

## Writing in Sociology

### Language and Conventions:

- In general, it's useful to think about language as a means to convey ideas (as opposed to language as the main event, as in a close reading for an English class). Use direct quotations only if you can't restate the idea in your own words!
- Get right to the point: no need for a "throughout human history" introduction
- Cut out fluff, make it concise! Summarize authors' arguments as briefly as possible before incorporating them into your own argument
  - For example, "to" works just as well as "in order to"
  - Example of a "fluffy" sentence: "Considering the case of Disabled people in the context of Taylor's work elucidates the fact that if disability is to become something else—that is, impairment—this taxing process must occur vis-a-vis body work."
  - Example of "fluffless" sentence: "Taylor contends that Disabled people must perform taxing body work in order to resolve their disability into impairment."
- First person isn't taboo, so long as its purpose is to acknowledge your position as a scholar (rather than to assert your own unsubstantiated opinion)
  - ex) "I conducted 25 interviews" works, "I think [x]" doesn't work so well

### Structure:

- Your first sentence can introduce the arguments and authors you'll be using
- It's often helpful to include a road map at the end of first paragraph for shorter paper, or as short second paragraph for longer paper. Start with your thesis, and then run quickly through each step of your argument, ending with the conclusion. This can be in first person: "In the following paper, I argue \_\_\_\_\_. First, I introduce..., then I analyze...finally, I conclude..."
- After your intro paragraph/road map, it's often helpful to write a paragraph that (a) introduces your theoretical framework and (b) defines important terms
  - (a) "I explore the topic of [x] through Marx's theory of dialectical materialism, which argues..."
  - (b) "In the following paper, [x] refers to [definition]." Indicate here whether these definitions are your own or come from an author you've read!
    - Defining a term the first time you use it is a great way to make sure you and your reader are using a common language. One rule of thumb is to define terms that a fellow student who has not taken the course you're writing for would not know.
- One way to approach topic sentences (the first sentence of each paragraph) is to match them to the road map (in slightly different language - this can be a declarative third-person statement rather than an "I" statement of intent)

- A topic sentence is usually an explicit, argumentative statement that sums up the central point of your paragraph, relating it to the broader argument.
- You can ask yourself, “If my reader only read this sentence, would they understand the paragraph’s main idea?”
- To see if it is argumentative, ask yourself, “Could someone reasonably disagree with this statement?” If the topic sentence is not debatable (For example, “People find community in different ways”), then you might want to make it more specific or take a stronger stance.
- Ideally, your topic sentences can be strung together to make a coherent summary of your argument. Try putting them together in a “reverse outline” and reading them out loud.
  - This can help you determine whether you’re trying to cover too much. A persuasive simple argument is better than a chaotic complex one!
- In your conclusion, restate your main argument, and maybe do a little retroactive road map too (can be shorter than the original one: “in this paper, I argued...”). A “so what” is good, but don’t let it get too broad! Don’t worry about the implications for all of humanity. What policy might your argument inform? How does your argument impact how we should read certain texts? What other argument does your claim discredit?

### **Citations:**

- There’s no need to write the title of the book/article/work you’re citing, you can just use the author’s name. The full citation is already in your bibliography.
- The first time you mention an author, include the year in parentheses
  - ex) “Marx (1867) argues...”
  - After that, you can just use the author’s name
- In the Haverford sociology department, you can always use conversations, or class notes, as evidence - just make sure you cite it, because it’s outside material
  - This could look like (Class discussion, DATE) / (Conversation with Professor McKeever, DATE)
- In the Haverford department, you can use your own words as many times as you want (presuming they aren’t published) - “self-plagiarism” isn’t a thing!
  - This may vary outside the department, you can always ask your professor
- Sociology uses ASA style for citations. The Purdue OWL has a great [citation guide](#). Remember to use autocite tools (like on JSTOR and in Tripod) to make your life easier—and look in your syllabus for course-specific information about format and citations!

*Compiled spring 2021 by Lizy Szanton in consultation with Fiona Kegler & Professors Matt McKeever & Shelly Ronen*