

Sociology 138 writing paper guide.

Paper guide

The model for the papers is something like a legal brief. The papers ought to describe the argument and the evidence used by the theorist and *critically evaluate the argument*.

Structure:

- The paper needs to be coherently organized (i.e., it will probably help if you outline what you are going to say before you start writing).
- Spelling, grammar and organization count (for up to 10% of the total grade). This is about thinking and writing.
- Include a title page and a bibliography (not counted in the page total). Footnotes or end notes are up to you. You can cite the text as simply “C1ST” or “CoST” for the classical and contemporary readers respectively. Any other outside source needs to be cited using a consistent style. See the text bibliography for examples.
- The paper should have two distinct parts:
 - *An exposition* of the general argument (if you are writing on one of the books, don't try to summarize the whole book. Write on one of the substantive chapters).
 - *An evaluation* of the argument made in the paper/chapter.
- These should be specific sub-headings. The grades will be assigned on a (roughly) 75% exposition, 25% evaluation.
- *Length*. The papers should be between 4 - 6 pages (more if you want, but don't be too long-winded, this is a minimum). I am figuring this on a Times New Roman 11 pt font with 1 inch margins, and it equates to about 350 words per page. I'm not going to count words, but if you turn in some monster with 3 inch margins and 17 point bold type, it'll get counted against you.

What does 'exposition' mean

The exposition part of the paper should summarize the main argument, or some significant part of the argument, of the theorist you are evaluating. The standard I use is that a person who has read your brief, but not the original reading, should have an accurate understanding of the author's argument. Think of this as writing your own cliff notes. To do this well in 3 pages (or so) you need to focus your writing.

What does 'evaluation' mean?

Evaluation does not mean your opinion. It means make a critical judgment, and base that judgment on a logical argument. Thus, if you say “I think this was rotten” you will not get any credit. If, on the other hand you say, “I think this is rotten, because ...” and proceed to spell out the reason that you like/dislike the argument, the better. *An excellent evaluation includes a part that proposes how to fix any critique that you raise*. This is the hardest part of these papers. You need to organize a response to the argument that is based on the logic or evidence relevant for the problem, then propose a better way of thinking about the issue the author raised. An excellent example of this sort of task is given in the Sewell reading at the end of the course (see the online link).

How to write a research paper

A research paper is not an essay. As such, the form and content differ from what you might be used to writing in, say, a literature class or an intro writing class. Unlike an essay, I am not that interested in hearing your “voice” or some other creative expression of self. Instead, I want the paper to provide a critical understanding of the material. Below are some hints on what should and should not be put into a research paper.

Structure the paper

- A research paper should start with an introduction (usually a paragraph, maybe two) that tells the reader what to expect. Once one has finished reading this paragraph, the reader should know what is coming: what the main argument will be.
- The body of the paper should be logically ordered, make sure that an idea you are discussing has been defined, and that if you need one concept to understand another, that they are introduced in the proper order. For example, you would not talk about “species being”(from Marx) without having first introduced “alienation”.
- *Write an outline.* This is the simplest, most certain way to have a well structured paper.
- *Use section headings.* This alerts the reader to where you are going and the structure of your argument. You should have a new section heading for each main point in your outline.
- *Avoid block quotes.* These fill space, but rarely contribute much to the argument. ***I will allow no more than one block quote, of not more than 5 lines, in each paper.***
- *A critique is different than your opinion.* A critique or evaluation takes issue with a given part of an argument, and logically (or empirically) challenges the argument. Whatever you say about an author’s work, needs to be backed up with logical arguments or by showing an error of fact. For example, If I were to show that Arendt had the facts of the Holocaust wrong, then I can link this error to an error in her ideas. Or, if I think the leap between working in a factory and being ‘disconnected’ in the world is too strong, then I can show how a different interpretation is possible.
- *Be concise.* Do not ramble. Read each sentence. If it is not necessary, cut it.
- *Check your grammar and spelling.* All word processing programs now have automatic grammar, punctuation and spelling checkers, use them.
- *Proofread your paper.* Read it after you have written it. The BEST way to do this is to give yourself at least a day between the time you write it and the time you proof it. Read it aloud. Have someone else read it. You will be surprised how important this is, and how easily reading the paper aloud to your roommate will highlight silly mistakes.