

## An Introduction to Scholarly Writing. Some Basic Considerations

Scholarly writing serves the spread of knowledge. Prerequisite for this is the curiosity, desire, and urge to know something more or to better understand something or a situation. This may be an interest based on pure findings (basic research), whose immediate usability is not foreseeable, or an interest in knowledge (applied research), for which the prospect of useful application is the catalyst and driving force. Architectural theory has stakes in both fields of scholarship, in that it is the critical reflection on the construction and constructed works of architecture, as well as the critical reflection on the cultural function of architecture in a dynamic cultural field. Today in modern society, architecture is not possible without critical reflection, in the same way that in modern societies, culture without cultural reflection would be precisely the barbarism against which it seeks to differentiate itself.

### A. Catalyst, Starting Point and Goal

**a. Triggers for scholastic interest** can be open questions or drawbacks, that can result from technical developments, social and societal changes, or other changes within a cultural context. Scholarly interest can also be awakened by pure curiosity. Often, however, it is the knowledge itself about something that raises new questions and reveals gaps in knowledge that require answering.

**b. The starting point for scholastic interest** is a gap in knowledge, a concrete problem, from which a precisely formulated question is derived. Scholarly writing is supported by an academic method, i.e. a concrete way of proceeding. Ideally, the process of scholarly writing is as follows:

1. Definition of a problem and a question
2. Formulation of a working hypothesis
3. Formulation of a thesis
4. Confirmation or falsification of the thesis;  
In the case of confirmation, this can lead to a principle or definition

**c. The goal of scholarly writing** is to arrive at objectifiable, plausible, and logically comprehensible findings. While the way in which one works may well be idiosyncratic, that is, characterized by personal style, the results should be generally valid and therefore verifiable. The academic work is also - and by no means incidentally - characterized by the way in which it is mediated. Scholarship is the entity of theoretical foundations, methods of academic work, and the mediation of the resulting scholarly knowledge.

### B. Material, Medium und Methods

**a. Material of Scholarly Writing** Every scholarly work is based on the precise research and appropriation of the status quo of knowledge. Its basis is the acquisition of existing knowledge based on source material of the most varied nature and origin. An important criterion is that the sources must be available for others to acquire and review:

1. *Written testimonies*, such as: books, magazines, newspapers, sometimes as: order books, bills, military orders, diplomatic cables, letters, business correspondences, diaries, etc.

2. *Oral testimonies* in the sense of an oral history, such as: interviews, statements by witnesses, survey results, etc.
3. *Pictorial testimonies* such as: images, photos, x-rays, drawings, sketches, films, videos, plans (elevations, floors plans, views, perspectives), posters, etc.
4. *Material artifacts* such as: architecture, utensils, archaeological artifacts, material samples, models (virtual and analogue), etc.

**b. Medium of scholarly knowledge** is the written word. Scholarly writing – especially in the humanities, which includes the theory of architecture and philosophy – is grounded in conceptual work, in the expression of conceptions, the formulation of logical conclusions and derived insights, which then lead to general, binding definitions and principles. Depending on the type of knowledge gained, the subject area, and the methods used, different types of written representations can be distinguished:

1. *Scholarly publications*
  - a. *Academic article* in scientific or academic anthologies and journals. The goal is the objective presentation and transparent discussion of the results of scholarly work, including the visualization of theoretical as well as methodological premises.
  - b. *Academic essay* as a special form, which emphasizes the reader's conviction in a stylistically sophisticated form, often through stylistic elegance, rhetorical sophistication, and a certain ease of speech.
  - c. *Monographs*. These are comprehensive debates on the topic of an academic work of an author in book form that is formulated into a clearly defined scholarly question.
  - d. *Anthologies*. These are collections of texts usually pertaining to a certain topic of essays from different authors or a collection of texts from one author on different topics.
2. *Smaller Publication Formats*
  - a. *Speeches and lecture manuscripts*
  - b. *Exposés* from essays, books, research projects, -proposals and conferences
  - c. *Protocols* from seminars, academic discussions, or lectures
  - d. *Excerpts*, such as personal copies of passages or sentences from scholarly literature, books, essays, etc. as the basis for one's own academic work
  - e. *Reviews and Critiques* of books and conferences in journals
3. *Secondary publication formats* with a diminished level of scholarly knowledge, yet a greater interest in communicating knowledge to a wider audience:
  - a. *Feature articles* in weekly or daily newspapers
  - b. *Interviews* in magazines or newspapers
  - c. *Satire, Caricature, Wit (gnoseologia inferior)*
  - d. *Critiques and Reviews* of books or conferences in daily newspapers
  - e. *Editorials* or *Forewords* to book publications and journals

**c. Methodological prerequisites** for scholarly writing. The findings are usually written down and discussed with support - if necessary - from visual material or even material artifacts. This requires prior clarification and explanation of:

- a. the question. What are the knowledge gaps and the knowledge gains, and why is it worthwhile to occupy oneself with them?
- b. the facts. What is the current state of knowledge, and what is the source material, from which one can take?
- c. the examination procedure. What is the method and procedure in which one can structure the work and work in a goal-oriented manner?
- d. the underlying theories. What are the scholarly perspectives and the logical prerequisites of this scholarly work? For example, is it about symbolic theory or phenomenological interests, is the work based on the conceptual instruments of Marxism, system theory, critical theory, etc.?
- e. the expected results and findings.

