Introduction

“Few things are more imposing than a blank sheet of paper, and the initial phases of research often include periods of furious non-productivity where the only thing produced is a cold sweat” (Booth and Crisler 1976:51). There are three considerations, alone or in combination, causing our sweat: what to write about; how to write it; and how to write. These can be restated as topic, mechanics, and quality/style. These problems are not unique to undergraduates. Graduate students and professionals, even widely-published professionals, often have difficulties with how to write. Certainly, how to write is the greatest problem of writing in sociology (perhaps in other disciplines as well), so much so that a stilted, ponderous writing style has become an unwanted hallmark of sociology (e.g., see Cowley 1956).

Until recently, there was no singular and coherent body of advice providing useful direction. However, Howard Becker (1986) has demystified the process of writing, committing to print many of the characteristics of bad and good writing in the social sciences, and more importantly, constructing a roadmap of many routes from the former to the latter. In demystifying good writing, Howard Becker reveals no secrets. There are no secrets. Rather, good writing is hard work. The demystification is the public declaration that good writing is ultimately difficult for all of us, graduate students and professionals, not just for undergraduates. Read Becker and take him to heart. It reads like a novel or a series of short stories rather than a writing guide, an exemplar of good writing. However, a word of caution; if you read Becker, you will not write better, but if you read Becker and work at it, you will be on your way to better writing.

While Howard Becker has admirably and cogently addressed the problem of how to write, for the undergraduate, at least, what to write about and how to write it (mechanics) still remain problematic. What to write about (your topic) may be problematic because of a lack of commitment or imagination.

Often, when undergraduates select (or fall into) a particular topic, they have no commitment to it, other than it fulfills the course requirement for a paper and fits the course topic. Having no interest in, or commitment to your topic beyond that of fulfilling a course requirement may well affect the quality of the final product as well as the production process. Writing is not merely a task, it is a social act involving the politics of symbolic interactionism. Our writing is for consumption by an audience and is thus another presentation of self. Even when individuals keep a diary, it is the action “I” writing for the later consumption of “Me.” Write a letter or complete application forms for a job and you reveal much about yourself. Write a research or term paper and you also reveal much about yourself. With this in mind, you should invest yourself in the paper, because it is a presentation of self. Such a commitment to the paper is easier to sustain if you have a genuine interest in your topic.
Many undergraduates declare an interest in a particular substantive area, e.g., criminal justice, and flounder for a paper topic in courses outside their area(s) of interest. Yet, most undergraduate programs require that students take courses from two different areas – the area(s) of students’ interest (their electives) and the areas required of all students, often referred to as the core courses. Here, with imagination, is the student’s salvation” core courses are core in the sense that they cut across all other substantive areas.

For example, a student with a dominant interest in criminal justice or community may be required to take social stratification or social change as a core course. To identify a paper topic offering the potential for commitment, the student should start with her/his area of interest and assess its connection to the core course. Start with what you know and see how it fits. For example, how has social change affected community planning or growth; how does stratification manifest itself in each stage of the criminal justice system – arrest, sentencing, prison life? Based on conversations with students, too often they try to identify a topic from within the context of the core course, at best a myopic perspective. If you have no commitment to, or interest in the particular course, why start there in search for a paper topic? Sociology conforms to a basic law of ecology – everything is connected to everything else – so start with your areas of interest and identify the connections to identify a paper topic. This will yield a more interesting topic, and commitment to it will sustain your research efforts.

Selecting a topic must be done in a timely manner. While the topic should not be identified hastily to “get its selection out of the way,” neither should it be delayed nor deferred. Identifying a topic, at least tentatively, early on creates advantages that contribute to the quality of your effort – advantages like modifying or changing topic, using interlibrary loan, re-reading and revising your paper through several drafts.

