Instructor's Guide

to

Writing for Sociology

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Preface

In 2006, the Berkeley sociology department undertook a writing initiative to improve undergraduate writing. This effort produced, in 2007, *Writing for Sociology*, a guide targeted to students. Early feedback from professors and GSIs suggested that instructors faced their own challenges trying to help students improve their writing, so we turned our efforts to producing another guide, this one tailored to instructors. It is this guide that you hold in your hands.

The Instructors' Guide, produced with funding from the Teagle and Spencer Foundations, collects information from many sources. Some aspects are Berkeley-specific: we surveyed sociology faculty, graduate student instructors and readers, and undergraduates on campus. We spoke with representatives from campus institutions designed to help students with their writing and those who educate instructors. We also trawled the web for tips and tricks, looked at pedagogical research, gathered advice on how to incorporate writing into subject-specific courses, investigated teaching writing in a diverse classroom, and drew from discussion at the Teagle/Spencer conferences. In compiling these materials, we aimed for a product that would benefit lecturers, seminar and discussion section instructors, and graders.

Why Teach Writing?

Most faculty and graduate students in the department believe that a majority of Berkeley undergraduates struggle with their writing. As we discuss below, many students receive little formal instruction on how to do college-level writing and virtually no instruction on writing for sociology. But what should we, in sociology, do about this? Faculty often believe that they barely have time to cover course material, much less teach writing. GSIs, who often wish to improve student writing, express uncertainty about how to do this. Readers, who are frequently first- or second-year graduate students not far removed from their own undergraduate careers, sometimes question their qualifications for assessing student work. This guide is for all of these people.

We believe that while our primary job is to teach sociology, better writing is part of better college-level learning. Writing about a subject is one of the best ways for students to learn. If students cannot write well enough to express sociologically complex arguments, they will not be able to convey the sociology they have learned. Incorporating writing into a course need not take time away from teaching content (see Chapter 5 on low-stakes writing for a more detailed discussion). While helping our students improve their writing may at times be a struggle, we believe that it is an important part of our job as instructors. Good writing is part and parcel of the skill set students need to for sociology. In the spirit of our department's commitment to improving writing and to giving students the best undergraduate education we can, we offer this guide.

To facilitate your use of the guide, we have designed each chapter to stand on its own. We begin in Chapter 1 by outlining Berkeley's university-wide undergraduate writing requirements and the expectations for California high school graduates, to give instructors an idea of students' writing background. We then move to practical considerations. Chapter 2 presents brief tips on how to encourage your students to focus on the writing process—everything from including a disclaimer in the syllabus that "writing counts" to requiring drafts. As good writing begins with good reading, Chapter 3 focuses on ways to help students read sociological writing with more ease and understanding. Chapter 4 then discusses creating writing assignments and introduces two general types of writing assignments: low-stakes and high-stakes. Chapter 5 then discusses low-stakes writing assignments in greater detail, offering suggestions of low-stakes assignments you may want to use in your classroom. Chapter 6 turns to high-stakes assignments, reviewing 3 basic types: assignments to assess understanding of course material, assignments involving primary research, and large research papers. Chapter 7 turns from assignments to assessment with a discussion of grading and giving useful feedback. This chapter also includes examples of peer editing strategies, which are a useful way for students to receive feedback on their work without adding to the instructor's workload. Finally, Chapter 8 focuses on Berkeley-specific writing resources, providing a quick users' guide to the Student Learning Center, Athletic Study Center and other places to which you might refer students.

Of course, what works for one instructor may not work for others. This book could easily have been called "An assembly of tips and tricks," as our aim is to offer a set of resources that instructors can use quickly and easily. We hope you try out various strategies to determine what best suit your courses and teaching style.

Chapter 1

What to Expect from Students

Berkeley undergraduates come from a wide range of backgrounds, but all UC students must adhere to guidelines mandated by the UC Board of Regents for admission to the University of California. To give instructors a better sense of their students' writing experience, here we summarize the writing standards at California high schools and we review the writing requirements students must meet when enrolled at Berkeley.

1.1 Writing Expectations at California High Schools

In fall 2008, 85% of incoming first-year students graduated from California high schools. The same percentage came from a public school. Under the state's curriculum standards, by eleventh or twelfth grade, California public school students should be able to:

- write "coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument"; students should also have some understanding of how to write persuasively, how to structure an argument, and how to revise.

- "combine the rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description to produce texts of at least 1,500 words each. Student writing [should demonstrate] a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies [outlined above]."[1]

In addition to these statewide guidelines, the University of California requires four years of college-preparatory English for admission, encompassing frequent

[1] Available from the California State Board of Education Curriculum Standards: http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss

and regular writing, and reading of classic and modern literature.[2] Students high school English classes are expected to contain substantial, recurrent practice in writing extensive, structured papers.[3]

However, a 2002 survey of UC, CSU and CCC (California Community College) professors suggests many faculty feel that students are not adequately prepared for college-level work.[4] In this survey, 34% of professors who regularly teach large introductory courses felt that students' writing abilities had declined since they began teaching. More than 90% of UC professors, 85% of CCC professors, and 70% of CSU professors felt that the absence of analytical reading skills contributed to students' struggle with college-level courses. When asked to assess their students' preparation for the different writing tasks assigned in college, professors documented a fairly substantial mismatch: they suggested that approximately 60% of college-level writing assignments required students to analyze and/or synthesize information, but they felt that only about 35% of students entered college adequately prepared do so. Faculty did feel that more than 60% of students were skilled at writing personal or informational essays, but they felt that this format comprised only about 10-15% of college-level work.

This last sentiment—that high school better prepares students to discuss their opinions or feelings about a work than to provide critical analysis of it—was also echoed by sociology instructors at Berkeley. In our survey, one faculty member commented, "Even good students have been mis-trained in high school (and college) to write 'personal essays' that involve expressing their 'feelings' about the materials at hand. This is counterproductive to scientific writing, which requires distanced arguments and employing 'objective' evidence."

Several GSIs also discussed the challenge of getting students to rely on evidence and literature rather than personal experience. For example, one noted, "[Students] thought they could pull off papers based on their own common sense or past experiences. It was hard to make them see that they couldn't use themselves as data, but had to work with the readings or their observations."

These surveys suggest that California public high school seniors may not be getting the kind of training necessary to allow them to write good entry-level college papers, including the types of papers required for most sociology courses.

1.2 Writing Requirements at Berkeley

To prepare undergraduates for college-level writing, the university has formal composition requirements as part of the required curriculum. Unlike many institutions, however, Berkeley does not have a single required freshman composition course. Instead, there are two types of courses all undergraduates must take:

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[2] Available from the University of California: `http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad_adm/paths_to_adm/freshman/subject_reqs.html`

[3] Available from the University of California: `http://www.ucop.edu/a-gGuide/ag/a-g/english_reqs.html`

[4] Full survey results available at `www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/reports/acadlit.pdf`

the University of California Entry-Level Writing Requirement, and the Reading and Composition Requirement, fulfilled by taking two additional courses designated as "writing-intensive."

The Entry-Level Writing Requirement can be met in a variety of ways. If students score well on the SAT, ACT, or AP English exam, they can test out of the requirement altogether; this option is also available for students who have taken a qualified English composition course at a community college. Entering students who do not have some prior qualification must take the Analytical Writing Placement Examination in the spring before they start classes at Berkeley. This exam is the final way for students to "opt out" of an introductory composition course; any student who does not pass the exam is required to take a 6-unit course, College Writing R1A, during their first semester. This course, offered by the College Writing Program (CWP), is described as a setting where students

> read imaginative, expository, and argumentative texts, representing the range of those encountered in the undergraduate curriculum. In response to these readings, [students] write short (2-3 pages) and longer (4-6 pages) papers; other writing assignments might include journals, quickwrites, reflections, or text responses. The students' writing serves as a text in the class as well, and papers are frequently revised.[5]

Students who are required to take College Writing R1A, then, have had formal training in basic college-level writing skills. This course fulfills both the Entry-Level Writing Requirement and the first semester of the Reading and Composition Requirement. For those who have tested out of the Entry-Level requirement, the Reading and Composition Requirement allows significant flexibility. Students can take their two writing-intensive courses at any point in their college career, and they do not need to take them in the same department. Students often put these courses off until their last year, and they can get conflicting advice from across the disciplines about what "good writing" looks like.

It is worth noting that no sociology course counts toward the Reading and Composition Requirement, thus even upper-division sociology majors may never have received formal training in the conventions of writing in sociology. As instructors, we cannot assume that our students will know the conventions of sociological writing from previous courses.

The rest of this guide is designed to help instructors integrate sociological writing into their courses so as to help students become proficient college-level writers, all the while keeping the time burden on instructors to a minimum.

[5] Available from the College Writing Program website: `http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/newsite/faqscwr1a.htm`

Chapter 2

Bringing Writing into the Classroom

If we want students to produce good writing, they need to know that their instructors and graders will be grading their writing. In our survey of undergraduates, we found a significant number of students arguing that sociology courses were not the place to discuss writing. As one student said, "I'd rather just stick to sociology and not enter into an English class." If we do not make our expectations about writing clear from the beginning of a course, students may be surprised if we comment on problems with their writing and may feel that the instructor has graded them unfairly. Writing professionals around campus told us over and over again that in order to make writing matter to students, instructors need to make it clear that it matters to them.

2.1 Making Writing Expectations Clear from the Start

> You have to get [students] to show up, you have to get them to engage, and you have to get them to think about the material.
>
> — Professor Mary Kelsey

The process of getting students to take the writing process seriously begins on the first day of class. Gail Offen-Brown of Berkeley's College Writing Program and Steve Tollefson of Berkeley's Office for Educational Development were united in the belief that instructors need to make their expectations clear from the beginning. This can be done simply by mentioning your policy on writing in your course syllabus. Even if a course has sections and GSIs, it always helps if professors reinforce the importance of writing in lecture, for example, by providing general writing guidelines along with paper prompts or allocating lecture time to peer review or other hands-on writing activities.

For Instructors: Sample paragraph about writing for inclusion in a course or section syllabus

> Part of your grade on papers will depend on the quality of your writing. Good writing is a key part of expressing your thoughts; the ideas you're conveying can't be unlinked from the words and sentences you're using to present them, and regardless of what major you're planning to have in college or what career you're expecting to pursue when you're finished, you'll need to be able to express yourself intelligently on paper. We will spend time in lecture and section this semester discussing the mechanics of how to write a sociology paper. You'll also have lots of opportunities to practice sociological writing in non-graded situations.

2.2 Encourage Drafts

Another way to increase students' accountability for their writing is to encourage them to write drafts. Drafting requires students to revisit their writing and assess strengths and weaknesses. It also gives students an incentive to take comments (either from instructors or peers, in the case of peer review) more seriously.

As Professor Mary Kelsey points out, "what [drafting] means is that in the worst case, the students have written their papers over two nights instead of one." Another way to increase student accountability comes from Michael Burawoy's theory course, where students are required to post their reading memos to a blog that is read by their peers and their GSI. In Professor Burawoy's words, this "gives them a bit more pride in their work."

2.3 Early Assessment of Student Writing

One challenge we face as instructors at Berkeley is the diversity in experience and training among our undergraduates. Some students come from elite high schools armed with years of advanced training; others have never written a document longer than a three-page personal essay. In this context, it is useful to give students a quick assessment at the beginning of the semester. Here are three ways to do this.

1. Ask for a single paragraph of writing. Instructors can then evaluate this sample using a quick and straightforward rubric (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of rubrics). Rubrics help instructors identify issues common across

students' writing without a heavy workload. Early assessment is also a great way to learn about a new group of students. For example, one exercise, used by Peter Evans in his undergraduate seminar on development, had students define development and globalization in a single paragraph. This allowed his GSIs to evaluate both the students' writing ability and their prior knowledge of the course material. (In assigning a paragraph like this, you should mention that you will be looking at the way they write as well as the content).

2. Add a question or two to the "information sheet" many GSIs ask students to fill out on the first day of class. You can, for example, ask students about the longest paper they have ever written. Their responses provide a good shorthand to understanding their writing background.

3. Ask students to fill out a separate "writing skills" sheet. Instructors might consider summarizing these responses to the class, so that students know they are not alone in struggling with certain writing issues. (A sample writing skills sheet can be found in the appendices.)

2.4 Peer Review

> In the process of reviewing someone else's work, students learn what actually constitutes a good paper.
>
> — Professor Michael Burawoy

Allowing opportunities for peer review can be enormously helpful in encouraging student writing. Peer review brings the writing process into the classroom as a topic of conversation and gives students a chance to reflect on their writing by seeing it through the eyes of their peers. As an added benefit, allowing peer review makes it so that students can receive more and a greater variety of feedback than they would if they relied on the instructor alone. Time and workload concerns prevent many instructors from requiring or reviewing drafts of papers. Peer review mostly bypasses these workload concerns—although if you use peer review in your classroom you will likely want to set up a system for encouraging good, thoughtful review and discouraging free riders (see tips below).

> Suggestion from Professor Ann Swidler:
>
> Have your students practice peer editing on a very simple, easy-to-assess assignment, and then hand in their comments to the instructor for review along with the author's original text. Every student can then get instructor feedback both on their paper and

on their skills as a reviewer. This is only feasible if you have some extra time in your syllabus.

You may want to use peer review in your classroom, but be unsure of how. The simplest way to bring peer review into the classroom is to have students bring and **exchange drafts in class**. In this case, small groups (2 reviewers per paper) would read over each other's papers and offer feedback on the spot. This technique is simple and requires little planning—a major advantage—but it doesn't allow as thoughtful review and means that a fair amount of class time will be devoted simply to reading the papers, rather than to feedback. To avoid these problems, instructors can also set up **electronic paper exchanges** so that students can read each other's papers and brainstorm feedback before class.

In addition to providing the space for peer review, you will want to give the students clear guidelines about what is expected of them, both as authors and as reviewers. It is also important to explain to your students why you are doing a peer review and how it will help them as authors and sociologists. Peer review can be especially helpful on drafts of papers, as students will be able to directly respond to the feedback from their peers. Here are some tips on making peer reviews work in your classroom:

- *Make sure everyone is starting from the same place.* Ask students to bring a specific component of the assignment to class on the day of the peer review. This does not have to be the whole paper; depending on the nature of the course and the assignment, you might ask students to come in with just a thesis statement or research question, an opening paragraph and an outline of the rest of their argument, or a complete first draft of their final paper.

- *Provide a peer editing guide.* Steve Tollefson and Gail Offen-Brown recommend this, as well as Luisa Guilianetti from the Student Learning Center: by giving students a worksheet to fill in as they review their classmate's work, you give students something specific to look for and help them feel like they can make helpful comments. **Sample peer review guides can be found in the appendices.**

- *Reiterate the terms of the assignment.* As you create the peer editing guide, revisit the assignment prompt. For example, if the paper is asking students to incorporate particular readings, you might ask the reviewer to evaluate how well their peer incorporated the readings into their work.

- *Prompt reviewers to make positive as well as negative comments.* Include questions such as "What does the paper do well?" and questions such as "Where can the author improve?"

- *Keep the guide short.* The guide should not be more than one page.

- *Set some ground rules.* Particularly if students will be working in small groups instead of pairs, set some rules for the review process. One practice often used in writing workshops, for example, is that the person whose work is being reviewed cannot respond to comments until the reviewers are done giving feedback.

- *Hold students accountable for their reviews.* To discourage free-riding or lazy reviewing, incorporate peer review into the course grade, either on a pass/fail basis or even with a letter grade.

At the University of Michigan, a team at the writing center has developed *an innovative technique using Microsoft Word's "comment" feature.* They have students insert 3-4 marginal comments in their paper drafts identifying areas where they struggled or had questions. Peer reviewers then responded to those comments in their review, along with noting other points of interest or concern. By forcing students to reflect on their own writing with their comments, this technique elicits more thoughtful writing from the start. By then having peer reviewers respond to those concerns, it also ensures that students receive more useful feedback. Courses using this technique graded on the quality of feedback, giving students an incentive to take the review process seriously.

2.5 Peer Writing Groups

If you want to include a lot of peer review in your course, you may want to form class-based peer writing groups.[1] Each group would then review each other's writing throughout the semester, giving them a greater sense of the development of each other's writing and research projects along with a greater investment in them. A potential disadvantage: if a group doesn't work well together, it may be difficult to resolve the problem, leaving those students disadvantaged compared to their classmates in better-functioning groups.

In courses that require lengthy research or analysis papers, such as 190 seminars or the honors thesis, a writing group that meets regularly outside of class can help students stick to a regular writing schedule, brainstorm ideas for further research, get feedback on their writing more regularly than they can from the professor alone, and learn about other students' ideas as they develop their own long-term project.

For courses with several short assignments, such as most lower-division courses or the 101A/B sequence, writing groups can still be useful. The group can meet during the weeks before papers are due to figure out the assignment, brainstorm strategies, figure out which readings will be most helpful, and read one another's drafts.

