

University of Zenica
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature

Writing essays and seminar papers
-a quick guide-

Zenica, 2020

1. Writing essays

1.1 Types of essays

The first thing of importance when dealing with essay writing is knowing what type of essay is required, as not every essay is the same by nature. We differentiate a variety of them such as descriptive, argument, analytical, evaluative, reflective and other essays. Hence, before even considering any further step, it is of paramount importance to ascertain the aim of the essay and which corresponding type is required.

1.2 Form of the essay

Irrespective of the different types of essays, it must always conform to a standardised form requiring an introduction, main body and conclusion. The **introduction** must present insight into what the essay shall elaborate, to that end, it may present background data to the reader, provide a quotation, a question to provoke thought and similar. Regardless of how you structure the introduction, it must contain a thesis statement. A **thesis statement** contains the **controlling idea** – the topic that will be analysed in the essay – which serves as an identification of the structure of the main body. Ideally, the introduction should follow the principle of an inverted triangle, i.e. from general to specific. The **main body** of essay may consist of one paragraph or several, depending on your needs in a given situation. What is relevant, however, is the requirement of cohesion and coherence between those paragraphs. A body paragraph must include a **topic sentence**, **supporting details** and **concluding sentence**. The **topic sentence** represent the main idea of a paragraph and the supporting details are the **arguments** (opinions, research, facts, etc.) that give that idea weight and meaning. Sometimes paragraphs include a **concluding sentence** that serves as a link or bridge to transition smoothly to the next paragraph. It is supposed to reflect your own conclusions, representing your own analysis of the elaborated case in the paragraph. The **conclusion** is the final step of an essay where no new information is added, but only a summary of the developed ideas in the essay is made. The conclusion must be in correlation to the thesis statement. To that end, the conclusion may be a restated thesis statement or even a summary of all topic sentences.

1.3 Style and formatting

Every essay, apart from the required form, also needs to conform to set standards of formatting and style. In this instance, APA style is preferred¹. It is advised to look into MS Word referencing options for easier management of sources. This entails that any references must conform to the APA style of citations as in some basic examples shown below:

Lipson, C. (1991), *Why are some international agreements informal?*, International Organization, 45, 495–538.

Additionally, the same style allows for short in-text references to avoid amassing footnotes, provided that the full reference as shown above is given in the references to the work:

“...Quote...” (Lipson, 1991).

In case the source is a webpage it should be referenced as follows:

Article title. (Year, Month Date of Publication). Retrieved from URL

Apart from the manner of referencing, the APA style also dictates the formatting of the essay. The page size in MS Word should be at default setting, A4 format, with default margins of 1”. The required font size is 12, Times New Roman with 1.5 line spacing and justified alignment. Starting from the very top of the first page, your essay must include your faculty, department, name and date on left-hand side of the page with no spacing after or before paragraph². One single paragraph space below is the location for the essay title. It’s font needs to be increased to 14, bold, centered alignment. One single paragraph space below is where you begin your essay body with 0.5” indentation on the first line of every paragraph with single spacing between every consecutive paragraph.

For visual aid, see the Figure 1 below.

¹ In other contexts, depending on individual faculty policy, other styles may be preferred.

² Unless stated otherwise, for certain categories such as letters.

