

Handbook of Project Writing

Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies

Aalborg University

**Handbook
of
Project Writing**

How to Write a Project
A Guide for Foreign Students at Aalborg University

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Print: UNI.PRINT, Aalborg University
© 1998 Study Board of Foreign Languages – Aalborg University
2nd revised edition – August 2001
English Translation – March 2002
Revised – September 2004
Revised – August 2005

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1. Introduction – what is a project?

Aalborg University has traditionally used the project as a study form. However, gradual changes to this specific study form have emerged. For instance, increased emphasis has been placed on the individual student's performance within the framework of the group; other work forms and examination types supplement the project; and more projects are written in the students' foreign language – to mention but a few of the essential changes that have occurred. Nevertheless, the process is basically the same: a group of students (usually 3-5) prepares a report about a given problem in their academic field. The majority of the exams will still take place in groups and will be centred on the project report. In other words, when the student's work is evaluated at the university, it is largely in relation to his or her contribution to the project work.

Consequently, project work, student interaction and co-operation, advising, and the final product are fundamental features of the students' academic lives at Aalborg University. In order to gain the most from one's academic life, it is worthwhile to put time and effort into learning about the structure of the project. It is by no means difficult to argue why it is necessary to master the preparation of a project report. It is far more difficult to tell exactly how students become good at mastering this skill. Below are a number of essential elements and tools for achieving this goal.

Practice and experience are probably the most essential factors. During the making of one's first project, it is particularly important to gain some practical experience in how to work in a group, how to search for literature and find the necessary material, how to work while being pressed for time, and how to take an exam. For example, one will probably experience that it is important to begin the search for literature early on in the process; that one works better with some fellow students and not so well with others; that it is crucial to have a schedule for the completion of the project, and so on. Upon the completion of the first project, one is now able to focus increasingly on academic and methodological demands.

Course in project work method. As a help to getting started on the first project, new students are offered a course in project work at the first semester. The aim with this course is to introduce new students to the structure of the project and to the requirements for a finished product. It is up to the student – in co-operation with his or her fellow students and adviser – to put this knowledge into practice. The course also deals with questions such as how to use the project form.

This and other books on method. On a final note, it is important to mention that the project form at Aalborg University is meant to function as the first step toward learning an academic work form. Therefore, the project is, to some extent, subject to the same requirements as is other academic work such as, e.g. refereed articles.

This implies that investigations into ‘the real world’ (*empirical* investigations) must be conducted according to certain principles. In other words, the student should eventually learn how to do empirical research and be aware of the consequences of choosing one method over another. The student can find his or her methodological material either according to interest or to meet the empirical requirements.

Furthermore, there are some specific requirements for how to use sources. These requirements (for example, footnotes and quotations) can be found in this book (chapter 6). This book is first and foremost a work of reference that deals with practical issues in relation to the work process itself and the development of the final product – the project report. With regard to other dimensions of scientific research, such as empirical investigation or theoretical issues, we refer to other methodological and theoretical materials. The project adviser can assist the student in finding the appropriate literature. Some of the most commonly used books on methodology are referred to in the bibliography of this handbook. With regard to specific academic requirements, we refer to the curriculum, the students’ handbook and the project adviser.

2. The Phases of the Project

Project work is characterized by being a problem-oriented process of realization rather than being purely a knowledge acquisition. Usually, the process of realization consists of two parts. The first part takes its point of departure in a lack of knowledge in relation to one's surroundings, that is, one wonders about something, which is different from what one expected, or, which turns out to be different from what one would expect. This wondering may result in the formulation of a problem that is to be dealt with. The second part consists of thinking through the steps that are needed to take in order to investigate and potentially 'solve' the problem. The realization, then, occurs in the interplay between actions and thought, where one carefully considers one's actions and acts according to one's thought process.

As a result of this interaction between action and thought, a number of processes usually occur in project work, which correlate in certain ways. The succession of the processes reflects that they enter into an overall process of realization. The project's different phases may, thus, be compared to a spiral, inasmuch as understandings gained during the process may prompt the re-evaluation of previous understandings.

Here it must be emphasized that the phases should not be perceived as a cooking recipe from which one cannot diverge. Rather, they should be regarded as guidelines for understanding the processes one passes through in the course of writing a project, and they should provide an indication of where the student is situated in the process at a given moment. In general terms, the different phases are described as follows:

2.1 Introduction and Choosing a Topic

The group is formed, and each group member presents their knowledge and interests. Potential project topics are discussed. The topic should, of course, be relevant to the student's academic program and must fall inside the framework of the curriculum. It may sometimes be tempting to choose a topic, which is cutting-edge and therefore interesting. It is important, however, to keep in mind that an interesting or cutting-edge topic does not necessarily prompt a good problem formulation.

When the group has decided on a topic, the students start putting together their first materials. In this initial phase, one should try to find material, which bears an overall relevance to the topic. The main purpose of finding and reading the initial material is to acquire a general understanding of the topic and to think up interesting questions in relation to it. If the student discovers at an early point in the process that material relating to his or her topic is difficult to come by, a reconsideration of the topic may be necessary.

2.2 Choosing a Problem

Based on the collected information and material, this provides a general understanding of the chosen topic, which one then is able to formulate a ‘problem’. Often, this formulation occurs through a process during which the individual group members discuss which aspects of the topic they are interested in and what they find to be ‘problematic’ about them in connection with the project. The ‘problem’ is, in other words, the identified aspects of the topic that the group wants to investigate and account for in their project report. Furthermore, a ‘good’ problem points to contradictions in the group’s surroundings – contradictions that cause one to ‘wonder’.

2.3 Problem Formulation

The chosen problem is formulated in writing in a manner which makes it possible to work with it in the context of the project. Here, it is important to limit the problem as much as possible. The formulation of the problem should be as precise as it can possibly be at this stage. The group should make it clear from which point of view the investigation of the problem is going to be conducted (cf. chapter 3 for further comments on the problem formulation).

