



Application support for international students

Tips for written applications



Publisher

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Introduction

Many of the consultations we have with students as part of our Careers Service revolve around applications, with the main focus often being written applications. How do you make your documents personal, reader-friendly and authentic, for example?

Writing a good application is a big enough challenge for native speakers, let alone for international students who have not grown up in Germany.

This guide is designed to help you put together your application documents. We'll give you an overview of the right content, structure and language to use in applications, and also explain some typical aspects you should remember when submitting applications in Germany. We'll also give you tips on application strategies and how to get your bears in the German job market.

We'll be glad to advise you personally on your documents, on job interviews and selection processes, and on all other matters relating to starting an internship or career. Take advantage of our special consultation hour for international students at the ServiceCenter's Infothek (main building) or arrange an appointment with us through Stud.IP.

In addition to individual consultations, the Careers Service also offers workshops specially tailored to the needs of international students. All details are available on our website: zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/international

The team from ZQS/Schlüsselkompetenzen wishes you all the best with your application.

ZQS/Schlüsselkompetenzen

Career Service

Starting your career in Germany

You may have already applied for an internship and gained experience in writing applications during your studies. Many students, however, only encounter applications once they have graduated. But application strategies start much earlier on. Below are some tips we have put together for you to help you start your career in Germany.

Setting a goal

To develop a successful strategy, you need a goal. So ask yourself early on: Where do I want to go? What is my professional goal? This requires analysing your interests and strengths, and finding out which job is right for you.

Important: Think about your interests and potentials as early on as possible. This will make it easier for you to write applications once you've completed your studies.

Collecting information

Once you've worked out what your strengths and interests are, you can start collecting information. Find out what jobs fit your strengths and interests. There are various ways to do this:

- Researching online on company websites
- Looking for job advertisements in the newspaper, on the Internet etc.
- Attending trade fairs and career shows
- Reading journals
- Speaking to an advisor at the Federal Employment Agency
- Speaking to an advisor at the Careers Service

Important: It's worth finding out the requirements for the job you want early on. Sometimes the requirements reveal things you weren't directly taught in your course. Keep up to date with any additional qualifications required, e.g. knowledge of project management or presentation techniques. The team of ZQS/Schlüsselkompetenzen runs helpful seminars on this free of charge.

Practical Experience

Practical experience is an excellent way of finding out what job is right for you, so gain as much of it as you can through internships, part-time jobs, volunteer work etc.

Useful online job portals include:

- https://stellenticket.uni-hannover.de/de/ (The Leibniz University Hannover's online job portal for internships and new graduates)
- https://jobicco.uni-hannover.de/de/
 (The Leibniz University Hannover's online job portal for part-time jobs)
- http://www.freiwilligenzentrum-hannover.de/jobs.html
 (Online job portal for volunteer jobs)

Important: It can sometimes be difficult to secure an internship. But volunteer work, working at a club/association, or helping with student initiatives will also give you practical experience in team-work, organising events etc. Make the most of every opportunity presented to you.

Involvement in cultural life

When it comes to starting off your career successfully, it helps if you're already familiar with German culture. Some students attend very few events outside their own course during their studies, and often have very little contact with German-speaking students. So attend as many cultural events run by the university, the City of Hannover etc. as you can. Study groups, university sport etc. are other ways of fostering contact with German-speaking students.

Important: In addition to studying and career-planning, make sure you also consider getting involved in cultural life. This will show that you're interested in life in Germany, and are building important networks and friendships.

Developing German language skills

Internationalisation means there are more and more opportunities to speak English at work. But it is also important to speak the language of a country if you want to integrate well. Most companies require good German skills – even if the company's official language is English.

Improve your German skills by taking language courses, for example. Try to speak as much German as possible even in your free time and everyday life.

Important: It's important to learn German even if the course you're taking is in English. Strong German skills will greatly improve your prospects on the German job market.

Building networks

Networking is one of the most important application strategies. It means forging personal contact with various people. Professional and personal contacts can help you find a job.

Important: You can network during an internship or at trade fairs and career shows. Volunteer work or work at a club/association can also help you (see "Collecting information" and "Involvement in cultural life" above). Contacts give you information on the so-called "hidden" job market. Around 70% of jobs are secured through the hidden job market, i.e. through helpful contacts.

Legal safeguarding

To ensure there are no barriers to you successfully starting off your career, it is very important to clarify any legal requirements.