## C. Outline of a Scholarly Paper

**a. Title. Subtitle.** Every scholarly paper needs a title that illuminates the topic in the most concise form (content objective as well as associatively suggestive). The success of a scholarly paper depends on a cleverly chosen title, easily quotable, memorable, and one that can be used as a catchphrase (which, however, can often lead to a certain dangers of trivialization or abuse), such as: *Learning from Las Vegas*, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* or *Prehistory of Modernity*, etc.

1. The *title* of the thesis should contain a picture, a metaphor, or a term that is memorable and that places the work into an ordered thematic context. An associative, conflict-laden tension should become visible, one that arises expectations.
2. The *subtitle* is the necessary factual complement to the title, to indicate the direction of the argumentation. This clarifies that the paper is about Adolf Loos and his cultural criticism, but not about Adolf Loos' stay in the USA or something else in this manner.

Example 1: *Prehistory of Modernity. Theory of the History of Architecture*

Example 2: *The Alphabet and the Algorithm. How the Digital Challenges Architecture*

**b. Tripartism of scholarly papers**, similar to the sonata form in music:

(1) Introduction, (2) Exposition, Implementation, Reprise, and (3) Coda.

1. *Exposé / Introduction* The Exposé takes the place of the introduction. Presentation of the topic, introduction to the problem, and a short summary of the main arguments (maximum half a page or for feature articles, only two sentences)
  - a. The exposé presents the topic and the corresponding questions.
  - b. The Exposé is less an argument, but rather formulates theses and sharpens them in a concise manner, so that questions arise that the reader finds exciting and would like to have answered.
  - c. The exposé can often only be finished toward the end of the work. At the beginning, one does not yet have an overview of the whole range of one's argumentation and is not yet able to sharpen it.

Example: Modernity is by no means without history. As the author shows, this applies especially to architecture. After the break of modernity with the obsolete and immediate past - the 19th century - the reconceptualization of architecture serves as nothing less than the search for the past, for the primal history, which can only succeed as an innovative, contemporary practice by connecting to this history.

2. *Exposition, Implementation and Reprise* constitutes the main part of the argumentative exposition of scholarly questions. This part depends on clear argumentation and the conclusiveness of evidence. At the end there should be one's own convincing insight which can be either (a) deductive out of existing, accepted rules of logic derived from an individual case, or (b) inductive, out of a particular case of general rules
  - a. *Exposition*: The theses and counter-theses are dialectically introduced.
  - b. *Implementation*: critical discussion of the subject. Evidence, reference objects, secondary literature, etc. should either
    - substantiate and confirm the thesis
    - supplement in sub-aspects the thesis, and
    - back up the thesis against the counter-theses on the basis of evidence.
  - c. *Reprise*: Conclusion. The thesis should be included here and the main arguments for it and against it are presented. One refers again to the exposition, and argumentatively shows how the reference back to it is closed.
3. *Coda* Here, especially in shorter scholarly papers, one can take a personal stand again. The significance of the findings is emphasized, or an outlook on subsequent questions is given.

**c. Linguistic standards** The ultimate goal of a scholarly work is comprehensibility. It is about the communication of what can often be quite complex knowledge, not only for a professional audience,

but especially in architecture, for practicing architects, students of architecture and related subjects, the non-specialist audience of builders, and the general public. The following basic rules can be named:

1. Scholarship thrives on clear and simple statements. The findings should be complex, the language simple. Difficult sentences that one must read several times to understand them should be avoided. Academic essays are not literary masterpieces; it's not about the ambivalence of the statements. It's about scholarly knowledge, which means clarity.
2. Avoidance of words in a foreign language. For a better understanding, especially for a non-specialist audience, all unnecessary foreign-language words are to be avoided. They are to be replaced by the equivalent English words, unless they are technical terms that are well established. But even in these cases, it makes sense to briefly explain the foreign-language words in one sentence.
3. Colloquial and very rarely used words have no place in academic papers.
4. Scholarly writing is about objective knowledge. Emotional expressions, therefore, feel out of place. Yet, sometimes it might be appropriate to let one's own enthusiasm shine through, so as to bring the reader into one's reasoning, so that the argument becomes more balanced.
5. Each sentence brings a new thought, a new statement, or introduces a new aspect in terms of a former thought.
6. Filler words such as 'but', 'yet', 'also' etc. are to be reduced as much as possible to the places only where they are necessary. While writing, one thinks that one needs them, but in the editing process, special attention should be paid to eliminating the superfluous.
7. Cliché phrases or hollow phrases are to be avoided, they indicate that the author has little or nothing to say and is either unaware of one's shortcomings or simply knows that the substance is too low.
8. Redundancies should be reduced to the necessary level. Redundancies, i.e. repetition of the same facts, are tiresome, annoying and lead to a loss of attention. Nevertheless, a repetition or reminder of the topic and the reasoning may well be appropriate in certain parts of a text. They can redirect attention to the topic, arouse new interest, and even contribute to the memorability of the thesis.
9. Superlatives should be avoided, such as the word 'very'. They bring into the text a level of assessment that is often inappropriate and that questions objectivity. Often a simple statement is stronger than an exaggerated one with a superlative.
10. It is advisable to read the essay aloud toward the end. In order to find out where the flow of speech is interrupted, where one stumbles, or when passages are difficult to understand.