2.4 The Planning Phase

The rest of the project is planned. The group decides on a methodology and a theoretical framework and finds more specific material that is directly related to the ‘problem’. The group makes an outline of the structure of the project, that is, which themes, questions and sub-questions they think should be part of the project. The group draws up a work schedule and specifically agrees on “who does what and when?”

2.5 The Completion Phase

In the completion phase, the group tries to analyse its material in relation to the ‘problem’. This means, among other things, that it should try to summarize the arguments and documentation found in the material. The group also considers whether the material is reliable and relevant in relation to the problem. In other words, the group attempts to relate critically to the material in an objective manner and perhaps combine it in new ways than previously. There should be a continuous evaluation of what the members of the group do and why (cf. the problem formulation). The group should meet regularly and draw up working papers and presentations to be discussed – both internally in the group and/or with the group’s adviser. If the group should encounter something unforeseen and/or completely unknown, it might be necessary to return to the problem formulation phase or the planning phase.

2.6 The Presentation Phase

In this phase, the group presents its achieved realization in the shape of the project report. Clear and coherent argumentation and satisfying documentation are emphasized as important features. A ‘good’ report is characterized, among other things, by the logical coherence of the text, that is: basic knowledge before the discussion, clarifications and prerequisites before subordinate aspects. It is crucial to argue and document one’s conclusions and results. This can be done, for example, by including examples from the material, using references (cf. chapter 6), make comparisons, or draw up tables and graphs that illustrate one’s points. If it turns out that some parts of the problem analysis do not contribute in any substantial manner to the overall realization, it is important to state this explicitly such as to demonstrate that one, through analysis, have gained new insights and knowledge. This type of realization is typically placed in a preliminary conclusion, in the final conclusion, or in a section at the end of the report, which puts the overall realization in perspective.

2.7 The Evaluation Phase

Since as the evaluation of a project in most cases is conducted in the form of an oral project exam this will most likely be perceived as a form of control than as an actual project phase. Ideally, however, this final phase of the project should occasion new questions and problems, as well as identify where it is considered proper to institute new investigations.

3. The Problem Formulation

Metaphorically speaking, working with the problem formulation might be described as a funnel. Beginning at the top with a general idea about what one's wants to engage in, this idea is then narrowed down to a topic, which is finally specified as a concrete problem and a problem formulation.

However simple this may sound, it is in fact a rather complicated process, in which the group argues for and against different ideas and topics and different ways of solving a given problem. Mostly all members of a group have innumerable ideas as to what the group can write about. The most difficult part is often to agree on a topic and a problem. Sometimes, however, it may be difficult for the group to think of a topic, which might conclude in a problem. In such cases it may be worthwhile to try brainstorming.

Brainstorming means that the students set aside time (for example 20 minutes) during which they write down all ideas and thoughts which might be relevant to the topic. Corrections and deletions in connection with brainstorming are banned. It is often easiest if one member of the group writes everything down on the chalkboard such that the whole group can be continuously inspired by new ideas.

This method may also be used if it is difficult to start writing. In this connection, brainstorming should be less focused on thinking up brilliant ideas, and more focused on writing something down on paper which can be corrected or used as a starting point for a well-structured and well-thought-out text.

At any rate, it is important to spend quite some time on the problem formulation. Often, the case is that groups that do not spend enough time on the problem formulation, which results in problems such as disagreements between the group members as to where the project is going or how to 'substantialize' it. However, if the problem formulation is clear, the group will know where the project is going and how group members' individual contributions are to fit into the project at large. Thus, there is a unifying principle in the work (cf. 4.1.2).

3.1 Topic or Problem

When beginning the writing of the actual problem formulation, it is important to distinguish between topic and problem, or *topic-orientation* and *problem-orientation*. Simply put, topic-orientation is descriptive, and one will typically work based on formulations such as "write about" or "describe." Problem-orientation, on the other hand, is pointed toward identifying and solving a problem, and here the work is based typically on questions such as "how" and "why." One identifies a problem and decides on different approaches and possible ways of tackling the problem and (hopefully) reaching a

realization or solution to the problem. The student establishes connections, produce new knowledge or new questions – he or she transgresses, so to speak, existing knowledge.

In order to write a good problem-oriented project, it is crucial to think of a problem formulation that is transparent and unambiguous, or, in other words, it is crucial to know which problem one wants to solve and how it is going to be solved. It is important to delimit the problem formulation to the extend that it functions as a navigation tool for the selection of relevant material. Otherwise, far too much time will be spend locating and acquiring knowledge which then later on might prove to be of little or no relevance to the project.

It is important to remember that, no matter how ambitious one is or how much time one is willing to spend on the project, only a small part of the selected problem will be clarified. Therefore, the problem formulation should specify which point of view the group is going to take. For example, should a project about Denmark's export to Germany be written from a socio-economic, an intercultural, or a market-oriented point of view?

3.2 An Example of the Problem Formulation Process:

A group needs to write a project about 'British Society'. The participants want to inquire into something, which is topical in Great Britain. The group decides on the British royal family. The process might be outlined as follows:

- 1 "Something topical in Great Britain."
- 2 The British royal family
- 3 The great public interest in the royal family in Great Britain. The British population lives in a hyper-technological society at the turn of the 21st century. Why are they interested in a seemingly outdated institution that has no real power?
- 4 A problem formulation containing problem, method and point of view

4. Group Work

In connection with the first semester, students are placed in random groups – ‘intro-groups’ – for practical reasons. When writing the actual project, however, the students form their own groups.

