Most courses require you to write one or more papers. It is therefore important that you know what an academic paper should look like. Students who have little or no experience in writing academic papers in English are recommended to take one of the skills courses in academic writing at an early stage in their studies. Information about the skills course Academic Writing in English will be published at the student portal website at the beginning of the semester (go to www.student.uva.nl and select your master’s programme) (please note: this course is only open to students in the English taught master’s programmes of the Graduate School of Social Sciences and for students in the Undergraduate Certificate Programme).

Most academic papers in the Netherlands are reference papers. This means that all your papers should have proper annotations and an alphabetical bibliography. If a paper, style of annotations and/or bibliography does not have the proper format this will be reflected in the grade you receive for the paper.

Never hesitate to contact your lecturer and/or programme manager if you are unsure about what exactly is requested from you in the form of papers, other assignments and course work.

**CHOOSING A TOPIC FOR YOUR PAPER.**

In some cases the lecturer/supervisor will present a list of topics you can choose from. In other cases, you will be allowed to choose a topic yourself, but the lecturer will have to approve. In any case your topic needs to be elaborated and clearly defined. For a historical essay for instance, it does not suffice to select a theme (e.g. the Reformation), you also will need to define an area (e.g. The Netherlands) and a period (e.g. the 16th century). A good way to find a topic is to go to the library and take out a book on the theme you want to write on (in this case ‘Reformation’) and then see if you can find a topic by narrowing down the theme to a period and area. Another way to select a topic is by going through the literature of your course or a bibliography of one of the books and/or articles used in class.

In most classes you are requested to hand in a proposal for your paper with an outline of what you are planning to write about and what the question you are going to answer in your paper will be. Try to be as specific as possible already in your proposal. It is always advisable to make an outline of the structure of your paper before you start writing. The better and more elaborate the proposal, the easier the writing process will be!

**THE FORMULATION OF A PROBLEM OR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Once you have chosen a topic, you need to formulate a research question that you will discuss and answer in your paper (no matter how narrow the scope of the topic you have
chosen). If you decide, for example, to write a paper on ‘The Reformation in Holland in the 16th century’ you could for instance formulate the following question: ‘What was the importance of the Reformation in the Netherlands for the development of the political system of the Republic?’ Alternatively, you can formulate a hypothesis, for example ‘Most catholic churches in the province of Holland were destroyed by the iconoclasm of the Revolt’ and prove or disprove this hypothesis in your argumentation.

From your paper it has to be clear which problem/question you seek to address, what the arguments are (empirical or other) and which conclusion/answer you present to the reader.

**FINDING MATERIAL FOR YOUR PAPER**

You can begin selecting material by going through the bibliographies of books and articles on the topic or the books and articles used in class. These will contain titles of handbooks written on the subject. Bibliographies of handbooks will refer you to more specialised books and documents. All libraries of the UvA have computers that you can use to find material. You can also access the electronic catalogue of the UvA libraries through the Internet. On the starting screen you will be given the opportunity to ‘converse’ with the computer in English or German. You can then search for books, typing in a keyword, name of author, title of book etc. The then provided list also informs you in which library of the UvA the book is located.

Most libraries also have bibliographies (books on books) listing books and articles written on a particular subject. More recent bibliographies (especially on articles) can be found on CD-ROMs in the Central UvA Library on Singel 425. Most libraries also still have a systematic catalogue (card index) providing information on the books/articles written on a particular subject. In each UvA library there are also librarians who can help you with the different systems and with locating books and magazines.

The UvA also has a Digital Library on which you can find lots of digital magazines and articles on a wide variety of topics. On the website of the UvA library more information on how to work with the digital library system is given (http://www.uba.uva.nl). Alternatively you can attend on of the Library Skills Workshops we organize for the students in the English taught master’s programmes at the GSSS and for students in the Undergraduate Certificate Programme at the beginning of each semester. More information on the Library Skills Workshops will be posted on the student portal of the various programmes (go to www.student.uva.nl and choose your programme). Workshops in Dutch on how to use the UvA (digital) library are also organised by the Central UvA Library.

Don’t hesitate to contact your lecturer if you have problems finding the right materials to adequately deal with your (research) question.

**THE FORM OF AN ACADEMIC PAPER**

- All papers have to be typed, hand-written papers are not allowed.
• Use a readable, consistent and clear layout and letter type; most students use Times New Roman, Arial, Tahoma or Garamond 11 pt.
• Use 1.5 spacing. Use single spacing for:
  - quotes longer than three lines. The margins should be wider for quotes longer then three lines.
  - footnotes or endnotes (but leave one line blank between the footnotes)
• Include page numbers.
• Check and re-check your paper for spelling errors, grammar and punctuation before handing it in. Non-native speakers are strongly advised to have their paper read and corrected by a native speaker if possible. Too many spelling and grammatical errors will make your paper look sloppy and will affect your grade.
• Make sure you use different chapters and/or paragraphs to improve the structure of your paper. Also make sure your typography with respect to chapter- and paragraph headings is consistent!
• Your paper should have a title page which states: title, name of author, name of the course, name of the lecturer, student number and date.
• Write for a reader. Remember that your paper demands the attention of another and that you will be responsible for someone's reading experience. Try to formulate clearly and avoid making style, grammar or spelling errors. Avoid using sentences that are longer than three lines.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN ACADEMIC PAPER

1 title page
2. table of contents (optional for short papers but obligatory for long papers)
3. preface (optional)
4. introduction
5. construction of the argument (the actual chapter(s))
6. conclusion
7. footnotes/endnotes (unless you use footnotes or references in the text)
8. maps and illustrations (optional)
9. tables and graphs (optional)
10. appendices (optional)
11. bibliography

ad 1. Title page
This should give the following information:
- title of paper
- name of lecturer
- name of the course for which the paper was written and in which GSSSS programme you are
- your name and address
- date of submission
- your student identification card number (‘collegekaartnummer’)

ad 4. Introduction
The introduction should tell the reader straight away what the paper is about. This can be done in many different ways. You can immediately ‘fall with the door in the house’, as the Dutch would say, or you can do it in a more playful way, by starting with an anecdote, a citation or anything else that leads to the subject.