So read up thoroughly on the conditions relating to your residence permit.

- Seek out advisors and counselling centres early on, so as not to miss any deadlines.
- The main point of contact for residence-permit queries is the Foreigners' Registration Office [Ausländerbehörde].

Preparing application documents

Germany has its own application standards that are different to other countries. So be sure to find out what these are. In addition to this handbook, our "Writing Job Applications" workshop also provides important information, and enables you to work on your own documents. You are welcome to arrange a consultation with us if you would like personal feedback.

Important: Many companies are very interested in employing their staff for the longer term. Some worry that international students will return to their home country after gaining 1-2 years of work experience. So it's important you mention in your application why you want to work in Germany, and what your professional goals in Germany are.

Preparing for the job interview and other selection processes

Once your written application has been successful, it is usually followed by a job interview. Some companies invite you to a telephone interview or an assessment centre. Our workshops and consultations provide you with information and enable you to practise interview scenarios.

The components of a written application



Every application consists of the same components and follows the same basic rules. There is no difference between applications for internships or applications for your first job. It's always about tying your skills into the job criteria, and presenting your motivation concisely and convincingly.

The classic application documents always include:

- 2.1 The covering letter
- 2.2 The CV
- 2.3 References/certificates and proof of work (appendices)

You may also add the following to your application documents if you wish:

- 2.4 The photo
- 2.5 The cover sheet

Important: German applications are considerably more detailed than those found in the English-speaking world. In addition to a covering letter and CV, you should also include work references. Work references are an important part of applications in Germany. They are written assessments of previous jobs held. So make sure you get a reference for any work you do in a professional environment (internships, part-time jobs, social involvement). It is rare to provide personal contacts as references in CVs in Germany.

2.1 The covering letter

A covering letter allows you to set yourself apart from other applicants. It is a way for you to concisely and convincingly summarise what drives you, and arouse the company's interest.

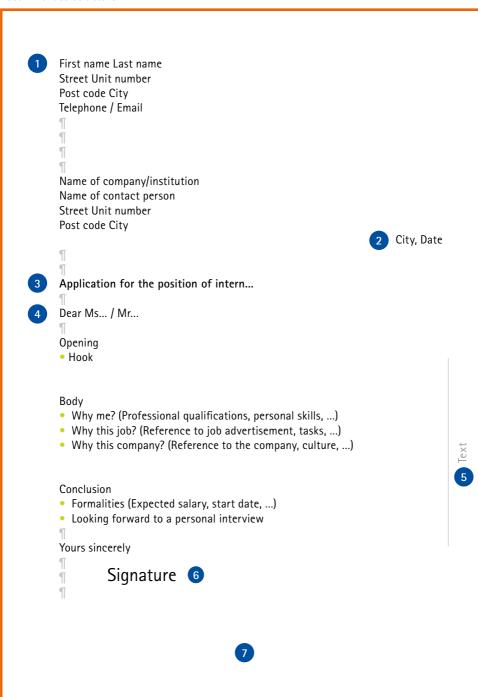
The letter revolves around the following questions:

- Why are you applying for this job at this particular company?
- What expertise, personal skills and practical experience can you offer?

It is important to remember the following when writing your covering letter:

- Your letter should be no more than one page.
- Include selected highlights from your life so far in order to promote yourself. What is important in relation to the position, and therefore of interest to the company?
- Choose carefully and tailor the wording of each letter specifically to the advertised position, company and requirements.
- It is important to be concise, accurate, active and positive when writing about your studies, qualifications, practical experience, and professional and personal skills. Always back your statements up with detailed examples.

Ideally avoid	Ideally include			
Standard phrases: I wish to apply for I was very interested to read I saw on your website	Personal reference: Many thanks for the informative conversation we had at the "Career Dates" job fair. Genuine interest: With its virtually endless supply of networked data, your company provides an exciting work environment for me as an IT specialist.			
Flowery language: I would like to work at your company because it is one of the largest and most innovative in the world.				
Claims: I am flexible, a team-worker and have strong communication skills.	Concrete examples: I was involved in various projects as part of an internship at XY company. This saw me respond flexibly to various customer requests.			
Exaggerations: I meet every single one of the requirements for your advertised position.	Authenticity: The "PR" and "organising events" task areas particularly appealed to me.			
A focus on your own benefit: The position would give me the opportunity to	A focus on benefit for the company: My goal is to help develop your department through a high level of commitment and initiative.			
Justifications: I decided against continuing my studies because	Arguments: I furthered my interests/specialisations in the xy course.			
Passive voice: I was assigned the task xy	Active voice: I independently performed the task xy			
Modal verbs: During my internship, I was able to I was able to improve my skills	Confident language use: During my internship, I [use verb directly in the simple past tense] I developed my skills.			
Subjunctive: I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss things with you in person.	Indicative: I very much look forward to the opportunity to discuss things with you in person.			