At this point, one might have met some fellow students who work in much the same way as oneself. If a new foreign student wishes to form a group with one or two fellow foreign students, it is recommended that one or two Danish students who might be interested in the same topic are asked to join the group. Or, one may ask to join a group of Danish students who one has come to know in the classes. It would be unusual for Danish students to form a group with students they do not know, so foreign students usually need to take the initiative.

In the first semester, the groups can have up to eight members, groups in the following semesters up to six. However, the normal size of a group is 4-6 members in the first semester and 3-5 in the following. If a larger number of students wish to participate in a group, an application for dispensation is needed.

No matter whether one is a first, third or sixth semester student, group work makes extensive demands on the individual student, both in terms of the actual studies as well as socially.

4.1 Academic Co-operation

When beginning work on the first project – and this is especially true for first semester students – the first exam at the end of the semester might weigh heavy on the mind and dominate one’s thoughts. To pass the exam and to write a good project is all that matters. The academic work and co-operation often become top priorities.

4.1.1 Meetings

Make binding appointments as to when and how to meet, and what the meetings are going to be about. Make sure to select an adequate environment in which to work. Some meetings might take place in the cafeteria between classes, whereas others require more time and perhaps other tools such as dictionaries, computer, a printer and so on. The individual student should – perhaps before the meeting – hand out copies of his or her work to the others. This will give the fellow students an opportunity to read through it and comment on it at the meeting. In this way, all group members know at which point the project is and where it is going.

At the first group meeting, it is a good idea to draw up a schedule for the project. Through the schedule, time in relation to the project’s deadline is managed. In other words, some

clear deadlines should be agreed upon: when to finish the problem formulation, when to write the different sections, or when to hand in sections to the adviser. If the schedule is adhered to, this helps to ensure that the deadline for the project is met. Moreover, if, for one reason or another, a schedule cannot be followed, one may deal with that in due time. Examples of this may include: whether or not to work even more intensely, skip sections, or – the worst scenario – ask for an extension of the deadline.

Each meeting requires preparation, either as a joint assignment or, more often, as individual, designated assignments. As a member of a group, each member has a *personal* responsibility to live up to within the group's written and unwritten rules; for example, show up for meetings on time (or cancel ahead) and prepare individually designated assignments. If these rules are broken, this might spoil something for the other members and damage the academic co-operation.

If the group is supposed to discuss a limited assignment at the meeting, the structure of the meeting is self-evident. Often, however, there are several points on the agenda, and so it might be necessary to make a short outline in order to manage the meeting and ensure that all points are discussed. It might also be a good idea to have a chairman or chairwoman if the group members are eagerly discussing the points without listening to one another.

At a meeting, it is important to remember that the group, to a large extent, functions as an independent unit, that is, the group members decide how to structure and manage their work. This work form is informal, however, it can, at times, be dangerous because one runs the risk of letting things get out of hand and of letting the work process become unstructured. Here, it is important to remember that group work, as well as other types of work, require breaks, which might be planned in advance. A ten to fifteen minutes break every hour means that the group can leave the work and return to it with renewed strength, inspiration and concentration.

It is a good idea to have as many internal meetings as possible. It is, however, unrealistic to expect that all participants will be able to show up at all meetings. Therefore, one should make a habit of taking minutes for each meeting, enabling potential absentees to stay informed. The minutes also ensure that the participants can make a checklist of all the things they need to prepare for the next meeting.

4.1.2 The Unifying Principle

If the group's academic co-operation forms a synthesis where every group member is familiar with the others' ideas and work and the reader of the finished project feels that he or she is guided through the text, then the text usually has a unifying principle: the project is coherent and might as well have been written by a single person.¹ Such a project has

¹ Even though a good project is coherent, it is nevertheless required that one clearly states which member is responsible for which section. This might, for example, be noted in the table of content. (See the evaluation section 7.2).

decent odds in the following evaluation because the group is strong when there are few or no gaps in the project or inconsistencies between the sections.

The group should co-ordinate the different sections in point of language, otherwise the project might, for that reason alone, seem incoherent. Even though it might be tempting to try to raise the level of the language in the project by using loanwords or highly academic terms and concepts, this is rarely a good idea because few first year students can do this consistently throughout a project. Choose a language style that is easy to manage, write clearly and coherent and use relevant and necessary academic terms and concepts.

Moreover, consider creating coherency in the project by referring to other sections within the report. This is done by writing, for example: “as previously mentioned”, “as previously written”, “as pointed out above”, or “as pointed out in chapter 4”.

4.2 Social Co-operation

If a group, for one reason or another, does not function socially, this can ultimately lead to an inadequate product.

Making the group function socially requires tolerance. It is crucial to tolerate and accept that the members of a group – as members of any social community – are different. Difference can be employed constructively because everybody has something different to offer. However, it can also mean that conflicts may emerge which lead to a poor working environment. If, for example, one person wants to make all the decisions, if one or more persons are silent while the rest of the group is discussing, or if the same person always handles practical issues such as getting coffee, copying, or formatting, this may lead to an unreasonable distribution of work and tensions within the group.

It takes a collective effort to maintain the functionality of the group. Therefore, it is worthwhile to discuss potential problems in advance or to bring them up while they are still small and manageable. Be open and honest! If a group member is unable to attend a meeting, for example due to a job or other things, he or she should tell the other members of the group well in advance. Discuss problems openly and talk about how they can be solved most appropriately. The solution can vary from reaching universal consent to reaching a compromise, which is acceptable to all parties involved.

Bear in mind that the group is only a temporary social community, which does not need to last for a lifetime. It is not required that group members are ‘best friends’ in order to work with others – on the contrary, some might even claim that too close a friendship hampers the group’s efficiency because there is too much gossip and irrelevant talk. It is also important to remember that working closely with people who are different from oneself is highly educational and valuable. Perhaps one might not realize this while in the process of writing the project, however, afterwards one often looks back and appreciates the experience and the work that the group members have done together.

