

# Writing Guide for Sociology

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

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Sincerely,

Jennifer Jones and Sarah Quinn

# Preface

by Kim Voss  
Professor and Chair

I blame it on IQ tests. Many undergraduates arrive at Berkeley with the idea that writers, like geniuses, are born rather than made. They imagine that my colleagues and I simply sit down and write books and articles in pretty much finished form, spending little time on drafts or any hours at all on editing and reformulating. A lot of undergraduates despair because they think that if they were not born writers, they are condemned never to be very good at it.

Yet, as you will learn here, the genius model of writing is wrong. Just as psychologists have discovered that many differences in I.Q. scores have environmental, not genetic, roots, so too is writing an ability that can be nurtured and improved. All the good writers I know spend hours rewriting and reworking unclear text, put in days painfully confronting their own fuzzy thinking, and devote much attention to the craft of writing itself.

The academic environment is a writing-intensive environment, and during your college years you will be asked to write dozens of assignments—from brief response papers to essay exams to full-fledged research papers. We ask you to write because we want you to learn a skill that you will need in the future, whether you decide to become an activist or an attorney, a professor or a physician, a social worker or a software engineer. We also ask you to write because—above all else—we want to teach you to think clearly, precisely, and profoundly.

This guide grows out of the Berkeley Sociology Department's quest to find ways to teach our undergraduates to become better writers. Beginning in 2005, we decided to tackle head-on the writing difficulties that many of our faculty and graduate student instructors were observing in the courses they were teaching. We began by organizing a series of department-wide colloquia on different techniques for teaching writing and for incorporating sociological writing into undergraduate courses. We also decided to prioritize writing instruction in allocating Graduate Student Instructors to undergraduate courses. Once our new emphasis on writing instruction had been in place for a year, we met to compare notes and to figure out what was working well and what needed to be improved. We agreed at that meeting that the one thing that would most help all of us—undergraduates, graduate student instructors, and faculty—would be a short booklet on writing for sociologists.

Producing this writing guide has been a labor of love. Led by Jennifer Jones and Sarah Quinn, the graduate students in the Berkeley Sociology Department have built on their experiences as Graduate Student Instructors to put together a writing guide that they wish they had had when they were undergraduates. I echo that wish—perhaps I'd have spent fewer hours pulling out my hair over



my own lousy first drafts if I'd had this guide when I first set out to learn the craft of writing. I hope that you will use this labor of love to make yourself a better writer.



# Introduction

## Welcome to Berkeley Sociology!

Graduate students in the sociology department created this guide. We combed the internet, begged our faculty, and badgered our peers in order to compile all the advice we wish we had heard when we were undergrads. The guide is designed to help you produce interesting and satisfying work each and every time you write. And in the process of improving your writing, you will find that you think in more rigorous and profound ways. This booklet is filled with tips and directives, but they are all facets of a few simple ideas:

**Writing is about thinking.** Written work is not only assigned to evaluate your performance; it is a chance to develop your understanding of a topic. If you cannot write about something clearly, you need to understand it better. When you practice writing, you also practice thinking. As you learn to write with greater precision and clarity, you will think with greater precision and clarity.

Chapter 1 introduces the different types of thinking you will be asked to master in college and explains what it means to move past summarizing a text to the more complicated terrain of analyzing, applying and evaluating it.

**Communicate, don't regurgitate.** There are two models for going through school. In the regurgitation model, students seek to please the people grading their papers by pandering to their interests and parroting points from lecture. In the communication model, papers are a chance to have an in-depth and personal discussion about a topic.

Assignments are conversations on paper that communicate your take on a subject, and the comments you get back are a continuation of this conversation. Many people go through school just regurgitating, but if you see your assignments as a kind of communication, you'll find that writing is more enjoyable and rewarding. As you write, you enter ongoing conversations about how the social world works. Chapter 6, on dealing with other people's writing, will explain the rules for engaging with others' work in a responsible way.

**Make a point about something that matters.** The best work takes a stand about something that matters. Remember that professors ask you to write because they want to give you a chance to think things through and because they want to know what you think. Pick a topic that is worth the investment. Make sure that your writing represents a fully-formed point of view about the subject at hand. Chapter 3 will help you identify how to pick a meaningful

and appropriate topic, and Chapter 5 will help you develop that topic into an argument.

**Develop your writer’s voice.** No matter what you write, your voice should be present throughout, so that the reader feels engaged with what you are arguing, pondering or illustrating. Chapters 3 and 4 address the writing process and the mechanics of writing. When reading them, consider how to hone your voice and writing style.

**Be clear.** In a verbal conversation you can find out quickly if someone misunderstood you. As a student, if you haven’t been clear enough with your writing, you often will not find out until you get your grade. You must say exactly what you mean the first time. The best way to learn how to be clear is to share your work with others and find out if they understood what you meant. Seek out feedback on your work from friends, classmates, GSIs, professors, tutors, and through the many writing resource centers and opportunities on campus (a list of them is available in Appendix A). This guide also provides tips for being clear in Chapter 5: Mechanics.

*I write to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means.*  
— Joan Didion

**Writing is a craft that is learned through practice and hard work.** Though it might seem that great writing is a mysterious gift, in reality it is a skill developed through practice and hard work. Study habits matter. This guide won’t help you manage your time better, but it will walk you through a set of work habits that matter most for writing a paper. The section on Reading for College (in Chapter 1) lists tricks for understanding and remembering what you have read. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth look at the writing process. The secret to great work is planning, editing, and more editing. We also detail the process of outlining, editing, rewriting, and absorbing feedback from Readers, Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs) and professors. If you are patient, practice your writing, and work hard, you will be sure to see an improvement in your work.

# Chapter 1

## Thinking and Reading for College

The standards for good college level writing are different from those for high school writing. In order to write well for college you need to understand how college writing differs from high school writing. You also need to understand how to read critically. Learning how to read well will help you learn to write well.

### 1.1 Bloom's Taxonomy

College-level writing is different than high school writing because you are asked to think in more complex ways.<sup>1</sup> While high school writing frequently develops your capacity to obtain knowledge, understanding, and application, college writing pushes you up Bloom's pyramid towards the more complex skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge exemplifies the transition from high school writing to college writing. In 1956, Benjamin Bloom developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. Bloom found that over 95% of the test questions students encounter require them to think only at the lowest possible level: the recall of information. This level of learning is generally not adequate for college-level work.

Bloom identified six levels of thinking, from the simple recall of facts, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order which is classified as evaluation. Listed below are examples that represent intellectual activity at each level. For each example, we have included the verbs typically used in each type of assignment. Look for these words when you get an assignment—they are clues to what the professor expects of you. Each example ends with a sample answer.

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<sup>1</sup>This section has been adapted from [OfficePort.com](http://OfficePort.com)

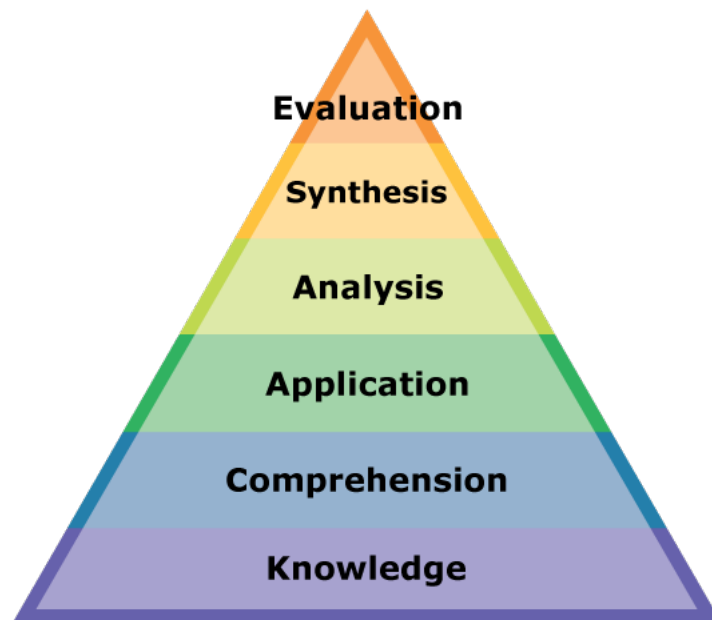
1. **Knowledge:** remembering appropriate previously learned information.  
Verb clues: define; describe; enumerate; identify; label; list; match; name; read; record; reproduce; select; state; view.  
Example: Durkheim's discussion of suicide in 19th century Europe identifies four different types of suicide—*anomic*, *altruistic*, *fatalistic*, and *egoistic*.
2. **Understanding:** grasping the meaning of information.  
Verb clues: classify; cite; convert; describe; discuss; estimate; explain; generalize; give examples; make sense out of; paraphrase; restate (in own words); summarize; trace; understand.  
Example: Durkheim's investigation of suicide explores a social problem across various societies and simultaneously tells a great deal about the differences between these societies.
3. **Application:** using information in new and concrete situations to understand them better and solve problems.  
Verb clues: act; administer; articulate; assess; collect; compute; construct; contribute; determine; develop; discover; establish; extend; implement; include; inform; instruct; operationalize; predict; produce; project; provide; relate; report; show; solve; teach; transfer; use; utilize.  
Example: Durkheim's analysis of suicide can help us better assess the causes of higher suicide rates following disasters such as hurricane Katrina.
4. **Analysis:** breaking down information into its component parts; examining (and trying to understand the organizational structure of) information to develop divergent conclusions by identifying motives or causes; making inferences and/or finding evidence to support generalizations.  
Verb clues: break down; correlate; diagram; differentiate; discriminate ; distinguish; focus; illustrate; infer; limit; outline; point out; prioritize; recognize; separate; subdivide.  
Example: Durkheim argues that some advanced societies fail to retain social control over individuals and fail to regulate their aspirations. These societies are insufficiently integrated. The social institutions that previously performed this integrative function—including the state, the family, and the church—can no longer connect the individual to the social group because they no longer exist as consistently cohesive and integrated societies in themselves.
5. **Synthesis:** creatively or divergently applying prior knowledge and skills to produce a new or original whole.  
Verb clues: categorize; collaborate; combine; communicate; compare; compose; contrast; create; express; facilitate; formulate; generate; incorporate; integrate; intervene; model; modify; negotiate; plan; rearrange; reconstruct; reinforce; reorganize; revise; structure; validate.

Example: Durkheim concludes that the state is too distant to impact the individual, that families are fleeting and weakened, and that the church serves mainly to curtail free thoughts. When lives are further disrupted in this troubled context, suicides will likely increase. Applying this to Katrina, it suggests that increased rates of suicides during the hurricane were the result of social problems, rather than the natural disaster. But reports of people helping strangers through the flood waters suggest that anomie and solidarity can both result from crisis ...

6. **Evaluation:** judging the value of material based on personal values/opinions; creating an end product with a given purpose and without real right or wrong answers.

Verb clues: appraise; compare & contrast; conclude; criticize; critique; decide; defend; interpret; judge; justify; reframe; support.

Example: I agree that suicide is an inherently social phenomenon that seems immoral because it offends the collective conscience. However, Durkheim has not sufficiently established that the best way to prevent suicide in modern societies is to rely on corporations. Today's corporations are often unstable, and his assumptions about career choices and class structure are flawed.



Bloom's Taxonomy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Image from [http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/misc/2008/blooms\\_old.png](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/misc/2008/blooms_old.png)

## 1.2 Reading for College

Just as college demands new writing skills, it also demands new reading skills. Reading well is one of the most important skills you will develop in college. If you don't understand a given text, you will have a hard time explaining it in a paper or essay. Incredible writing skills don't make a difference if you can't grasp the reading.

This section provides an overview of efficient and effective reading techniques. These strategies help you identify the main points, recall what you've read, and analyze the authors' main points and assumptions.

### 1.2.1 Guidelines for Critical Reading

by Cinzia Solari

Being a critical reader means questioning the perspectives, assumptions, and evidence behind the author's argument. It means not passively accepting the authority of the printed word. We need to train our minds to ask certain questions and look for clues so we can separate essential points from less important ones. The process of critical reading is similar to reverse engineering—your task entails breaking the argument into its parts to see how the pieces fit together.

The following key questions will help you to understand the logic or structure of an author's argument. Asking yourself these questions as you read should also help you isolate the parts of the book or article you should pay close attention to from those that you can skim.

#### I. Summary, or “What does the text say?”

1. What is the question being asked and answered in this book? In other words, what is the author's problem or puzzle?

Explicitly formulating a question that “frames” the book, in ONE sentence, with a question mark at the end, is perhaps the most important thing you can do to further your understanding of a text. The challenge is to come up with a formulation neither so broad nor so narrow that it misses the book's essence.

2. What is the author's main argument or thesis?

Identifying this preliminary answer to the question you just formulated will help you to grasp the thread that runs through the whole book and ties everything together.

3. What claims does the author present to support the thesis?

What is important here is not that you recapitulate all the details of a book or other text, but rather that you identify the sub-arguments that relate back to the central question. Suppose, for example, that the author spends a chapter or section discussing XYZ. What does XYZ tell us about the question that frames the book or text?



4. What are the author's conclusions?

Look for ways the author relates the argument of the book or text to broader debates about the subject. According to the author, what are the implications of the claims made in the text?

## II. Analysis, or “What does the text mean?”

1. Upon what assumptions does the author's main argument rest?

Looking for the assumptions underlying the study—both explicit and implicit—helps evaluate the author's claims. Consider whether or not you agree with the author's assumptions.

2. What evidence does the author use to support the argument?

Notice the author's evidence and what is omitted. Identifying missing pieces can be an important part of your reading.

3. Is the argument persuasive?

Think about whether the evidence matches the claims and whether other kinds of evidence would give different results. Is the argument logical, well-reasoned, fair, balanced, and consistent?

4. How might you critique the author's argument?

Your job as a critical reader is to evaluate the argument and evidence the author presents. Would the author's argument hold if applied to a different, comparable case? Can you identify cases where the author's argument is useful in explaining an observable phenomenon in the social world and cases where it might be less useful?

## III. So what, or “Why does the text matter?”

1. What is the author's agenda?

People write books and articles for a variety of purposes—to inform, amuse, persuade, and/or goad into action. In sociology, authors are often engaging in political and/or theoretical debates with other writers.

2. How does the book relate to other readings you have done for the course? To readings for other courses? To debates about families? To the world around you?

Once you have summarized and evaluated the text, think about it in a larger context. How does it make you think differently about families, gender, the state or other topics? What further questions does it inspire?

### 1.2.2 Get Messy!

Coming up with a system to keep track of what you read will make your life much easier in the long run. The particulars of the system don't really matter, as long as you can go back later and understand why you did what you did. Some students like to write short comments in the margins that summarize each paragraph.

Don't go overboard with highlights and underlines! If you highlight every other sentence, you're not reading critically and you're not producing helpful references for yourself. Underline, highlight or otherwise identify only the key points, questions, and arguments in a reading.

## Chapter 2

# Understanding the Assignment

One of the most common and serious mistakes students make is not following the directions in an assignment. It is crucial that you read the assignment with care and take any questions you have to your professor or GSIs. After you have finished writing, double check to make sure you followed the directions!

This section discusses the different types of papers you may be asked to write in sociology class and offers strategies for tackling them.

### 2.1 Summarize the Text

A summary is a brief overview of a piece of written work.<sup>1</sup> It should include a restatement of the author's main points and arguments. If you can write a coherent and accurate summary, chances are you understand the piece. A summary is often essential in any assignment. It helps to convey the basic outlines of an argument before you apply, interpret, or analyze it.

The key to a good summary is brevity and organization. Don't simply write reading notes in paragraph form for a summary. Instead, identify the most important points and think about the best way to present them. Include the concrete points and examples. Saying "In this piece, Marx discusses species being" is not sufficient. What is "species being"? And what does Marx say about it?

One good way to start a summary is with a sentence or two summarizing the main argument of the entire work. From there, you can explain the main components of the argument in greater detail. Use your discretion. You can't include every point made in a piece in your summary, so you must ask yourself: what are the most important points? Focus on those. While you don't want to leave out any crucial details, you do want to avoid redundancies and digressions.

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<sup>1</sup>Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 by Kristen Gray.

Ask yourself: are these examples or points crucial to the main argument? If so, include them.

## 2.2 Interpret or Explain a Passage

Often an instructor will give you a quote to analyze. For example, you might be asked to write a short essay on Marx's famous quote, "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers."

There is no one correct way to interpret a passage. That doesn't mean that an interpretation can't be wrong or inaccurate, just that there are multiple ways of being right. Develop an interpretation that makes sense given the writer's argument. Maintain a balance between explaining your given quote and connecting it to the larger work. To start this type of assignment, read the excerpt multiple times, asking first what its central argument and supporting points are. Then ask: How do these points fit into the writer's overall argument? You need to answer both of these questions when interpreting and explaining a passage.

## 2.3 Compare & Contrast

A "compare and contrast" essay explores the similarities and differences between two texts. The most common mistake students make when writing these papers is forgetting half of the equation, so that they explore only the similarities or the differences. But the point of these assignments is to show that you understand both.

Think about the arguments and evidence in each text. Identify each author's main points. Think about ways in which they are connected: do they talk about something similar? Do they seem to be arguing with one another? If so, about what? If the authors of these two pieces had a conversation, what would they say to each other?

Once you've mulled over some ways the two pieces you're comparing are similar and different, start thinking about what you want to argue in your comparison. The thesis statement of a compare and contrast paper should contain an idea or claim that unites a discussion of the texts. The thesis statement should also include the argument that you will advance in support of your claim. (See Chapter 5 for more on this topic.)

One tactic for coming up with a thesis is to consider whether one argument is more persuasive than the other. If so, how and why? Another approach is to see what a comparison reveals about the strengths and weaknesses of each text. What does each author do well? What does each overlook, ignore, or take for granted?

Organization is critical to a compare and contrast paper. Because you will be discussing a variety of evidence, be certain that your reader can understand your logic. Working from an outline can simplify your task and enable you to

Table 2.1: **Methods of Organizing an Argument**

<i>Method 1: Parallel by Author</i>	<i>Method 2: Parallel by Point</i>
I. Introduction	I. Introduction
a. Introduce subject matter	a. Introduce subject matter
b. Thesis statement	b. Thesis statement
c. First supporting point	c. First supporting point
d. Second supporting point	d. Second supporting point
e. Third supporting point	e. Third supporting point
II. First work	II. Summarize work 1
a. Summary of the first author's work	III. Summarize work 2
b. Relationship of work to first point	IV. First supporting point
c. Relationship of work to second point	a. The first author + point 1
d. Relationship of work to third point	b. The second author + point 1
III. Second work	V. Second supporting point
a. Summarize second author's work	a. The first author + point 2
b. Relationship of work to first point	b. The second author + point 2
c. Relationship of work to second point	VI. Third supporting point
d. Relationship of work to third point.	a. The first author + point 3
IV. Conclusion	b. The second author + point 3
a. Restate thesis	VII. Conclusion
b. Summarize your argument	a. Restate thesis
	b. Summarize

evaluate your own reasoning. There are two main methods for organizing these papers, each illustrated in table 2.1. In the first method, the essay is organized around the authors' theories. In the second method, the essay is organized around the key points of comparison. Neither is better or worse—the important thing is that all points of comparison are applied to each author.

