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Guide to Seminars Version 0.7.1

Seminar: Useful Hints

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1 Purpose of these guidelines

Seminars are part of "Vertiefungsmodule" and project seminars within the Bachelor program. Moreover, they are independent courses within the Master program. The following guidelines have been developed to provide useful pointers regarding the organisation of seminars, as well as to describe the learning objectives and give some hints on how to successfully complete a seminar module.

We advise all students in any of our seminars to carefully read through this section and hope it will help to achieve good results in our seminar modules. Whilst Section 2 and Section 5 focus solely on seminars, in particular Section 6 provides useful hints that are also applicable to Bachelor and Master theses.

2 Organisation of Seminars

The seminar topics and all relevant deadlines are introduced during the presentations of (project) seminars. A registration via the examination office (PAM) is essential to partake. Following the registration, topics are assigned to all participants during a seminar kick off meeting. Should students wish to withdraw from participating in their seminar after topics have been assigned, we ask them to notify their supervisor as soon as possible. This enables us to offer their place to students who have not been allowed to participate. Furthermore, it might be the case that seminar talks need to be rearranged in consequence of any withdrawal.

3 Seminar Deliverables and Grading Scheme

The following tasks have to be fulfilled:

- Writing a seminar paper about the assigned topic (45%),
- Preparing and giving a talk about the assigned topic and answering questions from the audience (45%),
- Posing questions regarding talks of other students and actively participating in discussions (10%).

In case one topic has to be assigned to two students, both work jointly on their seminar paper as well as give their talk together. The order of the presenters, however, will be determined by drawing lot just before the talk. The marks of the seminar paper are

accredited to both students alike; nonetheless there may be difference in the marking of their presentations.

As obvious from above, three partial marks will be assigned that are eventually aggregated into a final mark for the seminar.

Emailed questions and meetings with the supervisor in preparation of the seminar paper or talk *do not* negatively influence the marking. On the contrary, we strongly encourage actively contacting the supervisor(s) well in advance of the deadline, for instance, to discuss the outline, as well as later on a draft version and the presentation slides. All results will be submitted to the PAM. Only the grades published by it are binding. In case of any question regarding individual marks, the supervisors are happy to provide explanations. Appointments should be arranged for no enquiry regarding grades (and their components) will be answered via email. However, grades are final and *not* subject to any discussions.

4 Time Plan and Schedule of Seminars

Seminars are usually held on one or two subsequent days depending on the number of talks. The final schedule of presentations will be published sufficiently well in advance of the presentations. The deadline for handing in the seminar work has to be adhered to. Extensions can only be granted if a medical certificate is provided prior do the deadline. Until up to one week before a deadline, a draft version of the paper and the slides may be handed in for review and as basis for a discussion with the supervisor. This is voluntarily but it is strongly recommend to make use of it – in particular for the presentation as it counts almost 50% of the module grade.

During the presentation approximately five minutes will be recorded on video to allow for later analysis. The date for this analysis will be announced during the seminar. No student is required to participate in this debriefing which also means that it does not count towards the final grade. The analysis meeting is thought of as an opportunity for students to evaluate their own presentation skills from an onlooker's perspective. In the past, this resulted in interesting insights and findings. To ensure privacy only those recordings of students present in the debriefing session will be analysed and discussed; all recordings will be deleted after the analysis session.

At the end of the talk one of the supervisor signals when the time is nearly over (5 minutes prior to the end). Following this signal the presenter should end their talk in a timely manner. In case of a huge overrun it is worth considering to jump right to the last slide. A good time management (Not too long, not too short) has a positive impact on

the marks.

5 Learning Objectives

The three tasks of this seminar shall support participants in achieving designated learning objectives which will be further elaborated in the following three sections.

5.1 Seminar Paper

Writing a seminar paper serves the purpose of exercising academic practices. This encompasses the independent preparation of a topic based on an academic primary sources or on own research. In this phase students should take on the role of a critic who has to detect weaknesses, gaps, errors in reasoning and the like within the topic or work their seminar paper is based on. In case two students are working on one topic this may be done cooperatively.Furthermore, preparing a seminar paper helps to train scientific practices and techniques such as:

- Literature research using the library, (online) catalogues and publication services as well as the Internet in general.
- Ordering and structuring of the information collected.
- Structuring of the work according to the standards of the academic discipline (abstract, introduction, main body, conclusion, references).
- Citing properly (in text) and correctly list all literature used.

5.2 Seminar Talk

Practising the preparation of a presentation independently and giving a talk regarding a scientific topic are the primary goals of this exercise. In this part, students should take on the role of the person who wrote the paper underlying the talk or the one who "invented" the topic. They should take the position of someone who presents and defends their work in front of a sceptical audience. This includes:

- Giving a well-structured presentation (introduction/motivation, body, summary/evaluation).
- Presentation of motivating and illustrative examples.
- Visualization of core ideas.