4.3 Co-operation Problems

If, despite good will, good planning and lots of tolerance, the group still does not function, a rethinking of the situation is needed. First and foremost, the group and the other group members deserve a second try. For example, the group might dedicate a meeting solely to discussing the social tensions within the group without touching upon the actual work on the project. If such a meeting does not have any positive results, is a good idea to involve the adviser in the problem and ask for his or her advice.

If conflicts within the group are due to one person's reluctance to co-operate, the other group members should agree on the appropriate steps needed in order to solve the conflict. Of course, first a talk with the reluctant person about the problem is needed. If this does not change his or her approach to the co-operation within group, the other group members might agree to give him or her one or several warnings.

The ultimate sanction is, of course, 'the red card': exclusion from the group. Exclusion is a harsh decision and should only be used in cases where a person is absent repeatedly and/or where he or she is not preparing the designated assignments on several occasions. In such cases it might be helpful to discuss the problem with the adviser; although it should be emphasized that only the group knows the dimensions of the problem, and only the group is capable of making the appropriate decisions in relation to it. The problem may also be discussed with a student adviser at The Student Advising for Foreign Languages².

² Studievejledningen for Fremmedsprog.

5. Using the Adviser

As previously mentioned, the group functions as an independent unit. The participants control the process. The adviser should be conceived as a consultant, not as an expert, whom the group can ask for advice. The adviser is not a member of the group and cannot be held responsible for the lack of an ingenious problem formulation, a slow pace of the work, or an incoherent conclusion.

5.1 Guidelines for Project Advising

In order to assist students and advisers, the student representatives from the Study Board for Foreign Languages³ have worked up a proposal for guidelines for project advising. The guidelines describe what the students and the adviser can expect from one another in the period in which the project is written. There are, of course, several ways of advising students, and the guidelines should not be seen as a set of limitations on the extent of the advising but solely as a starting point for what is expected of the students and the adviser respectively.

The adviser should:

- know the curriculum (and potential academic description), the form of the exam in the given course and formal requirements such as deadlines, etc.
- before each meeting evaluate approximately how many hours of advising are available to the group and how many of those hours can be used for meetings. This is written down together with the student in the *co-operation contract*
- evaluate whether the topic and the problem formulation are academically relevant. In this phase it is important to distinguish between topic and problem formulation
- evaluate whether the problem can be solved satisfactorily within the immediate formal framework (number of pages, etc.)
- advise in the structure of the project
- read through the work papers and the meeting referendums from the group before the meeting
- be prepared for meetings with the group and offer a critique of the methodological and academic problems
- be aware of the group's need for methodological, theoretical, or academic advice
- be physically present (be available at the University) in the period during which the project is written

The adviser might:

- help with literature

³ Studienævn for Fremmedsprog.

- help pin down and specify the problem
- support the use of creative methods (such as brainstorming)
- function as mediator in a conflict between the students if asked
- discuss the exam process with the students if asked

Together the adviser and the student(s) should:

- agree on the nature of their co-operation and fill out the *Co-operation Contract*
- agree on when and where the next meeting(s) should be held

The student(s) should:

- know the curriculum (and the potential academic description) and the form of the exam in the given course
- initiate the first meeting
- Hand in work papers. During the first and second semesters, the students should also turn in an obligatory meeting proposal. Both should be turned in well in advance according to the agreement with the adviser
- be prepared for meetings with the adviser and deal critically with methodological and theoretical problems
- cancel the meeting well in advance if they do not have any questions or if they do not feel that a meeting is necessary. Do not hold the meeting for the sake of holding a meeting! Remember, only a limited number of advising hours are available to the students
- be aware that they cannot expect to receive all their advising hours at the end of the advising period
- be conscious of their work methods
- be conscious of the fact that they are responsible for the final version of the project

Co-operation Contract

The adviser should bring the co-operation contract to the first meeting and fill it out with the students whereupon both parties receive a copy.

1. The group has _____ hours available for advising, of which approximately _____ can be used for meeting.
2. The group should turn in their work sheets including *presentation papers* _____ business days before the meeting (*presentation papers* are obligatory during the first and second semester. During the following semesters they are only an offer to the students).
3. Agreements on cancellation, absence, etc. should be reported to:

| | |
|---|--|
| Adviser's phone number | |
| Adviser's email | |
| Adviser's office hours | |
| Group members' phone numbers and emails | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Presentation Papers

The presentation papers serve as a means to make the group conscious of their work and realization process and enables the adviser to focus on the areas that the students emphasize and to ensure the efficiency and quality of the meetings. However, the adviser can also point to problems of which the student(s) are not aware.

Presentation no. _____ Group _____

Meeting date
____/____ Room no. _____

Since last (what have we read, discussed, investigated, written, etc.)

Here and now:

- What are we doing now?
- Which problems are we facing?
- Where is the project going?

Advising needs

- What kind of inputs do we want?
- What do we want to discuss in particular?
- Which written presentations do we want feedback on, and what type of feedback?

Meeting agenda

6. Formalities

The size of the project report, that is, the maximum amount of pages that each student can write, is stated in the curriculum (Please see appendix for more details on the precise number of pages for each project exam offered under ICS). The curriculum also specifies whether the project should be written in Danish, or, alternatively, in which foreign language. This varies between semesters and languages, so be sure to check the curriculum well in advance.

A normal page corresponds to 2400 keystrokes. Enclosed material is excluded from the designated maximum number of pages that one may write. All pages should be written with 1.5 line spacing and have a margin of at least 2.5, and at most 3 centimetres. Remember to insert page numbers (not on the table of contents). The report should be written consistently in the same font and layout. It is worthwhile to decide on these formalities at an early point in the project, otherwise much time may be spent on this in the final phase of the editing.

