

BSc Thesis and Seminar

Meeting 3

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Today's meeting

1. Tips on writing based on common pitfalls observed in last years.
2. Tips on (preparing for) presenting your final draft in the seminar.
3. Tips on being an opponent in the seminar and on commenting on other student's work.
4. Time for questions.

General issues that often come up

- ▶ Lack of own interpretation
- ▶ Internal structure not logical.
 - ▶ e.g. only listing articles and results without interpretation
- ▶ RQs that are tricky to answer
- ▶ References missing or citation incorrect
- ▶ Failure to discuss methods, assumptions, data.
- ▶ Failure to discuss channels of effects.

Logical internal structure

Coherence, consistency

- ▶ Say what you are going to do, and do it!
- ▶ you can revise the title and research questions during the work
- ▶ Make sure all concepts introduced in the background/theory section are actually referred back to in the main paper.
- ▶ make a distinction between theory and empirics and connect them
- ▶ When organizing: Think about the role in each subsection in the big picture of YOUR thesis.

Logical internal structure

Relatedly, students often start out from research questions that are tricky to answer, . e.g.

- ▶ What are the most effective ways to reduce / increase X...?
- ▶ How much does A affect B
- ▶ what is the best way to solve problem X

Often better to focus on outlining what are the ways that A may affect B, and why, what are the pros and cons about a certain type of policy tool...

References & remember to cite

General claims, claims about disputed facts, claims about the whole literature in a field - Here you do need references and perhaps you can even quote. Examples:

- ▶ Many people argue that... It is agreed that...
 - ▶ \Rightarrow a better way to say this is
- ▶ Intuitive thinking makes it logical that...
 - ▶ \Rightarrow a better way to say this is
- ▶ The consensus among economists is ...
 - ▶ \Rightarrow here you need to refer to concrete sources, ideally several review articles by credible and senior economists. This is also a bit of a risky statement.

Arguments & wording

Problematic arguments

- ▶ Diversity matters in itself \Rightarrow cite theories or philosophies that claim this.
- ▶ Climate change is an undisputed fact \Rightarrow this is not the case, so should be rephrased.
- ▶ "Evidently, these policies have led to a lot of suffering" \Rightarrow you need to show this "evidence", support for this by citing others.

Choice of words - be precise. Do not appeal to emotions - that is OK in journalism or an opinion piece, but not in an academic text.

- ▶ Words to avoid: terrible, huge, amazing, fantastic, tiny
- ▶ "Women are highly underrepresented in social mobility databases, which distorts the findings as *highly patriarchal*."
- ▶ "This is a *horrible idea* for equality"

See also these resources on [sloppy reasoning](#) and [fallacies](#).

References & citing

Case: A whole paragraph or section is (heavily) based on the same text.

Dilemma: repeatedly referring to same text gets annoying, but you need to be transparent that these are not your own thoughts.

Solutions:

- ▶ write something like: Author X outlines the following four arguments in favor of Y, and then have a bullet point list with each of the arguments. That way the whole bullet point list is based on the same paper.
- ▶ formulate the text so it is clear that you are not sharing your own thoughts but the thoughts of a specific author. E.g. you could write: "Becker (2020) argue that.... He also says that.... Further... " After a few sentences like that you can again add a reference but:
- ▶ Instead of putting the full reference (e.g. Becker 2020) repeated times, if the same source is referenced several times in a row, one can write (ibid.) the second and following times.

Systematic literature review

A good literature review compares academic papers systematically to be able to discuss how and why their findings differ. Especially when results are mixed, systematically discussing why that might be is important.

- ▶ Are some of the differences between studies due to data or method choices? Or due to different settings or setups?
- ▶ Is the empirical strategy/ the assumptions of the paper plausible/credible? Why or why not? Write enough so that the reader can also make a judgement.
- ▶ what factors do the authors emphasise as the drivers behind the effect observed? i.e. What are the mechanisms behind the effects?

Final draft presentation

In your presentation, make sure to:

- ▶ Teach us something!
- ▶ Focus on what you have learned so far
- ▶ Explain why your topic and question is interesting and relevant (not just to you personally)
- ▶ Explain what you do and why in a clear way: an outsider to your particular topic should be able to understand.
- ▶ Explain properly your method of analysis/theoretical framework.
- ▶ It is not: status report, the making-of-my-thesis documentary

Presenting research

A good layout

1. Introduction

- Start with the research question
- Explain why it is interesting / important
- May require background info (institutional details, terminology)
- Motivation with a figure
- Summarize what you found so far.

2. The main part of the presentation

- backs up the result you summarized at the start
- discusses limitations
- spends very little time on anything else

Please note that the presentation **CANNOT** exceed 12 minutes. So prioritize what to include.

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- ▶ Illegible copy-paste tables and figures
 - ▶ Slides usually require specialized versions

Presenting in the seminar

Reminder

Aalto University has created and collected resources to support students with presenting in public.

- ▶ Tips on what to think about before and during a presentation:

▶ [Link to video in English](#)

▶ [Link to video in Finnish](#)

- ▶ Tips and thoughts on anxiety and stage fright:

▶ [Link to video in English](#)

▶ [Link to video in Finnish](#)

Some additional resources and links will be posted on Mycourses under the *Presentations* section.

Acting as an opponent 1/3

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What to comment on? Some examples

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What to comment on? Some examples

- ▶ Readability of the draft. Are there arguments or (sub)sections that are difficult to follow?
- ▶ Structure of the draft and the discussion in the various (sub)sections. Is it logical?
- ▶ Assumptions. Does the author make assumptions that are implausible, or would some assumptions require more discussion?
- ▶ Weak arguments or missing points?
- ▶ Title or research question. Does the author answer the question s(he) poses in the title or in the introduction? Does the author answer the question convincingly?

Acting as an opponent 2/3

- ▶ Prepare for a 3–5 minutes presentation, without slides
- ▶ No need to give a summary of the study (this time)
- ▶ The audience should be able to follow the comments having seen the presentation
- ▶ Start with the most important points you want to discuss. It's unlikely that you have time for "would-be-nice-to-know" type of questions
- ▶ Be gentle when pointing out weaknesses
- ▶ Aim for constructive comments, i.e., comments that help the author to improve the draft

Acting as an opponent 3/3

- ▶ Be specific when suggesting improvements. For example, instead of saying “the discussion in section X is unclear” you may want to say “I didn’t follow the discussion in section X, perhaps because it was based on an assumption that was introduced only after section X. So I suggest that . . .”
- ▶ You don’t need to provide solutions but are most welcome to do so
- ▶ Do not comment on language in your presentation (unless the text is unreadable). If you have red-penciled notes you may give them to the author after the presentation
- ▶ Positive feedback is allowed