

HINTS ON WRITING PAPERS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

(Source: www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/anthro/docs/hintsonpapers.html)

Read these hints each time you start preparing for, and each time you start writing, any paper. These are general comments on content and form; individual instructors may have additional suggestions or requirements.

A. What is an essay?

A paper is a form of communication. Before you start, ask yourself the following questions: To whom am I writing? For what purpose(s)?

Writing an essay is an exercise in handling ideas. To gain a good mark, a paper must show originality as well as a serious attempt to relate anthropological principles and materials to the writer's personal experience.

While the same general principles apply to all essays, identify the specific characteristics of the paper you are about to write. Has a specific task been suggested? For instance, you may be asked to write a book review, a case study, a survey of the literature, or a theoretical discussion. By assigning an essay, an instructor is explicitly or implicitly asking you a question, or asking you to ask one. Your first task is to decidewhat that question is, then to answer it. There are two aspects totopic selection: course requirements and your own topical interests.

In the introduction, state what the question is, and how you intend to answer it. Then in the body of the essay, give it a detailed answer, disposing of all the points that the question has raised. In the conclusion, give a summary of your detailed answer.

B. The Plan.

An essay should be made of well-supported statements in a linked series of well-constructed paragraphs, which tackle, then deal with, and finally dispose of, the question implied in the title. An essay must be organised in sections, each with a title that accurately describes the content of the section. In the same way, make sure that the title of the essay is appropriate.

The plan is the single most important aspect of a paper. The plan evolves as you prepare and write the paper.

Before starting, establish the paper topic (formulate a preliminary title, which need not be catchy).

From this topic, develop a preliminary plan; this will help you establish a sequence of tasks - usually involving reading various sources.

Design your plan so that it will ANSWER THE QUESTION, THE WHOLE QUESTION, AND

NOTHING BUT THE QUESTION. Give it a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Some of the information you have collected will have to be set aside because it is not relevant. Do not be tempted to include anything that does not have a direct bearing on the topic identified by the title. Sheer volume of facts that are not linked logically to your particular question does not impress readers; it gives a negative impression.

C. Preparation.

An essay must show originality; it must also be based on a sound knowledge of the subject it deals with. This means that you must read.

The instructor may have provided a bibliography. Check MUSE, CD-ROM bibliographies, references in relevant articles, articles in the Annual Review of Anthropology and Current Anthropology.

As you read relevant material, adapt your plan; keep returning to your plan to decide whether you need to work further on a specific issue, or whether it has been dealt with adequately. There are two steps in reading for an essay.

You first try to identify, evaluate, and eliminate sources. You are gathering material relating to your general area of research in order to develop, refine, and clarify your essay topic. You are identifying whether various texts are appropriate or not for your topic. In the process, you make a preliminary outline of your paper.

Then you read the material you have retained from the previous step, seeking documentation for each part of your outline.

Use your title and your plan to decide whether specific topics should form part of the paper: not everything that is interesting is relevant.

1. How to take notes.

Make brief notes as you read. Do not waste time copying out long quotations. Go for the ideas and arrange them in diagrams and tables, which are easier to remember and use than verbal passages. Copy the actual words only if they say something more aptly than you could say yourself.

When you first read a text, identify important ideas, arguments, definitions, etc. in the margin of the text (except if it is a library book: marking a library book is vandalism; you can mark passages in library books with Post-it notes). Don't try to take notes before you know where the argument is going. When you have read the whole paper, it will be easier to identify the important passages; this is the best time to take notes.

Generally, there is one main idea in each paragraph. Identify the idea and judge if it is useful or important to your assignment. If it is, write it down. The important thing is not to make extensive

notes, but to extract the relevant material. If you find yourself noting a lot of material which is not obviously relevant, return to your plan and evaluate the goals of your assignment.