[1] Section adapted from The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In either case, writing groups may be most useful in classes where students' writing addresses unique (or at least one of several) questions or topics. As discussed in detail below, when members of writing groups are responding to different questions or topics, they are more likely to be able to see their piece of writing as unique and are less likely to copy from each other.

2.5.1 Avoiding Plagiarism

One concern instructors may have in forming peer groups is plagiarism. After all, we want students to work together to improve each other's writing, not to copy assignments from each other. Plagiarism is most likely to be a concern when all students are responding to the same question. Thus, if you want to make use of writing groups in your class, you will want to design your assignments so that each member of the group is writing a different paper. For large research papers this is easy, as group-members are unlikely to pick the same topic.

For short assignments, there are two things instructors can do to help prevent copying. First, you can *incorporate unique variety into prompts*. Popular tactics for doing this in sociology include having students carry out a small amount of independent research, such as an interview or participant observation as part of an assignment. Second, you can *provide a variety of prompts and have students choose one to respond to*. In this case, each member of the group would be required to respond to a different prompt.

2.5.2 Setting Up Writing Groups

If you are using writing groups, you'll want to set them up early in the semester. Think carefully about the size of groups. Anything more than 3-4 students may create too large a feedback burden for students. Other concerns to address when setting up groups include:

- Systems for sharing work—Do you want students to share work in class? Post work to some online source, like bSpace forums? Exchange work by email?

- Preparation for group meetings—Will students read and respond at the meetings themselves? Or should they prepare responses ahead of time?

- Responding to other's writing—It's important to encourage students to give constructive criticism. Pointing out both strengths and weaknesses, and offering concrete suggestions for how writing can be improved is much more helpful than simply listing all of a paper's shortcomings. You may want to provide a feedback form (examples can be found in the appendix) to guide students in giving feedback.

- Reacting to other people's responses to your writing—Although responders should take care to be constructive, those receiving feedback also need to be prepared to respond positively to the feedback they receive.

Sometimes it is difficult to hear other people respond to your work, even if they have the best of intentions. Students need to be reminded that their writing group is trying to help them become a better writer. They should try to avoid being too defensive. It's also important for them to remember that, ultimately, they decide whether or not to incorporate a peer's suggestions into a new draft. They should listen to feedback carefully, but remember that it is their paper, and if they disagree, they don't have to use it.

2.6 Promoting Academic Integrity

Students can struggle with using others' writing in an appropriate and ethical manner. But the reasons for why students plagiarize are often not malicious. In a study of why and how students plagiarize, anthropologist Susan Blum found that undergraduates have a vague sense of what "academic integrity" means, having been raised in a culture where many believe it is more permissible to borrow others words freely.[2] Given this, instructors are encouraged to be explicit about their expectations regarding citing others work, at the start of the semester and when assignments are passed out. Instructors should also stress the importance of giving credit where credit is due.

There are additional steps instructors can take to reduce the chances that students will plagiarize, or be tempted to plagiarize. Some students may feel pressured to plagiarize because of time constraints. Breaking an assignment into smaller chunks (e.g. requiring an outline or a draft before a final draft is due) will prevent students from cramming. Instructors could also have their students share their drafts with classmates, which may encourage students to spend more time with their assignment given that others will read it.

The *Writing Guide for Sociology* contains a wealth of information on citation rules, as well as examples of what constitutes plagiarism.

Definitions

Quotation. Taking from another source the exact words of the author and using them in your own written work. These words need to begin and conclude with a quotation mark.

Paraphrase. Taking short passages from a source, restating the content of the passage, reconstructing the passage phrase by phrase, and rephrasing the author's words in your own. Paraphrased material is not enclosed in quotation marks.

[2]Blum, Susan. 2010. *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Summary. Taking lengthy passages from a source, reformulating or outlining them in your own words, and using them in your own written work. Summarized material is not enclosed in quotation marks.

2.6.1 Berkeley's Policy on Academic Integrity

An integral part of achieving proficiency in a given subject involves understanding that under no conditions is that proficiency to be achieved through cheating.[3] An instructor has the right to give you an F on a single assignment produced by cheating. An instructor has the right to assign an F for the course if you plagiarized a paper, even if you have successfully and honestly passed the remaining portion of the course. Any student who knowingly aids in plagiarism or other cheating, e.g., allowing another student to copy a paper or examination question, is as guilty as the cheating student.

2.6.2 Addressing Possible Plagiarism

A reader or GSI who comes across a possible instance of plagiarism should notify the instructor for the course. After the instructor has spoken with the reader or GSI and has reviewed the assignment, the Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards recommends that the instructor take the following steps.[4]

When you are faced with a possible case of academic dishonesty involving your students, the Office of Student Conduct recommends that you collect all the documentation on the situation, such as statements from graduate student instructors or other witnesses, and the exam, paper, or assignment in question. Then arrange a meeting with the student to discuss your suspicions with the student. Here is some specific advice:

- If you have qualms or hesitations, talk with an experienced colleague or your department chair before you meet with the student.
- Consult with the Office of Student Conduct for specific guidelines and due process procedures.
- When you meet with the student, objectively explain the problem as you see it.
- Describe why this is a problem in grading or evaluating the student's work.
- Avoid using the words "cheating" or "plagiarism."
- Project an air of concern for the student as an individual, but communicate the seriousness of the situation.

[3] Paragraph excerpted from the General Catalog, University of California.

[4] Available from the Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards website: `http://campuslife.berkeley.edu/conduct/reporting-misconduct`

- Listen to the student's explanation.
- If a student denies any wrongdoing, question him or her about specific aspects of, say, the paper by asking for definitions of terms, interpretations, or restatements.

Resolution Options

1. Resolve Situation Yourself

   - Student NOT responsible—end matter.
   - Student admits and accepts academic sanctions.

   Faculty Disposition for Academic Dishonesty: With the student, complete this form and assign an "academic sanction." Upon receipt of the Faculty Disposition, the Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards (CSCCS) will send the student a "notification" and file the Disposition for the purpose of information ONLY. The Disposition alone will not create an official conduct record with the CSCCS. If the student has previous violations on file or CSCCS deems the violation egregious, CSCCS may pursue more severe violations. In the event of future violations, CSCCS may consider the Disposition in assigning sanctions.

2. Refer Directly to the Center for Student Conduct and Community Standards

   - You do not feel comfortable approaching the student.
   - Student admits but case is egregious.
   - Student does not admit or agree to academic sanction.
   - Student wishes the matter reviewed by CSCCS.

   Discipline Referral for Academic Dishonesty: Complete this form to forward the case to the CSCCS for administrative review and resolution. For full judicial procedures once CSCCS receives the case, click here. Once you refer the case, CSCCS will work with you to resolve the case by notifying you of the receipt of the complaint and the possible code sections violated, requesting a recommendation from you on the sanction(s) should the student be found in violation, and notifying you when the case is completed. When a case is under investigation by CSCCS, you should refrain from assigning a final grade for the course. Should the course conclude before the investigation is completed, it is recommended that you submit an "Incomplete."

Academic sanctions by instructors are governed by a November 7, 1987 memo from the Academic Senate Committee on Courses to all instructors. This memo states that "[a]n instructor may assign an F grade both to the assignment in which the cheating occurred and, when the offense is sufficiently serious, for the course as a whole. A student should, however, always be informed of the action taken. The student should also be told of the right to a grade appeal, if he or she considers the grade unfair."

Chapter 3

Teaching How to Read

Before students can write about a text, they must be able to understand it. In the social sciences, students are often confronting new types of literature. They may be more familiar with novels, newspapers and magazines. Yet, in our classrooms they encounter scholarly articles, dense theoretical texts or methodologically detailed empirical pieces. This can leave students unsure about what is most important or even how best to read these new types of writing. While different styles of academic prose require different interpretive tools, there are a few reading skills that serve students well across a wide range of material: learning how to extract the key points from a text, to consider a text critically, and to remember what they read.

The discussion below includes several suggestions for how to help students improve their reading. In addition, both Chapter 5 and the appendices include further resources for instructors to teach effective reading and critical thinking.

3.1 In Class Activity to Encourage Thoughtful Reading

Sociology GSI Kristen Gray has created a section assignment that focuses on teaching students how to be active readers. She suggests starting the reading discussion by breaking students into small groups and encouraging them to brainstorm two lists: things to look for while reading, and techniques for keeping track of an argument. By the conclusion of the exercise, she hopes that students have come up with most of the following themes.

What to look for:

- key concepts
- the general topic under discussion
- the author's stated goal

- lists
- overviews of theories
- critiques of theories

How to keep track of an argument:

- highlighting/underlining
- marginalia/margin notes
- reading notes
- outlines

Kristen also suggests that instructors take a moment to discuss how students should confront unfamiliar vocabulary. She offers her students three ways to deal with the problem: looking up unknown words, guessing their meaning from context, or ignoring them. She points out to students that each method has advantages and disadvantages, and notes that her own approach is multi-faceted: she circles unknown words, then uses context to figure out their meaning and importance, and looks up those that seem important.

3.2 Techniques for Keeping Track of Readings

Many students will come to your classroom with their own preexisting strategies for attacking course readings, but providing some guidelines for tackling course material can help students become better readers and better writers. There are many techniques students can use to help keep track of arguments and better follow their readings. This section briefly discusses 5 techniques you may want to encourage your students to use: highlighting and marginalia, reading notes, reading outlines, argument diagramming, and a technique developed by Stephen M. Fishman called "triple-entry note-taking." Generally it's best if students use both highlighting and another technique, rather than highlighting alone.

3.2.1 High-lighting and Marginalia

Many students have learned that highlighting or underlining the text is the most important part of "active reading." Unfortunately, while drawing attention to key passages in the text can be useful, students too often fall into the trap of highlighting everything, without sustained reflection on what they highlight. Students learn and retain information better when they balancing text highlighting with creating their own reading notes.

For Students: Tips for Productive Highlighting

- *Go in with a plan.* Suggest that your students take a moment before starting to read to consider what the most important parts of the reading are likely to be. Will they be expected to remember the author's theoretical framework? The empirical outcome of the study? The methodological details? This will help them decide what sections to focus on in their highlighting.
- *Familiarize yourself with the text first.* This method works especially well for articles or other short pieces. Recommend that students skim the whole article first, without making any marks; this will give them a sense of the author's trajectory and help them determine what might be important for later.
- *Don't over-highlight.* Gently remind students that less is more. If a whole passage is important, bracketing it will be just as useful as—and faster than—painstakingly highlighting each line.
- *Don't rely on highlighting alone.* Encourage your students to combine highlighting with notes in the margin that explain why a particular section is important.

3.3 Reading Notes

While generating a separate set of notes is initially more time-consuming than highlighting or taking notes in the margins, having separate reading notes can help students in several ways. First and foremost, taking discrete notes forces students to be judicious in what they pull from the readings. Second, notes for a set of course readings can be stored in a single file, providing a convenient resource for paper and exam preparation. Finally, in putting together reading notes, students get the opportunity to receive feedback on their note-taking skills. Instructors or peers can look over these notes and provide comments.

This feedback need not be extensive or time consuming; as discussed in Chapter 6, students can gain a great deal from non-graded assignments. John Bean recommends banning the highlighter and instead requiring students to keep a notebook of reading summaries, with instructors providing guiding questions for each reading.[1] These notebooks should be turned in at a few points during the semester, to be evaluated on a pass-fail basis. Instructors can then get a sense of students' critical engagement with the reading. Alternatively, students can be encouraged to exchange notes with one another. In small seminars

[1] Bean, John C. 2001. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.* 2001. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

and discussion sections, one student might be designated as the week's "on-call" discussion respondent, disseminating a summary to the class. In larger courses, instructors could break students into small study groups, with group members taking notes in rotation.

For Instructors: Suggestions for Talking about Reading Notes

- *Discuss common mistakes.* These might include over-highlighting, or writing notes that are overly brief or too cryptic to be understood later.
- *Outline the types of reading students can expect in the course.* Different styles of academic writing present different challenges to the reader. When reading theory, students should be prepared to disentangle straw-man arguments from the author's claims; when reading empirical work, students should be able to extract the details most relevant for the course (whether these are methodological or outcome-based).
- *Explain how reading notes can be helpful.* The specifics of the course will dictate the kinds of details most useful to include in reading notes. If students are required to write a paper based on course readings, students should take more detailed notes. If the course requires an outside research paper, students could keep a running list of interesting questions raised by the readings to help them choose a research topic.
- *Provide an example.* Circulating sample reading notes (perhaps for a reading from the first week of class) gives students a model to base their work on. There is an example available in appendices.

3.3.1 Reading Outlines

Another way of keeping track of arguments and gaining greater understanding of the texts are outlines. Sociology professor Irene Bloemraad recommends asking students to outline a reading, in one page or less. The outlines can then serve as aids to a class discussion of the reading, isolating the authors main argument and who or what they are arguing against, as well as evaluating the development of evidence and how the author draws conclusions. Students should be encouraged to critically assess both the argument and its organization and presentation. In addition to reviewing course material, this exercise helps demonstrate the need for a strong argument and good organization.

3.3.2 Argument Diagramming

Philosophy Professor Mara Harrell of CMU urges students to use argument diagramming to help them understand their readings. This technique is similar to outlining, but may be easier for students to use—especially if they are visual learners. Argument diagramming has students identify the main point (or argument) or a piece and then draw lines between it and the supporting points. Counterpoints are also indicated, with a different sort of line indicating the different relationship to the main point. Lines and points then build on one another until the entire argument is represented.

3.3.3 Triple-Entry Note-Taking

For students or instructors dissatisfied with the traditional outline format for reading notes, Stephen M. Fishman presents an alternative style called triple-entry note-taking.[2] In this method, each page of notes is split into three columns. The right-hand column contains phrases from the text that strike the reader in some fashion, perhaps points with which they agree or disagree or that remind them of another reading. The middle column should have the readers immediate reaction to the right-hand phrases; in Fishmans words, "it could simply be—'oh, no"' (58). Finally, the left-hand column is where readers are encouraged to reflect in greater depth on their reactions to the reading. This technique forces students to spend a few moments considering what they found interesting in a reading, and why. Answering these two questions can spawn an interesting paper topic. Also, when students have a record of their own initial reactions to the reading, it can help reduce writers block when they return to analysis of the text later. Another way to reach this goal is by encouraging students to write weekly responses to the course readings.

[2] Fishman, Stephen M. 1997. "Student writing in philosophy: a sketch of five techniques." Pp. 54-66 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Chapter 4

Creating Writing Assignments

To become better writers, students have to write. But they also must write with a purpose. One of the best ways to helping students write with a purpose is a well-constructed assignment (or well-constructed sets of assignments). Good assignments increase students' understanding of the course material, give them insight into the writing process, and encourage them to read and think more critically. However, if every piece of writing is produced for a grade, student and instructor workloads quickly become unmanageable. Instead, instructors can provide students with writing assignments at a range of different levels, encompassing what Peter Elbow calls both high-stakes and low-stakes writing.[1]

In this chapter, we discuss different aspects of creating writing assignments. We begin with tips for writing prompts, courtesy of Berkeley's Office of Educational Development (OED). We then provide an overview of high-stakes versus low-stakes writing and a discussion of how the two can be used together to improve student writing.

4.1 Writing Prompts

Regardless of the type of assignments, student writing always benefits from a well-constructed prompt. Writing assignments can differ dramatically, but assignments should always be constructed with the goals of the course in mind. Some instructors build their courses around one large project, with small assignments building toward the final product. Others use a series of assignments to familiarize students with different theories or topics. In all cases, assignments should work toward active learning goals, stretching students' critical thinking

[1]Elbow, Peter. 1997. "High-stakes and Low-stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing." Pp. 5-13 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

and improving their sociological writing skills. Sample assignment prompts can be found in the appendices.

> Don't assume that students know how to read a prompt; make your assumptions explicit.
> — Professor Mary Kelsey

Regardless of skill level, students' papers are only as good as an instructor's prompt. Ideally, prompts should be clear and precise enough to provide guidance, but not so narrow as to produce 50 identical papers on the same topic. OED director Steve Tollefson's pamphlet on *Encouraging Student Writing* offers the following tips:

- *Keep the prompt focused.* Students are more likely to write coherent essays if presented with a single question, rather than long lists of secondary questions. If they must consider additional information in their analysis, distinguish the key question visually: offset it in its own paragraph.

- *Be careful of jargon.* Clarify any writing terminology used in the prompt, including terms like "analyze" or "compare/contrast." Do not expect students to be familiar with this language.

- *Phrase questions with "how" or "why."* This gives students a start in formulating a thesis; questions that suggest a yes-or-no answer or prompt students to think in terms of "who," "where" or "when" are more likely to produce list-like responses.

- *Specify format requirements.* Include any relevant specifications on page count, word count, font and margins, citations or other technical details.