Don't forget to think about similarities! Usually you'll have more to say on points of disagreement. After all, if the authors agreed on everything, you wouldn't have much to write about. Still, don't forget what they might have in common, since similarities can be as revealing as differences.

## 2.4 Evaluate or Critique an Argument or Theory

One important thing you will be asked to do in your writing assignments is to evaluate arguments. The goal of this kind of assignment is to demonstrate that you've moved beyond basic understanding of a text and can think critically and independently about it.

These assignments can seem deceptively simple. However, evaluation is the most advanced form of knowledge. Coming up with an evaluation that is both correct and interesting is hard work and requires a careful balance between being bold and modest in your own thinking.

Here are some strategies to get you started:

**Look for gaps.** Identify the strengths and weaknesses of an argument. Think about what else you've read, and use this to pinpoint what the argument may overlook, fail to explain, or take for granted. Comparing the author to someone else is a great way to start.

**Don't forget the good stuff.** Often students skip right over the strengths in their rush to point out the weaknesses, but this is a mistake. First, pointing out an important contribution to sociology, especially one that may have been overlooked by other readers, can be as meaningful and original as pointing out a shortcoming. Second, people who aren't careful to note the strengths of an argument often go overboard when trashing its weaknesses. A good critique is a fair one; it does not overlook strengths as it reckons with shortcomings.

*Read the assignment with care, and answer the question you were asked. This is the first step to writing an effective paper, and students often overlook it. Instructors spend a lot of time formulating assignments and there is nothing more annoying than to receive an essay that demonstrates a lack of attention to it. Take an hour or so just to study the assignment.*

—Dylan Riley

**Pick something important.** A great critique moves past small points and states something that matters. If it's not clear why your critique matters, then write a sentence or two explaining what the stakes are.

**Anticipate the counter-argument.** Take some time to imagine how the authors you are critiquing would defend their position. Is it possible your subject might agree with your point, at least partially? If so, you might be glossing over important details. How would the author try to punch holes in your argument? If you notice any obvious rejoinders to your position, then you should go back and strengthen it.

**Don't confuse your opinion of an author's analysis with your opinion of the topic of the author's analysis.** In a sociology class you will be asked to discuss a theory or an author's point of view. For example, you might be asked to reflect on Weber's theory of religion. You may be tempted to discuss whether Calvinism is good or bad in its own right, but this would be misguided if the assignment was to really discuss how Weber is discussing Calvinism. Watch for this tendency to offer your opinion about the topic the author discusses rather than your opinion of their analysis of this topic.

### Think Internally

*It's almost always better to engage in an internal critique than an external one. That is, the point is to understand the author's project and argument. To criticize Marx for not discussing religion in Capital is an external critique. It's a bit like telling someone who made spring rolls that they don't taste like your grandma's blintzes. True enough, but it leaves us neither here nor there. Rather, it's almost always better to engage in an internal critique. That is, you can still criticize Marx for not discussing religion, but you need to show how an appropriate understanding of the capitalist mode of production requires an engagement with religion. A possible internal critique would be to say that the labor theory of value would be incoherent precisely because it would repudiate his critique of commodity fetishism (obviously you would need to elaborate this argument).*

—John Lie

## 2.5 Apply a Theory

In this kind of assignment, you are asked to take a set of analytical concepts from your readings and use them to interpret something you've observed. You may be asked to do a small amount of independent research for this type of assignment or you could be asked to analyze a single book, magazine article, event, movie, television show, or website.

Strong applications of theory use empirical data to move past the basic ideas posited by the author and draw on nuances to say something new or surprising about social life. Begin by identifying main points from the text you are applying. Use concrete examples to make your points—the more specific the better.

For example, if you will be using Weber's theory of bureaucracy to analyze the movie *Office Space*, you might start by summarizing Weber's main point. Then think about which of the supporting arguments in the theory are relevant to what you are analyzing. Next, you might review Weber's text and list his most important concepts, including things like hierarchy, written documents, and the organization of the work day. Keep these concepts in mind while you watch the movie, taking note of these elements in the film, and paying close attention to where the theory explains what's happening and where it falls short. Remember that you don't need to illustrate every detail of the example, just the important details. As with most papers, it is a good idea to go in-depth into a few key points rather than cramming every idea into your paper.

## 2.6 The Components of a Research Paper

You may also be asked to write a research paper.<sup>2</sup> Professors have different guidelines for their assignments, but below are some general tips for writing research papers.

**Introduction.** In your introduction you set up your problem, research question, or puzzle. Then state why addressing this problem, answering this question, or resolving this puzzle is important. Scholars often do this by telling the reader what the larger implications might be. Imagine your readers asking the question “So what?” at the end of your introduction, and think about whether you have given them a compelling answer to keep on reading.

**Literature Review.** The literature review offers your readers a concise synthesis of the previous work on your topic. Imagine the most prominent scholars who do research on your topic sitting around a table having a conversation. What do we know about topic X? What are the general points they would make? Who would say what? Who would agree or disagree with whom? What is the historical context of the debate? Are there any major points they have gotten wrong or ignored?

There are several ways to organize a literature review. A chronological approach works well for a research project on social change. If your research critiques the methods used by previous researchers, then organize it by method. If you’re building on or critiquing existing theory, then a thematic approach would be better. You might argue that the research on your topic can be grouped into two categories. One set of studies focuses on X and the other on Y, but neither accounts for your variable Z. By now you have convinced us that variable Z is very important and needs explaining. So your study is building on or expanding on past studies.

Another approach is to argue that the dominant theory for explaining your case does not adequately explain your findings. You summarize the relevant studies and show that if the dominant theory was correct, you would expect to find result A, but you have result B. How can we explain finding B? You have now set up a puzzle and built up suspense for the answer! Your study is modifying existing theories or alerting scholars that a theory that has been universally accepted should be questioned.

The amount of existing research on almost any subject is overwhelming! Spend some time focusing on your research question as you begin. Don’t be surprised if you realize the need to modify your topic; that’s why lit reviews are the first step in the research process. For this section you may want to review our guidelines on writing summaries (See section 2.1) Remember: your literature review will consist of paraphrasing what others have written. Use quotes, but only when a particular part of a text succinctly and pointedly describes the idea to which you are referring.

**Context.** Sometimes you have a research question that is interesting and understandable by other scholars in the field, but the case you use to illustrate

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<sup>2</sup>Section 2.6 adapted from Cinzia Solari’s Teaching Guide, with contributions from Jennifer Randles



### Presenting Your Work in Class

*Often you will be asked to present a finished paper or work in progress in class. Reading your paper out loud—word for word, beginning to end—will be tedious for both you and your audience. These few simple steps are needed to transform a dull presentation into an engaging one. Plan how you can present your materials in a clear, engaging way. Make an outline that distills your paper to its most important points. Use a few key examples or go through the paper and highlight the parts you want to read out loud. Make a handout that outlines your points and contains key examples, like quotes or charts. Better yet, plan an activity that will help the class understand your point (like an interactive game or exercise) and prepare some questions to start a discussion.*

the answer to your question is unfamiliar to most. In this case, you must provide your reader with background information that contextualizes your research question. For example, you might have a research paper with the following puzzle: “Studies show that men and women do caring labor differently. Women caregivers provide more hands-on care and do more emotional labor than men caregivers. In this study of immigrant careworkers from the former Soviet Union in San Francisco, I found the opposite to be true.” In order for the reader to understand the case this author is using, she will need to tell the reader something about the migration pattern from the former Soviet Union to San Francisco. How many people are we talking about? Who are they? Why do they come? etc. Equally important, she will have to explain what caring norms are like in their home countries compared to the United States.

In this section you might also suggest why your case is a good one for finding the answer to your question. For example, the author will have to explain why immigrants from the former Soviet Union add to our understanding of gender differences in paid caring labor.

**Data & Methods.** In this section, detail what you actually did to answer your research question and why you chose that method. If you did interviews, tell the readers who you interviewed (age, gender, occupation etc.) and why you chose them and not others. If you did textual analysis, explain how you chose the texts. If you did statistical research, you must explain why you chose one data set as opposed to another. Explain the limitations to your project, and how your results may be biased. Since you have done a lot of thinking and are confident that your interpretation of the data is correct, you also explain why your results should be trusted despite limitations. Convince the readers that you are thoughtful and trustworthy and that they should keep reading to learn what you discovered.

**Findings.** In this section, present what you actually found. Bring evidence to convince the reader that you have answered the research question or resolved

the puzzle you presented in the introduction. You must cite evidence from your research. Report what people said in interviews or did during your participant observations. If you did a textual analysis, cite your texts and explain what the passages mean to your project. If you did statistical research, report the results of your regressions. In your introduction and in your literature you foreshadowed the answer to your puzzle; here you must show the answer in a persuasive way.

Debunking alternative theories is one common strategy that sociologists use to organize findings. For example, a reader might expect that your question is solved by variable X. In the case about immigrant men and women caregivers from the former Soviet Union, a reader might suppose that the puzzle is explained by pre-migration jobs; if all the men in the sample were doctors with extensive training in providing care, but all the women were electrical engineers, this would account for why these men do more care work than women. However, your data show that this is not the case. Propose a convincing counter-hypotheses and then show them to be incorrect by revealing your data. This builds suspense while presenting your findings—the meat of your paper.

Don't shy away from examples that contradict your main story (called “counterexamples”). Often sociologists place their data into categories saying that X categories emerged from the data. For example, in the case of caregivers from the former Soviet Union, the author argues that two categories classify how informants both talked about and performed carework. She calls them professionals and saints. Often you have one or two cases that do not fit the categories you have articulated. Do not be afraid to tackle these cases. Cases that defy categorization often provide important insights to the boundedness and fluidity of the categories you are confident do exist.

**Conclusion/Discussion.** In this section of the paper you give a full answer to the “So what?” question you foreshadowed in your introduction. Here you “think big,” arguing that your findings are generalizable to a larger population or that even though your case is not generalizable, it has important implications for sociological theory, public policy, or how we understand our social world.

This section detailed the differences among different types of papers. But you will find that these types of papers share many similarities. The next chapter will explore such similarities in the process of writing, and offer advice for dealing with everything from picking a topic to dealing with feedback.

## Chapter 3

# The Writing Process

We cannot overemphasize the importance of writing as a process! Writing is where you figure out how to articulate your thoughts most clearly. It is rewarding and frustrating. To minimize the frustrations, this section provides advice on how to plan your project and make progress once you put pen to paper or sit down at your keyboard.

### 3.1 Picking a Topic With Care

**Take Intellectual Risks.**<sup>1</sup> Challenge yourself and move beyond familiar ideas for an exciting intellectual experience. Attempt to defend a controversial claim, question an authority on a particular issue, or pursue an idea even though you're unsure where it will lead. The experience will be more rewarding for you and your readers if you're learning something new in the process of writing or answering a question that genuinely interests you.

**Open-ended topics.** Open-ended assignments allow you to focus on something you find interesting. Open-ended topics can lead to trouble because they address themes that are too broad to cover fully in the space allotted. A good way to turn a broad subject into a manageable topic is to focus on a single text or a collection of texts that have a theme in common and to pose a “why” or “how” question for yourself. For example, rather than trying to write an essay that addresses the role of gender in all of economics, you might narrow your focus to ask how Arlie Hochschild's analysis of the “second shift” might help to explain why child care work is compensated at much lower rates than other occupations.

**Finding Something to Say.** Argument is the defining feature of the academic essay. While summary, description, and synthesis are important, your argument bears the greatest weight of all. Arguments in an academic paper are

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<sup>1</sup>Section 3.1 is excerpted with some adaptation from Harvard University's Making the Most of Undergraduate Writing: A Guide for Freshman [[http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/EWP\\_guide.web.pdf](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/EWP_guide.web.pdf)].

not aimed at winning a debate, but rather at putting forth an idea and supporting it with evidence or reasoning. Your argument is the heart of your paper. With a good one, your essay has strength and vitality; without it, your essay has no creative energy—it is simply a restatement of your sources. Your argument will be stated in a thesis—the central idea of your essay. Theses are sometimes easy to create; they come to you naturally as you read and think about your sources. Other times, you may find yourself staring at a blank document, unsure of what argument you can make. In situations like this, consider the following approaches:

**Pick the thing that doesn't make sense.** The fact that you can't answer a question immediately doesn't mean that you should ignore it! In fact, its difficulty may be what makes it such a valuable path to explore. Other people might not be able to answer the question easily either, and so by wrestling with it yourself, you have the opportunity to teach them—and to learn—something new.

*To be a good writer, you not only have to write a great deal, but you have to care.*  
—Anne Lamott

**Write about something small, and go deep.** It may seem counterintuitive that something small will yield a rich assortment of ideas. But if you think hard about a short passage in a text, a writer's assumption, a theory, or even a single word, you'll be surprised by the ideas, observations, and implications that will occur to you. And by digging deeply for these ideas, you will reveal something to your readers that is difficult to see rather than just make an obvious point. In other words, your idea will be a discovery; both you and your readers will learn from your analysis. (See Chapter 5 for more information.)

## 3.2 Approaching the Writing Assignment

These tips will help to sharpen your vision as you write and will make writing a much smoother and less painful process.<sup>2</sup> They will help you to clarify your thinking and identify what work you still need to do (read a text, find a new source, meet with a professor) before you begin.

**Start thinking before you start writing.** Before you sit down to write, think through your topic in as much detail as possible. Before you start drafting your first paragraph, develop a practice thesis, or make an outline, and contemplate your general topic. Working through ideas mentally first helps you avoid “drawing a blank” when it's time to begin writing.

**Take notes.** While thinking about your project or assignment, write down whatever comes to mind—words, names, phrases, images, fragmented sentences or ideas—regardless of how simple or insignificant they seem. Ask your professors and GSIs; they all have similar tricks to capture ideas and “aha!” moments.

<sup>2</sup>Section 3.2 adapted from Karina Ruth Pulau's “Handout on Writing” (English Department, University of California, Berkeley).

Try placing blank paper or index cards along with pencils and pens in your living space, backpacks or purses, in your car, your pockets, etc. Buy a small notebook to carry around everywhere, so you always have a writing surface and instrument on hand when inspiration strikes. When you are ready to begin writing, collect these cards and you might be surprised; you already have written ideas to work with, so you have already started!

**Pose Questions.** When you are unsure where to begin or find your momentum is waning, ask questions based on the 5 Ws. (This is a more specific version of “Picking the thing that doesn’t make sense” above.)

*Who?* Who is affected by this issue? Who is your audience?  
Who has addressed this topic in the past?

*What?* What are the issues involved? What is at stake? What are contributing causes? What interests you about your topic?

*When?* When does it begin and end? Do historical factors come into play?

*Where?* Where is this taking place? Where (in what contexts) will your work be read?

*Why?* Why does it occur? Why is it important?

*How?* How does it happen? How is it perceived and valued?  
How is it influential?

**Write a description.** Choose a person, idea, place or object relevant to your topic and compose a descriptive paragraph. The details might trigger your imagination.

**Free Write.** Free writing is a method of exploring a topic through writing whatever comes to mind, without editing yourself, for a certain period of time. Set a time limit, begin thinking about your topic, and then let your mind wander, writing down everything that occurs to you. When your time is up, look over what you have written. There will be parts that are unusable or nonsensical, but you may find insights and ideas.

**Map out your ideas.** Organize whatever ideas you may have into outline—either a traditional outline or a diagram. Remember that creating a diagram can be especially helpful for generating new ideas using a visual scheme. It is especially useful for exploring relationships among the parts of a broad topic or considering the links between various elements of an argument.

### 3.3 Organization & Themes

An outline is an organizational plan for your paper.<sup>3</sup> Your starting point is your introduction and thesis/research question; your destination is some sort

<sup>3</sup>Excerpted and adapted from the Purdue OWL, revised by Elyssa Tardiff [<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/01/>].

of thoughtful conclusion. How do you get from one to the other? An outline doesn't just help you articulate what you plan to say, but also how you're going to move from supporting paragraph to supporting paragraph to your conclusion. A good outline also saves time in the revision process because it reduces the need to rearrange your ideas once you've written them.

**The importance of outlines.** If you can't articulate your paper as bullet points, you won't be able to do it in prose. If you find structural problems or gaps as you outline, it's easier to fix them in the outline than in a draft. It's always easier to scrap part of an outline than a paragraph or entire essay.

Outlines make drafting less stressful not only by describing the relationship of your ideas to each other and to the thesis or question, but also by giving you small manageable chunks to tackle. Many professors and GSIs will be delighted to make an appointment with you to go over an outline and help you make sense of your writing plan. It is much easier for us to read than a draft, and can still be enormously helpful to you.

### 3.3.1 How to Construct Your Outline.

Before you begin, you need to have a sense of your argument. You should have notes, ideas, and possible quotes to cite as evidence.

To start, carefully read your notes. search for ways to organize or classify your findings in ways that relate them to your thesis or research question. Look for common trends in the findings scattered throughout your notes. It doesn't really matter how you classify or organize your findings. For a 5,000-word paper, you may find that you organize them into two huge headings. Once you have done that, think about what might fall under each heading. And don't forget to look back at the original assignment for clues about what your professor might be looking for.

You can classify your findings using a variety of techniques. If you like putting notes on index cards, then paper-clip ones that go together and shuffle them around to achieve the best order of ideas. You can also do this on paper: use different-colored symbols or highlighters or cut your sheets into strips.

With several piles of related concepts before you, think of other groupings that might make equal sense.

Once you're happy with what you've got, you may find that some sections are strong and fleshed-out whereas others are weaker. Do some more research where needed or see if two "weak" sections could fit under one stronger heading. Perhaps your points don't fit with the overarching argument you're making. In that case, don't be afraid to re-evaluate your thesis; it may need a qualification. Your evidence may be great, but if it supports a different argument, your readers won't see how great it is because they'll be expecting something else.

Now that you have thesis and support (or research question and answers) fitting together, give yourself a pat on the back—the really hard work is done!