Writing a project is not only a matter of qualified academic content. There are also a number of formal requirements of which the student should be aware. In the beginning, there are limited requirements to the form and content of the project in order to facilitate the students' learning of the new work form – without at any point forgetting that project work is a complicated and integrated process which requires that all the elements are appropriately tended to in order to yield good results.

For example, imagine a group which has a clear and comprehensible a problem formulation. Such a problem formulation has a limited value if the group does not work critically with the source material that is supposed to throw light on that very problem formulation. For example, should one take neo-nazi information at face value? Or is it appropriate to base a project solely on an interview with the leader of Scientology's headquarters if the aim is to write a project that is critical toward the way in which Scientology works?

The following will feature a discussion of a number of requirements that one might want a project report meet in terms of form and content. The requirements of the work process will not be discussed, rather, the focus will be on the written result of the process: the report.

It is always easier to describe the requirements of a good project report than the requirements of the actual work process. Therefore, it is also easier to think about progression against this backdrop, that is, to assess whether or not project work improves from semester to semester. It is, however, not as easy to (directly) determine whether the teamwork within the group has improved. Therefore, the discussion will be on what it takes to write a good project report rather than what it takes to achieve a good project

process. *Keep in mind, however, that a good project process is crucial to a good report and that the purpose of advising the project group is to facilitate this process.*

6.1 The 'Ideal' Project Report

It is not possible to determine the specific demands in connection with the structure and content of the ideal project report. There are, however, some general guidelines that one may use as a starting point, and the students' committee makes formal requirements that one should always follow.

The following points should be regarded as possible suggestions to the structure and the content of the project. They are only suggestions, and they may be diverged from them if one finds it appropriate. If one decide on a structure, which is fundamentally different from the one below, however, this should be discussed with an adviser in order to establish whether or not the formal requirements are met.

A report should contain the following:

- Front page with title. Remember, the title should refer to the content of the report. One may, for example, think up a catchy heading and a more informative subtitle.
- Title sheet, including the name of the student(s), the adviser's name, study program, semester and deadline (it is not advisable to include a preface which expresses thanks to the group's adviser for his or her work or advise. This almost always seems rather exaggerated and artificial).
- Table of contents. Make sure that the table of content corresponds to the headings in the report. This is also the case with page numbers.
- Summary of responsibility, that is, who wrote which section(s).
- Introduction, including presentation of the problem and the different theoretical and methodological approaches.
- Background material and analysis, divided into head and subsections.
- Conclusion. Keep in mind that there should be coherence between the introduction and the conclusion. These two sections should, in principle, make sense without the background material and analysis.
- Bibliography, including all sources that are referred to throughout report.
- Possibly enclosed material. Be sure only enclose material which is relevant to the report.

6.2 The Use of Secondary Sources

In resent semesters, there have been some cases of plagiarism, that is, instances of 'hidden citation' from secondary literature without citation marks or references. The academic conventions for the use of sources and citations should, therefore, be strongly emphasized:

- All verbatim quotations must be marked as such and must unambiguously refer to an exact source. Short citations in the text should be put in quotation marks, and relatively long citations should be marked by indentation and/or smaller font size. Citations should be accurate – also with regard to spelling and punctuation – and omissions are normally indicated by [...].
- Rewritten information or points from a secondary source must also have a reference.
- The reproduction of verbatim citations or the rewriting of information or points from secondary sources should be true and fair, that is, one is not allowed to use (chosen and possibly curtailed) citations or summaries that are not in accordance with the source's objectives as proof of one's own point of view.
- All written material should have a bibliography that encompasses all of one's sources, including the ones that are not cited directly.
- These guidelines pertain to all types of source material, including, for example, web documents or TV and radio transmissions.
- 'Hidden citation' or other forms of 'blurring' of the sources used in a report are regarded as plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in the failed grade 00 and will be reported to the study leader who may bring the case to the vice chancellor. Plagiarism at Aalborg University usually results in suspension for one semester.

6.3 References

There are different ways of referring to a source and of structuring a bibliography. Regardless of which method one decides on, it is important to use a consistent and precise style such that the reader can find the material to which one refers..

The following is an account of the most frequently used methods for drawing up bibliographies and references.

Ways of editing references:

- 1) One may choose to put the reference in a parenthesis in the actual text. Here one should indicate the author's name, the year of publication and the page number.

Example: I define communication as “the internal cultural exchange of meaning by means of signs and symbols...”
(Alsted 1988:7).

- 2) One may also use footnotes or endnotes. Footnotes and endnotes can be used for references to author and year of publication, or they can be used to comment on passages in the text.

Example: Here, the Swedish anthropologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren discuss different procedures, which might be relevant as well (7). They suggest that cultural

analysis should seek to “de-rival” or “exorcize” the well known by purging all preconceptions about a given or natural state of being (8).

7. Ehn and Löfgren 1982: 21-68.
8. The work of the American cultural sociologist Erving Goffman offers some clear examples of such an ethno-methodological approach.

Be aware that endnotes can be rather troublesome for the reader. The preferred method for projects and assignments in the Department of Foreign Languages is to put references in parentheses and use footnotes for commentaries on the text.

6.4 Citations

Citations must be visible. One may use quotation marks (short citations) or italics and indentation (long quotations), and perhaps single line spacing.

Citations are normally used in the original language. However, if citations are used to document/analyse/argue, one may choose to summarize or explain the author’s opinion.

Example: Wallendorf and Arnould (1988, p.54.) take their point of departure in the investigation of “the nature and meaning of attachments people form to objects that they designate as special or favorite.” This means that they are first and foremost interested in the choice of products, however...

It is important to cite correctly even if the author uses a special spelling or punctuation technique. If something is omitted from a quote, this should be indicated it by inserting three full stops in square brackets.

