

Essay Structure and Citation Guidelines

What comprises a logically constructed essay? In general, good essays have a clear, overarching argument that is developed and substantiated in the body of the paper. Sub-themes need to be related in some way to the main argument and you need to make the connections between sub-themes clear. By the conclusion, the reader should have a new perspective on the topic at hand.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

Introduction (Theme and Thesis)

The most important functions of the introduction are to introduce your topic and to present your position on the relevant issues of the topic. The essay questions give you the **topic** or **theme** for your paper (in this case, evidence that class inequality affects the quality of public education offered our children). Your particular position on the topic should be expressed as broadly-stated argument or **thesis statement**. For example, "In this paper I will show how education is not always 'the great leveler' of inherited class differences, but opens opportunities for some while closing opportunities for others." Or, "In this essay, I will explore how educational institutions can either create or take away opportunities from their students. I will argue that in the absence of a class-based understanding of education inequality, we as a society will continue to see success in individualized terms." Notice that the second example has two sentences. Your argument should be brief, but it doesn't have to fit into a single sentence. If you are not sure whether you have an overarching argument, try inserting this phrase--"In this paper I will argue that"--before the sentence that you think is your thesis statement.

If you don't have a clearly formulated argument when you begin your paper, relax. Many scholars begin their work with only a vague conception of their main argument. Jot down an idea on what you think you will argue in the paper, and start on the body of your draft. Once the essay is in draft form, you can rewrite your introduction with a clearer formulation of your position. While it is not necessary to do so in this assignment, scholars often finish their introductions with a brief overview of the paper. This part of the introduction is also easier to write once you have a draft of your entire essay.

A word of caution: you might be tempted to use your own experience as the basis for your argument about class structure and schools. As sociologists, we are looking for **general** patterns. There are always individual exceptions to any general pattern, but individual exceptions are not sufficient to support generally applied conclusions. Therefore, if you want to write about your school experience as "exceptional," make sure you acknowledge the general social trends. For example, "Although most sociological evidence documents a correlation between poor communities and less effective public schools, a well-organized poor community can lobby for and often get meaningful educational reforms."

Body

For the purposes of this essay, you don't need to have formal subsections in the body of the paper, but you might want to organize your writings so that you move from a brief review of relevant points in the readings to your analysis of the material. For example, the reader should clearly understand what sociologists mean by the term "class" and how it is

measured. You might also want to introduce some ideas from the readings on the relationship between class and education. The data/statistics you use from your worksheet will have more meaning if you create an interpretive context for your data.

As you reread your draft, make sure that the paragraphs in the body of the paper are in some way related to the main argument. And, when you change topics, make sure to use transitional sentences that clarify the link(s) between your new subject and old.

Conclusion

By the conclusion of the essay, the reader should have more or new insight into the topic at hand. An unwritten rule of conclusions is that they shouldn't include radically new material. While your conclusion should re-emphasize the most important argument of your paper in a clearly stated manner, you can enhance the sense of completion if you return to a major idea—now in more nuanced form—initially presented in the introduction.

OTHER CONCERNS

Collaboration vs. cheating

You will be asked to work with people in small groups. I ask that you work with peers in order to exchange ideas and experiences, help each other clarify key concepts, and in general make the process of writing an essay more fun. You may create some common ideas for your essays, but it is **very important that you write your essays in your own words**. If we find essays that have identical sentences (including identical sentences in different order), we will consider the identical sentences as evidence of cheating and mark down your grade accordingly.

Definitions

It is always a good practice to define a discipline-specific term (e.g., “cultural capital” or “socioeconomic status”) the first time you use it in your essay.

Grammar note: I find that some students still confuse “it’s” and “its.” If you use the apostrophe, you are writing a contraction for “it is.” Since we avoid contractions in formal writing, spell out “it is” if this meaning is appropriate. If you mean the possessive form of the pronoun “it” the correct form is “its”—with no apostrophe (e.g., *Each* school in the study had *its* own additional measures to assess student achievement). By all means, use spell check (and even grammar check) before you turn in your final draft. In either case, there should be no “it’s” in your final paper—only “it is” or “its.”

