

Practical advice for academic writing

About written assignments in general

Written assignments are home exams, course assignments, field reports, bachelor essays or master's theses. There are formal requirements of scope, layout, citations, references, and use of sources in written assignments. Violations of rules and formal requirements may result in failed exams or suspicion of cheating:

<https://www.uio.no/english/about/regulations/studies/studies-examinations/routines-cheating.html>

A well-written assignment starts with:

- Read the assign task thoroughly!
- Identify important words and terms.
- Relate the topic and terms to books and articles on the course reading list.
- Do the same with theory. Think explicitly about what you can write and not with the theoretical approach(es) you have chosen.
- Make an outline for the text.
- Formulate headings to help you structure your text. Make sure the headings cover the content of the text.
- Paragraphs may be marked in two ways and has to be consistent: 1) Indentation (<tab>) on a new line or 2) empty line (space line) between the paragraphs.

The writing process: Disciplinary independence versus disciplinary immaturity

Independence:

The written assignment should give the examiner(s) information about the student's overview and understanding of the literature and his/her ability to use the literature in an independent manner. Give your own evaluation of the literature and relate different parts of the literature with your coherent argument. Use your own sentences and constructions. The assignment should test the student's ability, understanding and evaluation of complex contexts. Check in your books after writing that you have interpreted correctly.

Begin with interpreting the exam question (just a few lines about what you think the question is about, and possible reasons for not taking into account alternative interpretations). Use your interpretation to formalte a reseach question. Mention shortly why your research questions is academically relevant. Possible important terms to be applied in the paper may be presented here. Make sure you integrate the theoretical concepts and your research question in the empirical text. The conclusion should be short. Reflect on the most important points and tie theory together with the empirical content.

Read the text out loud to yourself. This makes it easier to discover mistakes, incomplete or unclear sentences.

Immaturity:

Avoid including long quotes or paraphrased parts of your reading list or other literature (Anyone can copy text). Avoid using keywords or hints; write all sentences completely in prose.

Do not discuss concepts or theories that you do not apply later in your answer.

The text should neither include personal messages from the candidate to the examiners committee, nor excuses about time shortage etc.

Use of sources

More comprehensive guidelines and advice on writing, referencing, use of sources on

- [The University page on use of sources and citations](#)
- Citations and use of Sources at the Faculty of Social Sciences: <https://www.sv.uio.no/english/studies/resources/sources-and-references/>

Resources at the Library websites:

- the Library website [Søk & Skriv \(search and write\)](#)
- [The Library page on referencing and reference styles](#)

The home exam paper must list all sources. Scientific arguments and claims should be open to testing and criticism. Correct use of sources and citations are elements in ensuring this. Failure to properly cite sources or highlight quotes in any assignments that are handed in may be considered as cheating or attempted cheating. [Cheating can have serious consequences for students.](#)

It is important to familiarize yourself with the [Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences](#) about good citation practice and plagiarism.

Citations:

Direct quotes should be marked by quotation marks and accurate source reference in parenthesis (author(s), publication year, page). If the quote has been translated, add "my translation" within the reference parenthesis. If paraphrasing others' views and results, accurate source reference should also be provided in parenthesis, but without quotation marks. This also applies to use of others' ideas and perspectives.

For quotes longer than 40 words, the whole quote should be indented, and be separated from the rest of the text by a line before and after. If you leave out parts of the quoted text, use three points in brackets [...], four points [...] if the part left out includes the end of a sentence. Shorter quotes are included in your own text with quotation marks, as mentioned above.

Exaggerated use of quotes and paraphrasing may be sign of disciplinary immaturity, so limit these to what is necessary.

Reference styles

The department of Social Anthropology recommends the reference styles APA or Chicago 16B (Author-year). Most important is to choose one style and use it throughout your work. Litteraturhenvisninger er en del av dokumentasjonsmaterialet i vitenskapelige arbeider.

- [International standards for reference styles.](#)
- [APA](#)
- [Chicago 16B \(Author-year\)](#)

In the text:

Refer to author(s) and publishing year in a parenthesis, f.ex. (Østerberg 1986). In the case of two authors, both names need to be written every time. If more than two authors, all of them needs to be mentioned the first time, then in the following with "et.al." f.ex. "Smith et.al.". List the author name and complete reference in the bibliography at the end of the paper.

In some cases when particular attention is to a definition, an argument, a table, a paragraph or chapter. In such cases page number should also be included whether it be a direct quote or not, f.ex. (Østerberg 1986:33), (Østerberg 1986:33-5), (Østerberg and Engelstad 1995:33) or chapter (Østerberg 1986: kapittel 13).

If you refer to more than one publication of the same author, separate the publications by a, b, c (Østerberg 1995b: 33).

Do not use "ibid." and "op.cit.", but refer to the source as listed above.

Bibliography

There are many ways to set up the bibliography, but generally all styles include the following information: The author(s)' name (Surname, name/initials), year of publication, title, if the publication is part of a larger publication (i.e. chapter in a book, or article in a journal), possible editor(s) and the main publication title, place of publication, publisher, and possible pages.

The bibliography is organized alphabetically by author, secondary by year (ascending). In the case of unknown author, the publisher or institution is listed as the author, both in the text and in the bibliography.

See your chosen reference style for the various ways of referencing books, anthologies, journal article, webreferences, etc.