- *Test out the prompt.* Answer your own question. This helps you identify elements of the prompt that are confusing or unclear.

- *Remember that your best students will do well no matter what.* It is the rest of the students whose performance hinges on a good prompt.

4.2 High-stakes vs. Low-stakes Writing

High-stakes assignments are those found in the majority of college courses: formal, graded writing assignments, meant to assess the student's knowledge of course material and to display some level of polished academic writing. Low-stakes writing is typically not graded or graded on a pass/fail or acceptable/unacceptable basis. It is far less formal than high-stakes writing, and can be assigned far more frequently. The two work best when linked. Low-stakes writing can be used to build up to high-stakes assignments, or can be a chance to practice skills needed in more formal assignments.

4.2.1 Low-stakes Writing

Low-stakes assignments give students a low-stress opportunity to reflect on the course material in their own words, which can improve their grasp on difficult concepts. These assignments can take a variety of forms and serve a variety of learning goals. For example, low-stakes writing can:

- Encourage reading and critical thinking.
- Build specific writing or analytic skills.
- Build up to larger, high-stakes assignments.

> In my seminars, students have to submit a weekly response to the media we watch in class and to the class discussion. It lets me see whether students are paying attention, whether they can synthesize the readings, and whether they can in fact produce a piece of writing with a beginning, a middle, and an end.
> — Professor Tom Gold

Instructors should be open and precise about the purpose of low-stakes work to prevent students from viewing it as "busy work" with little purpose beyond filling up class time. Students will take such assignments more seriously if they see their purpose and see that they are valued by the instructor, either through feedback or through incorporating them into class discussion. The types and uses of low-stakes assignments are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

4.2.2 High-stakes Writing

High-stakes writing is generally longer and more formal, with an expectation of revised and polished academic writing. High-stakes assignments should require students to demonstrate their understanding of the course material, and they are a step toward training students to write professionally. Good high-stakes assignments also encourage students to think critically about the issues of the course.

Good prompts are important for all types of assignments, but are especially important for high-stakes assignments. Students will have a hard time producing good papers if they don't clearly understand what they are being asked to do. Low-stakes assignments can also be used in concert with high-stakes assignments. For instance, combining the two allows instructors to organize high-stakes writing as a series of stages. For longer papers, having a series of deadlines forces students to begin reflecting on their paper early, and eliminates some of the pitfalls of last-minute writing. Low-stakes assignments can also build skills needed in high-stakes assignments.

Chapter 5

Low-Stakes Writing Assignments

As mentioned in Chapter 4, low-stakes writing assignments can serve a variety of purposes. No matter the goal behind assignments, it's important for students to see how they are connected to broader course goals. This chapter provides a detailed overview of low-stakes assignments instructors can use to (1) encourage reading and critical thinking, (2) encourage engagement with the course, (3) build writing or analytic skills and (4) build up to a large graded paper.

5.1 Encouraging Reading and Critical Thinking

Many different types of assignments can be used to encourage students to do the reading and critically engage with course material. However, of all types of low-stakes assignments, these assignments are the ones most likely to seem like "busy work" to students. As such, it's especially important to highlight the ways such assignments serve broader learning goals and to incorporate these assignments into course discussion as much as possible.

One way to do this is to have students turn in these assignments before class so that you have a chance to review them ahead of time and incorporate insights or questions into lecture or discussion. Another way is to have students respond to each other's assignments, either by discussing them in groups or, if they are online (as with blogs discussed below) by responding to each other through this medium.

5.1.1 Reading Memos

Being compelled to produce a weekly reflection on course readings, or reading memos, encourages engagement with the text. Some instructors require a set number of memos over the course of the semester (8 memos for a 15-week course, for example), while others expect students to write a memo every week. In a small course, students might take turns presenting their memos to the class. In Professor Sandra Smith's class, students apply the same series of questions to each reading when they write memos. The questions range from straightforward practical information (the piece's central research question and methodology) to conceptual issues like what questions the student would have for the author after reading the study. Students are encouraged to be critical of the reading, pushed to discuss its strengths and weaknesses and consider possible next steps for researching the topic. Professor Smith's memo assignment is included in the appendices.

5.1.2 Study Questions

Alternatively, in Irene Bloemraad's class, students write their memos in response to questions on one or two weeks' worth of readings. She asks students to summarize each reading in a few paragraphs, discuss the readings' commonalities and differences and evaluate them theoretically. In a small class, students can also be paired up to respond to one another's papers in writing, agreeing or disagreeing with their peers' analysis. Instructors should not frame this as a competitive exercise; instead, students should be encouraged to view it as a way to improve their writing skills and a demonstration of how perspectives can vary on the same reading.

Stephen M. Fishman[1] uses a similar technique with weekly study questions to which students respond. These can be evaluated on a pass-fail basis, but he recommends making completion of the questions a significant part of the course grade. Rather than asking for facts from the reading, these questions should require interpretive answers, encouraging students to think critically about readings.

5.1.3 Blogging

A technique popularized in the sociology department by Professor Michael Burawoy and his theory GSIs is blogging. Blogging encourages students to be accountable for the quality of their work; by having their words posted in a public or semi-public space, students are pushed to think more carefully about how they frame their arguments. The free-form nature of blogs also makes them ideal for encouraging class discussion. Burawoy's students are required to blog throughout the semester, relating different course readings to current events and to a central course theme. In the theory course, this prompts students to consider how different authors might help them think about and evaluate the social world. Blogging can also replace simple reading memos, creating a more public forum in which students react to course readings. One helpful technique for making certain that students not only blog but also read each other's blogs

[1]Fishman, Stephen M. 1997. "Student Writing in Philosophy: A Sketch of Five Techniques." Pp. 54-66 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

is to require comments as well as posts. This is the technique used by Brenda Rinard at UC Davis.

5.1.4 Representing a Theorist

Since different students learn in different ways, this assignment, which Marcel Paret describes as "purposely vague," encourages students to be creative in how they represent the key elements of a theorist's model.[2] In addition to writing an essay, Marcel suggests that students draw a picture, make a collage, present the theorist's ideas in a table or graph, or write a poem. The only stated limitation is that students final product should include a representation of all elements that they see as being central to the theorist's model. This approach can also be used to present the work of multiple theorists. If there is a space or page limitation provided, this can help students effectively summarize the key points of different models. Other GSIs have used modified versions of this approach as a class project, breaking a complex theory down into its component pieces and encouraging students to produce a class picture book.

5.2 Encouraging Engagement with the Course

Similar to writing assignments designed to encourage student reading, instructors can use writing to encourage engagement with and get feedback on their courses more generally.

5.2.1 Weekly Response Assignments

Fulwiler requires his seminar students to write him weekly letters about the course, outlining what they have learned that week and what questions they still have, as well as any suggestions on how to improve the course.[3] He stresses that these letters should be examples of "good enough writing," meaning that students should be conveying complicated information but need not worry about academic language. After reading the letters, he responds to them in the following week's lecture. In Young's approach, students freewrite for five minutes at the end of each class, highlighting what they learned during the period and raising any remaining questions. Young also responds orally to the freewrites at the beginning of the following class period. In addition to giving students a stake in the structure of the course, these assignments force students to engage

[2] Section by Marcel Paret

[3] Subsection adapted from Toby Fulwiler, 1997. "Writing Back and Forth: Class Letters." Pp. 15-25 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers and Art Young, 1997. "Mentoring, Modeling, Monitoring, Motivating: Response to Students' Ungraded Writing as Academic Conversation." Pp. 27-39 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.*

with every lecture, and by the end of the semester they can stand as an account of everything students have learned in the course.

5.2.2 Peer Responses

Specifically designed for large lecture courses, Sargent suggests grouping students into peer-response groups of seven or eight, and then requiring group members to write what she calls "inksheds" (a term she prefers to freewrites when describing reading responses).[4] Each week, group members deliver their inksheds to a classmate who is that week's "group reader" (a position that each student will hold three or four times in the course of the semester). The reader should read and respond to the inksheds, commenting in the margins of each, and then turn them in to the instructor along with a brief summary report on her classmates' work. Instructors can then grade work on a pass-fail basis, evaluating the inksheds and the reader's marginalia and report.

5.3 Building Writing or Analytic Skills

Instructors can also use low-stakes assignments as a chance to help students build specific writing or analytic skills. In this case, it's best to spend some time in class discussing the skill students will be working on in the assignment. These kinds of assignments can cover anything from citing and proper paragraph construction to organizing and carrying out a comparison.

There are two ways you can organize low-stakes assignments to build writing and analytic skills. The first tactic involves **adding a skills-building component onto other low-stakes assignments**. For example, if you have students writing weekly reading responses, you could discuss paragraph construction and then ask all students to focus on constructing good paragraphs in the next week's reading response. Or if you want students to work on proper citation, you could ask them to do so for the next assignment.

The second tactic involves **tailoring assignments to specific skills you would like students to work on**. Kristen Gray used this tactic in building a set of 3 skills-building section assignments, which are discussed below. She assigns these in sequence, and then asks students to do a "mini-assignment" (discussed below) similar to an upcoming high-stakes assignment.

1. *Reading Notes/Marginalia:* This assignment is meant to help students become more active readers. After discussing techniques students can use when reading academic texts (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of some techniques), students are asked to try one out for the next class and to submit a copy of their reading notes (or marked texts, if highlighting and

[4]Sargent, M. Elizabeth. 1997. "Peer Response to Low-stakes Writing in a WAC Literature Course." Pp. 41-52 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

marginalia are an acceptable technique for the purposes of the exercise) the next class.

2. *Write a Summary:* For this assignment, instructors should discuss the purpose of summaries and what makes a good summary in class. It helps to emphasis the differences between summaries and reading notes or outlines. Unlike the later, summaries must be concise and coherent. One good way to start a summary is with a sentence or two summarizing the main argument of the entire work being summarized. From there, they can go on to explain the main components of the argument in greater detail. An example of this assignment can be found in the appendices.

3. *Interpret a Passage:* This can be a good exercise both to help students understand difficult readings better and to help them learn how to write about readings more clearly and analytically. Unlike with the summary assignment, the focus here is on interpretation (i.e. analysis). Students should be given a passage that they then must interpret, perhaps in response to a prompt, for the assignment. It can help to practice first in class by interpreting a (different) passage as part of class discussion.

5.4 Building Up to High-stakes Assignments

Another use for low-stakes assignments is to directly help students prepare for upcoming high-stakes assignments. For classes with a series of smaller high-stakes assignments, the “mini-assignments” tactic can be especially helpful. For classes where students work on one large project all semester, the “building up” assignments may be more useful.

5.4.1 Mini-Assignments

For courses that require a series of short assignments, rather than one large paper, instructors can “try out” a graded assignment in smaller, lower stakes form a week or so in advance. This allows students to get a sense of what they are being asked to do ahead of time and to receive feedback on the particular skills needed for an upcoming high-stakes assignment. Such assignments generally mirror upcoming high-stakes assignments, but are simpler and shorter. The point here is to familiarize students with the type of analysis they will be using and with ways to organize their papers.

5.4.2 Assignments to Build Up to a Large Paper

1. *Preliminary thesis statement/“paper plan.”* Write a few sentences, outlining the general topic that you plan to address in your paper.

2. *More detailed proposal/outline.* Provide a rough outline of subjects that will be covered in the paper. You might include information on which course readings will be incorporated, how, and where.

3. *First draft.* Write a rough draft, to be given to the instructor, a grader, or a peer for review. This draft can be submitted with a cover letter, in which the student outlines weaknesses in the current draft and what steps she will take to address these problems during revisions.

4. *Final draft.* Hand in a final draft, accompanied by (another) cover letter, in which you summarize your main argument in a few sentences. (Constructing this letter focuses students' thinking and helps refine their argument, as well as serving as a potential resource for instructors' evaluation.)

5.4.3 Assignments to Help Write a Research Paper

The assignments discussed above can help student develop and write independent research papers as well as other larger assignments. However, if your course includes an independent research paper you may want to make some adjustments.

- Replace the first assignment with one asking for students' research topic and research question.
- Add an annotated bibliography and/or literature review assignment.
- If the paper requires collection of empirical data, students should be held accountable for following a reasonable timetable to accomplish data collection, for example, by setting a deadline for choosing a research site or securing interviews.

Chapter 6

High-Stakes Writing Assignments

Sociological writing walks the line between the humanities—critiquing, comparing and contrasting texts—and the "hard sciences," which require students to survey the existing literature, develop research questions, discuss methodology and produce results. Some sociology courses require students to write semester-length independent research papers; others courses focus more on interpreting or applying existing theory. In this chapter, we've compiled tips on how to teach different types of sociological writing.

The following discussion is divided into three main parts, reflecting three main types of assignments found in the sociology classroom. The first section covers assignments where students are asked to demonstrate understanding of course readings. Such assignments are particularly common in Soc 1, Soc 101 and 102, and the various survey courses. The second section discusses writing involving independent data collection. Such assignments are particularly common in Soc 5. These first two types are also often combined, with students asked to collect a small amount of independent data and then apply course readings in analyzing it. The third section discusses large research projects, such as are carried out for the honors thesis, in the 190s and for Soc 107A.

6.1 Writing Demonstrating Understanding of Course Materials

Assignments designed to allow students to demonstrate an understanding of course material are common in sociology courses. This type of writing is often challenging for students. For more on how to help students write about theory, see the appendices.

Typically, such assignments are relatively short and given periodically over the course of the semester. A key challenge to the sociology instructor is to keep these assignments fresh and innovative, which can both help prevent plagiarism and make for better assignments for students. Below are several models that can be adapted to varied course material.

6.1.1 Apply a Theory

For this type of assignment, students are asked to use course readings to analyze and understand something. The something in question can vary greatly. Some examples include: current events (typically as explained by a newspaper article), an interview, observations, personal experience, a movie, a novel, an advertisement, etc.

This type of assignment is sometimes called *Real-World Writing Assignments*.[1] Crafting writing assignments that incorporate elements of students everyday lives can strengthen students' connections to the course material even more strongly. Such "real-world" assignments also demonstrate how sociology and good writing might be used in "real life." Some of these assignments can also encourage students to think about different styles of writing, including how they might adjust their writing to different audiences.

6.1.2 Issue-Based Assignments

Herrington suggests using issue-based questions to get students thinking critically about the course material. For example, we might ask students to consider how Marx, Weber, and Durkheim would explain the economic recession of 2009, outline the solutions each author might propose, and then evaluate which model seems best-suited to real-world circumstances.[2] A variation on this assignment might prompt students to frame their explanation for a particular audience: for example, compare Catherine MacKinnon, Gayle Rubin, and Judith Butler's theories of gender, and then outline them for an introductory sociology course, or even an advanced high school class.

One popular variant of the issue-based assignment used in the sociology classroom is the op-ed assignment. For this assignment student use course readings as supporting evidence in writing a mock op-ed column or letter to the editor about a current social problem. For example, in a sociology of education course, students could write letters arguing for or against the implementation of same-sex primary and secondary schools in California.

6.1.3 Reviewing Journal Articles

After a brief lecture explaining the journal peer review process, students could follow ASA peer review guidelines to write reviews of an assigned course reading. Being forced to critique published articles can help students think more

[1] "Encouraging Student Writing: A Guide for Instructors."

[2] Adapted from Herrington, Anne J. 1997. "Developing and Responding to Major Writing Projects." Pp. 67-75 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

critically about the materials they read, and can help them learn to evaluate the persuasiveness of an argument.

6.1.4 Interpreting a Passage or Evaluating a Theory

Assignments that ask students to interpret a passage or evaluate a theory are especially good for courses with complex readings that require careful analysis. For this type of assignments, students are given a key passage from the reading and asked to explain it, drawing on their understanding of the broader theory or literature.

6.1.5 The Compare/Contrast Paper

Compare/Contrast papers are popular in courses covering many competing theories. They're especially good at encouraging students to think about how different theories relate to each other and to evaluate theories relative strengths and weaknesses. General outlines for compare/contrast papers and an example of a compare/contrast assignment can be found in the appendices.

6.2 Writing Involving Primary Research

Sociologists use many different methods to collect and analyze their data. As such, assignments asking for independent data collection and writing about such data are similarly varied. This section discusses the two main types of sociological methods, quantitative and qualitative, separately.

Sociology instructors may require their students to carry out primary research for many different reasons. Many classes may ask for students to collect or analyze a small amount of data as part of an assignment meant to gauge their understanding of course material. This is especially common in methods classes, but is also popular for other courses. For example, a sociology of gender class may include an assignment where students observe and write about a gendered phenomenon.

Students may also be asked to collect and analysis independent data as part of a large, capstone paper (e.g. a term paper). The discussion of data collection found here is also applicable to this kind of assignment. In this case they are often also asked to review the existing literature. Discussion of literature reviews can be found in the next section on large research papers.