Your reading notes can be on note cards, in a notebook, or directly on your computer. Notes need to be clear, since you will refer to them instead of the original text once your reading is done. There are different types of notes:

a. Direct quotes. Make sure that you use quotation marks to identify them as quotes, otherwise you risk committing plagiarism in your paper. Make sure that your quotes are exact. Check that no word is missing or added, and that you use the same spelling as the author. Clearly identify the text and page. (In a paper, quote only when a paraphrase does not convey the information better or more concisely. A quote must be brief, less than a paragraph.)

b. Summaries of arguments or ideas.

c. Factual data.

e. Your own reactions to the text, e.g. whether or not you agree with the author, and why. Indicate clearly in your notes that these are your views, not the author's.

D. Writing.

1. First draft. At first, write for yourself; don't be too critical of your first draft. Get your ideas on paper, and *then* look at them in a more critical way. You need not start with the introduction; start with the easiest section. Usually, it is easier to write the introduction last, when you have already clearly presented your ideas and reached your conclusions. The introduction is a guide to readers: it tells them what to expect.

2. Let your work mature. Do not write your assignments at the last moment: this is less efficient and reduces the quality of the paper. Plan your work to produce a first draft in good time. Then let it sit for a few days (at least) in order to take some distance from it. When you reread it, you will note aspects you missed the first time; editing will be easier.

3. Comprehensibility. Read the finished product as if you were the intended reader. Is it clear? Is the information presented in the most comprehensible way? Tables and diagrams help; section headings are important. Have you justified your assertions? If relevant, do not forget to include material which you know the instructor knows: the paper should be comprehensible without reference to other sources.

The aim of paragraphing is not to beautify your manuscript but to break down your essay into manageable units. There should be a topic sentence near the beginning of each paragraph - usually, but not invariably, the first sentence. The 'topic sentence' usually has three functions:

(i) to introduce the issue you intend dealing with in the paragraph;

- (ii) to link the paragraph with what has already been written; and
- (iii) to provide a key to what should be included in the paragraph: everything that cannot be directly related to the 'topic sentence' must be rejected.

E. Length.

If the desired length of the paper has been specified, it is wise to consult with the instructor before deciding to write a longer or shorter paper.

F. References.

All quotations should be acknowledged. When you present ideas or data from the literature, you may either quote between brackets or use your own words. In both cases, you **MUST** cite the source or sources. OTHERWISE, YOU ARE GUILTY OF PLAGIARISM.

Append a list of references. Arrange it alphabetically by author as indicated in the Appendix below. YOU MUST FOLLOW THE STYLE OF REFERENCING INDICATED IN THE APPENDIX, as this is the correct anthropological format.

In the body of the essay, whenever you have occasion to support a statement by reference to a book or article, or to acknowledge a quotation, give in brackets the author's surname, the date of publication of the book or article in question, then the relevant page or pages. For instance,

“Ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order” (Leach 1954: 14).

If you mention the author in the text, the reference should be as follows:

Leach says that “individuals wield power only in their capacity as social persons” (1954: 10).

Occasionally, you will quote papers which have been reprinted. For instance, Frake's article, “A structural description of Subanum 'religious behavior'” first appeared in 1964 and was reprinted in a reader in 1972. When you quote this paper in your text, give the original date of publication, but refer to the page in the text you have read. Thus, (Frake 1964: 221) refers to p. 221 in the 1972 reader. (In the appendix, you will see how this reference should be described in the reference section. See also the Murdock and Ossowski references.)

You may have to quote an author indirectly, e.g. B.D. Smith, in his article “Archaeological inference and inductive confirmation” quotes a passage from W. Salmon. If you wish to include that quote without reading Salmon's paper, do as follows:

“In order to ascertain the probability we must have enough instances to be able to make an inductive generalization” (Salmon 1967: 91 in Smith 1977: 606).

Then, in the reference section, include **both** references.

