

GUIDELINES: WRITING AN ANTHROPOLOGY ESSAY

A) WRITING THE ESSAY

In anthropology you are expected to read widely and critically. You will soon discover that much of anthropology consists of argument about how social facts are to be interpreted. Our understanding often advances through a variety of contrary viewpoints and emphases. As in related disciplines such as sociology, political science and philosophy, there is an internal tension generated by the opposition of arguments that gives anthropology much of its vitality and interest. Anthropology is not so much a unified body of knowledge as it is a dialectical, on-going production.

Few issues in anthropology have been resolved. You won't find many generally accepted 'answers', and there are no single authorities who can tell you all you need to know. This means that we expect your essays to demonstrate not just factual knowledge but also some ability to present and assess arguments and counter-arguments about particular problems.

The criteria by which we assess are:

Relevance: The content of your essay should be relevant to the question or problem you've selected. Don't include material not directly related to it.

Well-informed: Your essay should be well-informed. Read as widely as possible. As a rule of thumb, an essay should cite at least five or six items.

Your own thinking and your own words: Familiarity with the literature is essential but not sufficient. In contrast to seminar papers (Hausarbeiten), an essay is not about demonstrating proficiency in the techniques of scientific work, but about evaluating and reflecting on one's own ideas, arguments, and reflections. In the case of the essay, the focus is on the reflection of a self-selected topic. Your essay must be based on your own thinking. Only a minor part should be direct quotations or material that is merely a modified or condensed version of another author's work. Extensive quotation or paraphrase isn't acceptable, as it doesn't evidence your thinking about your reading. We don't expect you to come up with original insights at this stage of your studies. But we do expect a serious effort to evaluate how the readings bear on the problem. One way to proceed is by comparing and contrasting the work of different writers. Consider the implications of the arguments and data used by one author for other works you are also referring to in your essay. Think for yourself and say what you think. By this we don't mean to encourage rash, unconsidered statements. Rather, we hope you will be stimulated by your reading and that you will make the effort to think through the issues raised.

Organisation:

After you have selected a topic, the thorough literature research follows.

Your essay should be constructed in a way that shows the logical steps in your argument, with data from various sources being brought in as appropriate. Remember that paragraphs are the organisational 'building blocks' of an essay and that each paragraph should have a main idea or theme. Good organisation can only be achieved by careful planning and frequent re-reading and revision of your writing as you proceed. Authors who haven't taken the trouble to review and revise their essays before submitting seldom succeed. A good essay gives a clearly structured answer to the question posed. It is characterized by an independent argumentation

and not by a stringing together of definitions and theoretical statements. The aim is rather to relate one's own knowledge to the set topic, whereby a common thread should be recognizable in the argumentation. Begin with an introduction that foreshadows your argument. A good introduction introduces the reader to the topic in just a few words. Here you formulate your thesis or question. This is followed by the actual main part of the essay, in which the argumentation for or against the established thesis takes place. Develop your discussion progressively and coherently. Ensure that sentences and paragraphs follow logically from one another. Your conclusion should draw together the threads of your argument and present a final answer to or assessment of the problem. In the concluding part of your essay, you should once again address your question and, to this end, draw a summary of your arguments. In doing so, both the content and the general validity of your line of argumentation should be presented. Furthermore, you can give an outlook on further topics and a deeper analysis. If there seems to be disagreement in the literature about the meaning of certain terms, mention this and state how you intend to use the term(s). Choose an appropriate place to define terms – usually where the particular term is first mentioned. Dictionary definitions are often inadequate when it comes to specialist concepts. Use a definition from the literature by preference.

A balance between abstraction and concreteness: Avoid the extremes of getting bogged down in masses of factual detail or of floating off into realms of pure abstraction. The essential point of writing an essay is to grapple with the relation between abstractions/theories and facts – to think about how best to understand the facts. A descriptive account simply of what the people of this or that society do may qualify as ethnography, but it doesn't rise to the level of anthropology. Conversely, a statement of opinions, theories or abstractions unsupported by reasoning and factual evidence similarly fails.

Expression: Take special care to express your ideas as clearly and concisely as possible. Write complete sentences and keep them as short and succinct as possible. We are interested in what you know and think, and will not penalise occasional errors in expression. The best way to find out whether your essay is well-written is to have someone read it. An alternative is to read it aloud to yourself. This can help you to recognise the syntactically awkward bits, and it may help you to see the mis-spellings and other errors. Writing skills should be taken into account in the overall assessment of work, and particularly that 'Markers should insist that ideas and facts should be expressed accurately and adequately, and should penalise the sort of writing which calls on them to provide a charitable interpretation of notions which have been vaguely or misleadingly expressed'.