**What should an outline look like?** It doesn't really matter. Unless it's required or you really do like the process, don't get bogged down in the

formal, “roman-numeral” structure. Do what works best for you in getting an assignment done.

### Why and How to Create a Useful Outline

Adapted from the Purdue OWL [<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/argutemplate.html>].

#### *Why create an outline?*

- It aids in the process of writing.
- It helps you to organize your ideas.
- It presents your material in a logical form.
- It shows the relationships among ideas in your writing.
- It constructs an ordered overview of your writing.
- It defines boundaries and groups.

#### *How do I create an outline?*

- Determine your paper’s purpose.
- Determine your paper’s audience.
- Develop your paper’s thesis.

#### *Then:*

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections—from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub-headings.

### 3.4 A Template for an Argumentative or Analytical Paper

The figure on the next page is an outline for an essay that has four main points that are evidence for the main thesis.<sup>4</sup> We've included ellipses within each paragraph because the number of examples you use will depend on what your topic for that paragraph is and how many examples it would take to convince a reader. For example, if you were analyzing health care policy for the poor, including several different examples of how a specific policy has impacted the poor would better illustrate that the pattern is a serious social problem. If, on the other hand, you were talking about changes in healthcare policy, you would likely have enough to say by summarizing some key events that are relevant to your argument.

The template also includes concluding sentences for each paragraph. These were added not because every paragraph needs a formal conclusion, but to remind you how you communicate to your readers why you're telling them what you're telling them.

The next chapter, on writing mechanics, will give you more guidelines on what should be included in your paper, and how to put it together piece by piece. This section will be more useful for doing some planning before you begin writing, whether it's the straightforward outline suggested above, or a more visual map of your ideas. The goal of outlining is to give yourself a sense of focus and to think about your writing assignment as a way to communicate an argument to your reader. Once you have a good sense of what you want to say, it becomes much easier to figure out how to say it.

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<sup>4</sup>Section 3.4 is excerpted and adapted from the Purdue OWL [<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/argutemplate.html>].



### 3.4. A TEMPLATE FOR AN ARGUMENTATIVE OR ANALYTICAL PAPER33

#### **Working Title**

##### *Introductory Paragraph*

- Background: What do I need to say to set up my thesis?
- Thesis Statement or Research Question (stated within a sentence, not as a question. E.g., “In light of a., it seems worthwhile to consider just what the effects are on...” ) This will usually include a mention of the main points to come.
- Main Points: (these are your pieces of evidence, possible answers, or findings)

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- Transition Statement
- *Body Paragraph*: Main Point #1

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- Transition statement
- *Body Paragraph*: Main Point #2

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- Transition statement
- *Body Paragraph*: Main Point #3

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- Transition statement
- *Conclusion*: Restatement of thesis and main points

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- Concluding statements: sum up what different angles have shown re: research question. Critically evaluate what is still needed in the field, or if you looked at three equally strong cases, analyze why one is still more convincing, look at the implications of what you have shown or said, etc.

**Source:** ([http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/writing\\_anxiety.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/writing_anxiety.html))

## 3.5 Writer's Block and Anxiety

If you have followed the steps outlined above, your writing is likely to be much clearer and more focused.<sup>5</sup> But you will sometimes get stuck. Writing anxiety and writer's block are normal. This section gives you tips on how to address these feelings and get past them as soon as possible.

“Writing anxiety” and “writer's block” are informal terms for apprehensive and pessimistic feelings about writing. These feelings are generally not pervasive in a person's writing life. Writing anxiety and writer's block are situational. You might feel perfectly fine writing a quantitative lab report but apprehensive about writing a paper on racial differences in educational access. People aren't born anxious writers; rather, they become so through negative or difficult experiences with writing.

### 3.5.1 When do These Negative Feelings Arise?

There are some common experiences that writers find stressful. For example, writers often struggle when they are:

- *Adjusting* to new forms of writing—like first year college writing, papers in a new field of study, or longer forms than they are used to (a long research paper or a senior thesis).
- *Writing* for readers who have been critical or demanding in the past.
- *Remembering* negative criticism of their writing received in the past—even if the critic won't be reading their current writing.
- *Working with limited or unstructured time.*
- *Responding* to an assignment that seems unrelated to academic or life goals.
- *Dealing* with troubling events outside of school.

### 3.5.2 What are Some Strategies for Handling These Feelings?

**Get support from a writing buddy**—someone you trust to encourage you in your writing life. A writing buddy might be a friend or family member, a classmate, a teacher, a colleague, or a Student Learning Center tutor. Talk to your buddy about your ideas, your writing process, your worries, and your successes. Share pieces of your writing. Check in with your writing buddy regularly. In addition, a group of buddies can provide readers, deadlines, support, praise, and constructive criticism. For help starting one, see our appendix guide to starting a writing group.

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<sup>5</sup>Section 3.5 adapted from The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [[http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/writing\\_anxiety.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/writing_anxiety.html)].

**Recognize that writing is a complex process.** You and your reader know that there is always more to be said about a topic. The best you can do is to contribute to what they know and feel about a topic right now.

**Think of yourself as an apprentice.** We often have trouble when dealing with a situation for the first time, but we learn and grow from confronting these challenges. Think of new writing situations as apprenticeships. When you're doing a new kind of writing, learn as much as you can about it, gain as many skills in that area as you can, and when you finish the apprenticeship, decide which skills will serve you later on. You might be surprised.

### 3.5.3 Learning About New Kinds of Writing

Here are some suggestions for ways to tackle new kinds of writing:

Ask a lot of questions of people experienced in the kind of writing you're doing, such as:

- What's the purpose of this kind of writing?
- Who is the audience?
- What are the most important elements to include? Which are less important?
- How do you get started?
- How do you know when your writing is good enough?
- How did you learn to write this way?

Ask a lot of questions of the person who assigned you a piece of writing. For help with this, see our section on assignments.

Look for examples of this kind of writing. (You can ask for a recommendation from your instructor). Look for variation. There are often many different ways to write within a particular form. Look for ways that feel familiar and approaches you like. You might want to look for published models or, if this seems too intimidating, look at your classmates' writing. Ask yourself questions about what these writers are doing, and take notes:

- How does the writer begin and end?
- How does the writer organize their work?
- How and when does the writer convey her or his main point?
- How does the writer bring in other people's ideas?
- What is the writer's purpose?
- How does she or he achieve that purpose?

Don't try to do everything at once. Start with reasonable expectations. You can't write like an expert your first time out. Nobody does!

Listen critically to your readers. Before you dismiss or wholeheartedly accept what they say, try to understand them. If a reader has given you written comments, ask yourself questions to figure out the reader's experience of your paper:

- What is this reader looking for?
- What am I doing that satisfies this reader?
- In what ways is this reader still unsatisfied?

If you can't answer these questions, talk to the reader or ask someone else to help you interpret the comments.

Once you understand what readers want, figure out which criticisms are consistent with your own purposes and engage with them. Don't expect an overnight turn-around; recognize that changing writing habits is a process and that papers are steps in that process. At some point in your writing life, you will encounter readers who seem to dislike, disagree with, or miss the point of your work. Figuring out what to do with this criticism is an important part of a writer's growth.

### 3.5.4 Try New Tactics When You Get Stuck

Often, writer's block occurs at particular stages of the writing process. Figure out what your writing process looks like and whether there's a particular stage where you tend to get stuck. Perhaps you love researching and taking notes on what you read, but you have a hard time moving from that work to getting started on your own first draft. Or once you have a draft, it seems set in stone and even though readers are asking you questions and making suggestions, you don't know how to go back in and change it. Or just the opposite may be true; you revise and revise and don't want to let the paper go.

Wherever you have trouble, take a longer look at what you do and look around for other approaches to try:

**Talk** to your writing buddy and to other colleagues about what they do at the particular stage that gets you stuck.

**Think** of yourself as an apprentice to a stage of the writing process and give different strategies a shot.

**Cut** your paper into pieces and tape them to the wall, use eight different colors of highlighters, draw a comic strip version of your paper, read your paper out loud in the voice of your favorite movie star...

When it comes to conquering a block, give yourself permission to fall flat on your face. Trying and failing will help you arrive at the thing that works for you.

**Celebrate** your successes. Whatever obstacles you've faced, celebrate the occasions when you overcome them.

**Get support.** Most people find relief for various kinds of anxieties by getting support from others. Sometimes the best person to help you through a spell of worry is someone who's done that for you before—a family member, a friend, a mentor. Maybe you don't even need to talk with this person about writing; maybe you just need to be reminded to believe in yourself, that you can do it.

If you don't know anyone on campus yet, reach out to someone who seems like they could be a good listener and supportive. There are many professional resources for you on campus, people with whom you can talk through your ideas or your worries. You can go to the Student Learning Center with a draft or even before you've started writing. You can also approach your instructor with questions about your writing assignment. Your academic advisor and your residence hall advisor are other possible resources. Counselors at the Tang Center are also available to talk with you about anxieties and concerns that extend beyond writing.

**Relax.** Apprehension about writing is a common condition on college campuses. Because writing is the most common means of sharing our knowledge, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves when we write. Talk with others; realize we're all learning; take an occasional risk; turn to the people who believe in you. Counter negative experiences by creating positive ones.

Even after you have tried all of these strategies, invariably you will still have negative experiences in your writing life. When you get a paper back with a bad grade, fend off the negative aspects of that experience. Instead, jump right back in to some area of the writing process: choose one suggestion the evaluator has made and work on it, or read and discuss the paper with a friend or colleague, or do some writing or revising—on this or any paper—as quickly as possible. Failures of various kinds are an inevitable part of the writing process. Without them, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to grow as a writer. Learning often occurs in the wake of a startling event, something that stirs you up, something that makes you wonder. Use your failures to keep moving!

## 3.6 Revising and Editing Drafts

Papers need to be revised again and again and again.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is in the process of revising that you push your analysis further, expand your argument, and, most importantly, make connections. When you revise, you're not just reworking sentences and paragraphs; you're actually reworking words, concepts, thoughts, theories—and the connections between them. That's how the revising process helps you develop a more complex argument.

Here's a little writer's secret: once a good writer has figured out where she is going with her argument—this often happens well into the first or second draft—she will go back and rewrite the earlier parts of the paper to add more information about the conclusions she made. The truth is, a lot of good

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<sup>6</sup>Section 3.6 is excerpted and Adapted from Paisley Currah's Writing Guide [<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/polisci/pcurrah/writing.html>].

essays are not written from beginning to end. All the parts of interesting, well-written essays—the introduction, the paragraphs in the body of the essay, the conclusion—hang together coherently as a whole precisely because the writer has gone back and added information, or changed what he/she wrote, to account for the analytical conclusions drawn at the end of the essay.

### 3.7 How to Revise

Having drafted your essay, you have now gained the perspective of hindsight.<sup>7</sup> Was the subject matter more complex than you had anticipated? Did your preconceived ideas prove less interesting than discoveries you made while writing? Would you like to revise, but feel uncertain about how to do so? Here are some suggestions:

**Get feedback.** Since you already know what you're trying to say, you aren't always the best judge of where the draft is clear or unclear. Let another reader tell you. Then discuss aloud what you were trying to achieve. In articulating for someone else what you meant to argue, you will clarify ideas for yourself.

**Construct a backward-outline of your essay.** Identify the main idea(s) in each paragraph. Rank their importance in advancing your thesis. Consider connections between and among ideas.

**Rework the introduction and conclusion.** Make sure to begin your paragraphs with topic sentences, linking idea(s) in each paragraph to those proposed in the thesis.

**Proofread.** Aim for precision and economy in language. Read aloud so you can hear stylistic infelicities. (Your ear will pick up what your eye has missed.)

*Perhaps the most important thing to understand is that effective writing is always done in drafts. There are no good or bad papers—there are only papers that are turned in at different stages of the drafting process. Brilliant writing usually begins as garbled, muddled and obscure, and only becomes brilliant through drafting. Drafting is how one clarifies one's ideas. To express an idea clearly and simply will require a painstaking process of editing, reformulating, and rethinking. This process is the foundation for all serious intellectual work. You should produce at least two and preferably three complete drafts for any paper you turn in. It is your job carefully to read through each draft and weed out errors, unclear formulations, grammatical mistakes, and so on. If you haven't done this work, then it will be done for you and that will be reflected in your grade.*

—Dylan Riley

<sup>7</sup>Section 3.7 is adapted from an article by Laura Saltz, 1998, and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, for the Writing Center at Harvard University <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Revising.html>].

**Rethink your thesis.** Because clarity of vision is the result of experience, it is unreasonable to expect to come up with the best thesis possible—one that clearly accounts for the complexities of the issue at hand—before beginning a draft, or even during a first draft. The best theses evolve; they are the products of the kind of precise thinking that is only possible to achieve through writing. Successful revision involves bringing your thesis into focus—or sometimes changing it altogether.

**Make structural changes.** Drafting is usually a process of discovering an idea or argument. Your argument will not become clearer if you only tinker with individual sentences. Successful revision involves bringing the strongest ideas to the front of the essay, reordering the main points, cutting irrelevant sections, adding implications. It also involves making the argument's structure visible by strengthening topic sentences and transitions.

**Remember: revision takes time.** Avoid shortcuts: the reward for sustained effort is a clearer, more persuasive, more sophisticated essay than a first draft can be.

The figure below is an example of revisions from our own graduate writing.

## Examples of Revision

### Many Drafts Later...

#### Second Draft...

The issue of an absent sense of collective subjectivity is at the heart of the contradictions of the multiracial movement. Despite a general consensus on the acceptance of the terms “multiracial” and “mixed race,” activists, organizers and mixed race scholars have not articulated any clear sense of what—culturally, socially, historically or politically—would define a mixed race identity. In contrast to most other identity-based movements, in the process of mobilization, multiracial activists and organizers in my data as well as in my review of secondary literature have been unable to articulate any coherent sense of a collective multiraciality while simultaneously inserting themselves within the United States racial classification scheme and racialized identity politics.

In the early 1990s, advocates for mixed-race identity engaged in an effort to insert a mixed-race category into the United States official racial classification scheme. Their efforts resulted in the Office of Management and Budget’s decision to include the two or more races category in the U.S. census for the first time. However, despite obtaining recognition from the state, as well as popular and scholarly consensus on the acceptance of the terms “multiracial” and “mixed-race,” multiracials have not clearly articulated what “mixed-race identity” means—culturally, socially, historically or politically. While many multiracials share a sentiment that something specific and meaningful about multiracial identity does or should exist, due to a number of obstacles, mixed-race organizations are struggling to grasp what that something is.

*The paragraph on the right is clearer and more dynamic, specifically identifying the issues to be addressed in the paper, doing away with unclear language and drawing the reader into the paper topic. Even the best pieces of writing can originate from truly horrible first drafts. Writing is often less stressful if you plan to rewrite; you don’t have to worry about getting a draft perfect the first time!*



## 3.8 Expectations: Great, Good, Fair, and Poor Writing

Caution: the following section is only a loose guideline to help you think about the differences between great writing and poor writing, and what falls in between. *This is not a guideline to prove to your professor that you deserve a better grade.* The sociology department shares general standards about what we think good writing is, but people may vary in how much they value different aspects of the assignment. That said, if you follow your syllabus guidelines, aim for the writing goals indicated here, and check in with your professor or GSI about their expectations, you should have no problem doing well in your writing assignments.

### 3.8.1 Sociology Writing Grading Guidelines

**A:**<sup>8</sup> An “A” paper demonstrates a superior, sustained, and consistent level of critical engagement with the issues that the writer addresses. This engagement can be seen in the following ways: The writer’s understanding of the text(s) upon which the paper is based is plausible, logical, and thoughtful. The response is thorough, exploring the issues in some depth, advancing reasonable claims, and anticipating counterclaims when appropriate. The thesis is clear, and perceptive. The paper demonstrates strong reasoning throughout, supported by persuasive evidence and relevant, fully developed examples. Similarly, the paper’s organization supports the development of the writer’s ideas, and demonstrates effective uses of cohesive devices. The word choice is varied and precise, sentence structure is varied, and only minor errors in grammar and usage are evident.

#### Excerpt from a student paper that got an “A”

*While [a local bar called] Blake’s clearly does not have the characteristics of the total institutions that Goffman describes in great detail in *Asylums*, it does draw distinctions between club security and club guests that are analogous to Goffman’s “Staff world” and “Inmate world.” Goffman finds that “in total institutions there is a basic split between a large managed group, conveniently called inmates, and a small supervisory staff,” where the staff tends to “feel superior and righteous” while inmates tend “to feel inferior [and] weak” (Goffman, p.8). The club bouncer in this context acts as the staff, as he regulates the club guests and is granted power over them, while the club guests assume the role of inmates as they must submit to the demands of the staff to function in the institution—the nightclub. There is already an inherent inequality in this relationship,*

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<sup>8</sup>Adapted from “What Your Grades Mean” in “Teaching Guide for Graduate Student Instructors” Graduate Student Instructor Teaching & Resource Center, University of California Berkeley, 2006-2007.

*as club patrons must voluntarily give up their free will and obey the bouncer in order to be accepted into the club.*

**B:** A “B” paper demonstrates competence and an acceptable level of critical engagement with the issues that the writer addresses. This engagement can be seen in the following ways: The writer’s understanding of the text(s) upon which the paper is based is plausible and logical. The response is adequate, although its exploration of the issues may be lacking in some details. The thesis is clear, and not already self-evident. The paper’s reasoning is sound, and is based on relevant evidence. The organization of the paper supports the development of the writer’s ideas. It generally demonstrates accurate and sufficient use of evidence, although there may be occasional lapses. The word choice is varied and precise, and sentence structure is varied. While errors in grammar and usage may be present, they do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the text.

**Example of a “B” version of the above excerpt**

*Aspects of Blake’s bar resemble Goffman’s ideas from *Asylums*, because there is a staff that supervises another group of people (Goffman, p.8). The regulates the club guests and is granted power over them, while the guests assume must submit to the demands of the staff to function in the institution the nightclub. There is an inherent inequality in this relationship, as club patrons must voluntarily give up their free will and obey the bouncer in order to be accepted into the club.*

**C:** A “C” paper meets the requirements of the assignment. The writer’s understanding of the text(s) upon which the paper is based is generally plausible and logical. The response is adequate, although its exploration of issues may be sufficiently lacking. The thesis is not clear or is weak. The paper’s reasoning is varied and is not consistently supported by relevant evidence and examples. The writer’s plan of organization may be occasionally compromised, insufficient or inaccurate. There may be errors in grammar and usage, but they do not interfere substantially with the reader’s understanding of the text.