Quotes must be reproduced **exactly**. Do not alter the spelling; if you italicise a word, indicate this after the reference (see example below). If you delete a passage from the quote, indicate this with three dots (or four dots, if there is a new sentence after the deleted passage). (Do so only if it is necessary, and make sure that you are not altering the author's argument.) In some cases, you may have to add a word to make the meaning of the quote clear (especially when the quote starts with such words as "He ..." or "This ...", which could lead to ambiguities); the added words must be in **square** brackets. For instance:

"[The commoners] gave their service as fishermen, hunters and craftsmen to their lords.... *A slave was a chattel in a very real sense*; he could be bought and sold, maltreated or slain at his owner's whim" (Drucker 1951: 271-273. Emphasis added).

G. Plagiarism.

Plagiarism consists in taking another person's work and presenting it as your own original thought or research. The use of unreferenced quotations or data is the most common form of plagiarism; other forms are equally prohibited. These include the use of another student's essay under your own name, the submission of the same essay in two different courses without permission of **both** instructors, and the purchase of an essay from a commercial "term paper service". If identified, plagiarism will result in failure of the assignment and probably the course.

It is taken for granted that you have written your paper entirely by yourself. If this is not the case, you must indicate it in a footnote.

H. Presentation.

Type your essay double-spaced. Leave a wide margin (4 cm) and a space on the title page or at the end for the examiner's comments. **ALWAYS** keep a copy of your essay (in case the copy you hand in is lost or accidentally destroyed).

Whenever possible and relevant, illustrate your essay or report with neatly drawn tables, maps and diagrams. Each type of illustration forms an unnumbered series. Distinguish between **Tables** (which usually consist of numbers) and **Figures** (which usually include diagrams and maps, though maps if numerous may form a separate series). For instance, if you have two tables and one diagram, number them as follows: Table 1, Table 2, Diagram 1 (not Table 1, Table 2, Diagram 3). The sources should be indicated at the foot of the table or figure, e.g.

Table 1: Hypothetical status scale

	[data]	

Goodenough (1965:10)

If a table or diagram is copied in modified form, acknowledge this change by writing "After" before the name of the originator, e.g.



Fig. 1: Ground plan of a Kachin chief's house (After Leach 1954: 108)

Whenever you are unsure how a word is spelled, check it in the dictionary. If you know that your spelling or grammar are poor, have the whole text checked by someone else. Even when the text is understandable, incorrect spelling reduces its overall quality.

Underline (or italicise) vernacular terms, e.g. "*kainga*", but not ethnic names, e.g. "the Nayar".

Underline (or italicise) Latin names for plants and animals, e.g. *Homo sapiens*, *Cucurbita pepo*, beginning with a capital letter for the first word (genus) but not for the second word (species). On the other hand, do not underline the name of specimens which, in your view, do not stand for a valid taxonomic unit, e.g. "Sinanthropus". It is appropriate to place such words in quotation marks. To write it as *Sinanthropus* means that you think these fossils are so different from other human fossils and living man as to be recognised as a genus distinct from *Homo*.

APPENDIX: Model for the reference section

1. Author and date

If there is a single author, the surname is followed by the first name and/or initials, then the date. E.g. Barnes, J.A. (1962)

If there are two or more authors, the first author is entered as above, the other name(s) with the first name first, then the surname. E.g. Epstein, Joshua M. and Robert Axtell (1996)

Some books are collections of articles by several authors, edited by one or more people. When citing the book as a whole, editors are identified as follows:

Béteille, André, ed. (1969); Cohen, Ronald and John Middleton, eds (1967)

The publication date is indicated on the cover page of periodicals. For books, the date of publication is found on or near the title page. If the text is a manuscript, write “n.d.” instead of the date (n.d. means “no date”); if the book is in press, write “in press”.

The references are listed in alphabetical order, following the surname of the first author. If an author is cited several times, the name is written once. For other references, the date is sufficient. If there is more than one reference in a particular year for a given author, they are distinguished by letters. E.g.

