

Anthropology Writing Guidelines

Anthropologists study the diversity of people's lives in every society and culture of the world. Amidst this diversity of interests there is also the need for some clear rules for communication and debate.

Writing the Introduction of Your Anthropology Assignment

The introduction is a prospective map of your assignment. You need to indicate clearly to the reader what you are going to do. Your introduction should reveal what your essay is about to the reader, what you are going to discuss, how are you going to discuss it, what examples you will use to illustrate your argument, and what is the overall aim of your essay. All you need to do is look at what is in the essay body and re-tell that in a prospective sense. Put simply:

Make sure that your introduction indicates all the concepts, arguments, terms and examples that the reader will be reacquainted with in the body of your essay.

The introduction to your essay does not need to be repetitive. If you are uncomfortable using the first person, you can use "this essay" or "this assignment". If you don't tell your reader what you are doing, they might form their own opinions and misunderstand your essay. If the reader has to work hard to figure out what you are doing they may be confused at the start. Take control of your essay and be explicit about what you are doing so that you demonstrate your control of its direction and structure. The introduction should start broad and narrow down its focus. It concentrates your information. For example, start with a statement about anthropology in general - then media anthropology - then the anthropology of music - then study of rap music - then your own case study or example. You could visualise this structure it like an upside down triangle or funnel; you move from the general to the particular.

Put all of the key terms you will be using into the introduction. Make sure that these key terms are defined and actually used throughout the remainder of the assignment. Many writers find it easier to write an introduction after writing the body of their essay so that they can 'see' exactly what it is that needs introducing. This also ensures that the introduction reflects exactly what is (and isn't) in the body of the essay. Some writers feel that writing the introduction first helps tie them to a structure and keep them on task. Others combine both approaches by re-writing the introduction after the essay has been completed! The strategy will depend on your personal experiences of how focussed you are when you write.

Writing the Main Body of Your Assignment

In general, try to move from:

- Theory
- Your explanation of the theory
- (Ethnographic) example
- Explanation of how example supports/contradicts the theory

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- Summary of the meaning of this in relation to the essay question
- Leading statement to the next section or conclusion, which recounts the whole process

In terms of number of references, you will probably need 2 or 3 references for each for topic covered by your assignment. This will help you to hone your search for resources, as you will know exactly what it is that you are looking for. You will only need to look for references that fit your paragraphs, rather than gathering and reading a whole pile of books that later seem irrelevant. This saves you time spent gathering wasted resources and improves the structure and strength of argument in your assignment. The result is that it will be you controlling the direction of your essay and its argument instead of being a slave to some interesting quotations and building an essay around them (which inevitably won't answer the essay/assignment question that you have been given).

Maintaining an Argument Throughout Your Assignment

Your argument is the thread that directly ties everything to the answer to the question you're providing. Take, for example, this question: 'Does fan activity subvert or reinforce the production of celebrity? Discuss using ethnographic evidence drawn from at least two different social contexts'. The argument of your essay would revolve around the relationship between fans and stars, in terms of celebrity. To keep the argument strong throughout your essay you will need to include key statements or 'signposting' statements to shape your argument. These statements would appear in the introduction and conclusion as well as at the end of each of your sections/paragraphs. In this example, the signposting could read something along the lines of the following: 'the ways in which fans write their own fantasy novels and insert themselves into the plot together with fictional characters is an example of how fan activity can subvert the production of celebrity. I shall now discuss this use of fan fiction in relation to studies of Star Trek fans carried out by...[etc.]'.

The effect upon the reader of hearing the essay question rephrased in this way throughout your essay assures them that you have answered the essay question and that your discussions have been relevant to the essay question. The effect upon the writer is that you are forced to constantly assess if and how your selected information either supports or challenges the essay question. In turn, this will improve your authorship, structure and argument.

Writing the Conclusion

Think of the conclusion as an extra section attached to the end of the essay after you have finished your analysis or argument. It is the retrospective map of what you have just done and mirrors the introduction (for example, "in this essay I began by looking at...") Remind the reader how you took them from the first point right through to the last and why. What were the logical thoughts that linked one topic/theme to another? What did you prove? Did your example either prove/disprove or support/challenge the theory that you started with? Why was this significant?

