

Sociology155b
Foundations in Social Theory

Mark Gould
Spring, 1991

Guidelines for Student Critiques of Student Papers*

The main purpose for criticizing your classmate's essay is to help her revise it to more effectively construct and communicate her argument. The process of writing your critique should also help *you* better understand how to construct and communicate a cogent and interesting argument in your own essays.

1. Read the paper once from beginning to end.
2. Read it a second time. Does the author clearly indicate the paper's content (and, perhaps, its argument) in the introductory paragraph(s)? If not, suggest how this might be accomplished.
3. Write down what you see as the writer's thesis, the argument she is endeavoring to construct. Is this argument clearly expressed in the essay?
4. List those arguments that you think are especially persuasive and note those parts of the argument that you think are most cogently expressed. List elements of the argument that need to be rethought and aspects of the presentation that you think are ill-articulated.
5. Do the points expressed follow from, build on, each other? Are they in a logical order throughout the paper? If not, what and where are the problems.
6. Are there spelling and punctuation errors? Are pronoun references clear? Is each sentence grammatically correct? Do the sentences follow one from another? Do they read smoothly? Point out specific problems.
7. Are the paragraphs coherent? Does each paragraph have a main point and does each stick to the point? Note specific problems.
8. Does the conclusion adequately summarize the paper's argument and the reasons the author adduces for and against her argument?
9. Note what is good and effective in the essay. Indicate where and how you think the author has misunderstood the issues under analysis. Suggest specific changes.
10. Are all citations clear? Does the list of references follow the correct format?
11. How could the paper be improved?
12. Note spelling, grammatical and other minor changes on the paper itself; your comments on the argument, organization, style and etc. should be written on a separate piece of paper.

Your critique will not affect the grade your classmate receives for her paper, except insofar as it enables her to write a better final version. It *will* count as part of your own work for the course. Your classmate will turn in the critique along with the draft and final versions of her essay.

*These Guidelines are loosely adapted from those prepared for Anthropology 104-A, Fall, 1983, U Mass, by Professor Forman, and come from a packet prepared by Professor Margo Soven, La Salle University.