6.2.1 Writing about Quantitative Data and Research

Interpreting quantitative data sets and pulling out the relevant information can be difficult for graduate students and faculty; students may not know where to begin when we ask them to discuss data in their papers. This section offers a brief overview of some issues to address if asking your students to carry out such research. For more resources, refer to the appendices.

Writing about quantitative data requires two main skills: a sense of how to interpret (and, by implication, how to present) the data, and knowledge of how to write up a summary that does more than just rehash the numbers. To that end:

- *Devote some time to "Reading Statistics 101."* The first time students encounter a course reading with charts and tables, take a few minutes to point out the most important elements to help them make sense of things: titles and headings, the labels on variables or axes, the relevant distinctions between different models, the importance of significance values, and so forth. Provide students with various models of how authors use quantitative data in their work.

- *Discuss the mechanics of quantitative paper construction.* Emphasize that tables and graphs are like words: they are used to communicate information, and often, an argument. To communicate well, make sure students understand that tables need to include information about the source of the data, even if it is "just the GSS," and that tables need headings and graph axes need labels. In Appendix 4.1, we reproduce a handout from demography GSI Reid Hamel on different ways to analyze quantitative data.

In his quantitative-intensive courses, Professor Mike Hout recommends that students consult *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers.*[3] The text includes practical information on captioning tables and figures, and a handy list of the "12 Principles of Good Writing About Numbers," reproduced here:

1. Establish the context for your facts.
2. Pick simple, plausible examples.
3. Select the right tool for the job.
4. Define your terms (and watch for jargon).
5. Report *and* interpret data.
6. Specify magnitude and direction of an association.
7. Summarize patterns.
8. Understand types of variables.
9. Specify units of measurement.
10. Examine the distribution of your variables.
11. Define standard cut-offs and patterns.
12. Choose a fitting number of digits and decimal places.

[3] Miller, Jane E. 2004. *The Chicago Guide to Writing About Numbers.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6.2.2 Writing about Qualitative Data and Research

In many courses, students are asked to collect their own qualitative data and then analyze the data using theories studied in the course, or compare the data to course readings. Such assignments require students to not only master ethnographic observation, interview techniques or documentary analysis, but also to balance discussion of their data with the need to tie findings back to the readings. Like many professional sociologists, students struggle with the question of how much qualitative detail is too much. To help students, break down the paper-writing process into steps:

- *Give your students time to practice.* The skills for collecting good qualitative data need to be learned, just like any other skill set. Some examples of "practice activities" for different kinds of qualitative research are listed below.
- *Provide models.* Providing solid article-length examples is not as easy as for quantitative work, but they help students see how much detail they ought to provide on methods, research design and empirical examples. If you are a qualitative researcher, this might be a place to bring in samples of your own work; if this is not an option for you, we include a list of good qualitative articles below.
- *Come up with an outline in class.* Research write-ups tend to be laid out a bit differently from other kinds of papers—make sure students understand the elements that need to be included.

Here are some tips for assignments using different types of qualitative data:

- *Ethnography Assignments.* For an ethnographic assignment, give students an opportunity to practice writing field notes in class. You can do this with a mini-observation activity around campus (as outlined below), or you can show a clip of a video for a large lecture course. You can also provide a sample of what field notes look like (see the appendices for an example).
- *Mini-observation.* In her discussion sections for Introduction to Research Methods, Hannah Emery sends students to Sproul Plaza where they spend 10 minutes in pairs observing the Sproul "traffic" to get a sense of how people use this public space. She asks students to keep in mind the following questions:
  - What is the traffic flow like? (Who is moving? Who is standing still?)
  - How do people move in the plaza? (Who is in a hurry? How can you tell? Who is strolling with friends? How can you tell?)
  - What activities are taking place? (Eating? tabling? someone making a political speech?)

  - How are people interacting with each other as they move through the plaza? (Consider ongoing conversations with friends/acquaintances, quick exchanges with strangers, walking alone or "in a bubble," etc. How do you recognize this?)
  - When the students return to the classroom, discuss the experience of taking fieldnotes. Students can compare notes in section, or hand in their notes for feedback.

- *Video observation.* If a course doesn't have discussion sections or an assignment requires a particular type of observation, use a short video clip (from a movie, YouTube video, etc.) to practice writing fieldnotes. For example, in Ann Swidler's Introduction to Sociology course, students are asked to write an ethnographic paper examining the expression of unequal power relations as outlined in Goffman's Asylums. A few GSIs for this course show students a clip from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, asking them to record the elements of power relations they witness in the asylum. This allows the instructor to talk about how particular observations relate to theory.

- *Interviewing Assignments.* As any interviewer knows, two of the most important parts of getting good interview data are comfort with the interview process and a good interview guide. In putting together an interview guide, have students divide their paper in two columns, with their interview questions to the left, and the reason they are asking each question or set of questions to the left. Have students do a practice interview with each other. It is good practice to have them submit a copy of their interview guide for review, to catch problematic questions and improve the questionnaire. Consider providing an example of an interview guide (see one example in the appendices).

- *Document Analysis/ Coding Assignments.* This method can be a fun way to practice data analysis and a good way to talk about concept development. You can use written texts, visual materials and even lyrics to songs. Give students some guidelines for what they should look for, and then let them work alone or in groups. One assignment Hannah Emery uses to familiarize her students with document analysis involves children's books. She picked up a set of books from the Berkeley Public Library that included only non-human characters, and asked the students to look at how certain elements were marked on the animals:

  - How is gender marked on the animals?
  - How is class marked (if at all)?
  - How is race marked (if at all)?
  - What other distinctions are made between different types of animals?
  - Who is wearing clothes? Who is not?

– How are human stereotypes brought into play in the way the animals are dressed or how they move?

– What might this suggest about how people are supposed to view different kinds of animals?

6.3 Large Research Projects

> believe that sociological writing should always be focused around questions, and different ways of answering the question. To put the point differently, what is a thesis if not an answer (the one you think is the correct one) to a central question that other people have answered differently?
> —Dylan Riley

Large research papers may draw on any of the techniques and forms discussed above, but their greater size and complexity bring special concerns. Two stand out in particular: time management and research techniques. With regards to **time management**, most students have little or no experience writing such large papers, and thus have little conception of how much time such a project takes. Giving students a series of staged assignments that build up to their final papers helps them organize their time more effectively and gives incentives for them to begin work early.

With regards to **research techniques**, most students have little experience tackling the independent research demanded of them in these papers. This is true for tasks from reviewing the literature to picking an appropriate research method to carrying out the necessary research. Instructors may want to dedicate class time to discussing and working on such questions. If a project demands a review of the literature, instructors can arrange a tutorial for the class with a research librarian. If students must carry out primary research, instructors can give feedback on method and can use class time to discuss and have student workshop appropriate methods.

Staged assignments help students begin the research process early and organize their time better as they carry out their projects. They also provide ample opportunity for peer work and peer review, as students can meet often over the course of the semester to work on projects together. Some assignments you may want to use to build up to a research paper include:

1. Topic and Question Introduction: A brief paper identifying the topic the student will address in their research and offering their first guiding research question (or a working thesis).

2. Annotated Bibliography: This paper identifies some of the student's sources and provides a brief summary of them.

3. Literature Review: More complicated than an annotated bibliography, the literature review discusses the literature in a synthetic way and identifies the area or question arising from it that the student's research will explore.

4. Data & Methods: If students are asked to carry out primary research, they could be asked to write a data & methods paper identifying what methods they will employ on what data and why this data and these methods are appropriate to their question.

5. Rough Draft: A full draft for review by either the instructor or peers is especially helpful for long papers.

6. Final Paper.

Depending on the nature of the assignment, you may not want to use all the assignments listed above. For example, if students are primarily drawing on primary research, include either the annotated bibliography or the literature review, but not both. If, on the other hand, students are drawing primarily from the secondary literature, ask for both an annotated bibliography and a literature review, but to omit the data and methods paper.

Staged assignments also provide an excellent opportunity to usefully combine low-stakes and high-stakes writing. Although you may only choose to grade the final paper, it can be helpful to grade earlier assignments as well so that students get a better sense of the instructor's standards for polished work. The literature review and data & methods papers both provide good opportunities for grading.

6.3.1 Organization of a Research Paper

Students benefit from some guidance on how to organize and format a large research paper. Paper organization strategies can vary, especially between papers requiring primary research and those relying on a review of the secondary literature. **For papers requiring primary research**, Cinzia Solari recommends that her students divide their large research papers into 6 parts: Introduction, Literature Review, Context, Data and Methods, Findings, and Conclusion/Discussion. A copy of the handout she gives her students can be found in the appendix along with another general outline for research papers.

For papers drawing from the secondary literature, most instructors still request and introduction, body and conclusion, but how the body of the paper is organized may depend a great deal on how the students approach the literature. For example, if they are comparing and assessing between two different schools of thought, their paper will likely be organized very differently from if they are showing how different literatures add to one another. In this case, it may be best to discuss organization more generally and to urge students to organize their papers in light of the argument they construct.

Instructors may also want discuss the use of **headings and subheadings** with their students. If they are accustomed to shorter papers, students may not think to use headings and subheading. But both instructors and students can benefit if they do. For students, it can be enormously helpful to think about a large paper in parts, rather than facing the daunting task of writing 15 to 20 or more pages at once. For instructors, the use of headings and subheadings can make reading students papers much easier as they provide further hints at students intentions in any given part of their papers.

Chapter 7

Evaluating Student Writing

Most instructors find grading the most challenging element of teaching. From "readers," often brand-new graduate students who do a substantial portion of grading at Berkeley, to experienced instructors, we struggle to assign grades that accurately and consistently reflect students' work, and to balance the desire to provide high-quality feedback with the substantial time-requirement of such personal attention. In this chapter, we provide suggestions for addressing these challenges. We begin with a discussion of grading criteria and rubrics, move on to how to write comments that students will take seriously, touch on a few specific issues in dealing with ESL students' writing, and conclude with an examination of peer reviews.

7.1 Grading Criteria

Although we often try to reassure troubled students with the phrase "it's just a grade," grading is a key component of our role as instructors. Students often view grades as the only important element of a course: the prospect of a good or bad grade can affect students' motivation, how they study and how much they learn. Unfortunately, grades are frequently imprecise and idiosyncratic, too often leaving students confused by the wildly different standards of different instructors.

For these reasons, and particularly when evaluating something as subjective as writing, it is essential that instructors communicate their grading criteria to students. In addition to making grading more fair and consistent, and helping students become more active learners, having concrete grading criteria benefits you as an instructor: you save time during the grading process and the criteria provide explanation after students receive their graded papers. Clear criteria can be especially helpful in classes with multiple graders since establishing a common grading scale and comparing grading distributions helps to eliminate complaints from students that one GSI or reader grades more harshly or lightly than another.

Grading criteria can be designed to consider a paper analytically or holistically.[1] While the analytical method bestows separate component scores for each item in a list of elements (thesis statement, organization, use of sources, etc.), the holistic method produces a single score for the entire paper. Some instructors suggest that when paired with comments, the analytical method provides a more detailed analysis of the paper, helping students better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of their writing. Those who argue for the holistic method, on the other hand, claim that a paper cannot be evaluated as a set of component parts. With regards to instructor convenience, both methods have their pros and cons: while holistic criteria often take less time to develop and can be applied to a range of different assignments, a set of analytic criteria specialized for a particular paper can speed up the actual grading process.

Analytical Example

Primary Trait Analysis[2]

Primary Trait Analysis (PTA) is both highly explicit and criteria-based. PTA has three parts: 1) identify the factors that will comprise the score; 2) build a scale for scoring students on those factors; and 3) evaluate the student's performance against the scale.

To create a PTA scale, instructors should follow these four steps:

1. Consider the test or assignment prompt that you will be evaluating. Make sure the objectives of the test or assignment are clearly stated.
2. List the elements that will be important to the evaluation. These should be listed as nouns, such as "thesis," "use of evidence," or "text references."
3. For each element, construct a two- to five-point grading scale. For example, "A '5' thesis is limited enough to treat within the scope of the essay and is clear to the reader; it enters the dialogue of the discipline as reflected in the student's sources, and it does so at a level that shows synthesis and original thought; it neither exactly repeats any of the student's sources nor states the obvious."[3]
4. Test the scale, with a sample of student work or with colleagues. PTA scales tend to be revised as you use them.

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[1] Bean, John C. 2001. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.* 2001. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp. 257-259.

Holistic Example

"College Writing R1A Rubric" by the College Writing Program

A: Excellent

Critical Engagement	The essay consistently demonstrates an excellent level of critical engagement with the subject. Understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter is discerning, logical, and thoughtful. The essay explores issues in depth, advancing convincing claims and providing rich detail.
Thesis	The thesis, whether explicit or implicit, is clear and perceptive.
Development	The development of the essay is compelling throughout, advancing a sustained line of reasoning, supported by persuasive evidence, and weighing alternate perspectives where appropriate.
Organization	The essay's organization reinforces the development of ideas and uses effective strategies to create coherence.
Word Choice	The word choice is varied, precise, and sophisticated in context.
Sentences	The sentences vary in length and type in ways that advance meaning.
Grammar and Usage	The grammar and usage are consistently accurate, supporting meaning.

B: Strong

Critical Engagement	The essay demonstrates a strong level of critical engagement with the subject. Understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter is plausible and logical. The essay explores issues in some depth, advancing reasonable claims and providing relevant details.
Thesis	The thesis, whether explicit or implicit, is clear and not self-evident.
Development	The development of the essay is thorough, advancing a sound line of reasoning, supported by relevant evidence.
Organization	The essay's organization supports the development of ideas and usually displays sufficient strategies to create coherence.
Word Choice	The word choice is varied, accurate, and effective in context.

Sentences	The sentences vary in length and type.
Grammar and Usage	The grammar and usage are generally accurate, supporting meaning.

C: Competent

Critical Engagement	The essay demonstrates a competent level of critical engagement with the subject. Understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter is adequate and usually logical. The essay explores issues, advancing claims, but lacking essential details.
Thesis	The thesis, whether explicit or implicit, is clear, although it may be self-evident or weak.
Development	The development of the essay may be uneven, or advance a thin or repetitive line of reasoning supported by simplistic or weak evidence.
Organization	The essay's organization may be formulaic or use strategies in ways that detract from coherence.
Word Choice	The word choice is generally clear in context, although it may lack variety and be occasionally imprecise.
Sentences	The sentences are usually varied, although some may be wordy or choppy, or break rules of sentence formation—compromising clarity.
Grammar and Usage	The grammar and usage support meaning, although the essay may exhibit frequent minor errors or infrequent major ones.

NP (Not Passing): Unsatisfactory

Critical Engagement	The essay does not demonstrate a satisfactory level of critical engagement with the subject. Understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter may be inaccurate, skewed, or illogical. The essay may be off-topic, simplistic, irrelevant, or seriously limited.
Thesis	The thesis may be unclear, irrelevant, or non-existent.
Development	The development of the essay is overly mechanical, excessively repetitive, or erratic, lacking evidence, or presenting evidence that is flawed or counterproductive.
Organization	The essay's organization fails to support the development of ideas and undermines coherence.
Word Choice	Word choice is redundant, inaccurate, or inappropriate in context.

Sentences	Sentences may lack variety, be wordy, and frequently break rules of sentence formation—compromising meaning.
Grammar and Usage	The essay may exhibit pervasive errors in grammar or usage.

7.2 Using Rubrics

As part of our departmental survey, we asked instructors what type of feedback they provided most frequently, and we asked undergraduates what type of feedback they would find most useful. Among instructors, 85% reported providing brief comments throughout the paper, a summary paragraph at the end, and a grade. Among undergraduates, 84% expressed interest in a grading rubric, but only 35% of instructors reported using them. While many instructors are dubious about the utility of rubrics, we believe that this tool has a place in student evaluation. Example rubrics can be found in the appendices.

A rubric is an example of an analytical grading tool. It lays out assignment expectations on a grid. According to Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi, rubrics are "one of the handiest aids to educators since the invention of the blackboard" (vii), and are not utilized enough by professors.[4] Among the benefits, they list:

- *Explicitly stating assignment expectations.* By laying out your expectations for students, you eliminate the guesswork for those unfamiliar with the unspoken or hidden rules of academic culture. This can be particularly helpful for non-native English speakers and first-generation college students.
- *Linking the grading process to the fulfillment of specific learning objectives,* instead of subjective considerations of rank and effort.
- *Encouraging students' active learning and critical thinking.* If students go into an assignment with an understanding of the instructors expectations, they may have a more accurate sense of what grade their work is apt to receive, and will be able to take more responsibility for their work.
- *Providing a more equitable grading process for students and instructors.*
- *Making the grading process quicker and easier.*

[4]Stevens, Dannelle D. and Antonia J. Levi. 2005. *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning.* Stylus Publishing: Sterling.