**Example a “C” version of the excerpt**

*Blake’s resembles Goffman’s ideas from *Asylums*. Goffman finds that “in total institutions there is a basic split between a staff and inmates, and a small supervisory staff,” where the staff tends to feel superior and righteous and inmates feel scared and lonely. The bouncer in this context acts as the staff, as they regulate the masses and control their actions and feel superior, and the masses are inmates who submit to all of the demands of the staff because they want to stay in the nightclub. This is always an unequal relationship, and customers must voluntarily give up their free for the entire night.*

**NP:** A “NP” (Not Passing is C- or lower) paper may meet some of the requirements of the assignment, but it is unsatisfactory in other ways. The

writer's understanding of the text(s) upon which the paper is based may be inaccurate, skewed, or illogical. The response may be simplistic or incomplete, lacking in detail, use of examples, and the like. The thesis may be unclear or self-evident. The paper may fail to adduce evidence, or the evidence presented may be unpersuasive or even counterproductive to the writer's goals. It is unlikely that the paper offers a reasonable response to the question or meets the requirements of the writing prompt. The pattern of development may seem erratic to the reader, or overly mechanical. The word choice frequently may be imprecise or repetitive. There may be major errors in grammar and usage that interfere with the reader's understanding of the text, or there may be pervasive minor errors of different types that detract significantly from the effectiveness of the paper.

**Excerpt from a student paper that got a “C- or Lower”**

*Blake's is just like the places Goffman talks about in Asylums because that's where Goffman finds that in total institutions there is split between people who are bossed around who are called the inmates and people who do the bossing around called the staff. It's the staff that likes to feel superiority and high self-esteem while inmates don't like themselves and are pawns in the staffs games, like the movies "One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest" starring Jack Nicholson and "Girl Interrupted" starring Winona Ryder and Angelina Joile. These movies are exciting looks at life in asylums. Blakes is just like this. Blakes is like this because the bouncer dominates, they make sure the people in the bar behave. If people don't behave they get kicked out. So the customers at the bar are beneath the bouncers, and so are alienated and feel anxious and scared, which is why they drink.*

### 3.9 What to Do When You Get a Paper Back

If you're like most students, you skip to the end of the paper when the instructor returns it.<sup>9</sup> You usually ignore the comments in the margin. You might read the comments at the end. To learn something, take a new approach. After all, the instructor must have had a reason for putting those marks there.

**The general rule:** Consider the instructor's comments to be part of a dialog and respond in writing to those comments. Respond on the paper itself, right next to the comments themselves or on a separate sheet.

Here are some examples of marginal comments and how to respond to them:

**Awkward.** Don't say to yourself, "Oh, awkward, huh? Well, that's not so bad." Often the sentence will contain an error of some kind, in diction, or grammar, or structure. Try on the spot to rewrite the sentence or phrase.

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<sup>9</sup>Section 3.9 is adapted from "What to do When You Get a Paper Back" in Encouraging Student Writing by Steve Tollefson, UC Berkeley Office of Educational Development.

**Wrong word/word choice.** Try to figure out what word might have worked better, and write it down above the incorrect one.

**Do you mean...? Isn't this...? Why?** Such questions are attempts to get you to think about what you've said or to explain more fully. Your first response may be a huffy "No. I didn't mean that," or "No, this isn't..." Before you go to the instructor for clarification, try to write out a reply assuming at first that you need to examine the issue more thoroughly.

**Grammatical errors.** Simply try to correct them when they occur.

Responding to marginal comments will not only help you learn the ropes, but also help you focus any questions or comments if you go over the paper with the instructor.

**End comments.** Usually end comments involve larger issues, like development and organization, and do not lend themselves to making changes directly on the paper. Instead, they are most helpful during revision. However, you can do some work immediately with them. For example: In your introduction, you might do x and y. Go ahead and try to revise the introduction. The middle section of the paper seems confused. Go to the middle section and outline your points to see if all related points are in the same paragraph and if the paragraphs fit together properly.

If you've given yourself 24 hours to study and attempt to respond to the comments but still have questions or concerns, then go to the instructor with specific questions. And remember: instructors like it best when you don't demand to know why the paper wasn't perfect as written!

### 3.9.1 When Are You Done Writing?

Examine your "final" draft to decide if it really is your final draft, or if you need to revise again: Is it clear, cogent, well-organized, well-argued?<sup>10</sup> Is it convincing? (Ask someone else to read it.) Can you succinctly sum up its argument? Is the argument original? Does each paragraph follow logically from the previous paragraph? Do you need to add transition sentences or phrases? Do you have a pithy title that hints at least at part of the paper's argument? Is your evidence documented correctly? Have you cited every source?

Avoid grammatical mistakes. If you are not sure about your grammar, read your paper aloud to yourself, pausing for commas—really read it, don't just skim over it thinking that you know what it says. When you read it aloud, you may be surprised to find that what you think is on the page isn't there. Often your ear is better than your eye.

Now that you have some strategies under your belt for approaching writing assignments and dealing with obstacles, you are ready to move on to the nitty-gritty of writing mechanics. The next section breaks down the components of an essay into manageable pieces, as well as giving advice on producing clear, comprehensible writing.

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<sup>10</sup>Section 3.9.1 from Paisley Currah's Writing Guide [<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/polisci/pcurrah/writing.html>].

# Chapter 4

## Mechanics

This section provides an overview of basic components of good writing. We begin with a discussion of the principles of good writing and of the writer's voice. We then review components of good academic writing, from sentences and paragraphs to thesis statements and arguments. Then we address two key components of academic papers: introductions and conclusions. We end by reviewing the conventions of academic writing.

### 4.1 Principles of Good Writing

The list below is not exhaustive, but it does identify a handful of fundamental components of good writing.

**Be direct and clear.** Dylan Riley tells his students to express their ideas so that they cannot be misunderstood. Strive for clarity. If you can't understand what you write, there is no way that the reader can understand.

**Be precise.** Clear thinking and clear writing go hand-in-hand. Be specific with the words you use. Use the simplest words you can to communicate your ideas. Be as exacting as possible in your word choice and sentence structure.

**Don't write like an academic.** Often students get into trouble by cramming as much jargon and as many fancy words as possible into convoluted sentences. No one likes obscure references and prose, not even your GSIs. As Claude Fischer tells his students: big words and convoluted phrases do not mean big ideas. Write simply and clearly.

#### Beware of Your Thesaurus

*Don't look for fancy, intellectual-sounding words when plain old words will do. Speak in your own voice. I guarantee that if you try to sound smart, you will usually come off sounding stupid.*

—Jim Stockinger

**Be bold.** Don't be afraid to discuss provocative ideas or to use metaphors. Writing involves both skill and taste, and like anything that involves taste, preferences for it vary. Not everyone will love everything you do all the time, and that is okay. You shouldn't always follow the rules—go ahead and break them, but do so deliberately and judiciously.

**Know your audience.** Usually the immediate audience for your work in sociology classes will be your professors, graders, and GSIs. They will want you to write as if you are speaking to an intelligent and interested but ignorant audience. You have to explain course material in your own words! Don't just refer to something from lecture and assume that's enough. Have friends (who aren't in your class) read your papers: if they understand them, you've written for an intelligent but ignorant audience.

**Kill your darlings.** Many students like to include all of their best ideas and well-phrased sentences in their papers, end up with a completely muddled argument. Anything that gets in the way of the overall clarity and flow of your writing should be cut. It can be painful to cut something you really love, but if the text is stronger for it, then it probably should be done.

### Cut the fat

Consider the following two sentences:

“Marx’s fundamental argument about the division of labor can be expressed as the idea that the division of labor is the consequence of production.”

“Marx argues that production generates the division of labor.”

These two sentences convey exactly the same information. The first does so in tortured and pretentious prose, the second simply and directly. If you can say something in fewer and simpler words you should always do so.

—Dylan Riley

## 4.2 Predication

Good sentences make a point in a direct and concise way.<sup>1</sup> We can say that good sentences have strong predication. A **predication** is the core assertion

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Steve Tollefson, “Tip Sheet for Writers # 7” in Encouraging Student Writing, Office of Educational Development, University of California, Berkeley, 2002 [<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/docs/Tip7.pdf>].

of a sentence—the statement being made about the person, place, object or event that is the subject of the sentence. In general, the emphasis of a sentence should fall on the subject, and the predication should be as strong and clear as possible.

## Weak Predication

*One type of weak predication results from the use of impersonal constructions: there is, there are, it is. These constructions fill the key opening slot of the sentence without saying anything, and they are wordy as well.*

### Weak

It is worthwhile to reexamine Smith's results.

### Stronger

We can profitably reexamine Smith's results.

Smith's results are worth reexamining

*Deferring the main point of a sentence by making something else the subject also produces weak predication.*

### Weak

I think that Cooley is underrated as a force in sociology.

### Stronger

Cooley is underrated as a force in sociology.

The sociological community still under-rates Cooley's contributions.

## Predication Errors

*Predication errors arise from faulty logic or conceptualization. Think carefully about the following examples.*

### Incorrect

The cerebellum is where we find two cerebral hemispheres.

The Unified Field Theory is an example of hard work.

A legal holiday is when you don't have to work.

### Correct

The cerebellum contains two cerebral hemispheres.

The Unified Field Theory is the result of hard work.

A legal holiday is a day when most people don't work.

### 4.3 Active and Passive Voice

Avoid using the passive voice in your writing.<sup>2</sup> What is the passive voice? Remember when Mom came home from the store and cried, “What happened to my new clock?” and you replied, “It got knocked off the table”? You answered the question as she asked it, but of course you both knew that it was now in pieces on the floor. What she really wanted to know was who knocked it off. You used the passive response to avoid taking responsibility for the action.

We use passive voice when we want to hide the actors in a sentence or when we don’t care about the actor. For instance, in the following sentence, we really don’t care who did it, only that it had been done:

The names were written upside down on the diplomas.

Passive voice, then, does have a purpose in our communication, but we must be on guard and avoid using it in sociological writing. Why?

1. We often use it unthinkingly. It **slows down our sentences** and make our writing boring.
2. The passive voice is often **anti-sociological**, because it obscures the important actors in a given situation. The sentence “10,000 Bosnian women were raped in 1996” doesn’t tell us who raped them, or why, or what was done about it. “Ethnically Serb soldiers raped 10,000 Bosnian women as part of their retreat to Serbia proper in 1996” gives a much clearer picture of who did what, and why.

#### Passive Sentences

Your exam was misplaced.

The workers were exploited.

It was said that a “military industrial complex” could exert undue influence on the government.

Buses were not sent to New Orleans until nearly a week after the first levee breached.

#### Active Sentences

I misplaced your exam. I am sorry.

The owners of the factory exploited their workers.

President and former general Dwight Eisenhower warned that a “military industrial complex” could exert undue influence on the U.S. government.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) did not send buses to New Orleans until nearly a week after the first levee was breached.

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<sup>2</sup>Adapted from Steve Tollefson, “Active versus Passive Voice” in Grammar Grams [<http://administration.berkeley.edu/commguide/verbs-gg.pdf>] with contributions from Greggor Mattson.



## 4.4 Good Paragraphs

Paragraphs in essays are the equivalent of ingredients in a recipe.<sup>3</sup> Good ones, well-combined, will result in something that is a pleasure to digest. Mediocre ones carelessly thrown together will create a mess that no one wants to touch. There are a few simple guidelines that can help you write excellent paragraphs.

**Rule 1: Good paragraphs cohere around a single, main idea.** Pick a single idea for each paragraph and spend time fleshing it out. Ask yourself about each sentence in a paragraph: does this directly support the main point I want to make in this paragraph? If the answer is no, move the sentence to another paragraph or cut it altogether.

**Rule 2: Paragraphs need topic sentences.** At some point in the paragraph you *must* present the crux of its argument in a concise way. Figure out the main assertion of the paragraph, write a topic sentence summarizing it, and organize the rest of the paragraph accordingly. If you write a paragraph and then can't figure out what the topic sentence is, then your paragraph is muddled.

**Rule 3: Use signposts and transition sentences** to let the reader know when you have changed the direction of your argument. Don't assume that connections or transitions that seem obvious to you will also be obvious to the reader. Instead of jumping from one line of argument to another, let the reader know that a change is coming. Sentences like, "While Marx emphasizes conflict in his discussion of economic life, Durkheim emphasizes solidarity" get the job done without taking up too much space. In this case, the writer indicates that the topic will shift from Marx to Durkheim.

## 4.5 Introductions

Introductions are the roadmap to your argument. You want to briefly spell out the argument you will make (your thesis) and give the reader an idea of how you get there. Tell the reader why this topic matters and inform them of any relevant details about the context in which it emerged.

Clarity is important in all writing, but especially so in your introduction. If your readers aren't sure what your main point is, they might consciously or unconsciously fill in the gap, and read the paper with their own thesis in mind. This is bad for you as a writer, because now they are evaluating all of your sentences in light of what they have surmised the point is. *So if you don't clearly state your thesis, you risk having your entire paper misread by a well-intentioned but confused audience.*

Take care to remove extraneous information from your introduction. Ask yourself: "Do I really want my reader to think that my paper is about this?"

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<sup>3</sup>See also: UNC WritingCenter [<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/paragraphs.html>]; *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing* [<http://www.nutsandboltsguide.com/middle.html>]; and Sherri Wahrer's handout for the BGSU Writers lab [<http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/provost/file29054.pdf>].

If the answer is no, then delete the sentence! Great introductions present facts that definitively establish importance of the rest of the work or they introduce a puzzle or question that the paper can actually help resolve. Adding information only loosely related to your topic will not dazzle readers or make them think you are deep—it will just confuse, annoy, or distract them. Dive into your main point.

The introduction sets the tone for your paper, and should be revisited and revised once you have written the rest. By the time you have arrived at your conclusion and written your way through the complexity of your topic, your writing may reflect a significant distance from where you began. At the very minimum, come back to your introduction and make sure your paper comes together as a complete document and begins with clarity and style.

## Advice on Developing your Introduction

by Celia Easton and Paul Schacht for SUNY Geneseo's *Online Writing Guide*

[<http://www.geneseo.edu/~writing/topics/organization.html>]

- Avoid beginning with Great Truths about the Human Condition. (Example: “Throughout history writers have concerned themselves with the effect of modern science on Western Civilization.”) At best you’ll sound pompous, at worst foolish. (The example just quoted makes no sense: writers throughout history worried about the effect of modern science?)
- Don’t waste time “praising the bard.” Your English professor doesn’t need to be told that Shakespeare was a great writer. [Your Sociology professor already knows that Weber was a seminal figure in the field!—eds]
- Don’t include irrelevant or extraneous facts or ideas. Historical, biographical, or other facts that have no immediate bearing on your thesis make for tedious reading.
- Use quotations judiciously. The words of another writer, such as a recognized expert in the field under discussion, should be a complement to—never a substitute for—your own thinking. You may be less tempted to rely on someone else’s eloquence if you put a relevant quotation in an epigraph...Don’t use quotations that you’ve seen used frequently by other writers; what isn’t news to you is unlikely to hold novelty for your reader. “Someone once said” is an acceptable attribution only when the source of the quotation is truly anonymous; don’t use it in place of finding out who actually said the words in question.

- Don't try to manufacture an introduction by restating or paraphrasing your professor's assignment.
- Your mother was right: if you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all. It's better just to start with the thesis than to include material that's trite, too broad, or of dubious relevance to the topic. A well-phrased thesis shouldn't sound abrupt anyway, and springing it at the very beginning may actually be a good way to catch your reader's attention.

## 4.6 Conclusions

So much is at stake in writing a conclusion.<sup>4</sup> This is your last chance to persuade your readers, to impress yourself upon them as a writer and thinker. The impression you create in your conclusion will shape the impression that stays with your readers after they've finished the essay.

The end of an essay should convey a sense of completeness as well as a sense of the lingering possibilities of the topic, its larger meaning, its implications: the final paragraph should close the discussion without closing it off.

To establish a sense of closure, you might do one or more of the following:

- **Conclude by linking the last paragraph to the first**, perhaps by reiterating a word or phrase you used at the beginning.
- **Conclude with a sentence composed mainly of one-syllable words.** Simple language can help create an effect of understated drama.
- **Conclude with a sentence that's compound or parallel in structure;** such sentences can establish a sense of balance or order that may feel just right at the end of a complex discussion.

To close the discussion without closing it off, you might do one or more of the following:

- **Conclude with a quotation from or reference to a primary or secondary source**, one that amplifies your main point or puts it in a different perspective. A quotation from the text you're writing about can add texture and specificity to your discussion; a critic or scholar can help confirm or complicate your final point. Just be cautious, especially about using secondary material: make sure that you get the last word.

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<sup>4</sup>Section 4.6 by Pat Bellanca (1998) from "Ending the Essay: Conclusions" in *The Academic Essay: A Brief Anatomy*, for the Writing Center at Harvard University [<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Conclusions.html>].

- **Conclude by redefining one of the key terms of your argument.** For example, an essay on Marx’s treatment of the conflict between wage labor and capital might begin with Marx’s claim that the “capitalist economy is...a gigantic enterprise of *dehumanization*”; the essay might end by suggesting that Marxist analysis is itself dehumanizing because it construes everything in economic—rather than moral or ethical—terms.
- **Conclude by considering the implications of your argument** (or analysis or discussion). What does your argument imply, involve, or suggest? For example, an essay on the novel *Ambiguous Adventure*, by the Senegalese writer Cheikh Hamidou Kane, might open with the idea that the protagonist’s development suggests Kane’s belief in the need to integrate Western materialism and Sufi spirituality in modern Senegal.

Finally, some advice on how not to end an essay:

- **Don’t simply summarize your essay.** A brief summary of your argument may be useful, especially if your essay is long—more than ten pages or so. But shorter essays tend not to require a restatement of your main ideas.
- **Avoid phrases like “in conclusion,” “to conclude,” “in summary,” and “to sum up.”** These phrases can be useful even welcome in oral presentations. But readers can see, by the tell-tale compression of the pages, when an essay is about to end. You’ll irritate your audience if you belabor the obvious.
- **Don’t apologize.** Apologies—e.g., “I don’t really understand this topic” or (worse) “I was very upset while I was writing this and I hope you will take that into consideration while you are grading it”—are simply another way of avoiding responsibility for your argument. Besides, if your paper is really as dreadful as your apology suggests, whining only underscores its inadequacies, while if it’s not as bad as you thought, expressing uncertainty may actually undermine whatever favorable impression you’ve made. Finally, apologies tacked on with post-its or index cards are no better than those included in the essay. If you’re unhappy with your performance, apologize to yourself and resolve to do better next time.

## Some Additional Advice on Developing your Conclusion

by Celia Easton and Paul Schacht for SUNY Geneseo's *Online Writing Guide*

[<http://www.geneseo.edu/~writing/topics/organization.html>]

Conclusions tend to look backward and forward simultaneously—backward toward the body of the essay, and forward toward related ideas and issues.

