



Schreiben im Zentrum



Writing when studying abroad – Academic Writing Cultures in Canada and the U.S.A.

A short introduction to North-American Writing
Culture for German students

In this brochure:

- General Academic Culture in North-America
 - North-American Academic Writing
 - Content
 - Structure
 - Discourse
 - Advice from German students who studied abroad in the U.S. and Canada
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General Academic Culture in North-America

- **Workload:** Students at German universities are usually given the most work at the end of a semester. Often, a student's entire grade depends upon one final exam or final project. By contrast, students at North-American universities typically have a **demanding workload throughout the entire semester**. Though a final exam or final project may still be assigned, the North-American workload is far more similar to the workload German students experience in German High Schools. It is therefore common to **have many different small assignments**, like short papers or problem sets, **due each week**, instead of one large, comprehensive assignment at the end.
- **Professor-student interaction:** At North-American colleges and universities, students have the opportunity to **interact with professors both inside and outside the classroom**. Inside the classroom, professors may lead **class discussions** where student participation is required. Outside the classroom, professors encourage students to attend the professor's office hours. Professors are often willing to discuss a wide range of academic questions, not just ones related to the particular course. If the student cannot attend office hours, the professor will offer an alternative meeting time. As a whole, the relationship between students and professors is **less formal than in Germany**; professors tend to be **available more often and more personal**.
- **Writing Centers:** It is very common for North-American colleges and universities to maintain a Writing Center. Writing tutors, who are often fellow students, **provide other students with support at any stage of the writing-process**.

Writing Assignments: Content of the Text

What should I write about?

➤ An Argument

- Write to **convince** your reader of a particular claim or argument
 - Your claim or argument is called your thesis
- Everything you include in your text must support your thesis
 - All information included must **directly relate** to your argument and *should not* be included just to show that you have read an article or book
- Write about a **question or puzzle** and present an original solution or perspective
 - Do not argue an obvious fact that everyone would already agree with
- Sample weak thesis statement: “*The narrative talks about Julius Caesar in the war.*”
 - Summarizes the narrative instead of interpreting the narrative
 - Argument is missing
- Sample strong thesis statement: “*The narrative, therefore, is not an over-arching analysis of Caesar’s entire campaign, but rather an account based on the author’s own experience of the war*” (The Bellum Hispaniense as a Face of Battle Narrative).
 - Persuades reader to interpret the narrative in a certain way
 - Does not present all interpretations of the narrative as equal; one is better than the other

➤ **Original Thoughts**

- Text *should not* summarize class discussion or another author's ideas (unless specifically required)
- Thesis should be the **author's own, original idea**, though it can be **supported by outside sources**
- Thesis is **creative**
 - No one else has...
 - argued this specific claim OR
 - provided this sort of defense OR
 - generated these results

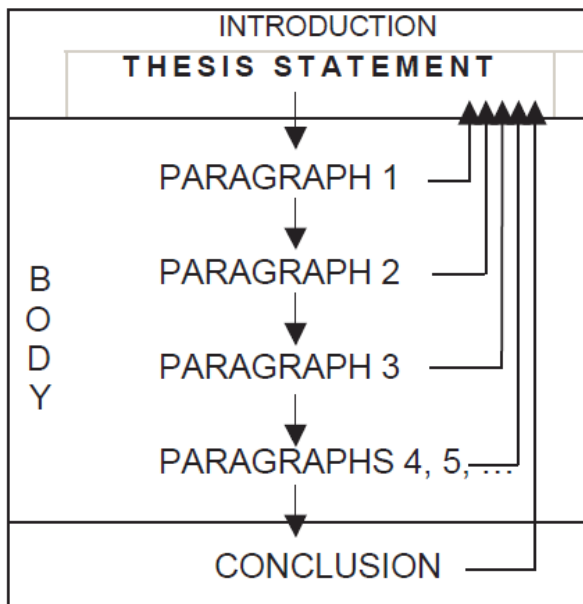
Argument & Thesis Checklist

- What is the issue or problem I am working on?
- What is my perspective on the issue? What is my solution to the problem?
- Why do I have this perspective?
- How is my perspective similar to other ideas in the discipline? How is my perspective different from other ideas in the discipline?
- Have I acknowledged the relationship between my own ideas and others' ideas?
- Does my thesis clearly state my perspective?
- Are there arguments that can be given to oppose my thesis? If not, is my perspective too obvious or too basic?
- Does my thesis answer the question or address the prompt? (If given a question or prompt from professor)

Writing Assignments: Organization of the Text

How should I order my ideas?

