

# Discipline-Specific Writing Guide: Social Work

## Emphasized Writing Skills

**Reflection, application of concepts** to practice situations or own life, and **assessment or evaluation** are the most emphasized writing skills within the social work program. Common assignments include observations and interviews, response papers, literature reviews, and essay exams.

## Some Key Questions to Guide Writing

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## Patterns of Organization and Use of Headings

Depending on the assignment, social work papers may be organized into **introduction, body, and conclusion** sections. These papers are typically **organized by topics**, which may be identified with **descriptive section headers** following APA guidelines. Some papers, including the MSW Clinical Research papers, are organized into standard social science sections: **introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion**, and **conclusion**

## Preferred Style or Tone

- Reflection papers may use first-person, but should still be fairly formal. Journals may be very informal, depending on the assignment requirements.
- Formal papers should be professional and fairly impersonal.
- APA writers should use the **active voice** and only sparingly use first-person, if necessary, but should be careful that first-person statements do not interfere with their objectivity.
- All papers should be written in gender fair language.
- **Previous research** should be discussed in **past** or **present perfect tense** (*have/has + verb form*, e.g., “Smith’s study *has changed* perceptions”).
- **Results** should be discussed in **present tense** (e.g. “the results of the experiment indicate that”).

## **Important Notes about Terminology**

### **Favored Research Methodologies**

Library research in the form of literature reviews, as well as both qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed by social workers.

### **Authoritative Sources/Evidence**

Social work is moving towards evidence-based practice, relying on **empirical research** to inform practice. **Scholarly articles** written **by social workers** and reported in **peer-reviewed journals** are considered to be the most authoritative sources in social work. Best practice articles, interviews with social work practitioners, and peer-reviewed articles describing research conducted in other relevant fields are also recognized.

### **Documentation Style**

APA (American Psychological Association)

### **Master's Level Writing**

*Samples of social work assignments are available for review in the Writing Center.*