- 1 As a standard, your address goes in the top left corner of a business letter. But it is also possible to have it right-justified, centred or in the header.
- The date can either be numerical or alphanumerical: Hanover, 16/6/2016
 Hanover, 16 June 2016

Important: The format followed must be consistent in both the CV and covering letter.

- Bold can be used for the subject line. If the job advertisement contains a reference number, it is important to include this in the subject line.
- If there is no personal contact, the neutral "Dear Sir/Madam" may be used. If a contact person is mentioned in the job advertisement, it is important to address the letter to this person.
- 5 The text should be structured with paragraphs and blank lines, and follow a central theme. Use conjunctions to make your text easy to read.
- 6 The signature should be handwritten or scanned. There is no need to repeat the signature in typed format.
- 7 Choose easy to read fonts and size 10-12pt.

Our tip

- Address the letter to a specific person, both in the address section and salutation. This person is usually the contact person mentioned in the job advertisement. If you don't know whether it is a man or a woman, google for the first name. The first name is omitted in the salutation, e.g. Dear Ms Miller.
- The letter should always be tailored to the respective position/company.
- The letter should be short (no more than one page) and informative. Avoid long, complex sentences.
- Do not repeat your entire CV in the letter.
- The letter should not contain any spelling or grammatical errors. Have it proof-read by a native speaker.
- Make sure you write the company name, contact person and address correctly.



2.2 The CV

A certain format is used for CVs in Germany. The CV is the most important of your application documents. It contains all the necessary information about you, and shows all the main stages of your life to date. Each CV should be tailored to the desired position. This means that the sequence and content will not be the same for each application, and will instead be adjusted to suit the respective job. You can mention various specialisations or describe some points in greater detail than others.

- The CV has a tabular structure, meaning the date information is on the left and the activity descriptions are on the right.
- The date information should be shown in months and years. There are multiple options for this, such as
 - 09/2017 01/2018 or 09/2017 to 01/2018
 - Sept. 2017 Jan. 2018 or Sept. 2017 to Jan. 2018

You can choose the format you like best. Just make sure you keep this consistent throughout the entire CV and don't switch halfway through.

- American sequencing has now become the general standard in Germany, meaning you start with your most recent position and finish with the least recent one.
- Seamless CVs are particularly important in Germany. HR managers like
 to be able to see exactly when you held which job. So any "gaps" longer
 than three months should be accompanied by an explanation.
- The CV should be no more than two pages long.
- The CV should be uniform the whole way through. This means you use
 the same font and follow the same principle in each section. If, for
 example, you always state the course, then the university and location,
 you should use this same sequence for the next entry as well.
- The "practical experience" section should contain dot points of the exact activities you performed.

Name • Address • Phone • Mail

CV

Personal details

First and last name (if not already in the header)

Date of birth Place of birth

Nationality (optional)

Marital status (optional)



Month/Year - Month/Year Course (e.g. Masters)

Institution, City (if not in the institution name)

Majors

Dissertation topic Grade (optional)

Month/Year - Month/Year Course (e.g. Bachelors)

Institution, City (if not in the institution name)

Majors

Dissertation topic Grade (optional)

Month/Year School-leaving examination, grade (optional)

School, City

Practical experience

Month/Year - Month/Year Position (e.g. research assistant)

Establishment / Company / Organisation, City

Department / Area

Task

Task

Task

Month/Year - Month/Year Position (e.g. intern)

Establishment / Company / Organisation, City

Department / Area

Task

Task

Task



Additional qualifications / Advanced training						
Month/Year	Training, certificate, scope Establishment, City					
Volunteer work						
Month/Year – Month/Year	Position					
	Establishment					
	 Task 					
Languages						
Language	Proficient					
Language	Fluent Very good skills Good skills					
Language						
Language						
Language	Basic skills					
IT skills						
Program	Expert skills					
Program	Very good skills					
Program	Good skills					
Program	Basic skills					
Interests*						
2-3 current and specific recreati	onal activities					
City, Date						
Signature						

2.3 References, certificates and proof of work (appendices)

References, certificates and proof of work are important application documents in Germany, and are included as appendices. They allow the company to get a better idea of you and verify the information in your CV and covering letter. If you have gained practical experience in Germany, you should always ask for a work reference. The same applies for internships.