Barnes, J.A. (1962) African models in the New Guinea highlands. *Man* 62: 5-9.

(1971a) *Social networks*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

(1971b) *Three styles in the study of kinship*. London: Tavistock.

Leave a space between references of different authors, but not between references of the same author.

2. Books

The title of the book is in italics, followed by the place of publication and the publisher. Do not list book chapters in the reference section. If it is important to mention the title of a chapter, do so in the text. If you are citing a book from a later edition or a translation, indicate this. E.g. Murdock (1949) and Ossowski (1963).

Béteille, André, ed. (1969) *Social inequality: Selected readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Cohen, Ronald and John Middleton, eds (1967) *Comparative political systems: Studies in the politics of pre-industrial societies*. Garden City, N.Y.: The Natural History Press.

Epstein, Joshua M. and Robert Axtell (1996) *Growing artificial societies: Social science from the bottom up*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

Leach, Edmund R. (1954) *Political systems of highland Burma*. London: Bell.

Murdock, George P. (1949) *Social structure*. New York: Free Press (1965 edition).

Ossowski, Stanislaw (1963) *Class structure in the social consciousness*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe. (Originally published in Polish in 1957.)

3. Articles in periodicals

The name of the periodical is in italics, followed by the volume number and page numbers. E.g. Barnes, J.A. (1962) African models in the New Guinea highlands. *Man* 62: 5-9.

Rosaldo, Renato I., Jr. (1968) Metaphors of hierarchy in a Mayan ritual. *American Anthropologist* 70: 524-536.

4. Articles in books

The name of the editor(s), place of publication, publisher, and pages follow the book title in italics. E.g.

Frake, Charles O. (1964) A structural description of Subanum “religious behavior”. In *Explorations in cultural anthropology*, Ward Goodenough (ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 111-129. Reprinted in *Reader in comparative religion*, W.A. Lessa and E.Z. Vogt (eds) New York: Harper & Row (1972), pp. 220-231.

Mithen, Steven J. (1994) Simulating prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies. In *Simulating societies: The computer simulation of social phenomena*, N. Gilbert and J. Doran (eds). London: UCL Press, pp. 165-93.

In the text, refer to the author of the article, not to the editor e.g. Frake (1964). If you cite several articles from the same book, each article is a separate entry in the reference section.

5. Manuscripts

Doherty, Joseph (n.d.) Towards a poetics of performance. Manuscript.

REMINDERS

A. Before starting to write your essay:

1. Have you understood the question?
2. Have you made a plan?

B. After writing the first draft:

3. Have you answered the question?
4. Is your essay organised in sections, with titles which adequately represent the plan of your essay?
5. Do your introduction and conclusion adequately reflect the argument of your essay?
6. Read your paper as if someone else had written it. Is the argument clear and unambiguous? Have you answered the question, the whole question, and nothing but the question? Could some data fit more adequately in a table or diagram than in the text?

C. Before typing your essay:

7. Have you acknowledged all quotations according to the guidelines in this essay? Does the reference section contain all the references (and only the references)?
8. Are you sure there are no spelling mistakes? The following words are commonly misspelled: words with -ie- and -ei-, such as receive, achieve; the past tense or present participle forms of some verbs ending in -r double the r (e.g. occurred), others do not (if you are unsure, check your dictionary). 'Data' and 'phenomena' are plural forms; the singular is 'datum' and 'phenomenon'. The following words or expressions must not be confused: there/their; principal/principle; *its* is the possessive form of 'it'; *It's* is equal to 'it is', and should not be used in writing. 'Their's' and 'who's' do not exist.
9. Do not forget to leave a 4 cm margin.
10. Read once more, carefully, "Hints on Writing Papers" to make sure you have followed the guidelines.

D. After typing the essay:

11. Proofread your text carefully to make sure that there are no typographical errors, missing or duplicated words, etc...
12. Keep a copy of your essay and hand in the original.