

Common Mistakes

Formatting and Layout

- The formatting as explained in the term paper guidelines is not used (font size, full justification, line spacing, margins etc.)
- One-sentence paragraphs
- Chapters that have a single subchapter (unnecessary)
- Wrong indication of work titles, such as quotation marks instead of italics or vice versa
 - For example: "The Hobbit" [incorrect] instead of *The Hobbit* [correct]
 - Or: *Song of the Lonely Mountain* [incorrect] instead of "Song of the Lonely Mountain" [correct]
- Wrong characters, such as these quotation marks " instead of these "" or a minus - instead of a dash –. This may be more obvious in certain fonts than in others
- Double quotation marks instead of single quotation marks to indicate the metalinguistic use of a term:
 - ○ "The term "Fantasy" describes..." [incorrect] instead of "The term 'Fantasy' describes..." [correct]

Grammar and Style

- Colloquial register or inappropriate register (this includes contractions)
 - For example: "Bilbo gets knocked unconscious"
 - "This is a really cool ring."
- Tense mistakes, e.g. using past tense in summaries, inconsistent tense
 - For example: "In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo went on an adventure"
 - When Tolkien first wrote *The Hobbit*, he does so for his son.
- Punctuation mistakes
 - For example: "It is striking, that Bilbo goes on this adventure." [There does not need to be a comma in this sentence]

- “However, “I wrote it for my son”, says Tolkien.” [In English, the punctuation (in this case, a comma) comes before the punctuation mark]

Content

- Line of argument or thought is illogical
- No coherence or cohesiveness
 - For example: “Because Bilbo goes on an adventure, the dragon hoards treasure.”
 - “Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit*, but his son preferred to eat pie.”
- Tangents and digressions, i.e. sequences that have little to nothing to do with the overall argument
 - For example: “Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* for his son. By the way, his son was very good at spotting inconsistencies and mistakes. Because Tolkien’s son was ill and could not leave the house, Tolkien wrote him an adventure story.”
- Conclusions are missing or underexplained
 - For example: “The Hobbit is a great example of a children’s adventure story” without any further discussion of what an adventure story is or why *The Hobbit* is a particularly good example of one.

References and Quotations

- References are missing or there are not enough references
 - For example, stating that Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* for his son without indicating where you found this information
- Terms remain undefined
 - For example, stating that *The Hobbit* is an adventure story without defining the term ‘adventure story’: or, that *The Hobbit* codified many aspects of fantasy literature without going into detail as to what these aspects are

- Poorly formatted or unformatted bibliography. Please see the guidelines or the MLA website on how to properly format a bibliography.
 - Tolkien, J.R.R.. “The Hobbit, or There and Back Again.” 2007, HarperCollins, [incorrect]
 - Tolkien, J.R.R.. *The Hobbit, or There and Back again*. 1937. HarperCollins, 2007. [correct]
- Quotations are not explained or interpreted
- There are only direct or only indirect quotes. A good paper has a mixture of both kinds.
- Unacademic references. Your study notes are not proper references
- References that are out of date
- Quotations longer than three lines need to be indented. See the term paper guidelines for more information

Other mistakes

- German-influence grammar, punctuation, and syntax; False Friends
- Your word processing programme might be set to German. This can lead to unintended autocorrects, such as moving the quotation marks to the bottom „“
- Mixing of British and American English. Choose one style and stick to it.
- Misspelling of the lecturer’s name or omitting their titles on the title page

Tips and Recommendations

- Strong ideas and arguments can be completely undermined by bad writing and structure.
- Consider if several one-sentence paragraphs could be combined into one longer paragraph
- Have somebody proof-read your paper
- It is better to look up the meaning of a word which you are not completely sure of and to find you were right after all than to use a word incorrectly

- If you copy and paste e.g. work titles, make sure to update the quotation marks and add italics when necessary
- To quote from a text that is not in English (or German), first quote the original and then provide your translation (or paraphrase). However, your lecturer might actually speak the language. Ask them!
- Always consult your lecturer if anything is unclear