

Discipline-Specific Writing Guide: Sociology

Emphasized Writing Skills and Typical Assignments

Sociology emphasizes **critical analysis** of social issues. This includes **clear description** of a social issue and the sociological principles involved, often including analysis of real or theorized solutions. **Reflection, observation, and synthesis** are key skills for sociology students, who may need to connect sociological ideas to personal experience or observation. Assignments vary, and critical analysis manifests differently in the different sociology courses. Some typical assignments are:

- Reflections (Intro)
- Journals (Intro)
- Textual analysis (Social Theory)
- Literature Review (Research Methods)
- Essay Exams (any)
- Ethnographies (Anthropology)

Some Key Questions to Guide Writing

Sociologists examine a variety of issues related to human behavior. They look for causes and effects of individual, group, and societal behaviors. The focus may be on structure, division, social movements, or other topics, but some basic questions include the following:

- How do individuals interact with each other within society?
- How do groups interact with each other within society?
- How do individuals, groups, and institutions interact within society?
- What causes these interactions?
- How do individuals, groups, and societies influence each other?
- Why and how does social change occur?

Patterns of Organization and Use of Headings

Critical analyses follow the introduction, body, and conclusion format. The body is typically organized in three main sections:

- description of the social or theoretical problem
- description of the sociological principles illuminating the problem
- reconciliation or synthesis of solutions.

Research reports include standard social science sections:

- introduction
- lit. review
- hypothesis
- methods
- results
- discussion
- conclusion

Preferred Style or Tone

While the reflections written in the intro class may be personal and informal, sociology papers should be **formal and relatively impersonal**.

Important Notes about Terminology

Sociologists typically refer to the people they study as "informants," not "subjects." Results of these studies do not "prove" or "disprove." In Fogarty's words, "There is no 'prove/disprove' except in math," so students should use non-mathematical language, such as "indicate." Students may want to avoid use of the terms "subjective" and "objective," since these are disputed in sociology.

Favored Research Methodologies and Authoritative Sources/Evidence

Qualitative and quantitative, ethnographic, and experimental investigations are all respected evidence, as are historical sources.

Documentation Style

ASA (American Sociological Association)

Samples of sociology assignments are available for review in the Writing Center.