But you won't just receive references for internships and professional experience. You will also receive proof of participation if you have attended an advanced training course, e.g. a language or computer course. If this training is of relevance to your desired job, you may add this proof to your application documents. The references and proof come at the end of your application documents, following the same sequence as the entries in your CV.

The references, certificates and proof of work below count as appendices:

- If you have not yet completed your studies: A hardcopy of your provisional average grade from your current course
- If you have already completed your studies: Masters certificate, Bachelors certificate, transcript of results etc.
- Work references
- Internship references
- Proof of advanced training
- Certificates
- If available: Letters of recommendation (e.g. from a professor)
- If available: Proof of scholarships, awards and prizes

Important: Your references/certificates and proof of work should be in English. So if you have obtained references/certificates abroad, you should have these translated and certified.

In the case of digital applications, attach the appendices as scans. But make sure the documents are clean, legible and not scanned crookedly.

2.4 The Photo

Although companies do not legally have to demand a photo, application photos are very common in Germany, so we recommend including a professional application photo in your documents. A well shot application photo can connect with readers on a personal level and get them on your side. Application photos must not be confused with biometric passport photos, which require a different size, image section and facial expression. Unlike in biometric passport photos, you should smile in an application photo.

What you need to remember for your application photo:

- It must be recent, i.e. no more than a year old.
- It must be shot by a professional photo studio.
- It may be in black and white or colour.
- It should show you looking well groomed (hair, clothing appropriate for the position).
- It should be in the classic format of approx. 6.5 x 4.5 cm.
- It may be placed on the cover sheet or CV.

2.5 The cover sheet

You may use a cover sheet if you wish. These are commonly used, and will make your application more personal.

The cover sheet usually includes the following:

- Your name and contact details
- The company/position you are applying to/for
- The photo (this may alternatively be placed in the CV)
- Additional, brief information on your studies, majors, practical experience as a mini profile with up to 3-4 dot points particularly relevant to the position

Advantage: By combining your application photo with a few important points in your profile, you can systematically attract reader attention right from the outset, and quickly steer them to the most important aspects.

Sending application documents

As digital applications have a number of advantages for companies, the most common way of applying these days is by email. Only very rarely do companies prefer receiving applications by post. But be sure to follow the instructions stated in the job advertisement.

3.1 Sending by email

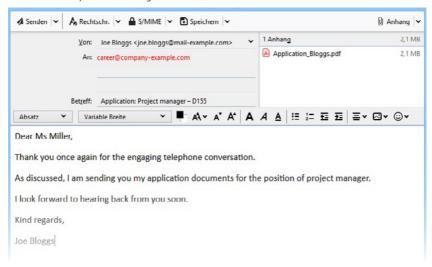
Email applications should contain all the elements of a written application as attachments. This includes the cover letter, CV, references/certificates and proof of work.

One frequently asked question is where the cover letter should go: Directly in the body of an email or as an attachment? We recommend attaching the letter to the email as a PDF. Then you can be sure it will be received in the same format you sent it in. The body of the email itself should be a short, polite text, mentioning the position and your attached application. Make the recipient curious about your application by establishing a personal link e.g. Have you already spoken by telephone? Then thank them for the conversation. Avoid formatting the body of the email (fonts, bold, special characters etc.), as the recipient's program settings determine how the message is ultimately displayed.

Your email text must also include your contact details (full address and other contact options). You could, for example, put a signature at the end of your message.

It is also important to use a clear subject line, as this is the first thing the recipient sees of your application. A clear, informative subject line enables the email to be easily categorised and retrieved later on. Make sure the relevant position's reference number if applicable is also included here e.g. Application for the position of sales trainee, reference number 1234.

Here is one way of structuring an email:



The attachments

To make the reader's life easier, send no more than 2 files. These should be clearly labelled (e.g. CV_Joe Bloggs). We recommend combining and naming all documents in one file (e.g. Application_Joe Bloggs). Too many attachments mean too many mouse clicks, and therefore more work, for the recipient. But there are various options and opinions on this. In cases of doubt, it's better to ask.