CITATIONS

If you use direct quotes in your text (a good idea), make sure you cite the author(s), year of publication. Include page number when you quote directly from the work or refer to specific passages.

Note, **if you are using material from the course reader**, cite the name of the actual author (available from the syllabus as well as the table of contents in the reader) and the year of publication (available from the table of contents of your reader). Use the original page number from which the quote was taken rather than the stamped page number of the course reader.

Citing quotations in the text

Quotations in the text (where the quote is four lines or less) begin and end with quotation marks.

Example one: If author's name is in the text, follow it with the publication year in parentheses. The beginning and end of the quote is enclosed in quotation marks. The page number(s) is placed at the end of the quote—outside the closing quotation mark and preceding the period.

In her study of childrearing patterns and social class, Lareau (2003) argued "white and Black middle class children in this study exhibited an emergent version of the sense of entitlement characteristic of the middle class. They acted as though they had a right to pursue their own individual preferences" (p. 6).

Example two: If the author's name is not in the text, enclose the last name and year of publication in parentheses at the end of the sentence. The page number follows the year of publication after a colon. Note that there are no spaces between the date, colon, and page number.

One study found middle class black and white children both shared "an emergent version of the sense of entitlement characteristic of the middle class. They acted as though they had a right to pursue their own individual preferences" (Lareau 2003:6).

Block quotations

Block quotations (for quotes longer than four lines) are presented in smaller type and are set off in a separate, indented paragraph. They are not enclosed in quotation marks.

Example one: If author's name is in the text, follow it with the publication year in parentheses. The "P" for "page" is capitalized when the page number is cited alone without author and date in formation, as in the example below.

As stated by Lareau (2003):

Educators believe parents should take a leadership role in solving their children's educational problems. They complain about parents who do not take children problems "seriously" enough to initiate contact with educators. In short educators want contradictory behaviors from parents: deference and support, but also assertive leadership when children had educational problems. (P. 27)

Example two: If the author's name is not used in the text, then the author's name, year of publication and page number follows the period in a block quote.

Some scholars noted teachers' inconsistent expectations of parents:

Educators believe parents should take a leadership role in solving their children's educational problems. They complain about parents who do not take children problems "seriously" enough to initiate contact with educators. In short educators want contradictory behaviors from parents: deference and support, but also assertive leadership when children had educational problems. (Lareau 2003:27)

Key idea citations

You should also give credit to an author if you paraphrase a key idea associated with a particular author. Like direct quotes, you should cite the author's name and the date of publication. You may want to include a page number (see example three) if you are citing very specific ideas, definitions or data.

Example one: If author's name is part of your sentence, follow it with the publication year in parentheses

In her study of childrearing patterns and social class, Lareau (2003) argued that class differences were far more significant than racial differences as a predictor of family interactions and attitudes of parents toward children.

Example two: If the author's name is not part of the sentence, enclose the author's name and date of relevant publication in parentheses. This method is often used when two or more authors make the same point. If citing two or more sources, use a semi-colon to separate your sources.

Several scholars have concluded that class differences were far more significant than racial differences as a predictor of family interactions and attitudes of parents toward children (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003).

Example three: If you are paraphrasing a very specific idea (as opposed to a general argument) from an author or are giving statistical information, include the page number where the idea is spelled out or the data is displayed. The page number should follow the year of publication after a colon:

The New York City public school district spends about \$8,000 per student each year, but spending on students in Mott Haven—the city's poorest neighborhood—drops to about \$5,000 per capita (Kozol 2000: 45).

Miscellaneous

If you are referring to lecture material, include the name of the lecturer, the fact that it came from a lecture and the date of the lecture, e.g., (Kelsey, lect. 11/27/01).

In general essays include a "Work Cited" page that gives bibliographic information about the source of the material that you cited in your text. It is **not** necessary to attach a Works Cited page to this essay unless you refer to material not assigned in the course readings. See the ASA Style Guide handout on the course web site for information on how to format a Work Cited page.