

TOP 10 OF „HOW TO MESS UP YOUR SEMINAR PAPER“ (BY CHRISTOPHER RÜHL)

1. Your paper does not state why this research is important (research gap), as well as how you address that gap (aim of your study)
How to avoid: Clearly, but briefly, state the research gap you derived from your literature review, as well as the overall research question you address in your paper in the introduction.
2. Your literature review does not include a critical reflection of the theory and studies you address.
How to avoid: Try to identify critical aspects or limitations of the theory you use and/or the studies you address.
3. You do not clearly state your research questions (labeled RQ 1, RQ 2, etc.) and the corresponding hypotheses under each research question at the end of your literature research, before the method section.
How to avoid: Just do the above.
4. You do not state why the theory and/or studies you use are adequate for your research.
How to avoid: Clearly state why and how your theory applies to the phenomenon under study and elaborate on the implications of the theory on your understanding of the phenomenon under research.
5. Your research instrument (operationalization coding scheme, interview guideline etc.) is not well-derived from literature, so the reader does not understand why you use the items you use and where they come from (coding scheme)/ why you ask the questions you ask and where you derived them from (interview guideline) etc.
How to avoid: Clearly state which elements of your instrument (coding scheme, interview guideline etc.) were derived from which studies and why they are important/how they translate into your study.
6. The presentation of your results does not chronologically answer your research questions, probably even does not refer to them. Instead, you just start describing a variety of results you took out of your analysis without addressing why the information is important.
How to avoid: Link the presentation of your results to your research questions and chronologically present your findings with regard to your research questions/hypotheses. Provide a basic sample description at the beginning of the result section, before addressing the research questions and hypotheses in more detail.

7. Your results section shows a mixture of result presentation and their interpretation.
How to avoid: Divide your result section in two parts: Chapter x.1 only presents the results and describes the findings, chapter x.2 addresses what these findings mean for your research questions, hypothesis and how you can interpret these findings in a broader context.

8. The discussion section of your paper does not:
 - a. tie your findings to the state of research in the field;
How to avoid: Tie back your findings to your literature review, and point out how your findings advance the understanding of the phenomenon under study, what the implications for communication management, public relations are, etc.
 - b. address the limitations of your study, and/or an outlook into how further research could deepen your study findings.
How to avoid: Simply address the above.

9. You do not use APA-referencing format whenever you cite quotations, make references to other authors' publications or list the publications you referred to throughout your paper in the literature list at the end of your work.
How to avoid: Refer to the APA-referencing guidelines from your "Proseminar", Moodle or type in APA-referencing guidelines in Google (or a search-engine of your choice) and familiarize yourself with the respective formatting.
Note: also check to include all references you refer to in your body of text in the literature list!

10. You use blurry graphics, neither number, nor label your tables and graphics and also do not provide explanations of your graphics in the text.
How to avoid: Carefully design all graphics yourself, do not use scans or photographs of book chapters etc. Carefully label and name your graphics and tables, make sure that all elements of a graphic as well as table are also described in the body of text. Tables and graphics can only help you to illustrate textual information, but can never substitute text.