Use conventional file formats for your attachments. We recommend PDF format, as this will ensure the appearance of your application cannot be changed by accident when the file is opened. PDF format is also easy to open. Try to avoid unknown formats and packed files e.g. zip.

Make sure the email is not too large with all its attachments. Many companies have a set limit for the data volumes they receive, so it's important not to exceed a total size of 2-3 MB though this can differ from company to company. Choose which of your attachments are particularly crucial for the position, and order them by importance. If you do not have all your documents at the time, you may send these later on upon request. A tip to keep file sizes small: references and certificates may also be sent in black and white.

Additional tips and tricks for sending applications

There are lots of little things to remember for email applications. Here are some other tips we have put together for you to follow:

- Send your application from a credible email address. Ideally firstname.lastname@provider.de. Do not use any nicknames, abbreviations or diminutives in your address.
- Send the application to the contact person's personal email address. If
 you do not know the personal contact, telephone them to ask for it. It is
 particularly important to have a specific contact person when it comes
 to email applications, because general email addresses are not used as
 often. But do not request a confirmation of receipt. This will only make
 unnecessary work and is often perceived as demanding.
- Some email providers also send advertising in the body of emails, and freemail providers can additionally limit the size of your inbox. Make sure you still have enough space in your inbox, and that responding companies do not receive any error messages. We therefore recommend sending emails using special email programs such as Outlook or Thunderbird.
- To check whether the email has been sent exactly the way you want it, send the email application to yourself as a test. You can put your own email address in the "Bcc" field; then you can be sure your email has been sent.
- Not every email application is acknowledged when received. If you haven't heard back after a few days, you may check and see whether the documents were delivered to the recipient. If you have not heard anything despite a confirmation of receipt, you may enquire by telephone.
- Check your email inbox regularly to ensure you can respond promptly to replies or interview invitations.

Summary: Make things as easy as possible for the other person

Start by preparing your complete, flawless application as a PDF file no more than 2–3 MB in size. This should include the covering letter, as well as the CV and references/certificates/proof of work. Then compose a short, polite message in the body of your email explaining your application. Be sure to use an informative subject line. Always send this message to a personal contact you can also speak to directly, and do not request any confirmation of receipt. Try to make the email and attachments as easy as possible for the recipient. The faster they're able to find their way around your documents, the greater your application's chance of success.

3.2 Sending by post

Please note the following for applications by post:

- Use good-quality paper (e.g. 90 100 g/m²)
- Use a clean folder that enables all your documents to be filed with removable pages, e.g. a spring binder. Some companies' job advertisements ask you not to send application folders. Read the job advertisement carefully.
- Don't fold your documents; use a DIN A4 envelope with adequate postage
- Personally sign the covering letter and CV.
- Do not send your documents by registered post.

Company online application forms

Online application forms on company websites are very common. They involve information being gradually completed and stored in the form of a questionnaire. Many company websites offer a login area for users, enabling them to keep editing their application, retrieve their current status, and keep documents updated. As such, the applicant creates a profile of themselves. They are often able to apply for multiple positions simultaneously. Depending on the area, various HR managers will then have access to their application. In other cases, the entered data can no longer be accessed once stored, so you should check your entries carefully before sending.

Completing online application forms correctly

The rules applicable to online applications are generally the same as for email applications. Carefully look through the questions on the form (e.g. with screen shots or notes) before answering them. Then prepare your answers and texts before finally completing the form correctly. Take as much time as you need for this. Refer to the job advertisement and specifically address the criteria stipulated there. Make sure your application is complete and individually tailored to the position and company.

It is important to note the following:

- Ideally complete all fields in the form. A field left blank may result in you dropping out of the search. The information on education and professional experience can usually be clicked on in a drop-down field as a standard, allowing HR managers to select suitable candidates through search functions. If your course or certain industries you have previously worked in are not shown in the field, choose an alternative similar to your area.
- Avoid the "Other" option (e.g. in drop-down fields). Many programs at companies have a ranking function. If you have selected the "Other" field, you may appear lower down in the rankings or even drop out completely. So it's better to instead choose an area that fits as closely as possible.
- Enter key terms in free text fields. To prevent you from being filtered out by applicant management software (search functions can also be embedded in free text fields), use wording featured in the job advertisement as much as possible here when describing your skills and experience. This will increase the likelihood of being found by the HR managers. Students from technical courses should, for example, use specialist terminology and synonyms as often as possible, as recruiters systematically search for specific terms.