- Choosing appropriate presentation media (PC & projector, overhead projector), which supports the audience's line of thought and does not distract or over-challenge the audience. The presentation is an opportunity to practise presentation skill such as:
- Dealing with presentation software (PowerPoint, Prezi).
- A clear and understandable enunciation.
- Speaking freely in front of an audience.
- Good time management.
- Learning to judge the impact of one's demeanour.
- Beeing able to show expert knowledge and familiarity with the topic.

The presentation also serves as preparation for talks in other seminars (e.g. project seminars) and job applications in assessment-centers as they offer the chance to practice this situation and reduce nervousness in the future.

5.3 Posing Questions

Active participation in seminar presentations of fellow students shows, that one is attentive and follows the talk. It, furthermore, signals interest in the talk and offers an opportunity to show own knowledge. The latter, however, should never be at the expense of the presenter. Good questions advance the kownledge of the whole seminar group.

6 Useful Hints for a Successful Seminar

As the previous section, this section, too, is structured following the three parts a seminar consist of.

6.1 Seminar Paper

For a good seminar paper every participant should start working on their topic early enough - preferably during the semester break. Everyone should calculate one month for literature research, reading and literature review and another month for writing down the report and preparing the presentation. Seminar papers ought to be about 15 pages in length and never exceed 20 pages.

It is recommended to not only consider one's own topic, but also look into topics related to it. Depending on the exact topic there may be interesting connections to

other seminar topics. Students with similar topics should consult each other during the preparation phase in order to prevent overlap in the papers and presentations. However, the report has to be prepared by each person or group individually. Furthermore, it hast to stand for itself, i. e., be comprehensible without any knowledge of other seminar papers. Cross references to reports written by other students are allowed to circumscribe the own work from others only. In case of any problems – in particular during the early phases – students should contact their supervisors. Research using catalogues, libraries and the Internet hast to be done independently and proactively. Literature which is easy to find will not be provided by the supervisors. However, support will be given in case literature is hard to find (i. e., no results after intense research) or in case that a particular article cannot be accessed without help. During this research step, it is recommended to discuss the outline with the supervisor at an early stage. Nonetheless, the outline should be more than "introduction; main body; conclusion" as only quality input allows for quality feedback. Up to one week prior to the deadline the work may be handed to the supervisor for counter-checking and feedback on the final draft. Additional information is provided by our guide *How to write a paper at the DBIS Group*.

6.2 Seminar Presentation

In this subsection we provide some hints regarding the design of slides and the presentation.

Presentation slides should be well laid out. As a guideline only $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the space available should be used. Generally, bullet points are more preferable than complete sentences. Sometimes a figure is more expressive than words, i. e., one should not rely on text slides only. On average every slide should be presented for about 2 minutes. This means for a 30 minutes talk no more than 20 slides (including agenda and the like) should be used. To guide your audience, it is sensible to repeat the outline of the talk whenever a new point comes up. It is recommendable to run through the presentation at least once in advance. This should help to get the timing right. Note though, depending on your type of presentation the real presentation might be quicker or slower in a real presentation.

To prevent significant overlap of presentations the individual presenters should coordinate who presents what aspects. For instance a theory, which builds the basis for several talks, should be presented in the first talk. Later presentation may then refer to the first. Problems regarding overlap do not only negatively influence the marks of the

group in the presentation of which they become evident – the whole seminar group is collectively responsible for a sensible differentiation. Similar to the seminar work itself, the presentation slides may be sent to the supervisor for feedback until one week prior to the deadline.

During a presentation one should generally speak slowly and clearly and pause where appropriate because the audience has to listen, read and comprehend. In particular when nervous but also generally, one should breathe deeply and calmly. Regarding the body language, hands should not be in the pockets and it is discouraged show too much movement in front of the audience. Gestures should be used purposefully and should not be exaggerated. Show commitment and interest for your topic and the audience. The talk shall not be an obligatory boring event. Rather, it should be an event the audience can take something away from. Remember: One ought to "defend" a topic. This includes that the presenter should address (and look at) all of the audience and not only the Professor.

It is also very important to be prepared for any question during the talk. The time available for the talk will be extended by the amount of time which has been taken up by interposed questions. However, there usually is a time frame for questions which should not be exceeded. It is one of the tasks of the presenter to decide when to answer which question. For instance it may be a good idea to divide questions into comprehension question and questions which potentially lead to a discussion. The latter can – with an according note towards the questioner – be postponed until the end of the talk. Furthermore, one should answer critical questions friendly and confidently, and not feel personally attacked.

6.3 Posing Questions

To achieve full marks in this section it is not sufficient to ask numerous questions. The quality of the questions will also taken into account. Since the seminar papers of all participants are published on the Internet prior to the talks it is possible to think of good questions in advance of the presentations. This time is well invested for this part of the seminar can make a significant difference in terms of grades.