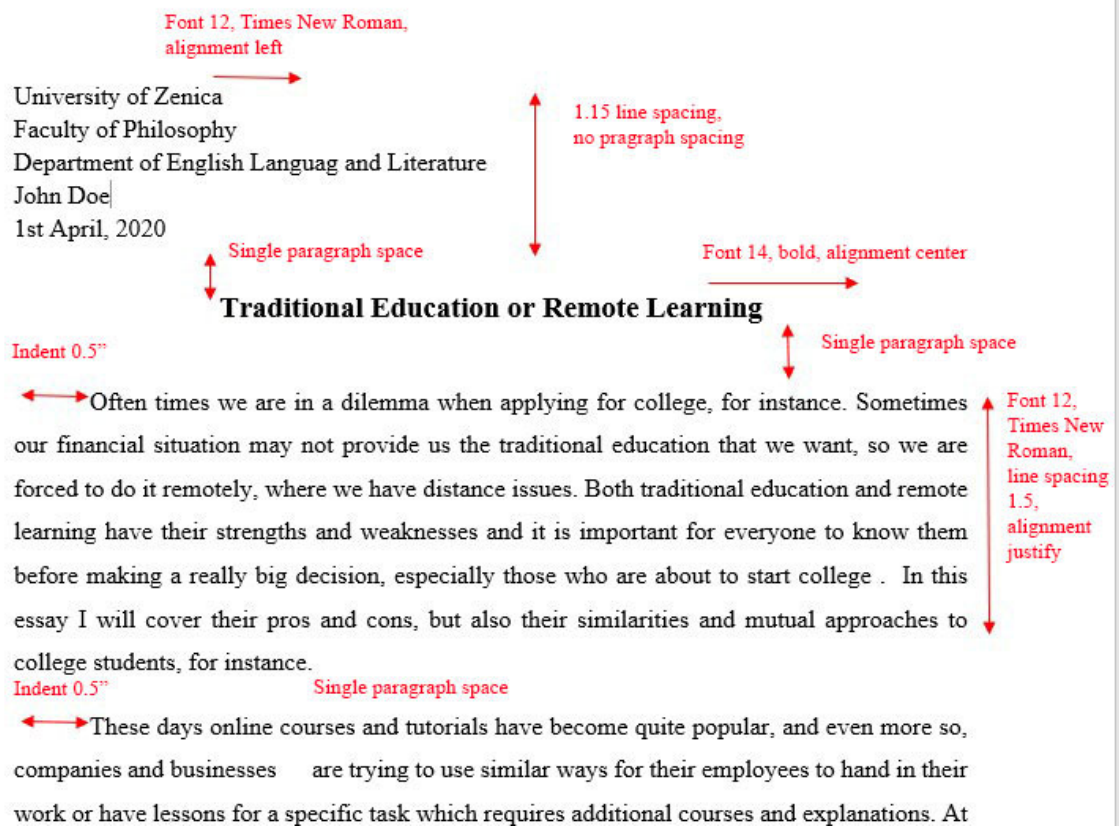


Figure 1.

2. Writing seminar papers

2.1. Definition and form

A **seminar paper** is a work of original research that presents a specific thesis and is presented to a group of interested peers, usually in an academic setting. (Aila, n.d.).

Similar to an essay, a seminar paper starts with a thesis of academic character that can either be defended or contested, though not in a shallow manner and not as constrictive as an essay can sometimes be, as the 12-page requirement of a seminar paper allows for a more in-depth approach in terms of research and presentation in writing. In terms of form, a paper shares some elements with an essay such as the **introduction**, the **main body** and **conclusion**, however, there are additional mandatory elements as shown in Figure 2 below.