Some of the same errors that plague introductions turn up in conclusions, such as:

- pompous sermonizing about Great Truths;
- inclusion of irrelevant facts;
- mechanical repetition of the assignment's original wording (or of the writer's own thesis);
- unwarranted autobiography;
- praising the bard (or the professor; e.g., "I learned a great deal from this assignment...").

### 4.6.1 Mix & Match

When writing your conclusions, feel free to focus on one of these approaches to combine them as needed. For example, below is a conclusion written by a student in a sociology class that incorporates many of the suggestions above—it draws on a quotation from Weber to amplify a main point, and then sets the discussion of the iron cage in a more general discussion of the drive to get into college experienced by many American adolescents.

*The unintended product of the Protestant work ethic is the iron cage of relentless materialism—without even the presence of religion: "Today the spirit of religious asceticism—whether finally, who knows?—has escaped the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer" (124). This kind of ideological hold on material acquisition and success that is legitimately so influential and real, is the college application process in America today. This is the stage before even the entry into the workforce, but it is nonetheless fueled obsessively by the hope to*

*succeed in the capitalistic system. Thirteen years of vicious competition and exhaustion are expected for entry into top schools, which are framed in our collective American conscience as the only methods for achievement in society; success has replaced salvation as the spark for a burning, ambitious work ethic...amongst fourteen year olds. The way children have now adopted an insistent work ethic displays the deeply rooted socialization of success in our modern world, an ethos certainly derived from the same iron cage Weber saw himself trapped within during the early twentieth century.*

## 4.7 Racism and Bigotry in Language

How can you avoid racism and other forms of bigotry in your writing?<sup>5</sup> For starters, you should scrupulously avoid all stereotypes and undocumented generalizations about social groups of any kind. You should also consult the dictionary on any words that you suspect of carrying offensive denotations or connotations.

However, the dictionary will only take you so far. There are no substitutes, in the end, for an awareness of history and sensitivity to context and implication.

As a student writer, you must exercise care and thought in choosing your words. You should never use any plainly hate-charged language, even where context might seem to neutralize it, unless explicitly permitted to do so by your instructor.

In addition, you should follow these practical guidelines:

**Modernize or contextualize outdated terms that you cite from your reading.** For example, in *The Fire Next Time* (1963), novelist James Baldwin writes of the misplaced confidence that the systematic murder suffered by Jews in the Holocaust “could not happen to the Negroes in America.” In an essay you should either quote Baldwin’s exact words or, if you choose to paraphrase, substitute the term “African-Americans” for “Negroes.”

**Keep your terminology consistent and parallel.** Write “white people and black people” rather than “white people and blacks.” If you capitalize “White,” capitalize “Black.” (Some writers prefer to capitalize these words when referring to people and groups rather than skin color. Others prefer to use lower case. The important thing, again, is to be consistent.)

For more on racism in language, see:

Philip Herbst, *The Color of Words: an Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States* (Yarmouth, Me., USA : Intercultural Press, 1997).

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<sup>5</sup>Section 4.7 by Celia Easton and Paul Schacht. Excerpts from “Conventions of Writing” in the SUNY Geneseo *Online Writing Guide* [<http://www.geneseo.edu/~writing/?pg=topics/conventions.html>].

Rosalie Maggio, *Talking About People: A Guide to Fair and Accurate Language* (Phoenix, Ariz. : Oryx Press, 1997).

To avoid sexism in your writing, use gender-neutral language. In spoken English, most people treat “they” and “their” as gender-neutral singular pronouns, as in “A writer can’t help where they came from” or “Everyone takes their hat off for the national anthem.”

The most respectable objection to the singular “their” is that it has so far failed to gain wide acceptance in formal college writing and is considered grammatically incorrect. However, using “he or she” is cumbersome.

In virtually every instance, writers can avoid the entire problem - and without resorting to “he or she” or “s/he.” How? **Make the antecedent noun plural:** “Writers can’t help where they come from.” “People aren’t responsible for their genetic make-up.” “People always remove their hats for the national anthem.”

For most job titles, gender-neutral words are neither difficult to find nor cumbersome to use: mail carrier (or postal worker) as opposed to mailman, firefighter as opposed to fireman, and police officer as opposed to policeman.





## Chapter 5

# Thesis Statements and Arguments

One of the most common hidden requirements in any paper written at the university level is a thesis statement. Even though many of your assignments may not explicitly ask you to formulate one, chances are your professors and GSIs are looking for a thesis. This chapter will provide advice on developing your thesis statement and integrating it into the rest of your essay.

Another common, but not hidden, requirement of a university level paper is a well-developed argument—you'll find advice about how to do this at the end of the chapter.

### 5.1 What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is a sentence or two that clearly states the argument you make in your paper.<sup>1</sup> The key word here is “argument”: a thesis is more than a statement of fact, and a paper containing a thesis is more than a recitation of facts. Theses are widely required in university-level writing because most of your professors want more than a report of known facts. They want to know what you make of those facts. In other words, they want analysis.

#### 5.1.1 Characteristics of Thesis Statements

Good thesis statements have two key characteristics. They are debatable, and they are narrow enough to be successfully supported with evidence. In order to be debatable, theses must be more than simple statements of fact. An example of a statement of fact is: Women earn \$.78 for every \$1 earned by men. Such a sentence isn't a good thesis statement because it doesn't allow for argument.

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<sup>1</sup>Section 5.1 adapted by Kristen Gray from Stacy Weida, “Developing Strong Thesis Statements,” Purdue OWL.[Availableonline:<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/>]

Unless we disagree with the fact itself, there's nothing to debate here, and if we do disagree with the fact, then our thesis should reflect that disagreement. For example, perhaps we believe the method used to calculate the gender wage gap is wrong. Then our thesis would be: "The gender wage gap is an artifact of faulty methods used to calculate average wages." This statement develops an argument that others may disagree with. If we don't disagree with the fact itself, then our thesis could involve an explanation of that fact. For example: "The gender wage gap is caused by employers systematically tracking mothers into lower-level positions."

But theses are also more than statements of opinion. The argument made in your thesis statement must be supported in your paper with evidence and analysis. As such, a good thesis statement needs to be narrow enough for you to support in your paper convincingly. An example of a thesis statement that is too broad is: "Drug use is detrimental to society." Which drugs? How are they detrimental to society? Which society are we talking about, anyway? It would be impossible to show convincingly that all drugs are always detrimental in all societies. A better thesis would narrow its focus. For example: "Illegal drug use is detrimental because it encourages gang violence."

### 5.1.2 Types of Thesis Statements

There are two main types of thesis statements: analytic statements and normative statements. Analytic statements are about what is, whereas normative statements are about what should be. In other words, analytic statements offer arguments about facts, and normative statements offer arguments about values.

*I believe that sociological writing should always be focused around questions, and different ways of answering the question. To put the point differently, what is a thesis if not an answer (the one you think is the correct one) to a central question that other people have answered differently?*  
—Dylan Riley

The two main types of analytic theses are:

1. Claims of fact or definition: This kind of thesis argues about the definition of a phenomenon. For example: Race is a social construct.
2. Claims of cause and effect: This kind of thesis argues that one (or more) thing(s) cause another. For example: "Smoking causes lung cancer."

The two main types of normative theses are:

1. Claims about value: This kind of thesis makes an argument about how important something is. For example: "Light pollution is a pressing environmental issue."

2. Claims about solutions or policies: This kind of thesis argues for or against a specific solution or policy approach to a problem. For example: “Smoking should be outlawed.”

## 5.2 How to Develop a Thesis Statement

How can you figure out what your thesis should be?<sup>2</sup> First, pick a topic. A topic is the subject under discussion. For example, if your paper is about undocumented college students, that’s your topic. If you’re given a topic as part of the assignment, you already have that. If you’re writing a research paper, you typically have to choose your own topic (within the parameters of the assignment).

Second, find your *question*. Once you have a topic, you need to ask a question about it. The answer to this question will be your thesis. To follow our example, your question about undocumented college students could be: how does being an undocumented immigrant affect undocumented college students’ academic achievement?

Third, answer your question. Do some research, review the relevant literature (assigned readings, if you’re not asked to do independent research), and see if that gives you an answer to your question. The first thing you come up with is your *tentative thesis*.

Fourth, look back over your materials, conduct more research, think a bit more. What supports your thesis? What doesn’t? You may need to reformulate your thesis on the basis of potential critiques. If you can show why the criticism is wrong or misguided, you’re good, but if not, you’ll need to reformulate your thesis.

You may have to repeat step four a few times before you’re satisfied with your thesis, but once you are, you’re done!

### 5.2.1 The Thesis as Part of the Essay.

As noted at the beginning of this section, most of the papers you write for college need a thesis, even though very few of them ask for one directly. How does the thesis statement fit into the rest of the essay? In this section, we answer this question in two ways. First, we discuss the analytic role the thesis plays in your paper. Second, we discuss sociological conventions for presenting a paper; in other words, how to present your thesis and organize the rest of your paper with it in mind.

**The Analytic Role of the Thesis Statement.** The thesis states the main point that you argue in your paper. The rest of the paper needs to support your thesis. You should be able to look at every other part of your paper and say how it derives from your thesis. The part in question may discuss the way

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<sup>2</sup>Adapted by Kristen Gray from Patrick Rael, *Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students* (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College, 2004) [<http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>].

you went about investigating your thesis, as you would in a discussion of your research methods. It may develop a point in support of your thesis. It may address a possible criticism of your thesis. Whatever it does, each part should relate directly back to your thesis. If it doesn't, ask yourself: what's this doing in here? If you really need it, you have to reformulate your thesis to make it necessary. If not, you should take it out of your paper.

For more information about organizing your argument, see the next section.

**Conventions and the Thesis.** In academic writing, the thesis is typically stated in the introductory paragraph or section. The subsequent sections then develop points in support of the thesis. Finally, your paper ends with a conclusion, where you restate the thesis and summarize your argument. Not all writers follow this convention, but if you use this form, whoever grades your paper should be able to follow your argument easily.

## Writing a Thesis Sentence

Karen Gocsik, Dartmouth College

[[www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac\\_paper/develop.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/develop.shtml)]

No sentence in your paper will vex you as much as the thesis sentence. And with good reason: the thesis sentence is typically that ONE sentence in the paper that asserts, controls, and structures the entire argument. Without a strong persuasive, thoughtful thesis, a paper might seem unfocused, weak, and not worth the reader's time.

Complicating the matter further is that different disciplines have different notions of what constitutes a good thesis sentence. Your English professor might frown on a thesis sentence that says, "This paper will argue X by asserting A, B, and C." Such a thesis would likely be seen as too formulaic. In a Social Science course, on the other hand, a good thesis might be crafted in just that way.

So what makes a good thesis sentence?

Despite the differences from discipline to discipline, a good thesis will generally have the following characteristics:

1. **A good thesis sentence will make a claim.**

This doesn't mean that you have to reduce an idea to an "either/or" proposition and then take a stand. Rather, you need to develop an interesting perspective that you can support and defend. This perspective must be more than an observation. "America is violent" is an observation. Americans are violent because they are fearful (the

position that Michael Moore takes in *Bowling for Columbine*) is an argument. Why? Because it posits a perspective. It makes a claim.

Put another way, a good thesis sentence will inspire (rather than quiet) other points of view. One might argue that America is violent because of its violent entertainment industry. Or because of the proliferation of guns. Or because of the disintegration of the family. In short, if your thesis is positing something that no one can (or would wish to) argue with, then it's not a very good thesis.

**2. A good thesis sentences will control the entire argument.**

Your thesis sentence determines what you are required to say in a paper. It also determines what you cannot say. Every paragraph in your paper exists in order to support your thesis. Accordingly, if one of your paragraphs seems irrelevant to your thesis you have two choices: either get rid of the paragraph, or rewrite your thesis.

Understand that you don't have a third option: you can't simply stick the idea in without preparing the reader for it in your thesis. The thesis is like a contract between you and your reader. If you introduce ideas that the reader isn't prepared for, you've violated that contract.

**3. A good thesis will provide a structure for your argument.**

A good thesis not only signals to the reader *what* your argument is, but *how* your argument will be presented. In other words, your thesis sentence should either directly or indirectly suggest the structure of your argument to your reader.

Say, for example, that you are going to argue that "American fearfulness expresses itself in three curious ways: A, B, and C." In this case, the reader understands that you are going to have three important points to cover, and that these points will appear in a certain order. If you suggest a particular ordering principle and then abandon it, the reader will feel betrayed, irritated, and confused.

## 5.3 Using Evidence to Support Your Thesis

The body of your essay presents the **evidence** in support of your thesis.<sup>3</sup> There are several things you should keep in mind as you compose this part of your essay:

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<sup>3</sup>From Celia Easton and Paul Schacht. Excerpts from Organization: Body in the SUNY Geneseo Online Writing Guide [<http://www.geneseo.edu/~writing/topics/organization.html>].

- Effective persuasion generally involves *analyzing* the objects, events, situations, or issues under discussion. Remember that the word “analyze” means, literally, to “break down” into parts. Ask yourself how you might break your subject into parts and examine how the parts relate to one another.
- Your essay organization can tell you whether or not you’re analyzing. If you’ve organized an essay around a simple chronology of events, chances are that you’re not analyzing your subject. You need to examine relationships, such as cause and effect, or to isolate a single part for intensive study.
- Each paragraph in the body of your essay should express one main idea. You should generally be able to point to one sentence in the paragraph as the “topic sentence,” the one with the main idea. Other sentences in the paragraph should provide evidentiary and logical support for this idea. (See Chapter 4.4 for more detail).
- Make sure to provide clear **transitions** between paragraphs and between sentences within a paragraph. The strongest transitions are those that indicate logical relationships and employ words such as *therefore, however, because, although*. While transitions such as *and, in addition, also, and next* certainly have their place, they are weaker because they don’t reveal logical relationships.
- Provide detailed, specific, and appropriate **evidence** for your ideas. The form for proper documentation of this evidence will vary from discipline to discipline (and sometimes from professor to professor), so **be sure to find out what’s expected in a given class**. When an assignment involves analyzing a text, the words of the text itself will usually form the bulk of your evidence. You will therefore want to *quote* from the text. Depending on the discipline, evidence may also include appropriately interpreted statistics, appropriately cited research findings from a worthy source, original data, and (when required or invited by the assignment) personal experience.
- A good persuasive essay heads off likely **counter-arguments**. For more information about counter-arguments, read on.

## 5.4 Counter-arguments

When you write an academic essay, you make an argument: you propose a thesis and offer some reasoning, using evidence, that suggests why the thesis is true.<sup>4</sup> When you counter-argue, you consider a possible argument against your thesis

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<sup>4</sup>From Gordon Harvey Excerpted from *The Academic Essay: A Brief Anatomy*, for the Writing Center at Harvard University (1999) [<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Counterarg.html>].

or some aspect of your reasoning. This is a good way to test your ideas when drafting, while you still have time to revise them. And in the finished essay, it can be a persuasive and (in both senses of the word) disarming tactic. It allows you to anticipate doubts and pre-empt objections that a skeptical reader might have; it presents you as the kind of person who weighs alternatives before arguing for one, who confronts difficulties instead of sweeping them under the rug, who is more interested in discovering the truth than in winning a point.

### 5.4.1 The Turn Against

Counter-argument in an essay has two stages: you turn against your argument to challenge it and then you turn back to re-affirm it. You first imagine a skeptical reader, or cite an actual source, who might resist your argument by pointing out:

- a problem with your demonstration, e.g. that a different conclusion could be drawn from the same facts, a key assumption is unwarranted, a key term is used unfairly, certain evidence is ignored or played down;
- one or more disadvantages or practical drawbacks to what you propose;
- an alternative explanation or proposal that makes more sense.

You introduce this turn against with a phrase like *One might object here that...* or *It might seem that...* or *It's true that...* or *Admittedly...* or *Of course...* or with an anticipated challenging question: *But how...?* or *But why...?* or *But isn't this just...?* or *But if this is so, what about...?* Then you state the case against yourself as briefly but as clearly and forcefully as you can, pointing to evidence where possible.

### 5.4.2 The Turn Back

Your return to your own argument—which you announce with a *but*, *yet*, *however*, *nevertheless* or *still*—must likewise involve careful reasoning, not a flippant (or nervous) dismissal. In reasoning about the proposed counter-argument, you may:

- refute it, showing why it is mistaken—an apparent but not real problem;
- acknowledge its validity or plausibility, but suggest why on balance it's relatively less important or less likely than what you propose, and thus doesn't overturn it;
- concede its force and complicate your idea accordingly—restate your thesis in a more exact, qualified, or nuanced way that takes account of the objection, or start a new section in which you consider your topic in light of it. This will work if the counter-argument concerns only an aspect of your argument; if it undermines your entire case, then you need a new thesis.

### 5.4.3 Where to Put a Counter-Argument

Counter-argument can appear anywhere in the essay, but it most commonly appears

- as part of your introduction—before you propose your thesis—where the existence of a different view is the motive for your essay, the reason it needs writing;
- as a section or paragraph just after your introduction, in which you lay out the expected reaction or standard position before turning away to develop your own;
- as a quick move within a paragraph, where you imagine a counter-argument not to your main idea but to the sub-idea that the paragraph is arguing or is about to argue;
- as a section or paragraph just before the conclusion of your essay, in which you imagine what someone might object to what you have argued.

Although using counter-argument can substantially sharpen and energize your essay, be careful that you don't overdo it. A turn into counterargument here and there can work well, but too many such turns will have the reverse effect by obscuring your main idea or suggesting that you're ambivalent.

### 5.4.4 Counter-Argument in Pre-Writing and Revising

As you consider possible theses and begin to work on your draft, ask yourself how an intelligent person might plausibly disagree with you or see matters differently. When you can imagine an intelligent disagreement, you have an arguable idea.

Ask a few people around you what *they* think of topic X (or of your idea about X) and keep alert for a useful disagreement. Awareness of this disagreement, however you use it in your essay, will force you to sharpen your own thinking as you compose. If you come to find the counter-argument truer than your thesis, consider making it your thesis and turning your original thesis into a counter-argument.



## Chapter 6

# Handling Other People's Writing

Students often struggle with how to use others' writing ethically and effectively in their own compositions. In most of the writing you do at Berkeley, there is no way around citing others, and in fact, it is an important part of the learning process. This chapter guides you through how to handle other people's work and still produce original, interesting texts. It will help you figure out how to use others' work without relying too heavily on it to make your point. The key is to develop your own ideas in conversation with others. Figuring out how to do this well takes practice, of which you will have plenty of in college. Nonetheless, plagiarism, even once, is a serious offense, and should be carefully guarded against. We begin this chapter with what not to do and proceed by outlining techniques for how to use citations and quotes appropriately.