Creating a Rubric[5]

1. *Think through your learning objectives.* This step can be part of creating the assignment prompt. If a prompt is well-constructed, often the learning objectives can be pulled straight from it. If the prompt does not spell out its learning objectives, break the assignment into 3-5 "learning goals."

2. *Create a scale.* Rubrics usually measure performance with a scale of 3-5 levels. These can be given labels unique to the rubric—for example, "beginning," "developing," "competent," and "exemplary"—or take the form of a more traditional point scale or letter grades.

3. *Draw up the grading table.* Once you have determined your learning objectives and performance categories, create a table detailing the qualities you would expect to see for each objective at each level. Looking at past student work may help set realistic standards for each category.

4. *Test the rubric on student work.* Ideally, "test papers" should be work from prior years. Otherwise, test the rubric on a few papers, then revise if necessary before grading the rest. Be careful not to substantially change the learning objectives from which students were working.

5. *Use the rubric to give constructive feedback.* Consider handing the rubric back to your students along with their paper. Alongside individual paper comments, a rubric can justify students' grades and help them assess their own writing.

7.2.1 Using Rubrics in the Classroom

The best way to incorporate rubrics into your course is to hand them out alongside the assignment prompts, and designate class time to discuss both the rubric and your expectations for the assignment. In addition to clearing up any misconceptions students might develop from reading the prompts, a discussion of the rubric is easily combined with a lesson on writing. For example, when discussing different learning objectives (a thesis statement, supporting evidence, etc.), you can explain why each objective is important for sociological writing.

7.3 Writing Comments

Comments are frequently a source of stress for both students and instructors. While instructors often feel that they spend hours writing comments that are never read by students, students may have difficulty interpreting or applying the comments that they do receive. If done correctly, however, comments can teach as much as a semester's worth of lectures.

Comments should always be framed in terms of course objectives. What instructors say in the classroom should be reinforced by the comments on student papers. Before writing comments, consider what you want your students to do with your feedback: the best comments are those that recognize students integrity as learners and writers, and encourage students to take control of their work through substantive revisions.

The Teaching Center at Washington University in St. Louis has created a handout for writing productive comments. Here we summarize their main points:[6]

- *Don't think of comments as simply justification for a grade.* Comments should help your students become better writers: structure them with the goal of providing students with the skills to critically read and revise their own work.
- *Read through the whole paper before commenting.* Take preliminary notes on a separate sheet of paper. This will prevent you from making overhasty judgments—like asking for evidence that appears on the next page—and encourage you to focus your comments on a few main points.
- *Respond to students' papers as a reader.* Rather than reading papers with an "ideal text" in mind, try to figure out what the student is trying to say. As you comment, focus on pointing out places where you could not follow the student's argument. Your goal should be pointing out weaknesses in students' work while leaving the details of how to correct it up to the author.[7]
- *Ask open-ended questions to help students improve their writing.* For example, instead of asking *Does the author really say this?* ask *Where does the author say this?* This type of questions directs students toward revision strategies.
- *Focus on facilitative instead of directive comments.*[8] While directive comments criticize a paper and lay out exactly what the student did wrong, facilitative comments ask questions to guide the students to revise papers on their own terms, thus helping them become better writers.
  - Directive comment: *This paragraph is awkward, tighten it up.*

[6] "Tips for Commenting on Student Writing." The Teaching Center, Washington University in St. Louis. Retrieved 2009 June 9. (`http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/tips-commenting-student-writing`).

[7] Brannon, Lil and C.H. Knoblauch. 1982. "On Students' Rights to Their Own Text: A Model of Teacher Response." *College Composition and Communication*, 33(2):157-166.

[8] Comments taken from Straub, Richard. 1996. "The Concept of Control in Teacher Response: Defining the Varieties of 'Directive' and 'Facilitative' Commentary." *College Composition and Communication*, 47(2):223-2251.

  - Facilitative comment: *Before starting your second draft, I suggest you do a bare bones outline of the article (you may be missing a few points), and then do the same for your response. I think you are trying to argue two points simultaneously.*

- *Resist the urge to line-edit.* Editing students' writing will not help them learn the revision process. Instead of suggesting specific text changes, point students toward process-based solutions. For example, if you notice a bad transition between paragraphs, you might note it and write: *Before writing your next draft, try outlining your paper to see how it fits together.*

- *Remember that less is more.* Not every comment that comes to your mind should necessarily be written down. After your preliminary read-through, establish the three or four main issues that are important, and focus your comments on those themes.[9]

- *Gear your comments toward improvement in future papers.* If students will not be redrafting this paper, frame comments in terms of "in your next essay," "for the final paper," and "in the future."

- *Focus your end comments on constructive criticism.* Give an honest assessment of the paper, but do not overwhelm your student with negative comments. Start with something positive, and frame your critique with descriptive words, not negative words. Do not assume that a poorly constructed paper was hastily written.

- *Model good writing.* Simply writing "vague" or "confusing" in the margins can leave students feeling as though the words describe the feedback they have received. Instead of many imprecise comments, write fewer, more detailed comments using complete sentences.

  - Instead of "vague," you might say: *Can you provide specific details here? Which findings are you referring to? What point are you trying to make with this sentence?*
  - Instead of "confusing," you could say: *I lost the thread of your argument here. Why is this information important? How does it relate to your overall argument?*

- *Encourage students to respond to your comments.* Too many students skim over comments: show students your comments are serious by providing class time to help them understand how to make use of them. Steve Tollefson of Berkeley's OED provides a worksheet entitled "What to Do When You Get Your Paper Back"; we've included a copy in Appendix 6.3.

[9]Hodges, Elizabeth. 1997. "Negotiating the Margins: some principles for responding to our students' writing, some strategies for helping students read our comments." Pp. 77-89 in Sorcinelli, Mary Deane and Peter Elbow (eds). *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

A Novel Approach to Commenting

At the University of Michigan, the writing center has worked with some faculty to develop a novel way of commenting. They have students use Microsoft Word's "comment" feature to leave 3-4 notes about their writing to their instructor, identifying places they particularly struggled, had some questions or concerns, or thought that their argument came together particularly well.

The instructor then responded to the students' comments with their feedback, along with responding to the paper more generally. Students found the exercise very helpful. Because their instructor's feedback responded directly to their questions and concerns, they found it far clearer and more helpful.

This final point, encouraging students to take comments seriously, is one of the most important elements of grading. Even the most carefully worded comments will do little if students do not read them. Steve Tollefson suggests you ask students to go through and correct your line-by-line notations and respond to your in-text comments. Tell students that they need to go over these comments, make appropriate changes, and resubmit the paper before they will get their grade. This will get them to look at what you said and think about how it affects their writing. It helps to say this even if you do not plan to read over the papers again and already have the grades determined.

Setting aside class time for students to ask questions and discuss your comments will also encourage students to take your comments seriously. Elizabeth Hodges suggests encouraging students to ask questions about your responses after returning papers.[10] She also suggests arranging your syllabus to allow students time to incorporate your comments into their writing.

7.4 Working with ESL Students

Many instructors find grading work by students for whom English is a Second Language a challenge. Some instructors feel that they should not hold these students to the same standard of grammar and organization that is expected from native English speakers. Others feel that giving these students more leeway may not encourage them to improve their English writing capabilities. Here are some tips on how to best help ESL students with sociological writing:

- *Do not ignore their writing difficulties.* According to Gail Offen-Brown from the College Writing Program, many ESL students come to her courses

[10] Hodges, Elizabeth. 1997. "Negotiating the margins: Some principles for responding to our students' writing, some strategies for helping students read our comments." Pp. 77-89 in Mary Deane Sorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds. *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

claiming they have never received negative comments on their written English. If a student is struggling to express themselves on paper in English, it is appropriate and helpful to (gently) let her know.

- *Do not mark up the paper with errors.* Students may ignore or skip over problems if they see too many red marks on a paper. It is better to take the first page of the essay and underline the grammatical issues, and ask them to apply these corrections to the rest of the paper. If you do this, make sure that you indicate where you stopped correcting the grammar.

- *Focus on one or two issues.* As you would with any student who is having trouble with English mechanics, do not mark every error. Steve Tollefson recommends focusing only on errors that affect the meaning of what the student is trying to say.

- *Make sure students know about resources available to them.* There are specialized resources for ESL students at the Student Learning Center; SLC tutors also have training in how to teach nuts-and-bolts English grammar, which is something that many subject instructors feel apprehensive about doing (see Chapter 7 for more information on writing resources at Berkeley).

- *Give the students as much lead-time as possible.* This can help all students, but can be especially important for ESL students. The earlier students get a paper topic and the more opportunities they have for feedback on their writing, the better.

- *Be explicit about your grading criteria.* Let students know what criteria you will use to grade their paper. This will help your ESL students decide how to best spend their time on their papers and can prompt them to get help on the elements of the assignment they feel less equipped to handle.

7.5 Promoting Grading Consistency

As a matter of equity, instructors and their graders should think carefully about promoting grading consistency in their courses. It is often difficult, however, to ensure grading consistency. Any number of factors—personal biases, experiences grading for other courses, fatigue, mood—can impact how someone interprets and grades an assignment. The most effective way of promoting grading consistency is to use a grading rubric, since grading according to agreed-upon learning objectives and criteria can limit graders' subjective considerations.

In large courses with many graders, it is often helpful for the instructor to meet with the graders to discuss grading expectations. Moreover, advisors from the Berkeley GSI Teaching and Resource Center suggest that graders take the following steps on her own to try to standardize grading across their own respective batch of assignments:

- After establishing preliminary grading criteria, read quickly through all the papers, pulling out examples of model A, B, and C work. This process provides a sense of the overall quality of the assignments.
- Next, read through each paper more carefully, writing comments and giving the paper a preliminary grade (in pencil, or in a data file if you have elected to do typed comments).
- After dividing the commented papers into four piles—A, B, C, and NP—evaluate each pile to make sure that papers getting the same grade are of roughly similar quality. At this point, you can finalize and record the grades.

It is also worth comparing grade distributions before returning papers to check for major discrepancies. Instructors should make it clear to graders if they expect certain distributions (e.g. approximately 20% of assignments in the A range, 40% in the B range, etc.).

Chapter 8

Berkeley Writing Resources

Berkeley undergraduates enter our classrooms at different skill levels. Some may go through Berkeley never requiring writing support, but for many others, the campus offers no shortage of resources to help undergraduates (and graduate students, and faculty) with their writing. In this chapter, we survey both widely-known campus resources, as well as some lesser-known ones.

8.1 Resources for Students

8.1.1 The Writing for Sociology Guide

The Sociology department has created a writing guide specifically addressing sociological writing for its undergraduates. It offers tips on all parts of the writing process. The guide is available through the sociology office and bSpace.

8.1.2 The Student Learning Center

The Student Learning Center (SLC) is Berkeley's official resource for helping struggling student writers. Yet many instructors have had the experience of sending students to SLC for help, only to have them return frustrated and still confused. We thus turned to SLC assistant director Luisa Guilianetti to help students and instructors maximize SLC resources.

SLC Tutors Will:

- Help structure an initial argument
- Work with a student to revise problematic passages in a paper
- Point out recurrent grammar mistakes, and even provide worksheets to help students master a particular error

SLC Tutors Will Not:

- Read more than 5 or 6 pages of any paper
- Line-edit papers, or revise something left with them by a student
- Review any materials for college applications, cover letters or resumes

The SLC is open Monday to Thursday from 8-6, and Friday from 8-5, in the Cesar E. Chavez Student Center Atrium. While the Center offers a range of services to students, the ones most likely to be used in conjunction with sociology courses are drop-in and by-appointment writing tutoring, individual writing tutoring, and study groups.

Drop-in tutoring

Available from 9-4 Monday through Thursday and 9-12 Friday, in the Atrium. Tutors meet with students on a first-come, first-served basis to review and give advice on assignments. To sign up, students go to the Atrium, add their name to a computerized list, and wait to be called by the next available tutor. Students are guaranteed a half-hour session with a tutor; if the Center is not too busy, they may get up to an hour.

By-appointment tutoring

Offered at the same hours as above. To sign up, students should go to the SLC website (`slc.berkeley.edu/writing/WritingBy-Appointment.htm`) and fill out a request form (which asks for name, local phone #, SID, email address and course). These appointments are one-hour blocks, and restricted to one per week. Students can request particular tutors, which can be handy if they plan to go back several times for the same research paper.

Individual tutoring

Designed for those needing significant help, this option pairs a student with one tutor for the semester. Students must sign up for this service in the first two weeks of classes, which is just one more reason to assess writing ability early. (Luisa recommends asking students to do a brief writing assignment in the first week of class, and/or asking those who are especially concerned about their writing skills to email you.) If your student does not find the service useful after six weeks' with her tutor, she has the option to cancel or renew her contract.

Study groups

Usually designed in conjunction with large lower-division survey courses, these are primarily intended as reinforcement for material covered by the instructor. Study groups are most facilitated by an upper-division undergraduate who received a good grade in the class (and sometimes a recommendation from the professor). While the groups do spend some time on exam and paper preparation, their main focus is on clarifying key course concepts. Groups are designed to handle fifteen to twenty students.

The best way for students to ensure that they receive useful advice from an SLC tutor is to come to the Center prepared. Ideally, students should walk in with:

- **Time.** Probably the most important element. For a long paper, students should come in a week before the deadline, if possible.
- **The paper prompt.** While the tutor may already have seen the prompt, bringing a copy provides something to reference during the discussion.
- **Specific questions.** For example, if a student was unhappy with her last paper grade, she should bring the paper, along with the instructor's comments, to identify where she needs help (argumentation, constructing a thesis statement, etc). If a student is struggling with a particular section of a long paper, she should consider bringing a few pages of that section, rather than a full printout of the term paper.

The SLC also provides services that can benefit instructors. In addition to offering training sessions for new GSIs, staff can organize a guest workshop, in lecture, to educate students about particular writing topics (argumentation, thesis statements, etc).

Although SLC tutors are undergraduates, they receive some formal training on teaching writing. Tutors—even returning tutors—enroll in a required training course every semester, which meets for one hour a week. Different courses focus on different aspects of tutoring work (drop-in tutoring, individual tutoring, etc). In their weekly meetings, tutors share general tips and tricks, as well as discussing specific challenges inherent to particular disciplines or even particular prompts. For these reasons, the SLC values input from instructors, both directly (i.e., providing a guest lecture to a tutoring class about the expectations and writing conventions for your discipline) and indirectly, by providing an advance copy of the assignment prompts for big lecture classes so that tutors can better prepare to help your students.

Finally, if a particular student is really struggling, it might be best to bypass the peer tutor step and refer him or her directly to one of the full-time SLC staff members.

- Luisa Guilianetti, Assistant Director (`lgiulian@berkeley.edu`)
- Rex de Guia, Social Science Resources (`rxdeguia@berkeley.edu`)

- Carolyn Swalina, Resources for Bilingual Students (cbs@berkeley.edu)
- Quame Patton, Resources for Transfer Students (quame@berkeley.edu)

8.1.3 The College Writing Program

Based out of 112 Wheeler Hall, the College Writing Program is best-known to undergraduates as the home of College Writing R1A, the course that satisfies the UC Entry-Level Writing Requirement and the first part of the University's Reading and Composition requirement. In addition, the CW program offers a range of courses for both undergraduate and graduate students, with topics ranging from advanced composition and new media to pedagogy for GSIs teaching writing. CW also offers a course for non-native speakers of English on academic usage and editing strategies. Instructors should recommend these courses to students who are interested in developing as writers.

8.1.4 The Academic Services Centers

These centers, located in the undergraduate residence halls, are mostly focused on first-year students, but they provide some resources that are useful to students at all levels. The Academic Services Centers provide drop-in tutoring Sunday through Thursday evenings in all five residence halls. The tutoring schedule for the semester are available on-line. While some centers are restricted to hall residents only, Units 1-3 are accessible to residents of all units.

As in other tutoring centers, Academic Services tutors are undergraduate students, hired on the basis of GPA qualifications. They are required to attend a three-day training session each semester as well as a weekly staff meeting. According to the Academic Services Centers website, tutors "are trained to coach you rather than provide answers, giving you the skills you need to succeed on your own after a tutoring session."

Alongside their tutoring resources, the Academic Services Centers offer a range of other information. The Centers website includes a selection of resources "to help [students] survive the daunting undergraduate experience that UC Berkeley offers," including a section on how to write essay exams. These resources are available at http://academiccenters.berkeley.edu/advising/resources.

8.1.5 The Athletic Study Center

As its name suggests, the Athletic Study Center (located in the Chavez Student Center) provides academic resources for student-athletes. ASC services are similar to those available at the SLC, but the ASC offers its tutoring and study groups in the evening, to accommodate student-athletes' complicated schedules. Some student-athletes are required to attend ASC tutoring as part of their scholarship package.

