



How to write a term paper in linguistics

Text and format

Your text must adhere to the standard linguistic notation conventions (see separate handout). Careful proof-reading and checking of language and all formalities is absolutely necessary. If your paper shows too many formal inadequacies (this means the form of your written English, too!), it will not be accepted. The main text of a term paper should consist of approximately 24,000 and 28,000 characters (without blanks); ca. 10-12 pages. This count refers to your own text, i.e., excluding all front and back matter (cover sheet, table of contents and reference list) as well as appendices.

DIN A4, 12-point font size, 1.5 spaced

- left margin: 2.5 cm, right margin: 4 cm, top and bottom margin: 2.5 cm
- page numbers (no page numbers on cover sheet and table of contents; page count starts only with the first page of your main text, i.e., usually with the introduction)

Structure

- **Cover sheet** (name of institution, course of subject, seminar details, paper title, your name, matriculation number and e-mail address)
 - **Table of Contents**
 - **Abstract** (a short informational text [100-200 words] that captures the essence of your paper, i.e., what you did, why and how you did it: methodology, results, and conclusion. It should help the reader to quickly ascertain the purpose, content and usefulness of the paper)
1. **Introduction** (central problem, wider (seminar) context and research question, i.e., what you want to find out, or hypothesis)
 2. **Previous research/literature survey** (brief overview of the state-of-the-art, i.e., the "Forschungsstand", what other linguists have found out and written about the topic)
 3. **Methodology** (the data you used, how you collected, filtered and analyzed the data)
 4. **Results** (quantitative and qualitative presentation and analysis of your results)
 5. **Discussion of results** (critical discussion of the results with respect to the initially formulated research question or hypothesis)
 6. **Conclusion** (summary, evaluation, problems you encountered, suggestions for further research)

- **References** (the research literature you have used)
- **Appendices** (large tables or figures which cannot be placed within the main text, if any)

Referencing

In linguistics, references are given **in the text, not as foot- or endnotes**. Footnotes are only used for additional information that does not fit into the context of your argument. Use only the last name of the author you are quoting or referring to, the year of publication of the respective book or article, and the page number(s). The work you are quoting or referring to can then be easily identified in the bibliography.

Examples:

Due to the fact that the structures to be tested are not highly frequent in written or spoken English, let alone in learner language, procedures of low explicitness, e.g., unstructured interviews or spontaneous conversation, will not provide data rich enough for our purposes (see Nunan 1992: 137).

Schmidt (1924: 4) claims that ...

Direct quotes are indicated by quotation marks and are also given in the text:

It has been argued that successful second language acquisition research needs to gather "as much information as possible about this complex piece of human behavior" (Tarone 1994: 335).

Examples given in the text are numbered separately throughout the paper:

- (1) Her father I like but her mother I can't stand.
- (2) I had two really good friends. Damon and Jimmy their names were.
- (3) It was necessary to pass if I was to stay at Oxford, and pass I did.

Tables or graphs/figures are also numbered separately and need a table/figure caption:

MAIN VERB	NUMBER OF OCCURENCES IN 1124 TOKENS OVERALL
<i>come</i>	204
<i>stand</i>	121
<i>lie</i>	110
<i>hang</i>	46
<i>sit</i>	41
<i>go</i>	33
<i>grow</i>	24
<i>rise</i>	23
<i>appear</i>	22
<i>live</i>	19
total	643 = 57%

Table 1: Non-*be* main verbs appearing in inversions (Birner 1995)

Bibliography (in linguistics usually called 'References')

Follow the standards used in the seminar bibliography. If there is more than one publication of the same author in a particular year, please use small letters following the year of publication to identify the respective work in the bibliography (e.g. Lieber 1992a, Lieber 1992b). Most importantly, you should follow one style consistently. **Do not mix different styles in one document!**

Examples:

a) books

Bauer, Laurie (2001), *Morphological Productivity*. Cambridge: CUP.

Booij, Gert, ed. (2000), *Morphologie: ein internationales Handbuch zur Flexion und Wortbildung*. Berlin: de Gruyter. Dressler, Wolfgang, Willi Mayerthaler, Oswald Panagl & Wolfgang Wurzel (1987), *Leitmotifs in Natural Morphology*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

b) journal articles

Bybee, Joan & Carol Lynn Moder (1983), "Morphological classes as natural categories", *Language* 59, 251-270.

Lieber, Rochelle (1992), "Compounding in English", *Rivista di Linguistica* 4:1, 79-96.

c) articles in edited volumes

Plag, Ingo (2000), "Irregular past tense formation in English interlanguage", in Ingo Plag & Klaus P. Schneider (eds.), *Language Use, Language Acquisition and Language History. (Mostly) Empirical Studies in Honour of Rüdiger Zimmermann*. Trier: WVT, 134-149.

d) internet sources

To quote files available on the WWW, give

- the author's name (last name first) or name of publishing institution (if known)
- the full title of the page "in quotation marks"
- the title of the complete work (if applicable) *in italics*
- the full URL or DOI <in angular brackets> and the date of access in parentheses

Examples:

Quinion, Michael. "CYBERPLAGUE. Help! A prefix out of control!", *World Wide Words. Investigating international English from a British viewpoint*, <<http://www.worldwidewords.org/articles/cyber.htm>> (05 November 2025).

Research and Development Unit for English Studies, University of Liverpool. *WebCorp: The Web as Corpus*, <<http://www.webcorp.org.uk/>> (05 November 2025).