

Justus-Liebig-University Gießen

Department of English

S: How to manage to write your MA-Thesis or your *Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit*

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## **Self-Reflection Based on the Presentation and Feedback in the Seminar**

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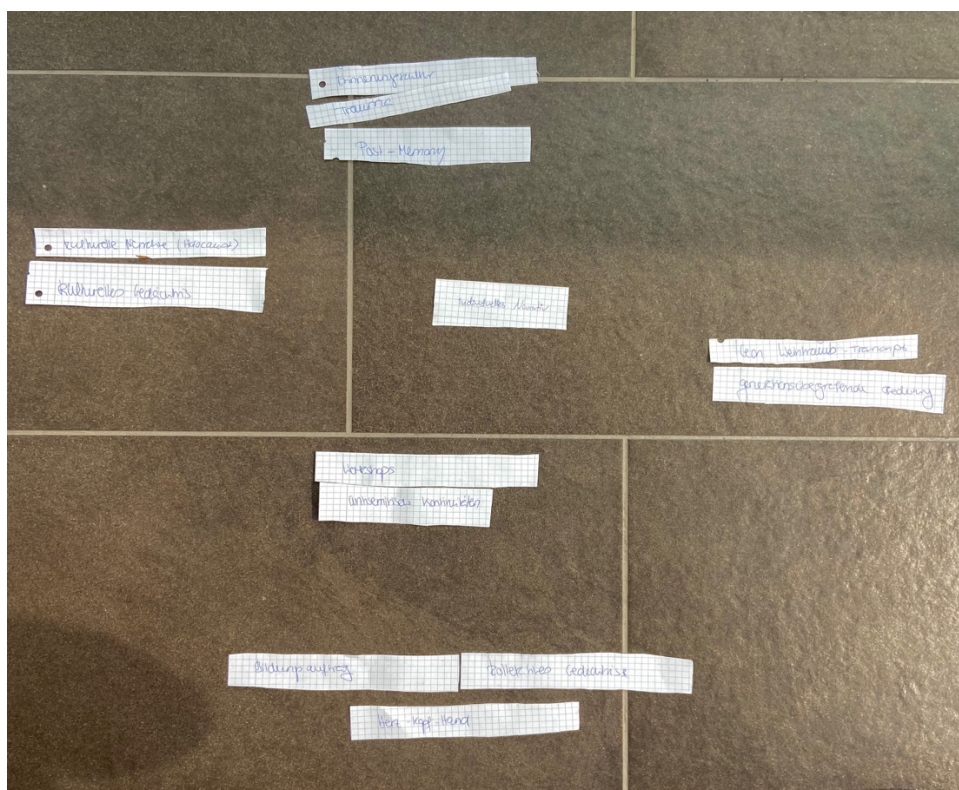
## **1 How did the preparation of the presentation supported me in writing my *Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit*?**

Writing an error-free term paper seems impossible. Small mistakes will always appear during the writing process, which the author of the work tends to overlook over time. But a perfectionist is not satisfied by just accepting small mistakes which are not avoidable. Every written term paper has to be error-free and almost perfect. If the writer did not do everything they could, it would not be enough to create the perfect text and being worth a good grade. Oftentimes, one's needs tend to suffer from the consequences of the behavior of a perfectionist. Ignoring personal needs can lead to more imbalanced and stressful phases, which feel even worse. Even smaller tasks can lead to sleepless nights, self-doubt, and sinking self-confidence in terms of academic writing competencies. These components are like a vicious circle that is difficult to get out of. A sleepless night leads to an unfocused day – an unfocused day ends up in self-doubt because the writer does not accomplish as much as they have to – not achieving self-imposed goals can lead to low self-confidence because the writer wants to achieve at least their own goals.

Accordingly, almost every major or graded writing assignment seems to be very challenging for a perfectionist. Therefore, I was even more scared in terms of the upcoming 60 to 90-page long *Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit (WHA)*, which is equivalent to a Master Thesis. When I started structuring the *WHA* and dealing with the upcoming research project, the stress level was already higher than it should be. I wanted to prepare everything perfectly so that the writing process would not feel as bad as I feared. In the colloquium, the vicious circle, fear of failure, and upcoming pressure were intensively thematized. Addressing my own problems in a direct way did not always feel comfortable, but it took away the feeling of being alone with my fears. Some of the participants in the colloquium talked about perfectionism and how it sabotages their academic work. Knowing that many students have the same problems was a relieving but also frightful experience.

Apart from the exchange about my personal main struggles with writing an academic paper, I was required to prepare a presentation that presented the topic of my *WHA*. Again, there was a lot of fear of giving a presentation that was not good enough. In the process of preparing my presentation, I was already in an advanced state of writing my paper. I only had to add another chapter, the introduction, and my conclusion.

Especially in the last few weeks before the submission, I questioned my performance more than usual. With the upcoming presentation, I felt even more pressured because I was also afraid to notice during the preparations of the presentation that I was missing the red thread or even realize that everything I had written in the last few months did not make sense. So, I was afraid of the potential fear. In preparation for my presentation, a group exercise in the colloquium helped me reflect on my work. My writing partner and I designed a chart that would represent the structure of my *WHA*. Since I was still struggling with my last chapter at this point, visualizing the structure helped me immensely to narrow down the content of the last chapter.