Study groups

While SLC study groups are largely supplemental, the ASC frames its study groups as an obligatory first step for struggling students. Students planning to request an individual tutor for a course for which a study group is offered are required to attend the group for 2-3 weeks before making their request. According to the ASC website, study groups "are formed based on need/demand from core lower division courses." If a study group is formed for a course, all enrolled student athletes will automatically be added to the study group roster. In spring 2009, there were ASC study groups offered for Sociology 3AC and Sociology 5; a list of current groups is available at `http://asc.berkeley.edu/tutorial/study-groups`.

Study groups

The ASC offers drop-in tutoring in its Student Center office from 7-9 PM, Monday through Thursday. In these sessions, students can get help with writing, social sciences, humanities, mathematics, statistics and economics. Both undergraduate and graduate students serve as tutors, and they are required to attend weekly meetings as well as start-of-the-semester training for their position.

One-on-one tutoring

One-on-one tutoring is available throughout the semester, particularly for students enrolled in College Writing, introductory composition or foreign language courses. According to the center website, "The ASC also offers individual tutoring in a limited capacity for other core lower division courses as well as a very limited number of upper division courses." If students have a one-on-one tutor, they will be expected to meet with the tutor weekly. Requesting an ASC tutor is much the same process as at the SLC: students should go to the ASC website (`http://asc.berkeley.edu/tutorial/tutor-request`) and fill out the form.

8.2 Resources for Instructors

8.2.1 The GSI Teaching & Resource Center

The GSI Teaching and Resource Center provides a number of different resources for graduate student instructors around campus. These include a teaching guide (provided to GSIs during their one-day training seminar and also available on the Centers website), small grants to improve teaching, and regular workshops on different elements of teaching.

The Center's teaching guide covers everything from the first day of class to plagiarism and lesson plans. For our purposes, the two most important sections are "Working with Student Writing" and "Evaluating Student Writing." These sections cover creating and grading assignments, time management, incorporating writing into classes and many of the subjects we address in this guide. The full text of the Center's guide is available at `http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/contents.html`.

GSI Teaching & Resource Center teaching grants are designed to help GSIs improve their teaching strategies; awards can go up to $300. Current GSIs can apply in any semester; more information is available at `http://gsi.berkeley.edu/grants/cigguidelines.html`.

Finally, the Center's workshop series offers special topics for instructors looking to help students improve their writing skills. In Spring 2009, the Center's workshops included one on grading with rubrics and another on teaching critical reading. Information on semester workshops is available at `http://gsi.berkeley.edu/conf_wkshop/workshops.html`.

8.2.2 The Office of Educational Development

Based out of 403 Sproul Hall and directed by Steve Tollefson, the OED is the campus-wide resource for helping instructors become better teachers. They have a wide range of resources available for instructors at all levels; their list of teaching resources (available at `http://teaching.berkeley.edu/teaching.html`) includes everything from designing and maintaining a course syllabus to lecturing, dealing with evaluation (of instructors and students) and balancing personal and professional life. They also provide a 40-page booklet on Encouraging Student Writing, which includes ways to incorporate writing into a course, evaluate written work, and design writing assignments, as well as a series of "tip sheets" to be handed directly out to students. These include:

- General Considerations for Writing
- Hints for Writing Research Reports
- Reviewer's Appraisal Form
- From Subject to Thesis
- Guidelines for Introductions
- Active and Passive Voice
- Predication
- Marking Symbols
- How to Develop an Idea
- What to Do When You Get a Paper Back

The entire booklet is available online at `http://teaching.berkeley.edu/docs/encouraging.pdf`.

8.2.3 The College Writing Program

In addition to offering undergraduate courses focused on writing, the CWP also provides resources for instructors. For new instructors seeking to improve as writing teachers, Gail Offen-Brown teaches a 300-level pedagogy course focused on teaching composition and writing. The College Writing Program also produced a periodical called Writing Across Berkeley; each issue focused on a particular writing challenge, such as designing writing assignments, responding to student writing and "writing to learn." Some back issues are available at `http://writing.berkeley.edu/wab/index.html`.

8.3 Resources for Both Students and Instructors

There are a few additional resources on the Berkeley campus that might come in handy both for instructors and for students.

8.3.1 Library Services

Perhaps increasingly overlooked by instructors in the "Internet age," librarians and library services can provide valuable assistance to both students and instructors, particularly where research papers are concerned.

For instructors, the library offers the possibility of scheduling "group tours" during class time. These might include an introduction to the library and to library resources, an orientation to how to do Internet research (using one of the computer classrooms in Moffitt or Doe) or some combination thereof. Instructors can reserve a scheduled session (three weeks ahead of time) by going to `http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/classrequestform.html`. If an instructor would prefer not to take course time for a library orientation, students can be required to attend one of the library's open tours (concentrated at the start of the semester) and get a certificate of completion at the end. Finally, the library can also provide a customized list of relevant library resources to be integrated into a course website or put on a syllabus. For more information about this, contact Jennifer Dorner (`jdorner@library.berkeley.edu`). Instructors interested in exploring library resources are also encouraged to contact Aija Kanbergs at `akanberg@library.berkeley.edu`.

The library also provides resources for individual students, who can meet one-on-one with a librarian through the Research Advisory Service (`http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/doemoff/ras.html`). Students reserve a 30-minute appointment with a librarian to help narrow a research topic and get a sense of how to obtain the best and most useful information through library resources.

8.3.2 Berkeley Writers at Work

Berkeley Writers at Work is a forum, organized by the Campus Writing Program, that features professors talking about their own writing process. These forums tend to be held around the middle of the semester. They last about 90 minutes and have been webcast since 2004. Past speakers include Professors Robert Reich from the Goldman School of Public Policy, Ronald Takaki and Elaine Kim from ethnic studies, and sociologys own Arlie Hochschild. Past webcasts and quotes from earlier interviews are available at `http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/bwaw/`.

Chapter 2 Appendix

Sample "Writing Skills" Questionnaire

1. What is the longest paper you have ever written?
2. Have you written a paper for a sociology class before?
3. Do you enjoy writing?

    [ ] Yes—I enjoy writing a lot.
    [ ] I sort of enjoy it.
    [ ] I don't mind it.
    [ ] I don't really like it much.
    [ ] I dislike writing.

4. What about writing makes you nervous? (Check all that apply)

    [ ] I have trouble coming up with a thesis statement
    [ ] I have trouble organizing my argument
    [ ] I have trouble with spelling and grammar
    [ ] I am an English language learner
    [ ] I have trouble writing a conclusion
    [ ] Something else (please specify)

5. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself as a writer?

6. Before writing a paper, do you tend to write an outline?

    [ ] Yes—always
    [ ] Only for big papers
    [ ] Occasionally, but not often
    [ ] Never

7. How do you hope to improve your writing this semester?

Peer Review Guides

Take-Home Theory Exam Peer Review Guide[1]

Paper Writer:

Peer Reviewer:

It can be really helpful to get input on your paper from fellow students to improve your writing. They can help you identify: *What ideas are clear? What ideas are not? What is confusing to the reader? Is the theory explained in simple terms and supported by evidence like quotations and specific details?*

Step I: Switch papers, read carefully, then comment on the following questions. Where the instructions say, "Note..." you should write comments/questions in the paper as you go.

Focus on writing, NOT grammar and NOT whether the essay "gets the theory right."

- Can you identify (Check Yes or No)
  - Abstract (150 words or less) that sums up the essays argument?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]
  - Thesis statement?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]
  - Answers to each part of the essay question?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]
- What is the paper's main argument? Does the paper explain WHY and HOW the theorist being discussed would analyze the essay topics as s/he suggests?
  - What does s/he explain best?

[1] by Abigail Andrews

- How could s/he improve his/her explanation?

- Does the paper use simple, clear language to explain theoretical concepts?
  Note (1) where it is most clear and (2) where it is not clear.
  - Does it define all key concepts?
    Note (1) good definitions and (2) concepts s/he doesn't define.
  - Does it explain what all words/phrases from the theorist mean?
    Note any words/phrases that aren't explained.
  - Does it explain how concepts relate to each other?
    Note (1) good definitions and (2) concepts s/he doesn't define.

- Does the paper directly address all parts of the question being asked (not just sections (a) and (b) but also each sub-question)? *Note anything that's missing.*
  - Does the paper stay focused on these questions?
    Note (1) good definitions and (2) concepts s/he doesn't define.

- Is the paper's argument backed up by evidence, such as citations from the theory, specific descriptions, and details from the example of NUMMI (for that essay)?
  Note (1) where evidence is effective and (2) where more is needed.

- Is the paper structured clearly, with an introduction and supporting claims?
  - Does the author present **one** supporting claim per paragraph?
  - Does s/he introduce paragraphs with topic sentences that sum up their content?
  - Does s/he provide a transition from each paragraph into the next?
- Does the paper use quotations effectively?
  - Does the writer say things in her/his own words where possible?
  - Are all quotations short (1-2 lines or less)? *No block quotations!*
  - Does s/he quote only central claims that s/he cannot paraphrase? *No lectures!*
  - Are all quotations introduced and explained? *Note anywhere the paper uses quotations to start or end paragraphs (a big no-no!)*
- List (at least) two things you found effective about the paper:
  1.
  2.
- List (at least) two things you think could be improved:
  1.
  2.

Step II: Share your answers with your partner, then give them this worksheet.

Step III: Refer to this worksheet at home when finishing your exam.

You DO NOT need to take all of your partner's advice; only what you find useful.

You SHOULD consider the criteria expressed in the worksheet for ALL your essays.

Reviewer Comment Sheet for Research Paper Rough Drafts[1]

Please use one of these sheets for each of the papers you review. Bring at least one copy of this with you to the next section.

Three things that the paper did well and/or that you liked:

1.

2.

3.

Three things that you think are the most important to change/improve for the final draft:

1.

2.

3.

[1] by Cinzia Solari

Suggested improvements for Theory/Concepts/Design

Suggested improvements for Content/Organization

Suggested improvements for Style/Writing

Other comments: What did the author specifically want you to focus/comment on?

Chapter 3 Appendix

Practical Tips for Reading Critically[1]

Reading scholarly books and articles critically requires a specific method and strategy that makes it very different from reading for fun or reading to survey a work. To get the most out of the materials you are assigned, you have to learn to **read critically or analytically, that is, to break down an argument into its constituent parts** (explandum, explanans, premises, hypotheses, theorems, laws and mechanisms, conclusions and corollaries, ramifications for other theories or arguments), **retrace its major stages and turns, evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, and validity, and grasp its implications** (empirical, theoretical, moral, practical, and so forth). Here are some practical tips to help you do just that.

Always **read with a purpose**. Moving your eyes across a printed page is not critical reading! Reading with a purpose means asking a question (or, better yet, a series of questions) that you keep in mind as you progress and that helps you put the pieces of the puzzle together. Always identify from the outset what the author intends to do in the writing, how s/he proposes to do it, and what kind of arguments s/he develops (causal, historical, interpretive, etc.).

Scan and scope the text beforehand. You'll do a much better job of picking up the argument(s) in the text if you know in advance what to look for. For this, always scan the full text beforehand: flip through the pages, grab a few paragraphs here and there, pay attention to titles and subtitles, notice highlighted phrases or italics, tables and figures (in particular their captions). In short, get a rough feel for what's going on. You can also read the first and last sentence or paragraph of every section, just to become familiar with the substance and tone of the argument(s). Then read the text in depth.

Read to **identify the logic of the piece**. This means identifying the problem the author is trying to resolve, the concepts s/he uses or develops for that purpose, the evidence s/he brings to bear on the issue, and the quality of the argument. Make an effort to **situate the authors' claims in the broader constellation of literary or cultural theories or research you are familiar with** (from class discussion, other classes, other reading you've donewhatever you've experienced that is relevant). Never read a text in isolation: always

[1] Adapted from Joshua Page & Loic Wacquant

relate it to relevant texts you've read (among them, those assigned for the same and prior weeks). Literary arguments have a structure; your reading should locate and mimic it.

Read differentially. Do not treat all printed text the same. "Democratic" reading is analytically inefficient (even unsound); some parts of a text contain critical conceptual or causal arguments and should be read slowly (and repeatedly if necessary); others contain illustrative materials, empirical elaborations, or theoretical digressions and can be read more rapidly (or sometimes even skipped). Allocate your time and effort wisely, in proportion to the difficulty and significance of the passage.

Annotate the text as you read. Read with a pen or pencil in hand and mark the progression, twists, and turns of the argument as it unfolds. You can devise your own stenographic system (arrows, stars, circling, underlining, etc.) to highlight in a consistent and economical manner the main names, dates, definitions, and logical turning points, conclusions, and implications. But do not defeat your purpose and highlight everything.

Sample Reading Notes[1]

Notes on Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," ***American Sociological Review*** **51 (April 1986): 273-286.**

Definition: "culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life" (273).

- Three steps to her theory:
    1. Image of culture-as-tool-kit
    2. Looks at "strategies of action," ways of ordering action through time, to understand culture's causal effects
    3. Sees culture's significance in providing cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action
- Traces the history of Weber (switchman metaphor/ideas as the tracks along which interests run), Parsons (values/the schema by which people structure action), then uses culture of poverty argument to disprove these: it's not that these people don't want to be successful, it's that they don't have the skills for it.

[1] By Hannah Emery.

- Weber's Protestant Ethic argument demonstrates that "what endures [when systems change] is the way action is organized, not its ends" (276)
- Rational actor model has problems because people don't build up their actions that systematically; also, all cultures have contradictory pieces of advice. 11People may have in readiness cultural capacities they rarely employ; and all people know more culture than they use (if only in the sense that they ignore much of what they hear)" (277)

- "If culture influences action through end values, people in changing circumstances should hold on to their preferred ends while altering their strategies for attaining them. But if culture provides the tools with which persons construct lines of action, then styles or strategies of action will be more persistent than the ends people seek to attain. Indeed, people will come to value ends for which their cultural equipment is well-suited." (277)

- **People with unsettled lives:**
  - Assumes a continuum from ideology to tradition to common sense; ideology is conscious, tradition is "what's done," and common sense is "natural."
  - During unsettled periods, ritual has added significance—it's more likely that cultural practices are ideology, because they're conscious (conversion, etc.)
  - Nonetheless, ideological movements are never complete cultures; "much of their taken-for-granted understanding of the world and many of their daily practices still depend on traditional patterns"

- **People with settled lives:**
  - Settled cultures support various options and patterns; "Cultural experiences may reinforce or refine the skills, habits, and attitudes important for common strategies of action, but established ways of acting do not depend upon such immediate cultural support" (281)
  - Certain aspects of a culture may be prioritized by people at different times and in different life circumstances.
  - Culture lag: people don't take advantage of new opportunities b/c they would have to remove established tool kits in order to do it.

- Implications for research: Identifies the ways in which values do shape action; in unsettled life, values are of minimal importance, but in settled life, values become very important. Direct attention to historical questions about the interaction of culture and structure; look at places where new cultural complexes allowed for new or reorganized action strategies.

Chapter 4 Appendix

Sample Assignment Prompts

Compare and Contrast Paper (by Irene Bloemraad)

Topic: All three theorists we have studied so far—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—believe that modern society suffers from a particular problem that is embedded in the relationship between individuals and society. Write an essay using TWO theorists in which you compare and contrast a set of specific ideas or concepts (e.g., alienation, bureaucracy, anomie, etc.) You will need to develop a strong thesis statement that allows you to discuss and explain the similarities and/or differences.

Some tips for writing this paper:

- Divide a sheet of paper into three columns and summarize how each theorist views individuals, the relationship between individuals and society, the problem of modern society, and appropriate solutions.
- Look at you summaries; compare and contrast them. What strikes you as interesting? Are they arguing different things, or are there points of convergence? (Consider basic principles, processes of change, their understanding of the "problem," proposed solutions, etc.) What drives the similarities or differences?
- While answering these questions for yourself, start to focus on two authors and develop a thesis statement. This statement should move beyond description to explain how or why the theorists agree or disagree. Consider counterarguments to your thesis and be prepared to answer potential criticisms in your paper.
- Try to outline your argument in point form. Breakdown your argument into smaller parts. The sub-parts will need textual references to support your contentions; jot down the page numbers of potential

quotations or passages. Don't expect the outline to be perfect; rather, consider this as an exercise in organized brainstorming. Look at your outline: Does it make sense? Revise.

- Once you are satisfied, write a rough draft.
- EDIT your rough draft: underline the topic sentences of each paragraph to see whether they build your argument in a logical manner; read it out loud to yourself to see if the sentences are clear; ask a friend to read it. Most good writers produce multiple drafts of their work. Once finished, do a spell check.
- Papers should be double spaced and in a font big enough not to strain a reader's eyes. Late papers will be marked down a third of a grade every day they are late.