### 6.1 Berkeley's Policy on Academic Integrity

An integral part of achieving proficiency in a given subject involves understanding that under no conditions is that proficiency to be achieved through cheating.<sup>1</sup> An instructor has the right to give you an F on a single assignment produced by cheating. An instructor has the right to assign an F for the course if you plagiarized a paper, even if you have successfully and honestly passed the remaining portion of the course. Any student who knowingly aids in plagiarism or other cheating, e.g., allowing another student to copy a paper or examination question, is as guilty as the cheating student.

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<sup>1</sup>Paragraph excerpted from the General Catalog, University of California, Berkeley, section on Student Conduct and Appeals

### 6.1.1 Examples of Plagiarism?

It is often easier to understand what is meant by plagiarism by reviewing examples.<sup>2</sup> There are subtleties to the concept that are important for you to master in order to avoid plagiarism. This example is taken from the *Random House Handbook* by Frederick Crews, New York: Random House, 1984, pp. 405-406.

Consider the following source and three ways that a student might be tempted to make use of it.

**Original:** *The joker in the European pack was Italy. For a time hopes were entertained of her as a force against Germany, but these disappeared under Mussolini. In 1935 Italy made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. It was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations for one of its members to attack another. France and Great Britain, as great powers, Mediterranean powers, and African colonial power, were bound to take the lead against Italy at the league. But they did so feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany. The result was the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all.*<sup>3</sup>

**Version A:** *Italy, one might say, was the joker in the European deck. When she invaded Ethiopia, it was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations; yet the efforts of England and France to take the lead against her were feeble and half-hearted. It appears that those great powers had no wish to alienate a possible ally against Hitler's rearmed Germany.*

**Comment:** Clearly plagiarism. Though the facts cited are public knowledge, the stolen phrases aren't. Note that the writer's interweaving of his own words with the source's does not render him innocent of plagiarism.

**Version B:** *Italy was the joker in the European deck. Under Mussolini in 1935, she made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. As J.M. Roberts points out, this violated the covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup> But France and Britain, not wanting to alienate a possible ally against Germany, put up only feeble and half-hearted opposition to the Ethiopian adventure. The outcome, as Roberts observes, was "the worst possible:*

<sup>2</sup>Section 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 adapted from UC Berkeley Tools for Teaching Handout by Barbara Gross Davis, From *Tools for Teaching* by Barbara Gross Davis; Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, 1993.

<sup>3</sup>Michael D. Santos, Ph.D. with passages cited from the Random House Handbook and the American Heritage Dictionary. Copyright held by Regents of California, maintained by Instructional Services.

<sup>4</sup>J.M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.

*the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all.*" (Roberts, p. 845)

**Comment:** *Still plagiarism.* The two correct citations of Roberts serve as a kind of alibi for the appropriating of other, unacknowledged phrases. But the alibi has no force: some of Roberts words are again being presented as the writer's.

**Version C:** *Much has been written about German rearmament and militarism in the period 1933-1939. But Germany's dominance in Europe was by no means a foregone conclusion. The fact is that the balance of power might have been tipped against Hitler if one or two things had turned out differently. Take Italy's gravitation toward an alliance with Germany, for example. That alliance seemed so very far from inevitable that Britain and France actually muted their criticism of the Ethiopian invasion in the hope of remaining friends with Italy. They opposed the Italians in the League of Nations, as J.M. Roberts observed, "feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany."<sup>5</sup> Suppose Italy, France, and Britain had retained a certain common interest. Would Hitler have been able to get away with his remarkable bluffing and bullying in the later thirties?*

**Comment:** *No plagiarism.* The writer has been influenced by the public facts mentioned by Roberts, but he hasn't tried to pass off Roberts' conclusions as his own. The one clear borrowing is properly acknowledged.

### 6.1.2 How Do I Avoid Plagiarism?

Cite the ideas, analyses, and conclusions of others in your papers. Simply rephrasing the conclusions of others does not make them your own—you still need to cite them. You don't include a citation only if the ideas and conclusions are your own. Don't be discouraged if your text is covered by citations—it is supposed to be. Also include citations for non-public facts. These are facts that you have to look up (you don't know them already). An example of a public fact is the number of states in the U.S.—everyone knows that and so do you, so there is no need to cite it. An example of a non-public fact would be the value of the trade imbalance between the U.S. and China. Since you would have to look up that fact, you need to cite the source where you got it. The next section elaborates on when to use citations.

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<sup>5</sup>J.M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.

## 6.2 When to use Citations

We cite to give credit where credit is due.<sup>6</sup> Citations let the reader know who came up with an argument, data, theory, etc. To understand when you use citations, let us distinguish between statements representing:

1. **What the author says.** The first kind of statement refers to direct quotations. When directly reproducing sentences or phrases from the text, use quotation marks and cite a page number. Borrowing key terms from the reading (e.g. “universal opulence” or “relations of production”) usually fall under #2 below (i.e. you will want discuss how the author defines the term). However, to make it clear that you are using the author's term and not yours, put it in quotes (as above) without a page number.
2. **Your interpretation of what the author says.** When writing the second type of statement listed above, make it clear you are expressing what you believe the author is saying. For example, “For Smith, the division of labor means X, but for Marx the division of labor means Y.” In this case, specific page numbers are optional. (If you give page numbers, however, it is easier for your GSI to recognize that you are giving an interpretation of the text, and decipher where this interpretation comes from. So, you might write something like this: “Adam Smith believes the division of labor is good for society (p. XX).”)

There are also longer versions of the second type of statement, where you summarize an author's whole argument. In this case, you don't confine the summary to quotation marks, but you do include a citation with page numbers referencing sections relevant to the summary.

3. **New ideas and points that you have developed.** We can assume that everything else is a statement of the third type. That is, if you are not either giving a direct quote (#1), or clearly attempting to express the idea of an author (#2), you are offering a new idea of your own (#3). For example, you might say: “As this example demonstrates, Adam Smith's theory does not apply to contemporary society.” Here it is clear that you are offering a new interpretation and making your own argument, something that you will almost always have to do!

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<sup>6</sup>from Marcel Paret's *On References and Statements*

### Definitions

**Quotation.** Taking from another source the exact words of the author and using them in your own written work. These words need to begin and conclude with a quotation mark.

**Paraphrase.** Taking short passages from a source, restating the content of the passage, reconstructing the passage phrase by phrase, and rephrasing the author's words in your own. Paraphrased material is not enclosed in quotation marks.

**Summary.** Taking lengthy passages from a source, reformulating or outlining them in your own words, and using them in your own written work. Summarized material is not enclosed in quotation marks.

## 6.3 How to Use Quotations and Paraphrasing

Here are some reasons to quote from your sources:<sup>7</sup>

**To provide support.** Cite as an appeal to authority, to bring the voices of experts into your paper.

**To use vivid language.** Cite because the wording of the original source is clearer and more effective than any paraphrase you could write.

**To represent the source fairly.** When you quote accurately and directly, no one can claim that you have misrepresented the source.

**To enrich an argument.** Cite to interject controversy, for example, and show what's at stake in taking a position.

A good quotation is more than a random selection from a source. It says something significant or important enough to be quoted. Even if the idea is important, though, don't quote poor or unclear writing; instead paraphrase. The best passages to quote, then, are "quotable": both well-written and enlightening.

*Remember:* Quotations serve as evidence or support, not as a substitute for your own ideas, arguments, or assertions. Here are some ways to integrate quotations into your own writing.

- As a rule of thumb give at least as much commentary on the quotation as the space the quotation takes up on the page; so, a quotation taking up five lines or forty words should have a commentary roughly as long.
- Introduce all quotations so that the reader knows who is being quoted.

<sup>7</sup>Section 6.3 adapted from: *The Skidmore Guide to Writing*, section on Documentation and Plagiarism.

- Comment or elaborate on your quotations. Your reader must understand why you have chosen a particular passage to quote, why what it says that is significant, and what you want the reader to take from it.
- Point out what is important about a quote for the reader; don't assume that your reader will see the same significance you see in a quotation.

In short, clearly integrate quoted material in your own writing, and make its importance clear in your paper.

### 6.3.1 Introducing Quotations

Introduce quotations to your reader.<sup>8</sup> Quotations without introductions are called “dropped quotations.”

**Dropped quotations:** Many readers are frustrated by reading Dante's *Inferno*. “The great Christian epic is a flabbergasting work, crazily methodical, both sublime and grotesque, cruel, dismaying, a work that bursts the usual moral and literary categories” (Denby, *Great Books*, 229).

**Revised:** Many readers are frustrated by reading Dante's *Inferno*. When David Denby returned to Columbia to take “*Great Books*” again, he observed, “The great Christian epic is a flabbergasting work, crazily methodical, both sublime and grotesque, cruel, dismaying, a work that bursts the usual moral and literary categories” (Denby, *Great Books*, 229).

### 6.3.2 Formatting Quotations

For a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks.<sup>9</sup> For example:

The new head of General Motors is cautiously optimistic about the influence the resurgent U.S. auto industry can have on the entire domestic economy, according to a recent *Time* magazine story: “All told, GM's Smith estimates, the recovering industry is now strong enough to add 1.5%—\$20 billion—to the nation's gross domestic product in the last quarter of this year. ‘It's been a long time, but you always thought of the U.S. auto industry as the engine of economic recoveries in the 1950s and 60s,’ says Smith. ‘I think we could be that kind of locomotive again.’ ”

Quotations of four or more typewritten lines should be set off from your text in single spacing and indented in their entirety, generally 5 or 10 spaces from the left margin, with no quotation marks at beginning or end.

<sup>8</sup>Subsection adapted from the State University of New York at Geneseo Guide to Writing, Section on Quotations

<sup>9</sup>Subsection adapted from University of Wisconsin “Writing across the Curriculum” section on “Quoting, Paragraphs and Acknowledging Sources.”

Use an ellipsis (...) only when it is not obvious that you are quoting only a portion of the whole.

Within quotations, use square brackets [ ] to add your own clarification, comment, or correction. For example, the material enclosed in square brackets in the following sentence was added to clarify the quotation: “He [Hamlet] changes significantly after seeing Fortinbras and his army.” Use [sic], which is Latin for “in this manner,” to indicate that a mistake or problem of some sort is in the original material you are quoting and is not a mistake you introduced in your transcription.

Place commas and periods inside the closing quotation marks, but all other punctuation marks—such as semicolons, colons, exclamation points and question marks—go outside the closing quotation marks except when they are part of the quoted material.

### 6.3.3 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is best used to borrow an author’s specific ideas without a direct quotation.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps paraphrasing is best defined by what it is not. Changing or omitting a few words of another author’s statements in order to avoid a direct quote is not paraphrasing; it is, to be blunt, a form of plagiarism. Readers are led to believe that it presents your understanding of another author’s words, when in fact it uses most of that author’s actual words. Paraphrasing requires that you express ideas in your own terms.

Of course, when paraphrasing you use some of the author’s terminology. If you are writing about corporate downsizing, for example, you can’t avoid that term. However, simply parroting the original author’s sentence structure, style, and diction, is not paraphrasing.

Here’s a strategy for paraphrasing: Read a section of the text you plan to reference, put the text aside, and write your own interpretation in your own words. If you can’t do it, you need to reread the text for better understanding before you try again. Sometimes reading aloud is helpful.

Here are examples of how to, and how not to, paraphrase.

**The Original.**<sup>11</sup> Vietnamese tradition wisely forbade the confiscation of land for the payment of debts, but the French ignored this tradition. A peasant’s land was treated like any other real asset that could be seized for the payment of debts. Fearing the confiscation of their land for non-payment of taxes, many peasants turned to wealthy Vietnamese for loans (at interest rates that often exceeded 100% per annum) to meet their tax obligation in a futile attempt to stall off the inevitable. Slowly but surely Vietnam was transformed into a land of huge estates on which approximately seventy percent of the population toiled as sharecroppers. French tax policy

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<sup>10</sup>Adapted from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Writing Center.

<sup>11</sup>Source: Quincy, K. (1995). *Hmong: History of a People*. Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press.

was exploitative and shortsighted. Within two generations it created the social and economic conditions for revolution. (Quincy, 1995, p. 114)

**Paraphrase.** Vietnamese tradition did not allow the seizing of land for the payment of debts. The French, however, ignored the tradition and treated land like any other asset. Fearing the loss of their property, many peasants went to wealthy Vietnamese for loans at high interest rates. Eventually, Vietnam was changed into a collection of huge estates, where nearly three-fourths of the people worked as sharecroppers. The tax policy of the French was unfair and misguided, and it set the stage for revolution (Quincy, 1995).

Take another look at the attempted paraphrase above; this time with words taken from the original source highlighted.

**Vietnamese tradition did not allow the seizing of land for the payment of debts. The French,** however ignored the **tradition** and treated land like any other asset. Fearing the loss **of their** property, **many peasants went to wealthy Vietnamese for loans at high interest rates. Eventually, Vietnam** was changed **into a** collection **of huge estates**, where nearly three-fourths **of the people worked as sharecroppers. The tax policy** of the French **was** unfair **and** misguided, and it set the stage **for revolution** (Quincy, 1995).

This “paraphrase” is really plagiarism. Most of the paraphrase consists of identical words in the identical grammatical form of the original. Even if the paraphraser were to find synonyms for the original words, the passage would still be a plagiarism because the pattern of expression is the same. Now compare the paragraph above to a more acceptable paraphrase, in which the ideas are summarized and expressed in a new way.

**Proper Paraphrase (one possibility.)** Quincy (1995) attributed the political instability in Vietnam to misguided and harsh French tax policies, by which the peasants forfeited their small landholdings to tax collectors or to greedy money lenders... As the confiscated lands were consolidated into large estates, most of the population ended up sharecropping for wealthy landowners. Eventually, the peasants rebelled.

If you believe that some of the author’s key words—for example, the description of French tax policy—ought to be retained, then quote only those words in your paraphrase, like this:

Quincy (1995) attributed the political instability in Vietnam to “exploitative and shortsighted” (p. 14) French tax policies, by which the peasants forfeited their small landholdings to tax collectors or to



greedy money lenders. As the confiscated lands were consolidated into large estates, most of the population ended up sharecropping for wealthy landowners. Eventually, the peasants rebelled.

## 6.4 Formatting Citations

The following is based on the American Sociological Association Style Guide (2007).

### 6.4.1 References in the main text.

Use page numbers only when you quote an author's words:

Sociological analysis of cities is "critical to achieving far-reaching social change in this century," according to Duncan (1959:71).

If the author's name is in the text, follow the name with the year in parentheses:

According to Duncan (1959), sociological analysis of cities is critical to creating positive social change in America.

For joint authors, use both last names:

(Martin and Bailey 1988)

For institutional authorship, supply minimum identification in the text and the complete citation under References:

(U.S. Bureau of the Census 1963:117)

Separate a series of references with a semicolon:

(Burgess 1968; Maxwell 1971)

If there is no date for a publication, use "n.d." in place of the year.

For unpublished materials, use "forthcoming" to indicate material scheduled for publication. For dissertations and unpublished papers, cite the date:

(Smith, forthcoming)

For works with three authors, list all last names in the first citation in the text; thereafter use "et al." For more than three authors, use "et al." throughout:

(Carr, Smith, and Jones 1962), then (Carr et al. 1962)

Block quotations are presented in smaller type and are set off in a separate, indented paragraph. They are not enclosed in quotation marks:

As stated by Wright and Jacobs (1994):

The variation in men's earnings relative to their peers in the labor force was not a reliable predictor of men's attrition. This finding is inconsistent with the prediction that declines in earnings are responsible for male flight from feminizing occupations. (p. 531).

### 6.4.2 Footnotes & Endnotes

Endnotes are used to explain or amplify text, cite materials of limited availability, or append information presented in a table or figure. Number endnotes and list them at the end of your paper. Increasingly people use endnotes rather than footnotes and use either one sparingly as they tend to disrupt the flow of the text. Use footnotes and endnotes only when necessary. Footnotes appear at the bottom of the page in which they originate.

<sup>4</sup>1,391,000 of the disenfranchised population are ex-felons (Fellner and Mauer: 1998:10).

### 6.4.3 Cited References (References List)

A bibliography includes all the works you read or scanned during the writing process. List references in alphabetical order by authors' last names. References without an author name appear at the beginning of the list. For two or more references by the same author, list them in order of the year of publication. Use six hyphens and a period (——.) in place of the name when the authorship is the same as in the preceding citation. To list two or more works by the same author from the same year, distinguish them by adding letters (a, b, c, etc.) to the year and list in alphabetical order by the title.

## 6.5 Sample Bibliography Formats

### Books:<sup>12</sup>

Berlin, Gordon and Andrew Sum. 1988. *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future*. New York: Ford Foundation.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1960. *Characteristics of Population*. Vol. 1. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

### Journal Articles:

Goodman, Leo A. 1947a. "Exploratory Latent Structure Analysis Using Both Identifiable and Unidentifiable Models." *Biometrika* 61:215-31.

———. 1947b. "Systems in Qualitative Variables When Some of the Variables Are Unobservable, Part I—A Modified Latent Structure Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 79:1179-1259.

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<sup>12</sup>Section adapted from ASA Style Guide: <http://www.calstatela.edu/library/bi/rsalina/asa.styleguide.html>.

In most cases, journal pages are numbered consecutively within a volume year. Therefore you can often omit the issue number. Include the issue number or month only when it is needed to distinguish one issue from another within a volume year.

**Articles from Collected Works/Chapters in Books:**

Clausen, John A. 1972. "The Life Course of Individuals." Pp. 457-514 in *Aging and Society*, vol. 3, A Sociology of Age Stratification, edited by M. W. Riley, M. Johnson, and A. Foner. New York: Russell Sage.

**Unpublished Manuscripts:**

Osterman, Paul. 1990. "Welfare Participation in a Full Employment Economy: The Impact of Family Structure and Neighborhood." Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. Unpublished manuscript.

**Newspaper & Magazine Articles in Print:**

Basic form for a newspaper or magazine entry is:

1. Author's last name, followed by a comma and the first name and middle initial, ending with a period.
2. Year of publication followed by a period.
3. Title of article in quotations and ending with a period inside the closing quotation mark.
4. Name of newspaper/magazine in italics.
5. Date of publication followed by a comma.
6. Page number of article within the publication ending with a period.

**Magazine:**

Jana, Reena. 2000. "Preventing culture clashes—As the IT workforce grows more diverse, managers must improve awareness without creating inconsistency." *InfoWorld*, April 24, pp. 95.