Sound, effective writing takes time, time devoted not only to the process and craft of producing the paper, but also to the process of revising and editing the paper. Often, subsequent revisions produce a shorter, tighter paper, eliminating redundancies and carelessness. In this manner, thinking and writing are reciprocally related. Just as thinking directs and guides your writing, writing, when read and re-read for revision, can refine and clarify your thinking. Hence, complete your paper, put it away for several days or a week, and then carefully and deliberately read it again, marking errors and ambiguities. That is, grade and critique your work before your professor has the chance. Every correction you make is a correction your professor cannot make. If possible, go through this process several times, each time putting your paper away for a few days. Students are generally surprised by the mistakes found even after the second or third editing/proofreading.

After you have identified your topic, and assuming that you have read Becker (1986), the problem of how to write it remains. The remainder of this guide is intended to standardize research and term paper expectations and formats within the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Perhaps all of the guidelines will not be relevant or applicable to your particular class. Your instructor may make specific modifications and deletions. All research papers should possess the following characteristics:
1. some minimum length, excluding bibliography.
2. well organized (perhaps with subheadings).
3. devoid of plagiarism.
4. on a topic appropriate to the course and approved by the instructor.
6. grounded in theory.

Other than errors of grammar and syntax, most errors occur in one or more of these six categories. Each one will be discussed individually.

1. LENGTH

The research paper, as some portion of your grade, should conform to some minimum length, excluding bibliography (sometimes there is a maximum length). Students may occasionally attempt to stretch their papers by “adjusting” the margins. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology requires one-inch margins, top and bottom, left and right. We suspect that students attempt to stretch paper length by “adjusting” margins because they have used too few sources. Ultimately, the solution to the problem of length is to adequately address your topic, and this cannot be done if too few sources are used. Sources may include not only books, but journal articles and government documents. Newspaper and magazine articles and personal interviews should be avoided or at least minimal. When you find a source that is useful, check its bibliography to lead you to other sources. You may want to use the interlibrary loan if you need to (although it may take several weeks to obtain materials by this means). The course syllabus will specify minimum and maximum length and at the discretion of the instructor, a minimum number of sources.

2. ORGANIZATION

The paper should be well organized. Subheadings can be quite useful in organization. For example:

   a. **Introduction.** Introduce your topic and define or operationalize the major concepts you will use. Make it clear to the reader how you are using the major concepts, and always assume that the reader knows nothing about your topic.

   b. **Theoretical Orientation.** Identify the theory you are using and briefly explain/develop the theory in two or so pages. Ideally, the theory section of the paper should be divided into two parts. The first part should articulate the basic components of the theory, fully referenced. In the second part of the theory section, you should explain or demonstrate how the particular theory you selected is relevant to/compatible with the development of your topic.

   c. **Main body of paper (with additional subheadings if desired)**

   d. **Summary and Conclusions.** Have a developed conclusion, even if only a page. Do not just leave the end of the paper hanging. The summary briefly reviews the basis for the conclusions.
While these subheadings are generic, yours should be specifically titled to fit your paper topic. Subheadings succinctly identify the subject matter that follow and may force you to become more cognizant of your paper’s organization. If used properly subheadings will convey a certain maturity about your paper and contribute to the reader’s comprehension of your paper’s development and direction.

A well-organized paper must also embody other characteristics. First, sources/references used must be coherently integrated. Using one before going to a new source (i.e., exhausting sources sequentially with no cross-referencing or integration of sources) is typically an indication of a shallow research effort. Second, transitions between sections and often between paragraphs must be developed or the paper will not flow and will lack coherence.

3. PLAGIARISM

The student Conduct Code of EIU defines plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty, as:

The use, without adequate attribution, of another writer’s words or thoughts as if they were one’s own. Any students who knowingly assist other students to engage in academic dishonesty are also guilty of academic dishonesty. If a student admits academic dishonesty, or, after a hearing, is found to have committed academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary sanctions may be imposed in accordance with this Code in addition to a reduced or failing grade in the course.