Evaluation. I will be looking for the following in your essay:

- A concise *summary* of each authors' position as related to your paper's topic; this should not be separate from the argument of your paper, but should be incorporated into your discussion.
- An informed *comparison* of the authors: how similar or different are they?
- An *analysis* of the comparison: What are the reasons for the similarities or differences you note? What are the implications of these similarities and differences?
- An *interesting approach* to the texts, which encompasses your response to critics of your thesis.
- A *clean copy*, that is, one that is well structured, easy to read, free of grammatical or spelling mistakes and makes proper use of citations and references [use only the class texts; you don't need to bring in any outside material.]

Research Paper Prompt (by Manuel Vallee)

1. **Research Proposal** (due Week 2)
   - Identify the disease you will be researching, and explain why you have chosen to study this disease.
   - Identify the resources you anticipate using to research that disease.
   - Identify the country you want to focus on, and explain why you want to focus on that country.
   - Relying on the `medicinet.com` website, provide an overview of the disease you are studying, including a description of the symptoms, the commonly understood causes, and its typical treatments.
2. **The Incidence History of Your Chosen Disease** (due Week 3)
   - Trace the disease's incidence history for the country you've chosen to study, and for another country.
   - Identify similarities and differences in the incidence between the two countries.
   - For your chosen country, provide a breakdown of the incidence according to EITHER gender, age, race/ethnicity, OR economic class.
3. **The Role of Chemicals in the Onset of Disease** (due Week 4)
   - With the help of research websites (including CHE & NPI), identify all environmental chemicals linked to the onset of the disease you are studying, including the strength of the association for each.
   - Supply in-depth information for the five chemicals that have the strongest association with the disease, including who manufactures the chemicals, what they are used for (i.e. are the chemicals used as pesticides, home cleansing agents, workplace chemicals, etc.), the health hazards they represent, etc.
   - Evaluate whether or not this was information provided on the `medicinet.com` website.
4. **Nutrition and Disease** (due Week 5)

   Report the information you found linking nutrition with your disease. Such information can include nutritional deficiencies that are linked with your disease, as well as the nutritional items (including specific foods, pesticides, or chemical additives) that are linked to the onset of the disease. Or your report can focus on specific foods and herbs used to treat the disease. Two websites you can consult include `www.mercola.com`, and `www.drweil.com`.

5. **Content Analysis of the Media** (due Week 7)

   Pick a mainstream newspaper, and conduct a Lexis/Nexis search for all references to the disease you are studying. Identify the number of articles you found for the last five years, and provide reference information on the twenty most recent articles. Also, provide a detailed content analysis for the most recent ten, focusing on the newspaper's coverage of either the chemical OR nutritional causes of disease. Identify whose economic interests were served by the coverage you identified, and relate your findings to the Phil Brown et al. article.

6. **Analyzing the Role of Government** (due Week 9)

   - Pick a government website (such as the FDA, CDC, NIH, or NIMH), and identify the causal explanations they provide for the disease, or the treatment approaches they recommend.
   - Compare the government's analysis to your earlier evaluation of chemical and nutritional determinants of the disease. What does the government no mention? Does it raise factors not seen in your prior research?
   - Try to account for the differences you found, using either Navarro's theory, or some other reading from the course.

7. **Paper Outline and Theory Discussion** (due Week 12)

   - Provide a detailed outline of the argument you envision making in your final paper. A detailed outline should include a clear articulation of the argument you will be making, identifying the various spokes of your argument, as well as identifying the data/information that will support each part of the argument.
   - Identify two readings from the course that relate to your paper, specify the arguments that link those readings with your research, and discuss the extent to which your findings support or refute those arguments.

8. *****Final Paper: Deepening or Expanding Your Data*****

   The last step of your research project will be to EITHER deepen OR extend the data from one of your earlier assignments, turning it into an 18-22 page research paper.

Short Assignment Prompts (by Michael Burawoy)

Assignment: The Power Elite Today

Complete the reading of The Power Elite and view the film Enron. In what way does this film endorse Mill's view of the power elite and in what way does it challenge his account? How might Mills elaborate his theory to take into account changes in the last 50 years of American capitalism? You can write this in any way you wish, as an editorial, as a film review by Mills, or as a contemporary critic of Mills. However you do it, it should be no longer than 500 words.

Assignment: White Collar Today

Read the whole of WHITE COLLAR. Evaluate Mill's claims about the place and politics of the new middle classes in U.S. society as it applies to the world of today. You can think of this as an opinion piece for a newspaper, or you can imagine yourself as Mills, returning to evaluate the world around him in the light of what he wrote in 1951. However you write this assignment it should be no longer than 500 words. [Professor Burawoy then provides some popular and journalistic accounts of the contemporary middle class.]

Chapter 5 Appendix

Sample Memo Responses[2]

Questions to Address in Memos on Each Assigned Reading

Title of Piece/Author	Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital by Robert Putnam
Central research question(s):	Whatever happened to civic engagement?
Central thesis:	The vibrancy of American civil society (measured by civic engagement and social connectedness) has declined over the past several decades. Television, living in and commuting from suburbs and women's entry into the workplace may be reasons.
What's the empirical significance, if any?	No empirical innovation. Putnam largely relies on data from other studies to make his point.
What's the theoretical significance, if any?	Putnam links declining membership in voluntary organizations and other forms of civic organization, such as church, union membership, the PTA, and fraternal organizations to declining social connectedness, and declining civic engagement over all.
Substantively, what's significant about the study?	Americans seem to come into significantly less contact with others in contexts where they can share views, build social trust, and get together to coordinate and cooperate for the common good, including actively and directly engaging in politics and government. This can hurt all kinds of things, including trust in others, health and democratic participation.

[2] by Sandra Smith

If an empirical study, what's the data source (type, data collection method)? How large is the dataset? When was it collected? Who/what constitutes the sample?	Putnam builds his argument by relying on the findings of other studies, notably surveys of people's reported activity and organizational membership data.
If an empirical study, what type of data analysis was undertaken?	Putnam presents many descriptive statistical tables and graphs.
Most important finding(s):	Using a number of measures, Putnam shows that Americans' participation in traditional civil organizations has declined, in some cases remarkably so.
Implications of the findings:	Something has happened in the U.S. in the last 2-3 decades to diminish civic engagement and social connectedness.
Strengths of study (from your perspective):	Putnam has highlighted what many may have overlooked—the decline in socializing with neighbors and general participation in social life beyond the nuclear family. Also, he suggests television, longer commutes from suburbs and women's participation in the labor market may have contributed to declining sociability and civic engagement.
Weakness of study (from your perspective):	Has civic engagement really declined, or has it just changed shape? Not sure about his "culprits" either.
After reading this study, what question remain for you? What question would you ask the author(s) for clarification?	
After reading the study, what would you propose as the next step to further advance this research agenda?	
Finally, in what way, if any, does the study inform your understanding of any other social phenomenon?	

Mini-lecture or Handout on Writing Summaries[3]

- What is a summary and why do we write them?
  - A summary is a concise overview of a piece of written work. It should include a restatement of the author's main points and line of argumentation. As such, a summary must discuss both the topic under discussion, the author's main point and/or the findings on the topic.
  - Summaries are useful in many instances. They help our understanding of the piece. If you can write a coherent and accurate summary, chances are you understand the piece. More importantly, summaries are first steps to analysis. When we apply, compare and contrast, interpret, or otherwise analyze theory, the reader needs to know the basic outlines of the theories being discussed. As such, including a summary is often essential.
- How to write a summary
  - The key to a good summary is being concise and coherent. You cant simply write reading notes in paragraph form for a summary. Brevity and organization are key! It is also good to avoid being overly abstract or vague in writing summaries. Include the concrete points made in the piece For example, saying "In this piece, Marx discusses species being" is not sufficient. What is species being? What does Marx say about it?
  - A good way to start a summary is with a sentence or two summarizing the main argument of the entire work. From there, you can go on to explain the main components of the argument in greater detail. However, summary writing always involves discretion. You can't include every point in your summary, so ask yourself: what are the most important points? Focus on those.

[3]by Kristen Gray

Chapter 6 Appendix

Writing About Theory[4]

Make sure that your paper is carefully organized, and that each paragraph is focused around a single point. One trick is to go back after you have finished the paper and make an outline based on what you have written. This should only take a minute or so. If you find that it is hard for you to pick out the main point of each paragraph, then it's a safe bet that readers will have even more trouble. Don't neglect your introduction, conclusion, and topic sentences. They are important signposts in any paper.

It is important to be as precise as possible with your word choice. This will not only improve the quality of your writing, but also your grasp of the theories. Clear thinking and clear writing go hand-in-hand; if you push yourself to be more specific, you will find that you think about the concepts in more exacting ways.

Draw on aspects of the theory that are the most relevant for the question at hand. You wouldn't use a screwdriver to hammer in a nail. Similarly, you shouldn't use Marx's theory of commodity fetishism to explain alienation when other parts of his theory are better suited to the task.

Part of writing about theory is learning how to summarize it well. This requires a delicate balance. You don't want to leave out crucial details, but you want to avoid redundancies and digressions. Concise summaries are important because (i) they show that you've spent time thinking about the theory, (ii) they reflect the degree to which you have mastered the text, and (iii) they free up space to make additional points. Summarizing theory in a concise manner is one of the most challenging aspects of writing about theory. It takes a time, patience, and practice.

Support all of your points with references from the texts. Use quotes and page references. If you do not support your points with evidence from the readings, I will assume that you haven't done the readings and grade accordingly. Never cite a lecture when the same material has been covered in the reading; this will also lead me to believe that you haven't done the reading.

Take drafts of your paper to the writing center: `http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/WritingDrop-in.htm`.

[4] by Sarah Quinn

Compare/Contrast Papers

Outline for a Compare & Contrast Paper[5]

Goal: To explore the similarities and differences between two texts. Think about the arguments and evidence presented in each text. Try to identify each author's main argument.

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement of a comparison/contrast paper should contain an idea or claim that unites a discussion of the texts. The thesis statement should also include the argument that will be advanced in support of the claim that is being made.

Methods of Organization

Organization is critical to a Compare/Contrast paper. Because you will most likely be discussing a variety of evidence, you will have to be certain that your logic can be understood by the reader. Working from an outline might simplify your task and help you to evaluate your reasoning.

1st Method

1. Introduction
   (a) Briefly introduce the significance of subject matter
   (b) Thesis Statement
   (c) First supporting point
   (d) Second supporting point
   (e) Third supporting point
2. First work
   (a) Summary of work
   (b) Relationship of work to first point
   (c) Relationship of work to second point
   (d) Relationship of work to third point
3. Second work (same structure)
4. Third work (same structure)

[5] by Kristen Gray

5. Conclusion
   (a) Restate thesis
   (b) Summarize how you proved your argument

2nd Method

1. Introduction
   (a) Briefly introduce significance of subject matter
   (b) Thesis statement
2. Brief explanation of Work 1
3. Brief explanation of Work 2
4. First comparative point
   (a) Relation of point to 1st work
   (b) Relation of point to 2nd work
5. Second comparative point (same)
6. Third comparative point (same)
7. Conclusion
   (a) Restate thesis
   (b) Summarize how you proved your argument

Comparing and Contrasting Foucault and Gramsci[6]

This assignment asks you to compare and contrast the theories of Gramsci and Foucault with respect to two themes: institutions and ideology. The assignment has two specific goals. The first is to practice writing a specific type of compare and contrast essay. The second is to continue thinking about the theories.

This compare and contrast essay requires you to take a very specific approach one that I will call the "thematic" approach. Preparing to write such an essay involves three crucial steps: 1) choosing the themes of comparison; 2) figuring out how the theme is addressed by each of the theorists; and 3) identifying the similarities and differences between the two theorists, as relates to the theme.

[6] by Marcel Paret

For this assignment I have already done step #1 by choosing the themes; your task is to complete steps #2 and #3 by figuring out how Gramsci and Foucault address institutions and ideology, and how they are similar and different in doing so. The last step provides the main content of the essay.

With this in mind, your essay should have four paragraphs with the following content:

- **Paragraph one:** A very brief introduction (probably 2 sentences, but certainly no more than 3), laying out the comparison that you will make and a summary of your general conclusions.
- **Paragraph two:** Compare and contrast Gramsci and Foucault with respect to the theme of institutions. For example, what is the function of institutions for each of the theorists, and in what ways are these functions similar and different? What is the role of institutions in the process of social change?
- **Paragraph three:** Compare and contrast Gramsci and Foucault with respect to the theme of ideology. What role does ideology play for each of the theorists, and how are these roles similar and different? How does ideology relate to the reproduction of the status quo and the potential for social change?
- **Paragraph four:** A very brief conclusion, summarizing the analysis and drawing from it some general conclusions (probably no more than 3 sentences).

This format is purposefully rigid. Although you will not have to stick to this format in the future, writing an essay of this kind is a good skill. There is also plenty of room for creativity. Indeed, there are no set answers, and you could take multiple angles within paragraphs two and three.

Quantitative Analysis Strategies for Term Projects[7]

Below are some analysis strategies to use in your papers. Some require knowledge of statistics, but many involve only basic calculations or graphing. You do not have to use advanced statistics for the paper, and you should not use a method you do not understand very well. There are many additional ways to analyze data; if you have an idea not listed below, feel free to use it.

Cross-tabulations are an easy way to compare variables by calculating a statistic for one variable, grouped by another variable. For example, if I have data on a group of people's ages and incomes, I can calculate the average income for different age groups, allowing me to compare age and income. (If you know more statistics, you can calculate whether any difference you find is "statistically significant.") You can also compare more than two variables.

[7] by Reid Hamel, Demography

Following the previous example, you could calculate average income by age group for people with a high school diploma and for people without a high school diploma. You are then comparing age, income and education. You can also use cross-tabulation to "control" for the effects of another variable. For example, if you have income and height data, and you want to know if shorter people make more money than taller people, you have to "control" for age because age causes you to get taller (as you grow) and to increase your income (as you gain experience). Comparing the height and income relationship WITHIN small age groups allows you to make the correct comparison. Comparing counts or averages for the same place in two or more different time periods is also a kind of cross-tabulation.

Time series data can be presented on a **line graph** to show trends over time. Time series for two different variables can be presented on one graph by making the axis on the left-hand side scaled for one of the variables and the axis on the right-hand side scaled for the other variable. This makes trend comparisons easy, but be careful that the scales are not misleading (you can exaggerate or downplay trends on a line graph by making scales too small or too big). One way to avoid this problem is to plot the variables on a log scale. Comparing log scales allows you to compare proportional changes from period to period.

Column, pie and bar charts are good for displaying all sorts of information. If you have a table of numbers, think about how you might put it into graph form to make it easier for your reader to understand. For example, if you are analyzing expenditures in the Federal budget over time, side-by-side pie charts or stacked up bar charts can show changes in the relative size of parts of the budget. Population pyramids are also a kind of bar chart.

If you have data on two or more variables for a group of individuals (or places or times), you can compare the variables by **plotting** them on a graph (the "XY Scatter" type chart in Excel). For example, if you have data for a group of schools that includes the percentage of seniors who are college-bound and average class size, you can plot those schools on a graph with one variable as the x-axis and the other as the y-axis. Look at the plot and see if you observe any patterns. Be careful in interpreting associations, though (see below).

If you have had some statistics training, you may feel comfortable analyzing **variance, standard deviation,** or **correlation**. **Regression analyses** are useful, too, if you are sure you know how to interpret them correctly.

Sometimes, if you are comparing one variable for two different populations, you can **standardize** on a second variable to see if it explains the difference in the first variable. In demography, for example, if we want to compare mortality in two different populations, we can standardize on an age structure. This helps us to see whether a difference is due to one population having higher mortality rates than another or whether the difference is because one population's age structure is more tilted towards older ages, when more people are likely to die.

Here's an example. In the tables below, I have data for two places, "A" and "B": average income, the percentage of workers at various levels of educational attainment, and the average income of the people within those education groups. Is the difference in average income due to a difference in the wages, or the difference in education from place A to place B? It's hard to tell because some education groups have higher wages in place A and some have higher wages in place B.

	Place A	**Place B**
Average Income	34,750	26,150

		% of *Workers*	Average *Income*	% of *Workers*
Education	Less Than HS Diploma	5%	12,000	15%
	HS Diploma	15%	16,000	20%
	Less than BA/BS	25%	30,000	35%
	BA/BS	40%	40,000	25%
	More than BA/BS	15%	55,000	5%

The following table represents a calculation of the average income in B if we "standardize" on the educational distribution in A:

	(1) **A's** % of Workers	(2) **B's** Average Income	(3) =(1)X(2)
Less than HS Diploma	5%	15,000	750
HS Diploma	15%	17,000	2,550
Less than BA/BS	25%	20,000	5,000
BA/BS	40%	40,000	16,000
More than BA/BS	15%	70,000	10,500
			Sum: 34,800

Think of the $34,800 amount in column (3) as the average income B would have if it had the same educational distribution as A. This amount is almost exactly the same as A's average income of $34,750. We can conclude that the main reason A has a higher average income is that it has a more educated work force, nor that wages are that much higher than in B. If we had data on more places, we could standardize them all based on A's educational distribution and compare. This technique can be applied to many different situations in which a population-level characteristic that can be broken down by sub-groups.

