s) may bring up aspects which the opponent has overlooked in the summary.

3. Discussion led by the opponents about the study and its different parts:

- Topic and aim
- Discuss important parts of the content that you have noted during your preparations
- Are all concepts well defined?
- Is the review relevant and linked to aim and topic?
- Do the findings answer the research questions?

4. Merits and shortcomings?

- What did you find interesting about the paper and the topic? Identify aspects in the project that you think have been covered particularly well.
- Were there any questions that arose in your mind about the project that did not seem to be provided in the outline? Identify aspects that you, as a reader, would like to read more about in the final paper, if you were to assess the work.
- Are there constructive suggestions or creative ideas that you have about how the project might be developed?

5. Discuss over-all standards and quality of the work

- Relevance of previous research, theory, ethics and methodology
- Trustworthiness, thoroughness, qualitative aspects

6. Conclusions

- Are the conclusions relevant and justified?
- Who (what individuals or groups) can use this information to change or improve the present situation? What are the major contributions?
- Comment on formal aspects, accuracy, language et cetera

7. (around 10 min left) Open the floor for others to raise their questions and opinions

8. Examiner and supervisor give their opinions