Referencing: Never quote or use an author's work in any way without acknowledging it. You must always indicate where in the literature you obtained the facts, concepts and points of view which you discuss in your essay. When quoting an author verbatim always show this with quotation marks and a citation. You must also indicate where a summary of someone else's work or ideas ends and your own discussion is resumed.

To quote or paraphrase another person's work without acknowledgment is plagiarism, i.e. the presentation of the words and ideas of another writer as your own. Plagiarism demonstrates that the writer has failed to think independently, and it is unjust to writers who do honest work. To the extent that work is plagiarised it loses value, and depending on the amount plagiarised, may receive no marks at all.

B) FORMATTING THE ESSAY

Margins: All margins should be at least an inch (or 2.5cm) wide. The left margin is often wider, to allow space for binding and/or marker's comments.

Title: Give your essay an appropriate title. The title can be a simplification of the topic being addressed or perhaps a catchy phrase that refers to a key aspect of your argument. Your name can appear below the title if you like. Your title should be in bold type and/or underlined, and title and author's name should be centred on the first page.

Justification: Left justification only is usually preferable to full justification (i.e. left and right but not centred), because the latter can introduce large spaces between words that interfere with readability.

Length: 2,000-2,500 words maximum continuous text

Headings: First-level heading: 14pt., bold, no colons, left-justified;
Second-level heading (only if necessary): 12pt., bold, no colons, left-justified;
Capitalise all nouns and adjectives, all words of four letters or more

Continuous text: Lettering of the essay should be in Times New Roman; Size of type in continuous text: 12pt., line pitch: 1.5, justify

Hyphenation function should not be used, do not divide words at the end of a line

Emphasis with italics: Novel, technical, key terms and labels (the first time only); Foreign terms (every time they appear), except if they have entered common usage Published documents such as book titles, newspapers, journals; Emphasise a word or phrase in a quotation indicating [emphasis mine]

Figures and Tables: Lettering: Times New Roman, 12pt, left justified
Caption of figures and tables: Label information set out in rows and columns as "Tables";
Label Graphs, drawings, pictures, Photographs etc. as "Figures"; consecutively numbering throughout your text followed by a description of the contents in italics; Please make sure all illustrative material is suitable for publication without further editing necessary; Photographs should be at least 300 dpi, high contrast

Endnotes (if applicable): 10pt., single-spaced line pitch, left-justified; Superscript in continuous text

Page numbers: should be on all pages but the first, where the number is optional

Citation: Quotations exceeding three lines: 10pt., single-spaced line pitch, indent paragraph with 1 cm. tab key, justify

Use the Chicago Manual of Style, author-date system, in-text citation in parentheses
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

References: 12pt., single-spaced line pitch, left-justified, hanging indent: 1 cm tabs key
The format should follow the Chicago Manual of Style, author-date system
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

C) FINAL CHECK

Even though we promote freedom of writing and style, this final check list might help finalizing your essay before submitting (see also, “On Writing Well. The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction” by William Zinsser)

Organization is something that readers notice – when you fail to organize. If an essay is organized, a reader will be able to read it from the beginning to the end without becoming confused. Therefore, we highly recommend you letting someone else read your essay before you send it to us to be sure that your thoughts are comprehensible. Writing in paragraphs and marking transitions from one idea to another in various ways usually helps the reader follow your ideas. But be aware that just using transition words does not guarantee that your essay is organized. The points you make must all relate to the topic of your essay and to the main idea you are presenting. In other words, your essay should be unified.

Avoid redundancy (repetition of ideas), unnecessary digression (points that are not related to your main point, and that take away the unity from your ideas), and unclear connections (i.e. when you make it hard for the reader to understand how two ideas or parts of your writing are connected).

Development is the amount and kinds of support (examples, details, reasons) for the ideas you present in your essay. Your essay should be well-developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications, and/or details. Formulate the thesis statement of your essay, i.e. the main thing you want to say, at least for yourself at first. Once you have it, remain aware how your developmental paragraphs relate to it (e.g. you could ask yourself what function a specific paragraph has for it to consolidate or clarify your main point). Don’t forget to let the reader know, too!)

At last, don’t forget the **Conclusion**. A concluding paragraph (or even sentence) summarizes your ideas. It is important to have a conclusion; without one, it may be difficult for the reader to know whether you have completed your essay. Write a conclusion that ties loose ends together and makes your essay unified.

D) SUBMITTING THE ESSAY

Please submit your essay as word.docx (if possible) to the email address provided by your lecturer. Please confirm submission schedules and consider bilateral arrangements applying to your coursework.

And now, off it goes! We are looking forward to reading your essay!

Note: *The guidelines were written by Thomas Stodulka and Klaus Behnam Shad, adapted from the <https://www.anthrometronom.com/> blog and the Anthropology Department at Macquarie University (courtesy of Greg Downey).*