

General assessment criteria for essays and theses at the Spatial Modelling Lab

Degree of independent performance

Conceptual and literature works:

The topic should deal with a new aspect of a problem. Your statements must be based on empirical research results. Existing literature should not be referenced side by side in a reproducing manner, but should be discussed under the aspect of the topic (e.g. literature review to answer your research question). Papers that essentially only reproduce the thoughts of various authors without discussing them and developing own thoughts cannot be assessed as “good”.

Empirical works:

Based on the available literature, a question should be developed that is empirically tested. The degree of independent performance here results from the presentation of the hypotheses, the implementation, evaluation, and interpretation of the investigation.

Substantive content

Wherever possible, you should engage with recent literature. The use of older literature should be justified (e.g. if no current research is available; if the literature serves to derive a topic). If several, perhaps even contradictory views on a topic are discussed in the literature, this should be made clear in your work. Contradictions that have not been clarified in the scholarly literature should not be formulated as “incontrovertible findings” but presented in a critical manner. If central concepts of a topic are missing, this is a deficiency of the work.

Planning and conciseness

The topic should be narrowed down so that it can be dealt with within the given framework (time and effort). It is better to leave out certain areas without justification than to get bogged down and lose sight of the overall goal. Each step and each section must be justified argumentatively.

Mastery of methods

In empirical work, this mainly concerns the derivation of questions, the formulation of hypotheses, the testing of hypotheses, and the derivation and discussion of results. The evaluation can be quantitative – in which case the statistical methods used must be mastered – or qualitative – in which case the methods used in qualitative research (interview, survey, etc.) must be mastered. In the case of “literature work”, it must be possible to assess the quality and significance of the studies included. The latter, too, requires basic knowledge of empirical research. In empirical and “literature work”, mastery of methods includes literature research and presentation of the results of the literature research.

Structure

The paper must be structured logically. In the introduction there should be a short introduction to the topic, some reasoning for the choice of the topic, etc. It should be clear from the introduction what the aim of the thesis or essay is. It is helpful if the introduction also provides an overview of the coming chapters. The structure should be stringent with regard to the research question. It is not a good idea to present everything that can be found on a topic in the paper. Instead, you should only present everything that is significant in terms of the research question. The treatment of the actual topic should take up most of the space. Any prior clarification of terms, theoretical contexts, etc. that may be necessary should therefore be seen in the light of their relevance to the actual topic of the paper and dealt with accordingly.

Your thesis or essay should address the following ten questions:

- (i) What is the topic of the work? How does it differ from related issues?
- (ii) Why are you dealing with this topic? (thematic relevance)
- (iii) What is the objective of the work?
- (iv) What research exists to date on the topic and the question?
- (v) Which questions and research gaps can be derived from the current state of research?
- (vi) How does your work differ from previous research?
- (vii) What methods can be used to deal with the topic and which ones have been used?
- (viii) What are the main results obtained and how do you assess them?
- (ix) What are the main conclusions that can be drawn from the results and what do they mean in terms of placing them in the context of related research?
- (x) What follow-up research gaps can be derived from the results?

The ten questions can be divided into chapters and serve as an orientation for the content of the research paper. They also serve as a content checklist.

(1) Introduction: (i) + (ii) + (iii)

(2) State of the art: (iv) + (v) + (vi)

(3) Methodology: (vii)

(4) Results and discussion: (viii)

(5) Conclusion and outlook: (ix) + (x)

Logical consistency and train of thought

Generally, all trains of thought must be presented in a comprehensible manner. Argumentation must be structured in such a way that consequences follow logically from the premises. A good line of thought also includes that the individual parts of the work come together – have a “red thread” – and are not strung together incoherently. It must always be clear to the reader why something is written at any point. References and back-references are possible to a limited extent but should better be avoided. If too many references are necessary, there is something wrong with the structure of your text and the latter should be reconsidered.

Linguistic expression

Work that is “rough around the edges”, has serious grammatical, stylistic, or spelling errors will be graded lower. A few typing errors or errors caused by shifting etc. in the word processing programme will hardly affect the grade of a good paper; more frequent errors of this kind, however, which indicate careless work, can lead to a lowering of the grade.

Formal aspects

This aspect refers to the consideration of general instructions such as correct citation, the presentation and completeness of, among other things, the list of contents, bibliography, tables, and figures, as well as the other documents to be added to the thesis (see also the citation guidelines of the Department of Spatial Planning).

General assessment levels

The following levels provide rough guidelines for the assessment.

A rating of “very good” (1.0–1.3) will be awarded,

if all criteria are optimally fulfilled, the work has no errors, and clearly stands out from the average in terms of content and processed literature, above all also the independent development of the topic. Mastery of methods, independence, and stringency of the work should demonstrate excellent scientific skills. Whether “something came out” of an investigation is irrelevant.

A rating of “good” (1.7–2.3) will be awarded,

if all criteria are fulfilled, the work does not contain any serious errors, and the topic has been dealt with independently, critically reflected upon and comprehensively.

A rating of “satisfactory” (2.7–3.3) will be awarded,

If the criteria are fulfilled with minor deductions (e.g. incorrect citation, insufficient selection of literature, uncritical adoption of unproven statements), especially also if the work is exhausted in the reproduction of the existing literature.

A rating of “sufficient” (3.7–4.0) will be awarded,

if some criteria are not met, the work shows disproportions in its structure, important areas, important literature are not discussed, but despite deficiencies an engagement with the topic is still recognisable.

A rating of “poor/fail” (5.0) will be awarded,

if most of the criteria are not met or the work contains serious flaws.