- Structure: Three major parts of text
 - Introduction
 - Introduce topic and/or problem
 - Present personal perspective - thesis
 - Body – split into many paragraphs
 - Provide arguments supporting thesis
 - Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence
 - Topic sentence summarizes the paragraph and links the paragraph to the thesis
 - Conclusion
 - Re-state thesis
 - No new points or information



(Granger 2004)

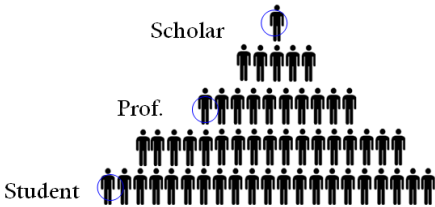
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- The structure of the text should make the text...
 - **Direct** – thesis is stated in introductory paragraph
 - thesis summarizes argument in one or two sentences, so that **the reader already knows your opinion** before reading the body of the text
 - **do not try to be neutral or share an opinion only in the conclusion**; make your perspective clear from the start of the text
 - **Logical** – paragraphs connect together to show the progression of the argument
 - in your introductory paragraph or first body paragraph, explain your argument's starting point or your underlying assumptions
 - the body of the text should show the steps you took in order to arrive at your thesis
 - **the text should not contradict itself; it should work together as a whole** to support thesis
 - **Explicit** – the organization of the text, the perspective of the author, and the purpose of each paragraph is **made clear to the reader**
 - thesis in the introductory paragraph summarizes your opinion and explains how you will defend it in the body of the text
 - each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence that summarizes the paragraph and links the paragraph to the thesis

Writing Assignments: Discourse of the Text

- Reader-friendly
 - Generally, the reader is assumed to be **educated, interested, and familiar with the discipline**, but **unfamiliar with the particular topic of the essay**
 - Features you should include to help your readers:
 - Begin Introduction with a broad attention-getter, that eases the reader into the topic
 - Analyze and explain all quotations or statistics you include
 - Make the purpose of the quotation or statistic clear to the reader
 - Use your thesis and topic sentences as signposts to help guide the reader, by telling the reader what to expect in the text or specific paragraph

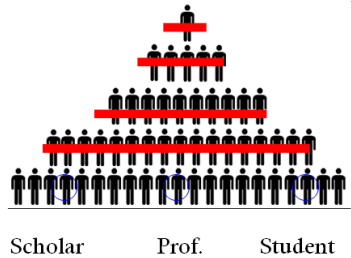
➤ Scholarly

- Author positions his or her ideas among the ideas of other scholars
- Author's thesis and text as a whole **contributes to the discipline** in a new, unique way
- Author is **confident and empowered**
 - Though the author is only a student, **he or she views him or herself as an expert, on par with other scholars in the discipline**



Hierarchy of Academic Writing in Germany

VS.



Heterarchy of Academic Writing in North-America

Structure & Discourse Checklist

- Evaluate each paragraph. Does each paragraph begin with a topic sentence? Does each paragraph cover one specific theme or topic? Does each paragraph support the thesis?
- Have I clearly, explicitly stated my argument? At what point in the text do I do this?
- Remove digressions. What information do I need to give in order to support my argument? What information is interesting, but not necessary to defend my thesis?

Advice from former German study-abroad students in North-America

“Try to write as many pieces in English at your home university. My own problem was not that I wasn't able to write in English, but that I was just not used to it. Read English Literature / literature - doesn't matter what, but read! Reading is great to learn about styles of writing, word choices, vocab in general, themes and topics.”

”Be prepared to write much during the semester. In Germany we usually write everything at the end. In order to get done all your work on time, you have to be well organized.”

“I had to use less sources than in Germany. In Germany more different sources are required.”

Further Resources

- Purdue Online Writing Lab - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
 - Help with citations, thesis statements, academic writing, grammar, etc.
- University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Writing Center handouts - <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/>
 - Variety of handouts, including ones for specific disciplines (Art History, Philosophy, etc.)
- Amherst College Writing Center - <https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/resourcesforwriters>

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Für Kurzinformationen zu verschiedenen Phasen der wissenschaftlichen und journalistischen Textproduktion, zu speziellen Textsorten des Schreibens im Studium und zu Tipps und Tricks für die Steuerung des eigenen Schreibhandelns stellt das Schreibzentrum Flyer zum Mitnehmen im Ständer vor dem Schreibzentrum oder zum Herunterladen/Ausdrucken auf unserer Homepage im Abschnitt „Selbstlernmaterial“ zur Verfügung.