

WISP GUIDELINES FOR INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

During Your 5-year MA studies, in order to prepare You for the task of writing an MA thesis, You are given two opportunities to practice the skills that will later make Your thesis-writing much easier. In our catalogue these opportunities are called

- Theoretical Supervised Research (2nd year, for the last time in 2012/13)
- and
- Empirical Supervised Research (3rd year)

You have a full academic year to complete each of these papers.

These guidelines are intended to direct Your activity in a general way so You can turn in a good paper on time.

You are responsible for finding Yourself a tutor for each of these projects. This should happen by the end of the school year preceding the writing. If You do not have a tutor You will not be allowed to register for courses. A list of tutors and their interests is published on our website. You must turn in a „**tutor declaration**“ to our office as soon as You find a tutor.

The tutor advises and aids You in preparing a schedule of work as well as in all other aspects of the research. Upon completion, each paper is graded by the tutor and reviewed by another scholar, who is selected by the tutor, based on competence in the field.

The research topic should be neither too simple nor too complex, too narrow nor too broad. The topic should be scientifically grounded, relevant to the competences You and Your tutor have, interesting, manageable within one year. The paper must be based on scientific literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books – not textbooks). You have access through the Psych Faculty library and through BUW to on-line databases such as ScienceDirect, EBSCO, Proquest. Although Your tutor can probably point You towards some literature, You are responsible for performing literature searches.

Potential topics include:

- A causal explanation of some phenomenon (“Why do people who self-silence have unhappier relationships?”)
- Comparison of groups (“Do people who self-silence have unhappier relationships than people who don’t self-silence?”)
- Fine-tuning a selected method (“How can we best measure self-silencing on a physiological level?”)
- Adaptation/normalization of a tool (“An adaptation of the Silencing the Self Scale (Jack, 1991) to the Polish context”)
- An improved replication of a published study (“The relationship between depression, self-esteem, and self-silencing: A replication and extension of Page, Stevens, and Galvin’s 1996 study”)
- A scientific explanation of a current public event (“Does self-silencing behavior contribute to suicide attempts made by bullied gay teenagers?”)

WHAT THE PAPER SHOULD LOOK LIKE

Overall

The paper should be about 25-30 pages in total, including title page, references, appendices. The manuscript (including: references, spacing, fonts, margins, tables, pictures etc) should be written in APA style (6th edition) (this means, among many, many other things, double-spaced and written in size 12 Times, Arial, or Courier font, and margins of 2.5cm). You can find a multitude of sites online that will describe APA style in more or less detail. Feel free to print double-sided to conserve paper! The text should be divided into sections mimicking papers published in peer-reviewed journals, including:

abstract, keywords, introduction, method, results, discussion, references, appendices (obviously some of these are relevant only to the empirical paper). The paper should be written in concise, comprehensive style, aimed at intelligent, educated reader outside the specific field of psychology about which You are writing (see <http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html> for Strunk and White's reference for good writing style). The paper should be submitted in two hard copies to Your tutor (one for the tutor, one for the reviewer) and in electronic form to the office (best to hand it in on a CD).

Theoretical

The theoretical paper is a literature review – answering a theoretical question, presenting and discussing an issue. Through writing this paper, You are expected to learn how to formulate a valid theoretical question, perform a literature search, select relevant literature, summarize findings and critically discuss them in the light of the research question. Please make sure You are guided by some theory as You write Your paper – not instincts or casual observations. This paper does not involve conducting a study and data analysis.

Empirical

The empirical paper is, essentially, a research report of research performed by the student (together with the tutor) or an analysis of existing raw data (for example from a poll or from a tutor's project). A fantastic resource for writing an empirical paper is Daryl Bem's classic paper available for download here: <http://www.psych.uw.edu.pl/jasia/scicomm.html> (among other places). Through writing this paper, You are expected to learn how to formulate a valid research question, summarize existing sources and draw on them to come up with reasonable hypotheses, design and perform research, manage data, analyze results and discuss results in relation to theoretical background and own hypothesis. There are three types of research report:

- Descriptive – case study report, possibly comparison of several cases, qualitative research
- Correlational study
- Experimental study

TAKE NOTE! The study should not be too difficult to execute! Don't design a study using materials that You can't get or equipment You have never used! Don't choose a participant population You don't have access to! A bad discussion section contains practical, methods-related excuses about why the study didn't work! Make sure Yours isn't a bad discussion section!

A SUGGESTED TIMELINE

By the end of the winter semester, You should have:

- a topic
- a page-long (?) step-by-step outline of what You will write
- a list of references, all relevant and citable, at least 10 deep

By the end of the spring semester, You should have:

- a final version, after at least two rough drafts that went through a process of editing, either by You alone, or by You and Your tutor
- this final version is graded by Your tutor (allow two weeks)
- this final version is given by Your tutor to a reviewer, who also gives it a grade (allow two weeks)
- both Your tutor and Your reviewer must fill out a review sheet and give it to You
- there is a contest for the best Theoretical Paper and best Empirical Paper in May-ish

ATTENTION: The grades from Your tutor and the reviewer are averaged and, if necessary, rounded up. You should get a „**theroetical/empirical paper review sheet**“ from both Your tutor and Your reviewer with comments and a grade. These should also be turned in to the WISP office so that Your grade can be appropriately recorded.

The learning outcomes for these papers are as follows

EMPIRICAL PAPER

Knowledge

- The student knows the theoretical bases for statistical analyses of results from empirical studies: the logical and philosophical bases of empirical research; probability; operationalization of psychological variables.
- Knows basic statistical methods used to describe variables, describe relationships between variables, and to verify research hypotheses through inferential statistics.
- Understands the scientific method in the context of empirical sciences, its advantages and limitations.
- Is acquainted with specific scientific psychological terminology, distinguishes theoretical from operational concepts.
- Knows the main methods of measurement of mental properties. Knows the assumptions and postulates of classic and contemporary psychometrics.
- Knows the basic concepts of intellectual property and uses them in academic life.

Skills

- The student is able to find, analyse, evaluate, select and integrate information using various sources, also from fields of knowledge beyond psychology, and from critical judgements on its basis, as an exit point to planning his own studies.
- Can formulate research questions and hypotheses, and operationalize them. Can create a research plan adequate to the research question.
- Presents research questions with statistical concepts and translates them to hypotheses, which he then verifies using appropriate methods of statistical inference.
- Has advanced research skills encompassing construction of research tools and conducting experiments, which allow for solving complex problems in various fields of psychological research.
- Has advanced oral presentation skills, in Polish or a foreign language, on various topics within psychology, and can prepare a presentation in the form of a research report or conference poster.
- Uses computer programs: statistical packages, calculation spreadsheets, text editors, to perform calculations and describe results from empirical studies.
- Can determine the ethical value of his own research and scientific pursuits.
- Can conduct substantive argumentation, utilizing personal views that are based on critical analysis of works from various fields of knowledge, and can create synthetic summaries on their basis.
- Can critically analyse popular psychological publications and separate views based on common sense from scientific data.

Social competencies

- The student is prepared and has the foundations to conduct independent empirical research. Presents and evaluates their results responsibly, critically and objectively.
- Communicates about data and conclusions from research understandably, using adequate indicators, tables, and graphs.
- Understands ethical standards for scientific research, uses them, following principles of scientific integrity. Is aware of and follow the basic principles of behaviour in an academic community.
- Is able to present a critical opinion concerning psychological materials presented in the media.
- Recognizes that the complex nature of links between psychological research and other fields of knowledge causes these fields to be in constant development, which as a consequence requires constant learning and updating knowledge.