- Make your texts informative and personal. If you are unable to upload your own covering letter, use free text fields to demonstrate your motivation and enthusiasm for the application and introduce yourself personally.
 Once again avoid standard phrasing here, and justify exactly why you are applying for this job at this particular company.
- Keep things concise. There is generally limited space for your text in free text fields. So concentrate on the most important things always relating them to the advertised position, of course. Use short, informative wording.
- No repetitions. If you are able to both upload a covering letter and present your motivation in a free text field, make sure you don't end up repeating yourself. You can use the same key terms in both areas – but not the same phrasing.
- Make the most of the opportunity to upload documents. Upload your document as a PDF file. Make sure your attachments are named clearly and informatively, and that the files are a suitable size (2-3 MB, depending on company specifications).
- Follow the rules of written correspondence. Use correct capitalisation and polite phrasing (no slang or abbreviations).
- Be honest about grades and levels. Online forms usually require you to enter exact grades, language skill levels, and course durations. Depending on software settings, this may result in applicants with lower grades being filtered out of the process. Be honest here. Remember that companies placing great emphasis on good grades would still filter out applicants with low average grades even in classic selection processes. If a company wants to know your average grade, state this truthfully.
- Be careful and accurate. Every field must be completed carefully and flawlessly, so check all entries and spelling before sending.
- No emoticons. Avoid unnecessary characters in free text fields (asterisks, hash symbols, bullet points, emoticons). Some software programs cannot display these characters, which can then disrupt your application's layout.
- Save your application. Always save a copy of your application, e.g. as a print-out of a completed form or a screenshot. Then you'll be able to remind yourself what you wrote down the track, and can use this to prepare for the job interview.

Summary: A convincing application

Always make your covering letter personal; don't use a template. CVs should never contain any gaps. Choose references/certificates and proof of work appropriate to the position you're applying for. Less is more. In general, focus your content around the respective position. Imagine your application as being an initial work sample, and show you are able to suitably summarise your skills concisely and appropriately for the position.

It is also crucial to ensure your motivation is clear: Why do you want to work in this position at this particular company? This requires you to intensively look into the advertised position and your skills. You are better to send fewer but more fitting, well researched and high-quality applications than a large number of standard, superficial applications. This is potentially also good preparation for a job interview. You are welcome to bring your documents to the personal consultation hour run by the Careers Service advisors.

Still have questions?

Got additional questions about the application process, internships or starting your career? Take advantage of our events and counselling options as soon as possible.

More success for your studies and job entry Consultation and Workshops of ZQS/Schlüsselkompetenzen

Application, internships and job entry

Having a clear career goal, first practical experience and business contacts as well as a convincing manner and attitude throughout the application process: All these are considered to be important factors for a successful career entry. The Career Service supports students of all faculties and graduates up to one year after their graduation along their personal career path.

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Career exploration / internships
- Application documents, Job interviews and selection process
- Contact with potential employers and companies (job fair, job shadowing and mentoring)
- Job searching strategies

Further information:

zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/career-guidance-and-service

Learning strategies and exam preparation

University studies differ highly from school, apprenticeships or learning on the job. They are far more demanding with heavier content and short assessment periods. Lernwerkstatt supports students to enhance their study-related skills aiming to facilitate the exam preparation, study organization and the overall learning process. Lernwerkstatt helps students to master the enormous workload and tight deadlines.

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Learning strategies
- Exam preparation
- Organization of class materials
- Time scheduling
- Self-organization

Further information:

zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/learning

Academic Writing

Academic writing is a complex process ranging from a first vague idea to the finishing touches - and everything that is happening in between: planning, formulating, and revising. Team Schlüsselkompetenz Schreiben supports students of all faculties to successfully complete their writing projects in German language (essays, reports, final theses etc.).

We offer consultation and workshops on the following topics:

- Formulating a research question
- Developing an outline and structuring the content
- Managing your writing project
- Reviewing sources and structuring material
- Avoiding plagiarisms
- Describing experiments, surveys and visuals
- Formulating and revising texts

Further information:

zqs.uni-hannover.de/en/kc/academic-writing

Notes