**Fig.1: Mind Map - Connections between Chapters**

Based on that, I was able to structure the final chapter and ultimately relate it to the previous chapters without hesitation. But how is the task in the colloquium connected to the preparations of my presentation? First, I realized that visualizing a problem helps me to get a broad overview of my *WHA*. In preparation for my presentation, I had to get an overview to select what I wanted to present or which content was beyond the scope. By selecting the content, I have already been able to see the connections between my work. I became aware of the good structure of my *WHA* when I practiced the presentation

several times at home and realized that I didn't have to worry about a non-existent thread. The intensive examination of what I had already written and the selection of the contents gave me the feeling that I am very well versed in the topic of my thesis and that I am the expert on my own work. Accordingly, I was able to give the presentation with more confidence than usual. I noticed the difference between a presentation that does not cover a topic that interests you and a presentation that reflects your own work and interests.

On the other hand, I realized during the preparation of my presentation that I have more passion and interest for the topic of my work than I thought. The way I dealt with the topic and connected the content with current events showed me once again that I am the expert on my own work. This point was also taken up in the feedback from the audience, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **2 Personal learnings out of the feedback of the seminar**

The feedback of the audience and Prof. Olson was particularly important to me, as I had only received feedback from my supervisor before, which did not turn out to be helpful advice. Again, I was concerned about the upcoming feedback because of the fear of being criticized for something that might not be good enough. Accordingly, in the following chapter, I would like to discuss the feedback and how it influenced me.

I received mostly positive feedback on my presentation. The audience emphasized my passion for the topic and the understandable structure of my work. These comments significantly influenced my self-image in relation to the *WHA*. I doubted having an understandable structure that represents how the content of my *WHA* is built up before, but the comments proved me wrong. It was very helpful that fellow students and Prof. Olson trusted me to complete my *WHA* successfully. What particularly stood out was that Prof. Olson highlighted that the topic of my *WHA* was too broad in terms of content and that I could formulate a dissertation out of it. During the process of my *WHA*, I also realized that I had to put too much effort into the research and writing process, but I did not trust my own evaluations. Accordingly, it was a positive experience to get this feedback from a professor. Here, I would like to highlight that the audience had no connection to the subject of my work before and only formulated these comments based on my presentation.

Regardless of the feedback that considered my presentation skills and the content structure of my presentation, I was especially grateful for comments about my passion

for the topic. It was very important to me that the structure of the presentation make it obvious that I care a lot about an appropriate handling of the topic. In addition, I aimed to show how crucial it is to deal with the topic of memory culture and the Holocaust. In this sense, my work is only an exemplary example of an intensive examination of the topic. The audience mentioned in their feedback that they particularly liked the opening quote of my presentation, and that it was also noticeable that I put a lot of work into my thesis. Another positive feedback was related to my self-reflection. In my presentation, I also explained my research process. Therefore, I also evaluated my failures and how I dealt with them. In summary, the positive feedback has temporarily calmed my fears. I think it will take time to evaluate myself positively, though.

I took the negative comments only secondarily negatively because every comment was very constructive and pointed out weaknesses rather than strongly emphasizing them. Some peers mentioned that I seem like I do not trust my competencies. From this, I learned that I should work on my self-confidence. Also, in terms of a potential future in academic research areas. In addition, some people added that I should not forget the "whole work", as I often get lost in detail. Therefore, during the writing process, I tried to focus on the chapter itself but did not forget that it was part of a larger thesis. Regarding my presentation skills, some fellow students mentioned that I should reduce my speaking speed. Unfortunately, I have been struggling with this problem since high school. Whenever I give a presentation in front of other students or lecturers, my voice shakes, I talk very fast, and my face blushes. So far, I am not sure how to overcome this problem. I have already noticed that I feel better when I am well versed in the subject, but still, I get into situations where I feel very nervous. This also results in the problem that my presentations come across as if I am reading off text. To avoid falling into nervousness, I write very structured notes. Again, I should try to speak more freely and practice my presentation more often. In terms of conveying the content of my thesis, fellow students mentioned that it would have been more helpful if I had contextualized my thesis more in detail. I took this feedback seriously, as I was unsure how to present a 90-page thesis in 20 minutes.

Apart from that, the audience asked for more comprehensive insight into my research. Within the presentation, I only dealt with my method superficially. If I had the possibility to hold the presentation again, I would make significant changes. I would refer

more precisely to the questionnaires and explain how I evaluated them. Here I could use exemplary examples to make clear to the audience how I arrived at my results. All in all, I really benefited from the feedback of my fellow students because they evaluated my presentation from an unknowing position in the field of my thesis.

### **3 Conclusion**

Finally, I would like to discuss my expectations for the seminar and evaluate to what extent the content helped me out during the writing process of my thesis. I decided to attend the seminar because I already knew that I would be writing my thesis during the semester. Accordingly, I hoped to get helpful feedback regarding my work process, on the one hand. Since I already knew that I quickly I tend to be stressed and often doubt myself, I also expected a positive exchange with other fellow students. Even before the seminar, it turned out to be helpful when fellow students shared their experiences to support each other.

I was a bit disappointed that I was the only student who started to write the thesis at the beginning of the seminar. Accordingly, I realized that the exchange with the fellow students was somewhat lacking since we were not all in the same situation.

Nevertheless, we were able to talk about methods that are useful to cope with individual problems like writing block or perfectionism. Regardless, I really liked the open design of the colloquium. The composition of the course and the way of teaching created a safe space, which facilitated open communication. Through the presentations of the fellow students, one could learn skills from the others but also gather new ideas through the creative ideas of the others.

In summary, the presentations of fellow students gave me inspiration for new topics to work with and pointed out that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. Personally, the feedback has especially supported me in realizing where my weaknesses are and how I can work on them. In addition, the positive feedback emphasized that I should have more self-confidence and not always doubt my performances. Finally, the course has challenged my English in a positive way. I realized that I am able to have daily conversations and academic discussions in a foreign language without being scared of using another language than my mother tongue.

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