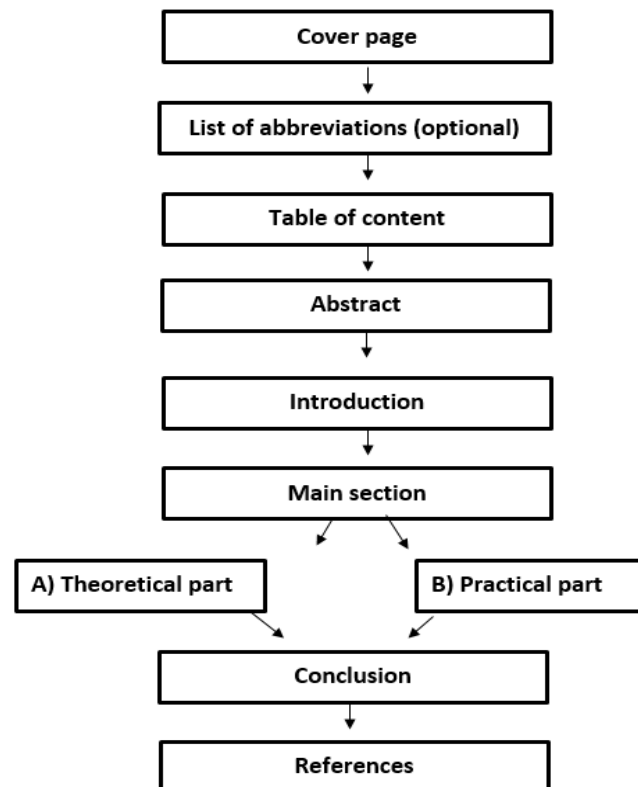


Figure 2.

The **cover page** must be in line with the presented example of Figure 3 below regarding the line spacing, paragraph spacing, font and margins.

The purpose of the **abstract** is to outline the importance, utility and underpinnings of a research paper or any other written document, in order to give potential readers the chance to familiarise themselves with the content or to wake interest for the topic. Some important key points the abstract has to include are the purpose, problem, methods, results and conclusion.

The **introduction** needs to provide the general motivation for the paper, i.e. its significance, along with the research question, i.e. the goal and also present a general outline and strategy of the paper.

The **main body** is a blend of two separate subsections. One focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis and reviews the sources the theory is referenced from, whereas, the other is founded on the application of empirical evidence to support or oppose the theoretical claims.

The **conclusion** is a concise summary of of the paper with personal assessments and opinions evaluating the papers itself, in addition to describing some future steps and outlooks based on the research. It is supposed to empohasise the importance of the research and highlight the main focal points of the paper again.

The **table of contents** must be included directly after the cover page and it has to present all the paragraphs, sections and subsections with page references for every item and identical headings in the table as they are written in the body of the paper.

“Seminar papers have to have a clear structure. This implies that sections and subsections follow in a logical order and do not merely constitute a random enumeration of aspects relevant to the main topic. The paper has to be subdivided into paragraphs, sections and subsections. Employing sections and subsections only makes sense if sub-chapter 1.1 is, for example, followed by sub-chapter 1.2. Sections, which are shorter than one page should be avoided. When structuring your seminar paper, please make sure to include reader-friendly transitions to guide the reader from one section to the subsequent one.” (Ahlheim, 2015)

Additionally, all figures, tables, charts and similar have to be numbered consecutively in a short note (text box, for instance) below in TNR, font 10, just like footnotes.

2.2. Plagiarism

Any paper without the appropriate reference list is considered plagiarism. Any paper without corresponding direct and indirect quotations of “borrowed” intellectual property is considered plagiarism. It is of paramount importance to list any intellectual property used as a source to avoid copyright infringement, this pertains not only to textual sources but also any charts, research data, polls, figures and similar. Therefore, you are obliged to use the APA style of citations.

2.3. General format rules of the APA style

General rules on formatting according to APA standards for the body text³:

- The paper should have 12 pages, unless specified otherwise
- Margins should be left at 1” (i.e. the default setting of MS Word)
- Font type: Times New Roman, font size: 12
- Line spacing 1.5 (unless specified otherwise)
- Alignment: justified
- Indentation 0.5” at the beginning of every paragraph

³ Unless specified otherwise

University of Zenica
Faculty of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature
Course (if necessary)

Title

Mentor:

Student:

Zenica, date

Figure 3.

3. References

- Michael Ahlheim, *Guidelines for the Writing of Seminar Papers*, 2015, n.p. Retrieved from https://umweltoekonomie.uni-hohenheim.de/fileadmin/einrichtungen/umweltoekonomie/1-Studium_Lehre/Materialien_und_Informationen/Guidelines_Seminar_Paper_NEW_14.10.15.pdf
- Fredrick Aila, *Guide to Writing Seminar Papers*, n.d., n.p.
- Dirk Thißen, *How to Write a Seminar Paper*, n.d., n.p. Retrieved from <https://tcs.rwth-aachen.de/www-bib/downloads/How%20to%20write%20a%20seminar%20paper.pdf>