Example: [...] this is indicated by full stops (Katzenelson 1988: 201)

If personal comments are needed in a citation, be it additions or explanations, these should be placed in square brackets: [].

Frequently used abbreviations

The following abbreviations can be useful because they often appear in texts, though the Department of Foreign Languages usually recommends that the students adhere to the method described above for references and citations.

Example: p. is an abbreviation of ‘pagina’, which means page in Latin; pp. means several pages.

Example: 10f means that one is referring to page 10 and the next page while 10ff denotes page ten and the following pages.

If the same text is cited twice or several times on the same page or within a short space, reference number two is abbreviated ‘*ibid*’ followed by the page number. *Ibid* stands for *ibidem* which is Latin for *the same place*.

Example: 22. Habermas 2004, p. 87.
23. *ibid.* p.43.

Some authors mention their source in the first citation; in later citations they only use the author’s name followed by *op.cit.* This is an abbreviation of the Latin *opus citatum*, ‘the cited work,’ or *opere citato*, ‘in the cited work.’

Example: 12. Habermas, J.: (2004) Time of Transitions. Oxford: Polity Press.
23. Habermas, J., *op.cit.* p. 89.

This method may be used for short reports, however, it is not recommendable for projects.

6.5 Literature List

A literature list is a list of all the used literature, while a bibliography contains the used literature as well as other relevant material. It is a personal decision whether one want to make a literature list or a bibliography. In many cases one does not distinguish between the two, and throughout this handbook both are referred to as a literature list. The literature list is arranged alphabetically and may be divided into a book section and an article section.

Books

If a book has a single author, it may be set up in the following manner:

Last name comma **first name** (year) colon or full stop **the complete title** full stop **place of publication** colon **publisher** full stop

Example: Turk, Christopher (1996): Effective Writing: Improving, scientific, technical and business communication. London: Spon.

If several titles by the same author from the same year are used, this is indicated by inserting the letters ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’ and so on after the year of publication:

Example: Eco, Umberto. (1989a): The Open Work. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press.

Eco, Umberto. (1989b): On the Medieval Theory of Signs. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publ.

In is the Latin 'in', and *et al.* is Latin for *and more*.

One should indicate if there are several authors, and if an author is cited in another book, it is customary to refer to both books.

Example: Malcolm, Norman (1959): *Dreaming*. London: Routledge & Paul. In: Dolezel, Lubomir (1998): Heterocosmica – Fiction and Possible Worlds. London: The Johns Hopkins Press, Ltd.

When referring to an anthology one needs to refer to the people in charge of editing the book, and this is indicated by adding this information in parenthesis '(ed.)'/'(eds.)'.

Example: Kaplan, Rob and Rabinowitz, Harold (eds.) (2003): Speaking about Books: the best things ever said about books and book collecting. Palo Alto, Ebrary.

Articles

Articles in journals may be presented in the following manner:

Dance, F. (1970): The 'Concept' of Communication. In Journal of Communication 20, Vol. 2 March.

Newspaper articles may be presented in the following manner:

Zimmerl, Carl. (2005): "The Riddle of the Appendix." In: The New York Times 09.08.2005.

If the author of the article is not indicated, newspaper articles are placed alphabetically according to the title.

Internet

When referring to information found on the Internet, one often encounter problems with web pages that are being updated and changed constantly. Therefore, it might not suffice to simply refer to a specific site, because it may have changed between the time when it was last looked at to the time when the censor and the examiner check to see if the references are correct.

If references to Internet sites in a project or if essential sections and ideas are based on information from the Internet, it is worthwhile to print out all relevant sites and enclose these along with the project (in an appendix). This ensures that the censor and the examiner have the correct information available. At a minimum one should include the web address in the bibliography.

6.6 Formats

Here are the page set-up formats used in projects and essays.

| | |
|---------------|--------|
| Letter size: | 12 |
| Line spacing: | 1½ |
| Left margin: | 2.5 cm |
| Right margin: | 3.0 cm |

One page corresponds to 2400 characters, i.e. letters, open spaces, punctuation marks, etc.

7. Deadline and Evaluation

The department's website informs of the date at which the project should be turned in. This means that one, during the entire semester, can dispose of the project work in relation to this date. For most students, however, it is difficult to have the project finished so well in advance that they can avoid some degree of last minute panic. Still, most students do finish their projects on time.

Three copies of the project report should be turned in to the secretary, of which one copy must be the original (unbound). The students are responsible for printing the projects. It is less expensive to have the project report be printed at UNI.PRINT, which is located on Myrdalsstræde 268, than to make copies oneself using a copy machine. Remember to make a printing reservation well ahead, as the printing office is very busy toward the end of the semester.

As a rule, the project should be turned in to the secretary before 12 pm on the designated date. If a student, for one reason or another, cannot finish the project on time, a request for having the date deferred must be handed in at least within three business days prior to the deadline. The request should be addressed to the coordinator for the relevant academic field and be turned in to the secretary. An extension of the deadline is only granted in special cases, and it is not sufficient to agree on a different deadline with the adviser or the secretary. Projects that are turned in too late without granted deferral cannot be evaluated until the next exam period.

7.1 Evaluation

The finished product is evaluated at a group exam. The evaluation is oral and is either in the foreign language or in Danish (check the curriculum) with the project adviser as the examiner. At the first semester all evaluations are in Danish regardless of the student's foreign language.

Some projects are evaluated internally, which means that the censor is a professor from Aalborg University who has not been the student's adviser during the semester. Other projects are evaluated externally, which means that the censor is appointed by the Ministry of Education and does not teach at Aalborg University. An external censor may come from another educational institution or from a company or an organization (typically from a place that has employed or would like to employ a foreign language graduate student).

The oral exam is meant to be a discussion between the student(s), the examiner and the censor based on the project report. The exam is usually a group exam, which means that the entire project group is examined at the same time. According to the exam announcement and the curriculum, however, each student must be evaluated individually as well.