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Where your introduction narrowed down in focus, your conclusion will blossom out. Its final statement will relate your specific argument to wider debates within your course and anthropology. For example, working out from Eminem, to rap music, to the anthropology of music, to media anthropology, and finally to anthropological theories in general.

Don't contradict your whole argument in the conclusion either. Don't argue that Pop Stars is as worthy of intellectual enquiry as Beethoven and then say how much you would rather use a Pop Stars video to prop up the leg of a wobbly table! The conclusion will be the freshest things in the marker's mind when they finish reading so it should reflect the quality you had in the 'body' of the essay. Try to end the essay with your conclusion, in your words (rather than with a quotation or citation) and think of the most interesting contribution that you can make to the topic.

Sexism and Language

It is University policy that all teaching materials and written work be prepared in non-sexist language. It is important that students grapple with this aspect of acceptable academic writing. One of the main ways that the humanities and social sciences have enshrined gender stereotypes has been through using the masculine as the universal gender. This is found in the use of words like mankind, and in textbook titles like 'man and society' or 'man in the natural world'. There was, until recent years, the widespread practice of writing ethnographies that claimed to be a comprehensive description of a society but in fact dealt only with men's lives and with men's views of women and domestic life.

You will often have to overcome the sexist languages and perspective of the texts you use as well as attending to your own language use. Watch out that you are not saying 'he' when you really mean 'he or she' (which is sometimes more economically written s/he or (s)he) and make sure you are not using words in which the female form is demeaned. Sometimes you will be able to find acceptable substitutes for sexist words, at other times you will need a simple rephrasing of a sentence or idea. For example, the word 'actor' for all those who act can be used instead of the gender specific term 'actress'.

Written Academic Language

In this section we confine ourselves to offering some basic points to remember when writing academically in the discipline of anthropology:

- 1. Introduce, define and explain key terms** before you use them. Don't take them for granted. Always use an anthropological dictionary or glossary where possible. Common words like 'culture', 'genealogy', 'capital' and 'structure' have particular meanings when used in anthropology or by certain theorists.
- 2. Avoid absolutes like 'always', 'never', 'best', 'worst'** – unless it is an undisputable fact. This is not just because you are setting yourself up to be challenged, but because a more anthropological angle would be to look at the cultural reasons behind why something is perceived as being 'better' or 'worse'.
- 3. Avoid value judgements** like 'A is more difficult/intellectual/valid/cultural/better/worse than B' because it's your job as an anthropologist to identify and challenge such judgemental opinions. One

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cultural act may be different from another, but does this imply any difference in quality?

Anthropologists are interested in the various and often contradictory ways in which things are socially understood and are given meaning in different ways not in your own subjective opinion of them.

4. **Learn to recognise your own assumptions and their questionability.** For example 'Britney Spears' lyrics are less intellectual than REM'. Or likewise, 'Dateline is obviously better than Neighbours'. This might seem to be the case because of popular cultural opinion, but one cultural thing is not innately or intrinsically better than another. Always substantiate your own opinions by framing them in terms of theory (either supporting or challenging theories). Don't launch into your own personal crusade without departing from a theoretically grounded position – otherwise you can't demonstrate how significant your opinion or example is, it loses its impact and makes you look unthoughtful and your essay un-academic.

5. **Be explicit** – don't imply that something is significant or leave something unsaid hoping that the reader will catch on. Spell it out or run the risk of being misunderstood.

6. Unless otherwise stated, **your assignments should be independent of 'the course'** or 'the course reader' or 'the lectures'. The essay should make sense to someone who wouldn't have a clue what your 'first reading' was about or what you spoke about in class.

7. **The longer your sentences are and the more points you try to pack into them, the less significant they become.** In other words, they will lose their point and their emphasis. Use proof reading to help you if you have a problem with this. Try to make only one substantive point per sentence.

8. **Be distinctively anthropological.** If you are writing an anthropological essay, try to use an anthropological tone. Focus on the people (viewers, consumers, watchers, readers, meaning makers) rather than on objects/things/phenomena themselves. Prioritise people and give them voices by using an anthropological tone. If you have not done 1st year anthropology, familiarise yourself with basic concepts used in the discipline, such as culture, ethnography, agency, participant-observation and ethnocentrism. Use an anthropological dictionary or glossary to look up any unfamiliar terms.