Guide to Formal Writing
Blogs and Research Papers

**Required Resources:** Assignment instructions, resources linked there and Rubric in Canvas; Guide to Information Literacy, and other course Guides (all on The Science of Sociology page of my website); Peer Review Guide; the Libraries’ resources on citing/referencing and Writer’s Corner, on the Learning Aids page of my website.

**Supplemental Resources:** Guidelines to Field Notes (Writer’s Corner), the Library and our Library liaison, the Writing Center.

Effective and clear writing is challenging; it takes time, a deep understanding of your subject, and objectivity about your success. Not only does the writing process clarify the writer’s thinking (which makes it a learning tool), but also, writing REVEALS the writer’s thinking – which is exactly why it is used to measure depth of understanding and evidence of learning. Writing is also communication; in contrast to notes and online-discussion, for example, formal writing is your opportunity to respond carefully to feedback on other course work and to demonstrate clarity, organization, and use of relevant sociological language on a topic of your choice. Apply self-reflexivity to feedback on previous Course Work to meet requirements and achieve optimal learning objectives in Blogs and Research Papers. The purpose of each Formal Writing Assignment is part of the Week’s Work (on the homepage) and in Assignment instructions. Making an empirically supported, sociological argument is ALWAYS expected.

Point differences among formal Writing Assignments (Blogs and Research Papers) are based on the extent to which the Assignment reflects independent learning and deep sociological thinking. Both of these are YOURS; formal writing assignments must demonstrate acquired knowledge and understanding BEYOND that provided directly in course materials and class time. Writing Assignments ‘test’ your integrated learning and demonstrate your developing sociological imaginations.

**Blog – Unit 1 & 2 Test, 20 points to wrap up Unit Work.** See Canvas Homepage and Assignment Instructions for more details.

- Thoughtful, evidence based, thesis driven essay/argument relying upon required materials and your investigation associated with Course Work throughout the Unit.

  **Assignment Requirements: Use the Peer Review process to verify you have met these requirements.**

  - Use of relevant required materials; ALWAYS includes a specified number of
    - sociological sources
    - semi-scholarly sources
    - and at least SOME student source selection responsibility
  - Average length – 750 to 1,250 words; a little longer is acceptable – shorter indicates ideas are underdeveloped.
  - Bolded thesis statement focusing your Essay/argument.
  - Meets due date for relevant assignment

**Project Completion Blog – Units 3 & 4, 25 points each.** These are Project UNIT TESTS and therefore reflect your accumulated knowledge, integrated learning and sociological imagination explaining a topic of YOUR choice.

- Evidence based explanation of a specific issue based on YOUR investigation of a topic; blogs are specifically an EXTENDED INQUIRY based on a Sociological/Researchable Question (from Weekly Work for example).

  **Assignment Requirements: Use the Peer Review process to verify you have met these requirements.**

  - Use of relevant required materials; ALWAYS includes a specified number of
    - sociological sources
    - semi-scholarly sources
    - and at least SOME student source selection responsibility
  - Average length – 1,000 to 1,500 words; a little longer is acceptable – shorter indicates ideas are underdeveloped.
  - Bolded thesis statement that structures/organizes your argument and is an extension of a Sociological Question
  - Meets due date by in Assignments, variable and repeatable by end of semester.

**Project Completion Research Papers: 30 points during Units 3 or 4; Submission accepted ONLY AFTER Project Composite Coversheet (Outline) AND relevant Blog have been graded.** CHECK FOR MORE Detailed instructions in Assignment in Canvas.

- Evidence based argument on topic of student’s choice developed over several weeks

  **Assignment Requirements: Use the Peer Review process to verify you have met these requirements.**

  - Previously submitted and reviewed Blog on developing topic AND Composite Coversheet (Project Outline) reflecting ALL sources used WITH thesis statement (relevant preparatory work is part of Unit 3’s Course Work).
  - Could include primary research or secondary analysis
  - DOUBLE the number and type of sources required for Blogs
  - Expected minimum length is 12 pages
  - Includes bolded thesis statement developed and approved as part of Course Work – likely in Discussion
Students are responsible for making sure they have met Assignment Requirements. Formal Writing Assignments lacking required sources, OR accurate references, OR a BOLDED thesis statement WILL NOT BE GRADED. USE Guide to Information Literacy AND Peer Review to ensure you have met source and format requirements. It is expected that work not graded or with an unsatisfactory grade WILL BE revised based on comments online and in Rubrics and resubmitted in a timely manner; see me outside of class if you have questions.