In order to ensure that each student's contribution to the report is evaluated individually, the report must, as previously mentioned, include a review of which student is responsible for which part of the project. In order to give a genuine evaluation, the individual student's contribution to the project must consist of academically appropriate coherent sections. This means that it is unacceptable if a group assigns each group member responsibility for many small sections. Nor is it acceptable if several group members share responsibility for each central chapter. Individual sections can, of course, be written by several group members (for example, short sections, introduction and conclusion) or have several responsible parties. Be aware that the adviser can demand a specification of each group member's contribution if a group report is turned in without an appropriate 'list of responsibility'. The evaluation should include an assessment of each student's contribution to the report as well as to the oral exam.

The result of the evaluation may be that all group members receive the same grade. This is often the case at the first couple of semesters because the project is meant to be a shared learning process for all group members, and because writing the project and presenting it at the exam ought to be an equal co-operation between all members of the group. The grade is, however, always individual and the same group can easily receive different grades. At the later semesters this is, in fact, often the case.

Typically, the oral examination begins with each student giving an introductory presentation. The presentations should form a whole and might, for example, summarize the main points of the project and point to problems, which the students would like to discuss in more detail. The students may also place the project in a larger context or put it into perspective by pointing to new problems that have arisen in connection with the project. The presentations should not be a summary or a repetition of the project. The presentations function as a sort of introduction to the discussion between the students, the censor and the examiner and are supposed to lie at the core of the evaluation. Therefore, the presentations should not take up most of the time at the exam. Sometimes there might be questions or short discussions after each presentation.

It is not obligatory to give a presentation. At the first couple of semesters, however, it is often worthwhile to start out with a presentation such that the group gets a chance to feel comfortable with the situation – which one usually need at an exam – as well as to allow all group members to contribute to the discussion. Here, it should be emphasized that if one chooses to give presentations, they should not appear as a speech that has been learned by heart and which is simply reeled off at the exam. Prepare the main points of what is to be said, and improvise the actual oral presentation accordingly.

The students are solely responsible for preparing their presentations. When the project has been handed in, the adviser becomes the examiner. The group is welcome to approach the adviser for answers to formal questions or for general guidelines in connection with the exam, however; the adviser neither can nor should evaluate the project beforehand or approve of potential presentations for the oral exam.

At the first semester, the exam often takes the form of a discussion among all participants, including the censor. At later semesters, the censor will often play a minor role. One can, however, easily come across censors who participate actively just like one might experience that the censor does not interfere in the exam at all. The censor's primary role is to ensure that the rules are obeyed and that all students receive equal and fair treatment. One may, thus, conceive of the censor as a person who guarantees a fair evaluation, which is based solely on the project report and the oral exam and not on to what extent the group functions internally or what sort of relation there is with the adviser.

7.2 Correction List

If one comes across errors or shortcomings in the project while reading it through prior to the exam, one may, at the beginning of the exam, provide the censor and examiner with a correction list. The correction list should only include essential errors or errors that disturb the meaning of the text, for example, errors in references or in the bibliography. If the project is written in the students' foreign language one may also include serious linguistic errors such as incorrect subject-verb agreement. It should be noted, however, that the correction list does not substitute for a thorough proof-reading before handing in the project. The examiner and censor have already gained a first impression of the project, and if it seems sloppy or faulty, it makes a poor impression.

7.3 Assessment

Both the project report and the oral defence enter into the final assessment of the project. Students should participate actively and constructively in the discussion, for example, by volunteering with relevant contributions or by giving the other students enough space to participate. Both the group and its individual members are, thus, responsible for contributing to an equal and fair discussion in which everybody is allowed to participate. However, censor and examiner are also responsible for ensuring that everybody is allowed to participate in the discussion such that they can evaluate the performance of each student.

Academically, the student's ability to relate to the theoretical implications of the project and possible empirical research as well as the ability to consider the consequences of using one theoretical approach over another are emphasized. Moreover, the student should demonstrate an understanding of the basic theoretical concepts and that he or she is able to use them actively during the discussion.

There are certain aspects that one should be aware of with regard to the project report. The academic content is, of course, central to the report inasmuch as the report cannot be approved as long as the academic content is flawed. This is the reason why the project group is associated with an adviser who is able to assist in academic matters. The adviser should not comment extensively on the language or structure of the report. The group is responsible for the structure and logic coherence of the project. The group should also make sure that there is coherence between the problem formulation and the analysis and

conclusion. Finally, the project should always be subject to a thorough spelling and grammar check (remember to be consistent with abbreviations and punctuation).

7.4 Exam Complaints

The following guidelines describe each phase of the case process and must be seen as a supplement to the Exam Regulations part 5, which apply to all internal and external exams mentioned in the various curricula exam rules.

A complaint could relate to:

- the basis for the examination (exam questions, projects, etc.) and connection to the curriculum,
- the course of the exam, or
- the evaluation.

A complaint could also deal with *legal matters*, e.g. a case of special, personal incapacity. Specific rules apply to the processing of this type of complaints, and the dean settles them. His decision can be brought before the Danish Ministry of Science. The processing of these complaints will not be defined further here, as there are very few cases.

An exam complaint (appeal) cannot refer to matters relating to the way classes are taught. For example, one cannot hand in a complaint about the evaluation which refers to the way classes are taught prior to the exam. Complaints about the instruction should, in due time, be handed in to the Study Programme Coordinator in question.

Any complaint must be made within 14 days of the announcement of the exam result. For oral exams, this is the date of the exam, and for written exams, this is the date specified in the exam plan. The complaint must be sent to the Faculty of Humanities Office.

Before handing in a complaint, one should talk to the examiner and receive an (oral) explanation for the grade. If one is dissatisfied with the explanation and decide to hand in a complaint, one should hand in a written, motivated complaint.