**Newspaper:**

Rimland, Bernard. 2000. "Do children's shots invite autism?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, A13.

**From Commercial Databases:**

Graham, Lorie M. 1998. "The Past Never Vanishes: A Contextual Critique of the Existing Indian Family Doctrine" *American Indian Law Review*, 23:1. Retrieved May 25, 1999 Available: LEXIS-NEXIS Academic Universe, Law Reviews.

#### **Web Version of Newspapers**

Clary, Mike. 2000. "Vieques Protesters Removed Without Incident." *Los Angeles Times*, May 5. Retrieved May 5, 2000.([http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/updates/lat\\_vieques000505.htm](http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/updates/lat_vieques000505.htm)).

#### **Web Based Journals**

Smith, Herman W. and Takako Nomi. 2000. "Is Amae the Key to Understanding Japanese Culture?." *Electronic Journal of Sociology* 5:1. Retrieved May 5, 2000. (<http://www.sociology.org/content/vol005.001/smith-nomi.html>).

#### **Information Posted on a Web Site:**

American Sociological Association. 2000. "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Workshop." Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, Retrieved May 5, 2000. (<http://www.asanet.org/members/socwkshp.html>).

#### **Government Documents:**

Since the nature of public documents is so varied, the form of entry for documents cannot be standardized. The essential rule is to provide sufficient information so that the reader can locate the reference easily. For example see the following:

United States. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. 1999. *Rehab a home with HUD's 203(k): HUD and FHA are on your side*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

#### **Dissertations & Theses:**

Valencia, Albert. 1995. "An examination of selected characteristics of Mexican-American battered women and implications for service providers." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA.

#### **Further References for Formatting:**

American Sociological Association. 2007. *American Sociological Association Style Guide*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for the Social Sciences*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Krenzin, Joan and James Kanan. 1997. *Handbook of the Mechanics of Paper, Thesis, and Dissertation Preparation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

The Sociology Writing Group. 1998. *A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers*. 4th ed. New York: St. Martins Press.



# Afterword

by Arlie Hochschild

Michael Burawoy gave me the title, “Good Writing Out of Berkeley,” and I want to say quite a lot about that.<sup>13</sup> But before I do, I just want to say how enormously grateful I feel and honored I am to have students and professors here for what amounts to two-thirds of my life. When I arrived in the fall of 1962, as a Swarthmore graduate with the kind of misty Quaker idealism, and came to these hallowed halls, there were a number of great luminaries that I felt honored to study with: Reinhardt Bendix, Erving Goffman, Leo Lowenthal, Seymour Martin Lipset. It inspired awe.

At the same time, it also inspired fear. People my age are supposed to look back on the golden days of the past and compare them to a dreary, dismal, declining present. But that’s not my story about this department. In the old days, when I was a student here, there were no ladder-ranked women; there were no people of color; there was a dropout rate of one out of three and for women—I think, my year, it was one out of two. And with good reason: you got a sense there were those who would welcome that.

Eventually one found one’s way to social support, but the path toward it was not clear. Today we have the same caliber of mind in this department, but better leadership, Kim Voss’ governance of “cohesive diversity,” Sue Thur’s helpful, can-do staff. We have the phenomenal Michael Burawoy, who has inspired our entire discipline to lift its eyes from the page and address the needs of a sorry world through “public sociology.” (And he hasn’t stopped at the U.S. border, but gone off to Taiwan and South Africa to spread the word.) Claude Fischer has launched *Contexts*, a model of first-rate writing. Claude, Laura Enriquez, and Irene Bloemraad are leading the local charge to get good writing out of Berkeley. So I say thank you, not for the good old days, but for the golden new days at Berkeley sociology.

How do we get good writing—more good writing—out of Berkeley? Let me share three basic thoughts: First, George Orwell’s passion for good writing and what it says for us; second, what we can add to Orwell that speaks specifically

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<sup>13</sup>The following is taken from a talk that Arlie Hochschild gave in the Sociology Department of the University of California, Berkeley on April 27, 2007, shortly before her retirement.

to the dilemmas we face as sociologists; and third, I want to end with a list of rules of good writing.

So, first, Orwell. He was passionate about lucid writing—the aptly chosen noun, the fresh metaphor, the sock-it-to-em verb. This mattered to him. We sense this passion in his 1946 essay, *Politics and the English Language*. Many of you recall from that his famous translation of a lyrical verse from Ecclesiastes into vacuous, desiccated, academic prose. Let me share it with you again. From Ecclesiastes:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

And now here's Orwell:

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

The passage from Ecclesiastes, Orwell notes, contain forty-nine words but sixty syllables, and all its words are those of everyday life. The second passage contains thirty-eight words but ninety syllables, Latin mainly and one from Greek. And, in spite of its ninety syllables, the second passage doesn't get the whole idea across. With more syllables, it says less.

Now, Orwell could have been imitating certain sociologists we know—Talcott Parsons, and, alas, others who have long sent shudders down our collective spine. But sociology isn't alone. Roland Barthe's—paradoxically entitled—*Pleasure of the Text*, gives us this from literary criticism:

The text itself is a topic, if not in its consumption, at least in its production. It is not a jargon, a fiction. In it, the system is overcome, undone. This overcoming, this defection, is signification. From this atopia, the text catches and communicates to its readers a strange condition at once excluded and at peace.

Say what? Let's listen to one final example—from the winners of the Fourth Bad Writing Contest of 1998. The book was published by the State University of New York Press, under the opaque title, *Foundation: Matter, the Body Itself*.

Total presence breaks on the univocal predication of the exterior absolute, the absolute existent of that of which does not possible to univocally predicate an outsider. While the equivocal predication of the outside of the absolute exterior is possible of that of which the reality is also predicated, and not the reality viz., of the dark, the self, the identity of which is not outside the absolute identity of the outside.



The good news is that we don't have writing like that coming out of this department—nothing like it. In fact, we could even do a reverse Orwell. Let me play with you a little bit. Let me take a paragraph from chapter one of the beautifully crafted, *Inequality by Design*, co-authored by a team of public sociologists: Claude Fischer, Ann Swidler, Mike Hout, Sam Lucas, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski and Kim Voss. In the passage below, they describe the growing gap between rich and poor, and nail it down like this:

Being prosperous may mean owning a vacation home; purchasing private security services; having whatever medical care one wants. Being squeezed may mean having one modest, but heavily mortgaged, house; depending on 911 when danger lurks; and delaying medical care because of the expense of co-payments. Being left behind may mean barely scraping together each month's rent; relying on oneself for physical safety; and waiting for emergency aid at an overcrowded public clinic.

Here's my reverse Orwell:

In the contemporary United States, different structural locations are inhabited by different individuals, and changes have transpired along a variety of social dimensions which we can take to characterize various locations within the existing social structure. Thus, changes can be characterized by alterations, or should it be said, changes in the coefficients of social stratification along various dimensions.

## Orwell as Model

Orwell had it in for vacuous, bloated, language like this. He hated stale imagery, dying metaphors, what he called, "verbal phantom limbs" such as "with regard to" and "for example"—and bad mixes of metaphors; we could call them "mixaphors." My all-time favorite, flamboyantly bad, mixaphor is this: "The fascist octopus has sung its swan song." We should submit it for a prize. Careless language is a sure sign, Orwell tells us, that the writer is not interested in what he is saying. In such cases, prose consists less and less of words "chosen for the sake of their meaning and more and more of phrases tacked together like sections of a prefabricated henhouse."

So, why is Orwell important to us today? Orwell had to think his way out of a box he got born into. Born in 1903 to an English family living in India, educated at Eton, serving in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma—Orwell was born into imperialism and capitalism, but he emerged from it a socialist and an anti-imperialist. He had to think his way out of that original box. And I think accurate, well-chosen words in the pursuit of hidden truth became his treasured friends. There is, Orwell observes, a politics to the English language. He gives this example: "Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, cattle machine-gunned, huts set on fire..." The

word for this? Pacification. What a field day George Orwell would have with Bush's ownership society, death tax, democracy to the Third World. The point here is that, like Orwell, we need to think our way and write our way out of the empire we've gotten born into. We can't afford to get drowsy or to talk in code to our secret pals.

## Sociology's Challenges

This leads me to my second basic point, which is that there are special challenges facing us in sociology. I see three: a) the physical science model of sociology and the disappearance of voice; b) the status gap between high theory and low data and the loss of illumination; and c) market language creep and the tendency to limit perspective.

**The physical science model and the loss of voice:** In the introduction to *Images of Man*, C. Wright Mills wrote,

There is an amusing little game played nowadays, especially in England by literary people, a few physical scientists, and historians, that consists of criticizing what they take to be sociology as a pretentious discipline, having no firm conceptions and agreed about propositions. Behind their criticism, there is the standard model of the physical sciences. Practitioners of sociology, they are saying, only ape the physical sciences in an often-ridiculous way.

So, Mills argues, sociology has been suffering from an inferiority complex of a late-comer discipline among the old settler disciplines of history, economics and the physical sciences. One way we try to seem scientific is through the elimination of voice. This does not make scientific work more objective than it would be otherwise. It simply makes it more dull. It develops a behind-the-curtains Wizard of Oz voice, as in: "In this paper it is argued that" or "the following phenomena were observed."

In reaction to the Wizard of Oz disappearing act, some other scholars have dashed off in the opposite direction to total self-revelation, like the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer Gerschel, who often placed himself in the center of the family gatherings which he photographed. We have one such, my husband Adam's family; they're all there, and then there's Gerschel! These authors tell us more about themselves than we sometimes wish to know.

Instead of either the Wizard of Oz or the Gerschel model of voice, I would recommend the voice of the analytic voyager. Take the reader with you as you solve a problem that you've set yourself. You set out to discover something. What do you find? What is your response to what you find? What steps in information gathering or interpretation do you take then? What if your hunch is wrong? What then do you think? You're taking the reader *with you* on an analytic voyage. Share the inquiry. Such a voice creates the drama based on analytic drive. You're not laying final treasures before the king as if there were no treasure hunt. Nor are you focusing throughout on yourself as the instrument

of discovery. You're setting up a fascinating problem, and you're taking us with you on your voyage of discovery.

Another challenge for sociologists—one Orwell doesn't tell us about—is the imagined status gap between high theory and low data. It's like the stratification system—high theory is pure and elevated; you look up, it's "parentalized." And lowly data is down, dirty, earthbound, and associated with things less valuable. It's "infantilized." In sociology, bad writing often takes the form of one abstraction strung onto the next abstraction strung onto the next abstraction and the next, without lucid, illuminating examples to indicate precisely what it is you're referring to. If as a writer, you can't find an exact example of what you mean, then you've got a bad proposition.

Good writers understand the method of lateral zigzag, from theory to testing it out on data. What's coming forward that is interesting? What generalization might that fit? Back and forth, zigging and zagging between theory and data. The metaphor is not one of high/low but of air/water. We need both; we go from one to the other and back. Good writing seems to me often to start with a vivid empirical example that helps your reader focus. For example, Karen Hansen (a student in the Department with whom I worked) began a book based on her dissertation, *A Very Social Time*, like this:

In the autumn of 1851, Barbara Elizabeth Metcalf participated in the neighborhood quilting party held to help prepare her friends Lizzy and Frank for their upcoming wedding... 'We had a very social time,' she wrote in the letter to her mother-in-law, quoting Metcalf.

By the end of the paragraph, we've come to the theoretical meat. But Karen didn't start out with the concept of social time. She started out with a focusing vignette which aimed like an arrow at her first theoretical point.

Another student with whom I had the honor to work, Anita Garey, wrote a dissertation called *Weaving, Work and Motherhood*. This won the William Goode Award in the sociology and family section. She begins,

'I know exactly how I'm going to do it. I'm going to get a very good job in the public health sector, work for 2 years and make myself indispensable to my boss. Then I'm going to have two children by the time I'm 27, take 6 months off for each child and return to work while one of my family members does child care for me. My boss will have to take me back because I'm so indispensable.' When asked which family member would care for her children, this 21-year-old female college senior replied, 'Well, my mother said she wouldn't do it, so I guess it would have to be one of my sisters.'

From there, Anita moves into a fascinating discussion, not of strategies of action, but of strategies of being. Does "working" go with "mother" or is it diametrically opposed to "mother?" she asks. But the vignette gets us into the spirit of asking that question.

Another good example is the latest book out of our department, Jerry Karabel's, *The Chosen*. Again, a riveting vignette:

On a clear fall morning in late September of 1900, a lanky young man with patrician features and pince-nez glasses stood among the more than five hundred freshmen gathered to register at Harvard. Though neither a brilliant scholar nor a talented athlete, the young man had a certain charisma about him - a classmate later described him as “gray-eyed, cool, self-possessed, intelligent...[with] the warmest, most friendly, and understanding smile.”

Then he goes on to say, “His name was Franklin Delano Roosevelt and in 1933, became the 4<sup>th</sup> graduate of Harvard College to serve as President of the United States.”

Another dilemma sociologists face that Orwell neglects to tell us about, is what I call market creep. Jürgen Habermas spoke about the growth of a system world and a life-world. Weber, Durkheim, Tönnies and others before Habermas also demarcated these similarly separate spheres of life. But increasingly, it seems to me, sociologists talk about the life-world using the vocabulary and conceptual categories of the systems world. That is, there can be a language creep from the systems world into the life-world. Instead of analyzing that creep, we intuitively participate in it. Instead of studying the iron cage, as the economic sociology, Ralph Fevre has observed in his book, *Toward a New Economic Sociology*, we speak from within it. Nineteenth century sociologists—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—wrote from outside that iron cage. We think and write from within.

Now I’m the author of a book that’s called *The Second Shift*, which is a very industrial term for a very non-industrial thing, so I’m including myself in this. Let me give you a few examples outside sociology to give you the gist of this. I’ve been studying a group of consultants who evaluate the performance of corporate executives, and they’ve now set up a parallel consulting service called “Family 360.” It’s modeled on the kind of professional evaluation where you go into a corporation and you want to evaluate the executive—you ask his secretary how was he, his coworkers, his boss. They are now going into the executive’s home and evaluating him as a father. And the consultants bring the language of the office with them into the home. They have devised a series of questionnaires and ten-point scales. And one of them is in “family memory creation.” You can get a 10 or a 7.5 in family memory creation. There are a variety of “high leverage” actions and behaviors that add to the value. Indeed, just as you can add value to a product at the office, you “add value” to paternity at home, they say. They suggest improving your fatherhood score by taking a walk with your child every day, even if it’s just to the end of your driveway and back. The good news is that this service is trying to help men become good dads. The bad news is that the service is bringing market lingo and market mental categories with them to the idea of a good dad, making him a good “market dad.”

Another example of “language creep” came to me from talking to an undergraduate in my office a few days ago. She said she had, last summer, joined Facebook, and had been approached by someone who said,

“I want to be your friend, I’m on the UC Berkeley campus, I’m

a friendly and outgoing person, and I'm a math/com major but am interested in sociology, I like to play tennis—can I be your friend?" She said, "Yes, you can be my friend."

Then she actually met face-to-face someone from Facebook. (A Facebook friend; new category, new language.) And this person said to her,

Hi, I'm an outgoing person, I'm a math/com person, but I'm taking sociology as a minor and I like tennis...

Suddenly this student was seeing a language creep. The vocabulary that worked on the Internet had crept into face-to-face interaction as well.

How does this apply to us? What is our version of "language creep"? I think we can see it in our use of the word, "capital." We have economic capital—that's money. We have then social capital—that's contacts, reciprocity; (we have many definitions of it, but if we go with Putnam, it actually involves orientations of trust.) We have cultural capital—for example, knowledge of the opera. We have human capital—getting education. Beyond that, we have emotional capital—you have these feelings, and the way you've organized them is capital. And we have physical capital. It's not that these are un-useful terms, it's that we don't have in our conceptual toolkit, in our language, concepts which highlight the life-world—or the systems world in life-world terms. A good book for understanding this is Louis Hyde's *The Gift*.

In short, writing can go haywire in lots of different ways. I have flagged three ways that I think it goes haywire for us: The physical science model and the loss of voice; the image of high theory and low data, and the loss of illumination; and market language creep and the loss of perspective.

## Rules for Good Writing

Let me end here with what I think of as my own collection of the dos of good sociological writing.

1. Zig-zag between theory and data in your thinking and in your writing.
2. Take the reader with you on an analytic voyage. Don't hide behind the passive voice nor distract the reader with your abiding presence.
3. For every generalization, offer a vivid example to clarify precisely what it is you mean.
4. Don't dumb down. Many writers who want to do public sociology or write a crossover book think, "Well, I just have to write more simply." Wrong. What you have to do is write more clearly. Many writers don't write in a way that reflects the full scope of their intelligence, of their grasp of a scene. Let yourself go. Show on the page what precisely you are seeing—and then if you feel hesitant about your ideas, you can offer a disclaimer

(“this is exploratory, hypothesis generating.”) But don’t hold back what you are seeing. In fact, bear down on the details, name them, point out the different kinds of what you see. And share with the reader how you came to the ideas you came to.

While first writing about “emotional labor” I remember saying to myself, nobody is going to know what I’m talking about. But then, when I went to Delta Stewardess Training Center in Atlanta, Georgia, they knew what I was talking about. As one flight attendant said to me, “When I’m up I’m out, when I’m down I’m in.” Indeed she and her colleagues were way ahead of me. They had already articulated a language for what they were doing. So I thought to myself, “so they do this thing; let me get some examples. Let me bear down on details.”

5. Broaden our linguistic and conceptual range beyond the realm you are investigating. If you are investigating the market, look at friendships, at trust, at magic. If you’re investigating families—ok, look at capital!
6. Remember there is an enormous power in logic and coherence, so organize your writing in a logical way. It accumulates great power, to be logical. Footnote your digressions. You may fall in love with an insight on the side. Put it in a footnote in, and, in the next draft, eliminate the footnote.
7. Revise, and re-revise, and re-re-revise your text to improve it in all the ways I’ve just mentioned. Take inspiration from Leo Tolstoy’s much-revised novel, *Resurrection*.
8. Read your text aloud, even if it’s not for an oral presentation. If your tongue is stumbling, cut it out.
9. Read George Orwell’s *Politics and the English Language*, followed by Strunk & White’s, *The Elements of Style*.

Lastly, remember never to write,

The fascist octopus has sung its swan song.

# Appendix A: Resources for Writers

Below is a list of the sociology courses, taught by particular instructors, which included intensive writing instruction in recent semesters. Also, please check the Sociology Undergraduate Course Descriptions, published each semester on the sociology department website, for a listing of courses with intensive writing instruction that term.