Basic Format for ALL Formal Writing Assignments:

- **Student/Course ID:** Name, date, course, Assignment name and number in upper right corner
- **Reference List:**
  - References alphabetical order (by first author’s last name), at the TOP of Blogs and on first page for Research Papers below student name/course/date/assignment.
  - Complete and accurate references for all sources used (see this link for help with reference format and in-text citing -- http://libraryguides.salisbury.edu/citation)
  - **Sources MUST be labeled by type – see Guide to Information Literacy.**
- **Bolded thesis statement – typically the last sentence in the introductory paragraph**
- Well-developed, empirically supported, logically sound, and sociologically relevant argument expressed in multiple focused and clear paragraphs, with appropriate in-text cites and organized to meet assignment goals and support your thesis.
  - This is the HEART of YOUR learning/writing; see Writing Advice on the Writer’s Corner, Learning Aids page of my website; rely upon the Peer Review Process; visit the Writing Center in the GAC for assistance.
- **A concluding paragraph; may include (self)-evaluation and/or suggestions for further inquiry/research**

I follow Scientific Method and use my sociological imagination in course design and grading which means that I rely upon evidence to assess your engagement and learning AND the ways in which your work reflects and demonstrates achievement of course learning goals/objectives. The Formal Writing Assignment Rubric (attached to Assignment Instructions in Canvas) identifies criteria reflecting the quality of your thinking and effort to follow this, and other, Guides and Guidelines.

Unit work and the Peer Review process is intended to guide the development of your sociological imagination and provide relevant constructive criticism for you to learn and achieve good grades. NOTHING is more important that reading Required Materials and course Guides carefully and INTEGRATING that knowledge INTO your work. Class-time is organized to address the trickiest and most complex issues students are dealing with. Weekly work is DESIGNED around a critical thinking an integrative learning; YOU must do the intellectual work to integrate your knowledge and develop your sociological imagination.

Review the Rubric attached to Writing Assignments for details about points and specific elements of the assignment necessary for a good grade but ALL are described above as well

- **Assignment meets Basic Format for ALL Formal Writing Assignments**
  - Accurate, complete, correctly placed reference list
    - EACH source labeled by TYPE
  - Bolded sociological thesis statement, appropriately placed
- **Accurate and appropriate use of sources demonstrated through use of in-text cites to reflect:**

**Depth and Clarity of Thinking:** accurate use of appropriate and relevant sociological language in a well-developed, empirically supported, logical argument is the best indicator of how well you understand your topic and relevant sociological issues; it is also the best evidence of your scientific method and logic.

- **Rule of thumb about the research process – if NEW information duplicates information you already have, and you haven’t missed key aspects of the issue in your investigative process, you have done all the research you need to do.**
  - Good notes (especially with GOOD, sociologically relevant comments) on sources is ESSENTIAL
  - Finding similarities – or patterns – in information in your sources is how you find THEMES
  - Organizing your thinking is a reciprocal and ONGOING process – NEW sources SHOULD force reorganization of your thinking
  - **Topics (or research questions) become thesis statements as research and critical thinking develops.**
    - BIG HINT: as a ‘last thing’ make SURE your Thesis Statement reflects the argument you made – revise your THESIS to make it match your argument rather than the reverse.
    - Introduction should be detailed description of the thing you want to explain (Dependent Variable)
    - Relationships between factors in thesis statements are sub-themes AND develop into paragraphs.
    - Paragraphs are sequenced logically to reflect relationships in thesis statement.
    - Conclusion emphasizes the significance of the social relationships your research/writing revealed.
    - Relevant sociological language is used appropriately and accurately throughout.