Besides name, address, preferably phone number or e-mail address, and exam title, the complaint must include an explanation for handing in the complaint. This means one must state the reasons for the complaint and what one expect to attain from it. Remember to sign the complaint.

The Faculty Office forwards the complaint as quickly as possible to the original examiners and gives the deadline for processing the complaint.

The original examiners can either:

- undertake another evaluation,
- offer a re-examination, or

- dismiss the complaint.

When processing the complaint, the original examiners must consider the criticism put forward in the complaint. The decision should also include a summary of the aspects of the case, a brief description of the examiners' reflections, and the decision followed by an explanation. If the examiners disagree on the decision, both examiners' point of view must be reported.

The decision is signed by both examiners or by one of the examiners on behalf of both. The complaint must be processed and the decision be sent to the Faculty Office no later than 14 days from the date the examiners received the complaint. If the complaint cannot be processed within 14 days, the examiners must inform the Faculty Office hereof, stating the reason for the delay and the expected date of completion. The Faculty Office will then communicate this message to the student.

The Faculty Office forwards the decision to the student as quickly as possible giving a deadline for bringing the decision before an Appeals Committee. The appeal must be handed in no later than 14 days from the date the complainant has been notified of the examiners' decision.

If the complaint results in an offer of re-examination of the student based on general shortcomings in the basis for the examination or the course of the exam, the offer must be extended to include all the students who attended the exam in question, according to the Exam Regulations. The dean will decide whether the original examiners must be replaced by new ones.

The Faculty Office will then write to all the students giving the new exam date (decided with the Study Programme Coordinator in question) and a registration form for re-examination. If the Faculty Office has *not* received the signed registration form within a certain date specified in the letter, the offer will be repealed. Re-examination usually takes place immediately in continuation of the normal exam period.

If the complaint results in an offer of re-evaluation based on general shortcomings in the basis for the examination or the course of the exam, a new evaluation *must* be conducted for all the students who attended the exam in question. The dean will decide whether new examiners should be appointed for the re-evaluation.

An appeal must also be written and motivated. This means that the student should define and explain why he or she finds the examiners' decision incorrect. The appeal must include the material originally evaluated, i.e. question(s) and exam paper, project report, thesis or any other material.

After receiving the appeal, the Faculty Office writes to the Study Board in question for the purpose of appointing an instructor, who may act as an examiner, and a student and a substitute member for each. At the same time the Faculty Office writes to the chairman of

the external examiners from the programme in question for the purpose of appointing two external examiners, including the chairman, and substitute members.

When the Appeals Committee has been put together, the Faculty Office sends the following material to the members (giving the deadline for processing the appeal):

- the appeal,
- the original complaint,
- the original examiners' decision, and
- the material originally evaluated.

The Appeals Committee can:

- give a higher grade or change the Not passed grade to Passed,
- decide to offer the complainant a new evaluation with new examiners,
- offer the complainant a re-examination with new examiners, or
- dismiss the appeal.

The purpose of the Appeals Committee is to assess whether the original examiners have processed the case correctly. If the Appeals Committee, based on the present material, has no doubt that the original examiners' offer of re-examination or dismissal of the complaint is correct, the Appeals Committee can dismiss the appeal. Likewise, if the Appeals Committee has no doubt that the new grade given is too low, it can give a higher grade. If, however, the Appeals Committee has doubts whether the original examiners have acted correctly, it can either offer a new evaluation with new examiners or a re-examination also with new examiners. If the Appeals Committee has decided to give a higher grade, change the Not passed grade to Passed, or offer a new evaluation on grounds of shortcomings, the decision affects all students who attended the exam in question.

The Faculty Office forwards the decision to the student as quickly as possible stating that within 14 days the decision can be brought before the dean, if the complaint concerns *legal* matters.

The dean's decision will be sent to the student as quickly as possible stating that within 14 days his decision on legal matters can be brought before the Danish Ministry of Science. According to the Regulations, neither a complaint nor an appeal can result in a lower grade than the one given earlier. This means that *if* for example a re-examination results in a lower grade, the student can choose which grade to keep.

Ruth Gjesing, June 24, 2003

(Slightly modified by Kristine Ellis, Sept. 6, 2004)

8. Suggestions for Further Reading

Bennett, Andrew et al. (1988): Language and Cultural Studies – An Introduction to Study Skill and Methodology. Aalborg University, Department of Language and Intercultural Studies.

Elbow, P. (1973): Writing Without Teachers. Oxford Univ. Press, N.Y.

Elbow, P. (1981): Writing With Power. Oxford Univ. Press, N.Y.

Spatt, B. (1987): Writing from Sources. St. Martins Press, N.Y.

Appendix

Number of pages allotted to project writing: (One page is counted as having 2400 characters per page)

| SEMESTER: | NUMBER OF PAGES IN GROUP: | NUMBER OF PAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL: |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| 2 nd semester English/SIS | 15 | 20 |
| 4 th semester English | 20 | 25 |
| 6 th semester English | 20 | 25 |
| 6 th semester English SIS | 20 | 25 |
| 7 th - 8 th semester CCG | 20 | 25 |
| 4 th semester Spanish SIS | 15 | 20 |
| 6 th semester Spanish SIS | 20 | 25 |
| 2 nd semester German | 15 | 20 |
| 4 th semester German | 20 | 25 |
| 6 th semester German | 20 | 25 |
| 4 th semester IBC | 15 | 30 |
| 6 th semester IBC | 23 | 30 |
| 8 th semester IIC | 25 | 35 |
| 8 th semester CMS | 20 | 25 |
| 2 nd semester Psy | 20 | 25 |
| 8 th semester Psy | 27-37 (2), 35-45 (3), 45-55 (4), 55-65 (5), 65-75 (6) | 20-30 |