For students who are interested in writing a longer research-based paper, we offer a writing seminar, Soc 194. The seminar is designed to improve your writing skills, with a focus on empirical sociological research. You will be required to conduct an original research project, turn in drafts of your work, participate in peer review sessions, and turn in a final paper (roughly 20-30 pages in length). You will present your research briefly in class at the end of the seminar. The writing seminar will also have a set of substantive readings. These readings will help students with specific substantive interests focus their work. The readings will vary by year and instructor, and may cover topics such as immigration, ethnicity, poverty, and more. Students are not required to write a paper on the topic covered in the substantive readings. Class size is limited to 20 students.

## Writing Intensive Courses within Sociology

Soc 101A & B, all instructors  
Soc 116 with Peter Evans  
Soc 125 with Claude Fischer  
Soc 130 with Mike Hout, Sandra Smith  
Soc 133 with Raka Ray  
Soc 140 with Laura Enriquez  
Soc 141 with Kim Voss  
Soc 131AC with Andrew Barlow , Sandra Smith  
Soc 170 with Cihan Tugal  
Soc 170AC with Andrew Barlow  
Soc 172 with Peter Evans, Tom Gold  
Soc H190A & B, all instructors

Various 190s

## Tutoring & Writing Support

**Student Learning Center:**<sup>14</sup> Writing Program: (510) 643-5737. [<http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/index.htm>] The Student Learning Center offers tutoring in writing for all undergraduate courses. Weekly individual tutoring and writing workshops support students taking R & C courses. Students in other writing-intensive courses may take advantage of drop-in, by-appointment, and limited individual tutoring. If you have a student who needs writing help that you cannot provide, this is the place to start. The Student Learning Center also offers tips on study habits, tutoring, seminars, study groups and skill-building for both individual disciplines, including sociology, and general skills. [[http://slc.berkeley.edu/studystrategies/acadsuccess\\_resources.htm](http://slc.berkeley.edu/studystrategies/acadsuccess_resources.htm)]

**Student Learning Center: Services for Non-Native English Speakers (NNS):** (510) 642-9908. [[http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/writing\\_resources.htm](http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/writing_resources.htm)] The Student Learning Center offers additional support for NNS writers, including grammar and word choice help, editing practice, and assistance with critical reading. The NNS Academic Literacy Specialist accepts student referrals and is available to meet one-on-one with instructors or visit departmental training sessions to provide strategies for working with NNS writers.

**Disabled Students' Program:** (510) 642-0518 (voice); (510) 642-6376 (TDD). [<http://dsp.berkeley.edu/>] DSP staff recommend academic accommodations-like large-print handouts or extended time for exams-so that students have a chance to learn and demonstrate what they have learned in classes. The program also provides many support services: Auxiliary Services (notetakers, sign language interpreters, etc.), disability-related advising, instruction in academic strategies and study skills, technical support in selecting and adapting computers-assistive technology. They also publish a helpful booklet for faculty, Teaching Students with Disabilities.

**Athletic Study Center:** (510) 642-8402. [<http://asc.berkeley.edu/>] The program provides study groups, individual tutoring, and advising for student athletes. Certain classes (College Writing, composition classes, and foreign languages) have regular tutors assigned. Tutoring for other classes can be arranged by request. Each student athlete is assigned an individual adviser.

**The Academic Centers in the Residence Halls:** [<http://academiccenters.berkeley.edu/resources/>] The Academic Centers' website includes offers tips on writing and reading and advice on preparing for essay tests.

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<sup>14</sup>Adapted from the University of California Student Learning Center



## Writing Classes

We encourage students to consider taking courses offered by the Berkeley College Writing Program that are designed to introduce students to the craft of writing. You can find out more at: [<http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/newsite/classes.htm>]

### **College Writing R1A. Accelerated Reading and Composition**

Prerequisites: Placement by the Analytical Writing Placement Examination (formerly known as the Subject A examination).

An intensive, accelerated course satisfying concurrently the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement (formerly known as the Subject A requirement) and the first half of the Reading and Composition requirement. Readings will include imaginative, expository, and argumentative texts representative of the range of those encountered in the undergraduate curriculum and will feature authors from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Offers instruction in writing a range of discourse forms and in the revision of papers.

### **College Writing 1. Grammar and Vocabulary of Written English**

Prerequisites: Self-selected non-native speakers of English.

The purpose of the course is to develop students ability to edit their own writing and to identify high-frequency non-idiomatic uses of English. Intensive, individualized practice will be provided for students from different language backgrounds.

### **College Writing R4A. Reading and Composition**

Prerequisites: Satisfaction of the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement (formerly known as the Subject A requirement).

This writing seminar satisfies the second half of the Reading and Composition requirement. It is designed to offer students structured, sustained, and highly articulated practice in the recursive processes entailed in reading, critical analysis, and composing. In like manner, the seminar affords students guided practice through the stages involved in creating a research paper. Students will read five thematically related book-length texts, or the equivalent, drawn from a range of genres, in addition to various non-print sources. In response to these materials, they will craft several short pieces leading up to two longer essays—works of exposition and/or argumentation. Students will also draft a research paper, developing a research question, gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information from texts and other sources. Elements of the research process, such as a proposal, an annotated bibliography, an abstract, a “works cited” list, and the like, will be submitted, along with the final report, in a research portfolio. Students will write a minimum of 32 pages of expository prose during the semester.

**College Writing 10A. Introduction to Public Speaking**

Prerequisites: None.

This is a strictly introductory course. It presumes no formal training of any kind on the part of the students. Emphasis will be on organization and delivery, with the goals of improving control over speaking habits and enunciation. Part of the intent of the course is to introduce students to the rudiments of the rhetorical theory which lies behind the practice of public speaking.

**College Writing 108. Advanced Composition: Digital Storytelling**

Prerequisites: Fulfillment of the Reading Composition requirement up to and including 1B or consent of instructor.

This course offers an opportunity to explore the definition of text in a digital era. Students will read and create hypertext and other digital documents and analyze the effect of the digital revolution on information dissemination, education, and democracy.

**College Writing 110. Advanced Composition: Challenging Writing**

Prerequisites: Completion of Reading and Composition requirement (1A-1B) or consent of instructor.

This writing workshop will offer students an opportunity to write essays and other nonfiction prose that speak both personally and politically to the issues and audiences they wish to address. The readings will focus on the rhetorical strategies of writers who have used the essay as a cultural form to challenge the norms of the time and place in which they live(d).

**College Writing 151. Introduction to Principles of Professional Communication**

Prerequisites: Reading and Composition 1A-1B, junior or senior status, or consent of instructor.

This course introduces students to key principles and rhetorical strategies of writing texts in nonacademic settings. Although the course may address issues of oral communication, the primary focus will be on learning and practicing strategies to generate written documents in a business context.

**College Writing 99 and 199. Supervised Independent Study**

Prerequisites: Consent of instructor.

Independent study in topics not covered by regularly scheduled courses. Student must initiate topic and present a written proposal.

## **College Writing N2-Summer Bridge. Writing the Bridge: From High School to the University**

Prerequisites: None.

This course serves students enrolled in the Summer Bridge Program and is offered during the second six-week session of UC Summer Sessions. In this course students will explore their educational experience as they read essays, poetry, and fiction focused on issues of language, culture, and identity. In their journals and in their essays, students will examine ways in which these forces interact to create a student identity.

## **The Summer English Language Institute**

During the summer, CWP offers English as a Second Language instruction. Bringing together faculty and students from around the world, the English Language Institute offers three courses: American Studies: American Language and Culture (CW 4), English as a Second Language (CW 8), and English for Specific Purposes (CW 9). In conjunction with the Summer English Language Institute, CWP also offers a graduate practicum in ESL teaching (CW 310).

## **Other Opportunities for Student Writing**

### **Berkeley Undergraduate Journal<sup>15</sup>**

(510) 642-3795

[<http://learning.berkeley.edu/buj/index.html>]

The Berkeley Undergraduate Journal welcomes papers in all academic fields from UC Berkeley undergraduates. Essays are selected on the basis of academic content, general interest, and clarity of writing. The journal is sponsored by the Division of Undergraduate and Interdisciplinary Studies of the College of Letters and Science.

### **Campus Prizes in Writing**

(510) 642-3498

[<http://students.berkeley.edu/fao/Scholarships/default.htm>]

The Academic Senate Committee on Prizes awards a number of prizes in poetry and prose, including short stories, essays in a variety of subject areas, and other kinds of writing. Some of the prizes are substantial.

### **Creative Writing Minor**

[<http://ls.berkeley.edu/ugis/creative/>]

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<sup>15</sup>Section from [<http://writing.berkeley.edu/newsite/campus.htm>]

The campus offers a minor in creative writing, through the division of Undergraduate and Interdisciplinary Studies.

**Student-Run Publications**

[<http://asuc.berkeley.edu/asinside.aspx?uid=63>]

There are more than fifty student publications on the Berkeley campus—ranging from literary, humorous, and academic to ethnic, cultural, and political, and including a daily student newspaper and an award-winning yearbook. These publications seek submissions of all kinds—poetry, essays, articles, and stories—from Berkeley undergraduates.

**Bay Area Writing Project**

[<http://www.bayareawritingproject.org/>]

## General Resources for Academic Support

**College of Letters & Science Undergraduate Advising:**<sup>16</sup>

[<http://ls-advise.berkeley.edu/>]

Advising about academic program, enrichment opportunities, and campus policies.

**Counseling and Psychological Services:**

[<http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/students/counseling/index.shtml>]

Individual consultation, groups, workshops on academic, career, and gender issues.

**Gender Equity Resource Center:**

[<http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/geneq.asp>]

Student academic achievement and personal development concerning gender issues.

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Programs and Services**

[<http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/geneq.asp>]

**Womens Programs & Services (Sexual Harassment Advocacy / Peer Education)**

[<http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/geneq.asp>]

**Multicultural Student Development:**

[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/>]

Academic support and courses, multicultural awareness, and community involvement.

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<sup>16</sup>Adapted from the University of California Berkeley College Writing Program

**African American Student Development**  
[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/aasd/>]

**Asian Pacific American Student Development**  
[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/apasd/>]

**Chicano / Latino Student Development**  
[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/clsd/>]

**Native American Advisory Council**  
[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/naac/>]

**Cross Cultural Student Development**  
[<http://multicultural.berkeley.edu/mc/>]

**Student Life Advising Services:**  
[<http://slas.berkeley.edu/>]  
Academic, personal, financial, and career guidance for all undergraduates.

**The Teaching Library at Moffit:**  
[<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/>]  
Workshops, handouts, one-on-one research assistance, and instruction tailored to your study group.

## Recommended Guides and Online Sources

A Research Guide for Students:  
<http://www.aresearchguide.com/1steps.html>

Revising, Editing and Proofreading:  
<http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/provost/file29063.pdf>

Wesleyan University Writing Workshop:  
<http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/departments/index.html>

Jack Lynch Guide to Writing and Style:  
<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/index.html>

Iowa Citation Guide:  
<http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/journalism/cite.html>

University of Kansas Writing Guide:  
<http://www.writing.ku.edu/students/guides.shtml#4>

The Armchair Grammarian:

<http://community-2.webtv.net/@HH!F9!71!91A4C51D649F/solis-boo/Grammar1/>

University of Wisconsin Writing Handbook:

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/index.html>

Common English Errors:

<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html>

Cal State LA style Manual:

<http://www.calstatela.edu/library/styleman.htm>

Bowling Green State University:

<http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/acen/writingctr/page29232.html>

St. Cloud State University:

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/>

University of Richmond Writing Center:

<http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb.html>

Purdue Writing Lab:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

UNC Writing Resources:

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/revision.html>

SUNY Geneseo Writing Guide:

<http://www.geneseo.edu/~writing/?pg=topics/composing.html>

Cornell Writing Guide:

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill1.htm>

Dartmouth Writing Guide:

[http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac\\_paper/write.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/write.shtml)

Skidmore Writing Guide:

[http://hudson2.skidmore.edu/academics/english/ENGLISH\\_DEPT\\_HP/WG/WGFRAMES.html](http://hudson2.skidmore.edu/academics/english/ENGLISH_DEPT_HP/WG/WGFRAMES.html)

<http://hudson2.skidmore.edu/%7Erscarce/WritingTips.htm>

Harvard Writing Guide:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/edit1.html>

The Guide of Grammar and Writing:

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/editing.htm>

The University of Illinois Champaign Urbana Writing Center:

[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/workshop/writer\\_resources/writing\\_tips/writers\\_block.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/workshop/writer_resources/writing_tips/writers_block.htm)





# Appendix B: Checklists and Editing Tips

## The General Checklist

You should check for all of the following before turning in any paper.

- The introduction accurately reflects the argument and structure of the paper.
- Each sentence contributes to the paper. You have removed anything that is redundant or tangential.
- You have used simple language instead of jargon. If you have used specialized terms you have defined them in clear, straightforward terms.
- If you have discussed other authors, you have accurately represented their work. This means that you have double checked the context of all quotes to make sure that you have not taken anything out of context or misconstrued any points.
- Each paragraph is organized around a single main point, and includes a topic sentence that states this clearly.
- You have checked to make sure that each point you have made has been adequately defended, either with an example, a reference to the text, or a few explanatory sentences.
- You have checked for inconsistencies, gaps, and flaws in your arguments. As part of this, you have considered counter-arguments for each of your points.
- The conclusion sums up the main points of the paper.
- The paper is formatted a commonly used font like Time New Roman 12. It is doubled-spaced, with normal margins.
- You have checked to make sure that you have cited when necessary.

- The reference list is complete.
- The paper is proofread. You have checked for correct grammar and spelling.

## Research Paper Checklist

### Section 1: Research Question<sup>17</sup>

- Clear, focused, and feasible research question
- Description of variables
- Explanation of possible relationship
- Description of theory-testing or theory-generating research
- Operationalized variables
- Description of why question is meaningful

### Section 2: Literature Review

- Overview of theoretical perspectives
- Appropriate citations, quotes, and paraphrasing
- Explanations of errors and/or gaps in literature
- Justification for research
- Discussion of any relevant epistemological issues

### Section 3: Research Design/Methods

- Description of study population
- Explanation of sampling methods and frame
- Description of how to get entrée
- Justification for chosen method

### Section 4: Ethical Considerations

- Addresses voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality
- Minimization of risk/harm to research subjects
- Possible benefits for participants
- Discussion of researcher's social position/power dynamic

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<sup>17</sup>By Jennifer Randles

#### Section 5: Feasibility Study and Preliminary Analysis

- Description of patterns in the data
- Connects data to hypotheses/previous literature
- Discusses fit of research design to research question

#### Section 6: Conclusion

- Discusses possible changes
- Main lessons
- Connects findings to larger social issues/processes

## **Things that Annoy your Instructors**

Almost all of your professors, Graduate Student Instructors, and Readers will be annoyed by sloppy papers, careless mistakes, and petty inconsiderate acts. Before you turn in a paper with any of the problems listed below, consider this: Do you really want to irritate the person who is about to give you a grade?

### **Sloppy Papers**

None of these are capital offenses, but they don't signal to your grader that you've paid close attention to detail either!

- A paper that is not proofread, and so is filled with trivial spelling or grammatical errors.
- Basic identifying information, like the student's name or date, is missing.
- Pages are not stapled together, so that your instructor either has to do it for you or take extra care not to lose stray, unattached pages.
- Pages are printed on scrap paper.
- The instructor's name is misspelled. Another version of this is when the name of an author from the readings is misspelled. Check the syllabus to make sure that you have spelled all names correctly.

### **Cut corners and flimsy arguments**

These are more serious offenses, and you risk losing credit in addition to annoying your instructor.

- A paper mostly filled with quotations or summaries of the points from lecture, so that the author appears to be simply regurgitating the material from class.

- Quotations unaccompanied by footnotes or references.
- Wikipedia-based research. Some instructors love Wikipedia, but those who don't like it really don't like it. You should always check with a professor before you cite it.
- Obvious mis-attributions and inaccurate statements about an assigned text, which suggests that the author has either not cracked the books at all, or has skimmed them so quickly as to miss main points and central examples.
- Big Sweeping Statements about the state of the world which are either banal or flat-out wrong (“Since the beginning of time man has longed for answers to the world’s mysteries” or “The civil rights movement vanquished racism in America”).
- Feelings where analyses should be. Use your emotions to inform your arguments, not in place of them.
- Crazy Formats in Short or Long Papers only serve to announce that you have chosen to disregard the requested page length of the assignment. Messing around with margins and fonts does not fool anyone. Instead of messing with the formatting, spend time paring down your work.

## E-mail Etiquette

- Just because you sent your paper on email 15 minutes after it was due doesn't mean it is not late.
- Emailed documents should have your last name and the date in the title (for example: `JaneDoe_13AUG2007.doc`). Also include the name of the course in the subject line of your email. Professors get a great many papers emailed to them. These steps will make their lives easier.

## Lazy Questions

- There are no stupid questions, but there certainly are lazy ones. It annoys instructors when students ask a question about something that they carefully spelled out for you already. If you have a question about the course or assignment, check the syllabus or prompt before asking for help.

## Will This Thesis Make the Grade?

In the end, you may have spent a good deal of time writing your thesis and still not know if it's a good one.<sup>18</sup> Here are some questions to ask yourself.

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<sup>18</sup>This section excerpted from Dartmouth College's *Materials for Students: Developing Your Thesis*. By Karen Gocsik. [[http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac\\_paper/develop.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/develop.shtml)]

- Does my thesis sentence attempt to answer (or at least to explore) a challenging intellectual question?
- Is the point I'm making one that would generate discussion and argument, or is it one that would leave people asking, "So what?"
- Is my thesis too vague? Too general? Should I focus on some more specific aspect of my topic?
- Does my thesis deal directly with the topic at hand, or is it a declaration of my personal feelings?
- Does my thesis indicate the direction of my argument? Does it suggest a structure for my paper?
- Does my introductory paragraph define terms important to my thesis? If I am writing a research paper, does my introduction "place" my thesis within the larger, ongoing scholarly discussion about my topic?
- Is the language in my thesis vivid and clear? Have I structured my sentence so that the important information is in the main clause? Have I used subordinate clauses to house less important information? Have I used parallelism to show the relationship between parts of my thesis? In short, is this thesis the very best sentence that it can be?



# Appendix C: Recommended Reading

Becker, Howard. *Writing for Social Scientists*.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*.

Johnson, William A., et al. *Sociology Student Writer's Manual*.

Michigan Series in English for Academic & Professional Purposes. *A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English*.

Strunk and White. *The Elements of Style*.

University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*.





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