Be a Skeptical Analyst! With all of the strategies listed above, be careful how you interpret your charts and graphs. Most of the time, we are able to observe association, not causation. Two things may have a relationship, but that doesn't prove that one causes the other. You should use your data to make informed guesses, noting that a change in one variable might be causing a change in another, or that a third variable might be causing both variables to change as observed. Observe your data and describe what you see, then you can go on to hypothesize about what might be causing it. Be a skeptical analyst and qualify your conclusions.

Qualitative Research Models

Sample Field Notes[8]

Background: The following is a selection from my field notes for my research in Oakland. This particular selection is from a trip I made with Rhoda Vava (a refugee from West Africa) and her son, Lambert, to the hospital. Lambert, a toddler, has serious health problems and needed to go to the hospital to get some blood work done. Rhoda has poor English skills and is illiterate.

> ...We walked inside the hospital, and Rhoda went up to the main counter which was situated off to the right off the main entrance. A heavy-set balding white man sat behind the counter. Rhoda walked up to him and stared at him, keeping her feet firmly planted on the floor. The man didn't budge. He sat with his arms crossed, leaning back in his chair, and stared back at her. For at least twenty seconds, the two adults stared directly into each other's eyes, each of them waiting for the other to talk. Neither of them smiled. Both had stern looks on their faces. Finally, Rhoda pointed to the emergency room to their right, holding her arm straight out to her side. The man handed her a visitor's pass. Rhoda took the pass, turned to the right, and walked away. The exchange was completely silent. No one smiled or said a word. Rhoda walked through the archway that connected the lobby and the emergency room waiting area. Then she walked up to the registration desk in the emergency room. An employee, a young-looking black woman, sat behind the desk. When Rhoda started walking over to her, the woman told Rhoda to sit down and wait, not allowing Rhoda even to reach the desk before sending her away. The woman pointed her finger to the chairs nearby, indicating that Rhoda should sit and wait.
>
> The waiting room was quite empty. A boy of maybe 8 or 9 sat wrapped in a big blanket with a surgical mask on his face. A man and woman sat with him. Rhoda walked toward the chairs, following the employee's directions, but stopped and turned around before we reached the seats. She went back to the woman behind the counter. "We need lab," she said to the woman.
>
> Woman: "Oh, you need the lab?"
>
> Rhoda: "Yeah."
>
> Woman: "Have a seat." [Pointing to the chair right in front of her.]
>
> Rhoda sat down in the chair on the other side of the registration desk, and I stood behind her. When the woman sat down at her computer opposite Rhoda, Rhoda reached into her purse and handed her the lab slip she'd brought with her. After turning over the lab slip, Rhoda looked down,

[8] by Hana Brown

staring at her feet. The woman did some typing, barely acknowledging Rhoda.

Woman: "What is Lambert's birthday?"

Rhoda (hesitating at the question and then turning to look at me): "Hana, help me. 2004?"

Me: "October...2004...I don't remember the day. I forgot my paperwork today."

Woman: "That's okay. I've found it. October 28, 2004." [The woman continued typing.]

Woman: "Do you know why Lambert needs the lab work?"

[She doesn't look up at Rhoda while she fills in these answers. She just stares at her computer screen.]

Rhoda: "Yes."

[Silence. The nurse looks up and stares at Rhoda waiting for her to explain.]

Woman: "Why?"

[Rhoda shrugs. More silence, the woman keeps typing.]

[After a minute Rhoda turns to me, looking me in the eye.]

Rhoda: "Hana, tell her about Lambert. Tell her he had liver"

[I waited a moment for Rhoda to finish her sentence, but she didnt keep going. She just looked definitively at me.]

Me: "About the operation?"

Rhoda: "Yes. So that's why he needs to draw blood."

[I turned to the woman.]

Me: "She says that her son had a liver transplant a few months ago. He comes in regularly for blood work just to make sure everything is okay."

Woman: "Oh, okay." [Smiling briefly at me and then returning to her computer.]

The woman handed Rhoda some paperwork and a blue card. Rhoda stood up and turned so that her body was perpendicular to the woman. The woman reached down and pulled out a medical bracelet. She put it around the boys ankle. Rhoda thanked the woman and we walked away. The woman did not reply.

Part of an Interview Guide[9]

Research Question: What prompted parents to choose a foreign language immersion school as an option for their children?

1. Why don't we start with you telling me a bit about your family. [Depending on the answer, probe for more information with the following questions.]

[9] by Hannah Emery

- Who lives in your household?
- What kinds of schools did you attend? Where?
- What about your partner? Where did they attend school?
- How long have you lived in the Bay Area? Have you lived elsewhere?
- Did the adults in your family grow up speaking a second language?
- What languages are spoken in your home now?
- Do all the children in your family attend the same school?
- Have any of your children ever attended a different school?
- Do you/your partner work outside the home?

2. When did you first hear about the idea of immersion schools?
    - Did you go looking for information? Or was it presented to you?
    - What were your first thoughts or impressions?
    - What appealed to you most about the idea of an immersion school?
    - What were you hoping your child would get out of this experience?
3. How did you decide to send your child to this school in particular?
    - What other schools did you consider?
    - How did you rank them?
    - How did you learn about the school?
    - Can you walk me through your decision-making process? (Did you attend open houses at various schools, research different kinds of bilingual education, eliminate certain kinds of schools right from the start?)
    - What were the most important factors you considered in making your choice? (Languages taught, public vs. private, etc?)
    - Who was involved in the process of deciding where to send your child?
4. What were your child's first impressions of the school?
    - Did your child have much input into the decision?
    - What contact had s/he had with the language before?
    - Describe your child's first day at school.
    - What did you think of your child's first teacher? What were your impressions of the classroom?
    - How did the first day go for your child? Did s/he come home frustrated? Did s/he seem interested?
5. Have you gotten any negative feedback about your immersion school decision? From whom?

- Are there any questions or concerns that are always raised with regards to your child's being in an immersion school (they won't learn English, they will learn more slowly, etc.)
- How do you bypass these objections?

6. Why do you think it is important for your child to learn a second language?
   - What kinds of benefits do you think bilingualism brings to your child?
   - What kinds of benefits come from knowing this language in particular?
   - Would you still want your child to become bilingual if s/he was learning a different language?
   - If given the opportunity, would you send your child to this school again?
   - What would you change about the program?

Research Paper Outlines

Organizing a Research Paper[10]

Introduction
In your introduction you set up your problem, research question, or puzzle. Feel free to create suspense! You then state why you think addressing this problem, answering this question, or resolving this puzzle is important. Scholars often do this often by telling the reader what the larger implications might be. In other words, if the reader asked the question "So what?", you would provide a compelling answer and encourage her to keep reading.

Literature Review
In the literature review, you relate your study to other studies on your topic. There are several ways to organize a literature review. Here are two common strategies:

- You might argue that the research on your topic can be grouped into two categories. One set of studies focuses on X, and the other on Y, but neither accounts for your variable: Z. By now, you have convinced us that variable Z is very important and needs explaining. So your study is building on or expanding on past studies.

- Or, you might argue that the dominant/accepted theory for explaining your case does not adequately explain your findings. You summarize the relevant studies, showing that if the dominant theory was correct, you would expect to find result A—but you have result B. How can we explain finding B? You have now set up a puzzle and built up suspense for the

[10]by Cinzia Solari

answer! So your study is modifying existing theories or alerting scholars that a social fact that has been universally accepted should instead be questioned.

Context

Sometimes you have a research question that is interesting and understandable to other scholars in the field, but the case you use to illustrate your answer is unfamiliar. You need to provide your reader with background information that contextualizes the case you are using to answer your research question. For example, you might have a research paper with the following puzzle: "Studies show that men and women do caring labor differently. Women caregivers provide more hands-on care and do more emotional labor than men caregivers. In this study of immigrant careworkers from the former Soviet Union in San Francisco, I found the opposite to be true." In order for the reader to understand this case, the author will need to tell the reader something about immigrants from the former Soviet Union to San Francisco. How many people are we talking about? Who are they? Why do they come to San Francisco? Equally importantly, the author will have to explain what caring norms are like in the home countries compared to the United States.

In this section you might also suggest why your case is a good one for finding the answer to your question. For example, the author will have to explain why one should look at immigrants from the former Soviet Union in order to add to our understanding of gender differences in paid caring labor.

Data & Methods

In this section, you lay out what you actually did to answer your research question and why you did it that way. If you did interviews, you must tell the reader who you interviewed (age, gender, occupation, etc.), and why you chose them as opposed to people with different characteristics. If you did textual analysis, you must explain how you choose the texts that were included in your data set. If you did statistical research, you must explain why you choose one data set as opposed to another. Here you can also let the reader know the limitations to your project. For example, was your data set missing some important variables? Do you think the information you got from your informants was biased because of their perceptions of who you are? Don't get overwhelmed by the limitations, however! If you are confident in your results—and by now you have done enough thinking that you should be confident that your interpretation of the data is correct—you need to let the reader know why, despite limitations, your results should be trusted. Convince the reader she should keep on reading to learn the details of what you discovered.

Findings

In this section, you lay out what you actually found. This is where you discuss your evidence to convince the reader that you have solved the problem, answered the research question, or resolved the puzzle you set out in the introduction. In other words, you provide proof that your interpretation of data is correct. You must cite evidence from your research. If you did field research, you will report what people said or what you observed. If you did a textual analysis you will cite your texts. If you did statistical research, you will report the results of your regressions. In your introduction and in your literature review you have quickly told us the answer to your problem/question/puzzle. Here you must show us the answer in a compelling and persuasive way.

One common strategy—by no means the only one—that sociologists use to organize their findings is the presentation and debunking of alternative theories. For example, often you can anticipate that a reader's intuition might expect variable X to answer your question or puzzle. In the example above, about immigrant men and women caregivers, it might be that the puzzle is simply solved by pre-migration occupations. If all the men in the sample were doctors and therefore had extensive training in how to provide care, while the women were all electrical engineers, they would be exceptions to the rule that women do more emotional labor in caregiving than men. If this were the case, the paper would be quite uninteresting. By proposing a counter-hypothesis, making it as convincing as possible, and then showing that the hypothesis is incorrect by revealing some of your data, you build suspense into your writing.

You then present the meat of your data—your argument. It often helps here to divide the discussion of the main findings into subheadings, which help to organize your thoughts. Do not shy away from discussing cases that don't seem to fit. Sociologists often place their data into categories: for example, in the case of the immigrant caregivers, the author argues that informants can be classified into two categories based on how they talked about and performed carework. She calls them "professionals" and "saints." But there might be one or two cases that do not fit the categories you have articulated. Do not be afraid to tackle these cases. Cases that defy categorization often provide important insights to the boundedness and fluidity of the categories you are confident do exist.

Conclusion/Discussion

In this section, you give a full answer to the "So what?" question you addressed briefly in your introduction. Here you "think big," arguing that your findings are generalizable to a larger population or, more likely, that even though your case is not generalizable, it has important implications for sociological theory, public policy, or how we understand the world.

How a Scientific Paper is Organized[11]

This is one recommended format for your paper. You can use others without penalty, provided that the overall organization is logical and you use data to make an argument.

Basic structure

- Introduction
- Data and methods
- Results
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendix (charts, figures)

1. Introduction
    - *State the topic.* What concepts are you looking at?
    - *Motivation.* Why do we care? Acknowledge other people who have worked on your topic, if your idea was sparked by theirs. Give facts about what we think we know so far.
    - *State the hypothesis/thesis.* What relationship do you expect to find?
    - *Preview results* (optional)
2. Data & Methods
    - *What data are you using?*
        - A preexisting source? Which variables are you using, for what time period and population? How many observations does the source include?
        - Your own survey? Give basic descriptive stats of your population, and describe your questionnaire and data collection process. Include your survey instrument in an appendix.
    - *Why did you choose these data?* If it is a case study, why is it interesting? If it is a comparison, what were your selection criteria? What makes the comparison interesting? Did you include everyone, or just a subset of the population?
    - *Define your concepts: what do your variables represent?*

[11] by Jenny Liu, Demography

- *What are you going to do with the data?* Manipulation of variables? What type of analysis are you doing (scatter plot, bar chart, over time, etc.). Don't use regressions if you don't understand how they work. If you use an online table generator, describe what parameters you entered to get the results you did.

3. Results

   - *For each graph/table/chart, state clearly IN WORDS what your analysis shows:* Refer to figure numbers in order, and lay out the observed relationship. Use the variable names, not the concepts.
   - *For each chart, interpret your results.* What does the observed relationship say about your research question? Relate your variables back to concepts.
   - *Be careful about causation.*
   - *What are the limits of your analysis?* Selection bias or representativeness? Factors that need to be controlled for? Reverse causality? Measurement problems?
   - *Omitted variables:* Are there other factors that could be causing the results you see?

4. Conclusions

   - *Summarize your findings (briefly!)*
   - *Be skeptical! Review your limitations.*
   - *Mention potential avenues for further research.* If you had more time/money/resources, what other kinds of analysis would you do?

5. References: COMPLETELY cite everything (including data sources).

6. Appendix

   - Number all your figures
   - Place them in the order that you talk about them in the paper
   - Completely LABEL everything
   - Don't include a chart that is not discussed somewhere in the paper

Chapter 7 Appendix

Sample Rubrics

See the rubric created by Mary Kelsey for Soc 3AC on the GSI resources web site.[12] Here is another, created by Alan Karras, used for the honors course he teaches in International and Area Studies (Alan's project is also supported by the Spencer and Teagle Foundations). The first is for advisors; the second is for students to evaluate themselves.

[12] http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/grading/rubricsSteps.html

Final evaluation of thesis by Faculty Advisors

Table 8.5: **Completed by Faculty Advisor**

Student's Name:				
Date:				
Thesis Title:				
Research Supervisor:				
Analysis and Argument	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
1. Does the thesis make a compelling argument for the significance of the student's research within the context of current knowledge and literature?				
2. Is the literature review (and/or discussion of the literature) accurate and complete?				
3. Is the data analysis appropriate and accurate?				
4. Does the thesis skillfully interpret the results of the research?				
5. Is there a compelling discussion of the implications and significance of the findings?				
6. Comment on the analysis and argument in this thesis:				
Research, Sources, and Evidence	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
7. Does the thesis represent the students original research?				
8. Are the methods appropriate, given the students research agenda?				

9. Are the primary sources that the student used appropriate, given the students research agenda?				
10. Comment on the research, sources, and evidence used in this thesis:				
Writing and Organization	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
11. Is the writing appropriate for the target audience?				
12. Does the thesis clearly articulate the students research goals?				
13. Is the thesis clearly organized?				
14. Is the thesis free of writing errors?				
15. Are the citations presented consistently and professionally throughout the text and in the list of works cited?				
16. Are the tables and figures clear, effective, and informative?				
17. Comment on the writing and organization of the thesis:				

Please indicate the suggested grade for the thesis:..........

(IAS policy is that the thesis grade from the faculty advisor will count for a maximum of 40% of the students course grade.) Please indicate the level of honors for which you would recommend this student.
(L&S policy determines the GPA break points for each level of honors. Your assessment is an important supporting piece of evidence that allows IAS to request either a higher or lower level of honors than would otherwise be awarded.)

............Honors
............High Honors
............Highest Honors

Additional Comments:

Signature:..

Table 8.6: **Final Self-Evaluation of Thesis**

Student's Name:				
Date:				
Thesis Title:				
Research Supervisor:				
Analysis and Argument	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
1. Does the thesis make a compelling argument for the significance of the student's research within the context of current knowledge and literature?				
2. Is the literature review (and/or discussion of the literature) accurate and complete?				
3. Is the data analysis appropriate and accurate?				
4. Does the thesis skillfully interpret the results of the research?				
5. Is there a compelling discussion of the implications and significance of the findings?				
6. Comment on the analysis and argument in this thesis:				
Research, Sources, and Evidence	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
7. Does the thesis represent the students original research?				
8. Are the methods appropriate, given the students research agenda?				
9. Are the primary sources that the student used appropriate, given the students research agenda?				

10. Comment on the research, sources, and evidence used in this thesis:				
Writing and Organization	**Unable to assess**	**No**	**Some-what**	**Yes**
11. Is the writing appropriate for the target audience?				
12. Does the thesis clearly articulate the students research goals?				
13. Is the thesis clearly organized?				
14. Is the thesis free of writing errors?				
15. Are the citations presented consistently and professionally throughout the text and in the list of works cited?				
16. Are the tables and figures clear, effective, and informative?				
17. Comment on the writing and organization of the thesis:				

Please indicate the suggested grade for the thesis:..........

Additional Comments: