MEMO Writing a Term Paper in American Studies

Choosing a Topic

Students who have to write a term paper usually see the greatest challenge in choosing a suitable topic. The following questions will help you with this decision:

- Which of the different topics taught in the seminar do I find most interesting?
- In order to tackle this topic, which theoretical concepts should be applied?
- Which literary text / film / television series is appropriate for a particular theoretical approach?
- What could be an appropriate and exciting research question for the topic I am interested in?
- Can I come up with a hypothesis?

Get involved in the topic, create a mind-map, narrow down your topic (or broaden it), and try to find a convincing starting point.

Once you have picked a topic, you will have to develop a hypothesis. Every well-written academic text is based on a hypothesis. Try to start with a rather obvious one. In the process of doing research and writing the term paper you will gain new insights that almost inevitably will make you re(de)fine your hypothesis.

Please remember to discuss your topic, research questions, and hypothesis with your instructor before starting to write the term paper.

Formal Guidelines for a Term Paper

> ✓ length: 10-12 pages for BA seminars, 15-20 pages for MA seminars
> (Page count starts on the first page of your continuous text, excluding table of contents, appendix and works cited.)
> ✓ line spacing: 1.5 for continuous text, 1.0 for works cited and multiline quotations
> ✓ margins: left 3-4cm, right 2cm, top 2.5cm, bottom 2.5cm
> ✓ justification (*Blocksatz*): full, please use hyphenation
> ✓ font: Times New Roman (12pt.) or Arial (11pt.)

Every term paper needs a cover page that indicates the seminar title, the title of your paper, and gives some information about yourself (name, email address, the year of your matriculation, street address, phone number). The cover page is followed by a 'Table of Contents' page that should include the page numbers referred to.

For guidelines on citation, in-text citation, and works cited please refer to the Memo 'Citation Guidelines.'