In your introduction you should formulate the problem (hypothesis) you want to discuss in your paper (see above: The formulation of a problem or research question). In your introduction you also give an outline of what you are planning to do in your paper. While writing your paper you should always keep in mind what problem and/or (research) question you are dealing with in your paper.

ad 5. Construction of the argument
In the introduction you formulate a question/hypothesis, in the conclusion you answer this question/hypothesis and in this chapter(s) you construct your argument by presenting all the facts and/or arguments leading up to the conclusion. Make sure you use different sections, paragraphs and/or chapters for the different parts of your argument. This will improve the structure of your paper.

When you start reading up on the topic of your paper you will be confronted with many facts. It is therefore essential that you select the facts that are relevant for your paper. Keep in mind that it is impossible (especially when writing a short paper) to be complete. If there are facts or arguments you would like to mention, but which would constitute too big a deviation from the problem you are discussing in the main text, you can put them in footnotes (see ‘footnotes/endnotes’).

You should always strive for a systematically elaborated argument. Problem formulation, literature review, theory and/or empirical results should be understandably and usefully related to each other. The paper should have a clear and straight line of argumentation, with explicit “thinking steps” and clear and logical transitions from one paragraph and/or chapter to the next.

ad 6. Conclusion
In the body of the paper you present different arguments to support the view, opinion and/or problem formulated in your introduction. In your conclusion you first give a brief summary of your argumentation and then a concise conclusion. A conclusion should not present new facts or arguments.

A well-informed reader (like a fellow student in the same course or the lecturer) should be able to understand the topic, line of argumentation and focus of the paper by reading only your introduction and conclusion. It is advisable to re-read, and if necessary re-write, your introduction after finishing your paper to check if you have done what you set out to do in your paper.

ad 7. Footnotes/endnotes/references
You can use footnotes/endnotes to give additional information that you do not want to incorporate in your text. You can also use footnotes/endnotes to refer to books, articles,
or documents you have used for your paper, however we prefer you use the ‘Harvard Method’ of in-text annotation (very similar to the ‘American Psychological Association’ (APA) method of in-text annotations).

All papers, no matter how short, should contain annotations, references and a bibliography. As stated above, we prefer that you use the ‘Harvard Method’ of in-text annotation. In this style, you add between brackets the author’s surname, year of publication, and page number(s) from which your quote or idea(s) came from. When using references, annotations and quotes in your papers make sure it is always clear to the reader who is speaking; you (the writer) or another author you are referring to or are quoting. Even though you are required to use sources in your paper it should be clear that in your paper you need to state your argument! So, a good written paper is not just a repetition and listing of quotes from others. Try to say things in your own words as much as possible, but keep indicating where your ideas have come from.

Also check the Guide on quoting and how to avoid plagiarism which you can find on the student portal for more instructions and details about correct referencing and quoting. Please go to www.student.uva.nl, select your (master’s) programme, go to the A-Z list and select ‘Plagiarism’.

ad 11. Bibliography
An academic work should always include a bibliography where you list all the sources of your secondary data. The list should be ordered alphabetically following the authors’ surnames. Articles from web pages without listed author should be included in the end. In the case that the document and/or web page comes from an organisation without listing the authors, the name of the organisation is considered the author.

Although there is no ONE correct way of doing it, here we present some examples of complete biographical references according to different sources.

Books:
Surname author, first name or initials, year of publication, Title of book, publisher, place of publication.
Example:

Book chapters:
Surname author, first name or initials, year of publication, “Title of article”, in name(s) of editors, Title of book, publisher, place of publication.
Example:
Magazine articles:
Surname author, first name or initials, year of publication, “Title of article”, in Title of journal, Vol., No., pages.
Example:

Newspaper articles with author:
Surname author, first name or initials, year and date of publication, “Title of the article”, newspaper (and section) name
Example:

Newspaper articles without authors:
Newspaper (and section) name, year and date of publication, “Title of the article.”
Example:

Web page with author:
Surname, first name or initials, year of publication, title of the article, complete URL and date you visited the site.
Example:

Web page not listing the author:
Title, date, complete URL and date you visited the site.
Example:

Web page from an organisation, not listing the author:
Name organisation, title (if known), (date (if known)). complete URL and date you visited the site.
Example:

Further readings

• Schultz, John. (1982). Writing from start to finish. (Boynton/Cook Publishers, Upper Montclaire NJ)
• Guidelines for writing an academic essay on http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~marinaj/guidelin.htm (visited on 04-05-07)

DISCLAIMER

We have tried to make the Manual for Writing an Academic paper as accurate as possible, but nevertheless the information may not be exhaustive. The GSSS cannot be held responsible for the contents of the information in the Manual for Writing an Academic paper or for any consequences from its use. No rights can be obtained from the information in the Manual for Writing an Academic paper.

Date of publication June 2009