

GUIDE FOR WRITING AND PRESENTING COURSE ESSAYS¹

These guidelines are prepared for supporting students in sufficient preparations of writing assignments in the framework of seminars offered at Women's and Gender Studies, Institute for Sociology, Goethe University, and Frankfurt.

1. General essay guidance

An essay should present a well-organized argument that responds to a set question. It should include a review and discussion of relevant literature and should also present an argument from your own perspective. Aim to convince the reader that your angle on the topic is valid, but make sure you demonstrate knowledge of other possible approaches.

a. The Introduction

You should begin with an introduction setting out the issue(s) to be discussed and tell the reader what your general approach will be. Avoid wasting space on definitions unless a particular question requires them. Make a clear argument and proceed from one point to the next so that the narrative builds on what went before.

b. The main body of the essay

Tell the reader where a line of reasoning you refer to is helpful or flawed and, using your own judgment and the work of previous commentators, explain why. Keep the essay focused on the argument and avoid meandering. Critique is appropriate in an essay but unsubstantiated, moralistic and generalized polemic is not. You might want to use subheadings to provide structure to the essay and guidance for the reader. Make the sections build on each other. Your essay should have a clear and succinct conclusion

Keep your essay simple and clear. Avoid padding, such as, 'In this section it will be judicious for the author to consider the effect of such theories upon social anthropology of the 1960s as following'. Look at each of your sentences. Change those you can from passive into active voice. Get rid of anything unnecessary. Do not use ten words when five will do, especially when the extra five words are things like 'it would seem logical to assert perhaps that'.

c. Conclusion

A conclusion can be a summary of your text as long as it does not merely repeat points you have made in the essay. Ideally, it should bring together your examples and argument in an analysis of what you have discovered and what is interesting about the topic.

d. Bad sentences

Many people argue that structural functionalism neglects history. (Who? When? What is the evidence for their criticism? Is it well founded? Can you provide any criticisms of / support for this argument from your reading?) I think that he was wrong / he was right. (Explicitly stating opinions in this way is clunky, especially if they are not supported by any further argument. The reader should be able to track your opinion throughout an essay in the way that you employ your material to advance an argument.) Replace with 'This argument has several

¹ This is its adjusted version of the guidelines designed for the purposes of the seminar "Encountering Gender and Religion - theoretical and methodological implications", SS 2015, organized by Marija Grujic and Safet HadziMuhamedovic. Safet HadziMuhamedovic is responsible for the original version of this text.

flaws', or, better, 'As Levi Strauss has argued, this argument has several flaws (1969: 16)'. Then go on to describe in precise terms exactly what those limitations are. Structural functionalists neglected to consider the meaning behind social structure. (Which ones? All of them? Assess the evidence put forward to support this criticism Structural functionalists saw society as a holistic system. (All of them? All the time?) Anthropologists believe that people are rational. (Do they all mean the same thing?) Apes should have rights because humans and chimpanzees are over 98% genetically identical. (Is this figure contested? What does it mean to be 98% genetically similar? How have different anthropologists interpreted this suggestion? What is the relationship between genetic similarity and the attribution of rights?) Statements of these kinds are either truisms (all humans breathe air) or contested (all humans are capable of kindness), and should be argued for in relation to specific ethnographic and theoretical examples.

e. Quotations

Quotes of fewer than fifty words should be contained within inverted commas in the text. If a quote is more than fifty words long you should separate quoted text from the body of your text and indented from the left-hand margin. In this case you do not need to use quotation marks.

f. Footnotes and Endnotes

Footnotes may be used for points of amplification, but are not generally necessary. Endnotes are discouraged. Read your footnotes several times before submitting your essay. Ask yourself the following: Is this really necessary to add here? If I find it so important, how come it is not in the main body of my essay? Try to shorten the text in the footnotes, leave only necessary information.

g. Proof reading

You should proof read every piece of work you write before you submit it. Spelling errors are distracting for the reader. Misspelling authors' names is particularly off putting. Proof reading will also support you in editing your text. Use a white paper sheet to cover the text, ready one by one sentence with focusing only on that line.

2. References

Sources listed in the reading list will provide good starting points, but you may introduce other material. You may locate further references through bibliographies in articles and books that you already have, through browsing relevant journals, through library catalogues, or through searching the web. Bear in mind that material on the web is very uneven in quality: you need to make judgements as to whether data are likely to be accurate, and whether interpretations are justifiable or opinionated. In any event, cite your web sources. In order to be clear and professional, you should cite and list your sources in a standardized way.

Useful Links (in German):

Goethe University Writing Center: <https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/43422007/studierende>

Instructions for Referencing (prepared by Prof.Lutz's team) http://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/51294511/Hinweise_zum_Zitieren.pdf

The Bibliography

Full references should be consolidated in a bibliography at the end of your essay, not in the form of endnotes. It should be in alphabetical order by author and should include all and only those works cited. It is important that you include all the information for a reference, and not only date, author and title.

Useful Links:

Tutorial on Harvard Referencing Style

<https://ilrb.cf.ac.uk/citingreferences/tutorial/theexamples.html>

In German:

<http://www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/52367685/Leitfaden-Expose-141013.pdf> (see pages 16-17)

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's thoughts or words as though they were your own - must be avoided, with particular care in course-work and essays and reports written in your own time. Direct quotations from the published or unpublished work of others must always be clearly identified as such by being placed inside quotation marks, and a full reference to their source must be provided in the proper form. A series of short quotations from several different sources, if not clearly identified as such, constitutes plagiarism just as much as a single unacknowledged long quotation from a single source. Equally, if you summarise another person's ideas or judgements, you must refer to that person in your text, and include the work referred to in your bibliography. Unless specifically agreed and deemed as a collaborative project by all parties, sharing work with other students will be regarded as plagiarism on the part of both the recipient and the originator.