Plagiarism is sufficiently serious to not only fail the student for the course but to have the student dismissed from the university. If the student turns in someone else’s paper as her/his own, with knowledge of the paper’s author, both individuals may be dismissed. With this warning, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology will seek maximum punishment in any case of plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism in your own work, the paper must be fully referenced, using ASA/AAA style documentation. Everything should be referenced, not just direct quotes. If you take just an idea or some conceptualization from a source, you are obligated to reference it, or you will be guilty of plagiarism – and PLAGIARISM WILL RESULT IN A GRADE OF F FOR THE COURSE! To be safe, every paragraph, even those which have no quoted material, should have at least one reference unless it contains only your own thoughts. You will not avoid plagiarism by simply changing a couple of words in the quote and claiming that you have paraphrased the material.

To help you avoid plagiarism and to enhance the quality of your paper, your instructor may employ the following practices. Regardless, bear in mind that your instructor will be acutely aware of any discrepancies between your class performance, including your style of writing on essay exams, and the quality of your paper.
a. Your term paper topic should be approved and discussed with your instructor initially, and in more detail as the paper moves along. There may be some minimum number of conferences during the semester.
b. An outline of your paper may be required and discussed with your instructor prior to writing.
c. Sources should be discussed and notes made available on request.
d. References will be carefully monitored.
e. Papers should be turned in at least two weeks before the last day of class (to allow the instructor time to actually check the references).

4. TOPIC

You should identify your topic early in the semester. If you delay your work, you may not get the books you need or want for your paper. It is important to have your topic well-defined and focused. If it is not focused, it will be impossible to adequately cover the topic within the prescribed length. A topic too generally defined is usually only superficially addressed. Be sure to have your topic approved by the date specified on your course syllabus.

5. ASA REFERENCING

There are several reasons why we insist you use the ASA referencing format (a format identical to scientific notation). First, this referencing is not unique to sociology but is also used in a number of other disciplines (largely the sciences and social sciences). Second, for sociology majors, learning the referencing appropriate to the discipline is, in some sense, as integral as learning the relevant theories and methods. It is inconceivable that a sociology major would not be exposed to or use the referencing style accepted by the American Sociological Association. Such an omission suggests that the student has become a victim of his/her own education, particularly if the student anticipated going to graduate school. Third, a scientific notation is straight-forward and easy to use; the reference is placed within the text of the paper, where appropriate, there are no end or footnotes and numbers to deal with, and there is value in seeing and associating researchers’/authors’ names and dates with their material rather than simply seeing a reference number. Students who take the time and make the effort to understand the ASA referencing style will generally express a real preference for its use (and regrets for not having used it before).

Specifically, the reference is placed within parentheses in the text of the paper and includes the author’s last name, year of publication of the source used (and page number(s) when using direct quotations) – for example, (Jones 1983) (Jones 1983:245). If one author has two or more publications in the same year, they are distinguished by year of publication in both the reference and the bibliography – for example, (Jones 1983a:245; 1983b:16). If two authors have the same last name, they will be distinguished by year of publication of their works unless their works happened to be published in the same year. In this case, use the initials of the authors to distinguish the two – for example, (K. Jones 1983:216-220; B. Jones 1983:119-120). If one work has multiple authors, the last name of each should appear in the reference – for example, (Smith and Jones 1983:7) or (Smith, Jones and Shims 1985:x1).
Following are more examples of referencing.

According to Marx (1962), “The decrease of variable in relation to constant capital, which goes hand in hand with the development of the productive forces, stimulates the growth of the laboring population…” (p. 236).

OR

“The decrease of variable in relation to constant capital, which goes hand in hand with the development of the productive forces, stimulates the growth of the laboring population, while continually creating…over population” (Marx 1962:236).

In the first quote, Marx’s name is part of the text, while in the second quote; Marx’s name is not part of the text and is thus placed within the parentheses. Also note the ellipses (…) in place of the words being omitted from the original source. For example: A decrease of variable capital in proportion to constant capital,”…which goes hand in hand with the development of the productive forces, stimulates the growth of the laboring population…” (Marx 1962:236). If you omit words within a quoted sentence, three ellipses are used. If you omit one or more sentences within quoted material, four ellipses are used.

OR

If you use a very long quote (more than 4 typed lines), it should be indented and single spaced, and you do not use quotation marks:

The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear at the starting and closing point, the motive and the purpose of production; that production is only production for capital and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the society of producers (Marx 1962:236-237).

You can also make Marx’s point in your own words, but you must still cite Marx as the source, but omit the page number:

Marx was concerned with tendencies for capitalism to produce internal crises. His crisis-theory does not predict the collapse of capitalism but is suggestive of various scenarios of societal transformation. For Marx, the major crisis-theory does not predict the collapse of capitalism but is suggestive of various scenarios of societal transformation. For Marx, the major crisis was that capitalism exists for self-expansion of profit and must be served by man rather than serving man (Marx 1962).

Quoted material should not be used excessively and long quotations should be avoided; rarely is more than half a page justified. Quotations should never be strung together to construct a paper. If done, you are not the writer but merely the cutter and paster. Typically, quotations are employed as spring boards for you to expand your points or are used to support your statements and conserve space.
If you wish to insert anything into quoted material – a letter, a word, an explanation, an exclamation point – use brackets []. Parentheses will be read as part of the original material being quoted.

Following are examples of bibliographic entries. The first is for an article in a book, the second for an article in a journal, the third for a book. By convention, titles of books, journals, movies, record albums/CDs, and newspapers are italicized while newspaper and journal articles, song titles and chapter headings are placed in quotation marks.


If an entry has multiple authors, the authors should be listed in the order they appear, not alphabetically, and only the first author has last name appearing first. You will probably not be able to get by with only these three examples. You should spend several hours in the library looking at examples of referencing and bibliographic form in articles found in sociology journals (e.g. *Sociological Quarterly, Social Forces, American Sociological Review, Rural Sociology*). As with any bibliography, entries should be in alphabetical order.

6. THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Any topic you choose must be treated sociologically. The paper should be theoretically grounded and analyzed from that theory (see section 2, ORGANIZATION). Many students seem to have a genuine fear of theory. As undergraduates, we feel that we do not understand theory, and as a consequence, we do not read theory. As a consequence of not reading theory, we do not understand theory – a self fulfilling prophecy. Engage theory and you will demystify it. The more you use it, the more you understand it.

As college students, you are expected to edit and proofread your papers carefully. As final products, they should be free of spelling errors, sentence fragments, and other symptoms of poor writing. Finally, as sociology majors, you are expected to employ sociological concepts and knowledge in the construction of your paper.
ALL PAPERS MUST BE TYPED

Papers are due two weeks before the last day of class unless otherwise noted and the percentage of your final grade represented by the paper will be determined by your professor.

How to hand in a research paper:

1. Assemble your paper with 1 or 2 staples in the upper left-hand corner; do NOT use folders, plastic or otherwise.
2. Hand your paper in to your instructor (i.e., in her/his hands), not in mailboxes or under office doors.
3. Keep a printed copy for yourself and submit the original.

The following are some typical errors/omissions often committed by students:

1. students are often myopic or monocausal; i.e., they attribute very complex phenomena to a single cause.
2. students often forget to include any theory or do not reference the theory section.
3. sometimes, students use lecture notes as reference/documentation materials. Lecture notes are not to be considered acceptable referencing courses.
4. poor transition between paragraphs/sections.
5. failure to define concepts being used.
6. omission of page numbers in references.
7. insufficient referencing – you must reference more than just quotes; reference all substantive material.
8. poor organization/failure to use subheadings or divisions to develop paper in a logical progression.
9. poor sentence structure.
10. error of punctuation.
11. some students try to make their papers of sufficient length by having large margins.
12. although providing some historical perspective is important, students often fail to utilize current sources (typically considered to be within the past five years).

Conclusion

The research paper is an important assignment. Thus, if you cannot write, or suspect you cannot write, you might take advantage of a variety of services offered on campus. Such services include:

FIND INFORMATION FAST WORKSHOPS

Description: Booth Library Reference Librarians will provide instruction on how to search the online catalog and databases. New databases will be highlighted. You will learn how to locate reliable and scholarly information for course assignments and research projects. Information on how to request materials from other libraries is also included. Call 581-6061.
Target Audience: Anyone wishing to learn about library resources and improve their searching
techniques.

**Learning Objectives:**
Limiting searches
Evaluating resources
Defining peer reviewed articles
Boolean logic

Workshop dates can be viewed at the Booth Library website:
http://www.library.eiu.edu/workshops/quickview.html

**USING THE WEB FOR RESEARCH WORKSHOPS**

**Description:** Booth Library Reference Librarians will provide instruction on how to take your internet searching to the next level. Learn techniques to improve your search results, learn how to determine when to use the web for course assignments, and learn how to incorporate your findings into your research. Call 581-6061.

**Target Audience:** Anyone wishing to learn about using the Web as a library resource.

**Learning Objectives:**
Improve search results
Evaluating the web as a resource
Incorporating your findings

Workshop dates can be viewed at the Booth Library website:
http://www.library.eiu.edu/workshops/quickview.html

**WRITING CENTER**

301 Coleman Hall, Telephone: 581-5929

The Writing Center is a tutoring service for all students at Eastern. While tutors do not proofread papers, they will answer questions, offer suggestions, and help make the work of writing more effective and efficient. Students may call tutors for an appointment or just walk in. Students who are aware of weaknesses in their writing and want to improve can come in for a “check-up” and regular tutoring sessions. Or, if a faculty has a question about a specific writing assignment, they can also use the Center. Students are especially welcome to come into the Center to work on papers; the Writing Center has study carrels, hot coffee, dictionaries, and immediate help. The tutors give individual help and no grades. The Writing Center is open Monday through Thursday, 9:00am to 3:00pm and 6:00pm to 9:00pm. Friday hours are from 9:00am to 1:00pm.
CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH PAPERS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

(complete and include as the last page of your paper)

1. _______ I have consulted and used at least the required minimum number of sources which appear with proper referencing throughout the paper and in the bibliography.

2. _______ This paper is written in the ASA/AAA (American Sociological Association/American Anthropological Association) style format.

3. _______ Early in the introduction of my paper, I have clearly stated the purpose of the paper after thoughtfully narrowing my topic to a manageable focus.

4. _______ I have edited the paper to determine whether everything that remains is relevant to my statement of purpose.

5. _______ My summary and conclusions section includes both a brief summation of the major points and suggestions for further research in light of conclusions made in my paper.

6. _______ I have used my sources critically in the sense that I have exercised my own judgment in evaluating what others have written, with effort to find errors of judgment, obsolete data, ideological bias, sloppy reasoning and so on.

7. _______ If tables or graphs are used, I have checked them for conformity to ASA/AAA style and have clear descriptions and appropriate statistical symbols. The tables are also referenced if taken from other sources.

8. _______ Throughout the body of the paper, I have material organized to reflect a progression of thought, and this is reflected in appropriate subheadings (consult examples from ASA/AAA journals).

9. _______ I have carefully edited the paper to correct errors in the final draft.

10. _______ I have duplicated the paper to correct errors in the final draft.

11. _______ Most of the sources used are current.

___________________________________
Signature
REFERENCES


Reference list formats: Some examples

Books


Editions of Books


Volumes of Books


Translations


Edited Volumes


Repubhlished Works


Articles from Collected Works


**Articles from Journals**


*Note:* In most cases, journal pages are numbered consecutively within a volume year. In these cases, you can 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 (i.e., when each issue in a volume begins with page number 1).

**Articles Published in More Than One Journal Issue**


**Articles from Foreign-Language Journals**


**Articles from Newspapers and Magazines**


**Archival Sources**


Note: If your manuscript refers to large numbers of archival sources, group them together in a separate section of the references headed “Archival Sources.”

Government Documents


Dissertations and Theses


Unpublished Papers


Working and Discussion Papers


Presented Papers

Machine-Readable Data Files


Electronic Sources

An action alert posted on the ASA home page:

An on-line journal article:

A newspaper article:

An abstract: