

## STUDENT GUIDE TO WRITING AN ANTHROPOLOGY TERM PAPER

Our motto (aside from "Get comfortable,") is:



### **Say what you are going to do; do it; say what you have done**

We know it's an old cliché; we know it doesn't allow the creative juices to flow; but we think you need to learn to walk before you can run (speaking of old clichés), so we want you to start simple; besides, what the motto means in practice is not as simple as it sounds. Here is what it should mean:

1. Your paper should have a title that creatively conveys the subject of your paper (subheadings throughout the paper also help improve its organization).
2. Your paper should include an introduction that organizes the paper and guides the reader by explaining what you are going to do (sometimes called a thesis statement). Your paper will be helped if you include in the introduction your objective in writing the paper. Finally, explain how you are going to construct it.
3. The body of the paper is where you support, elaborate on, and evaluate information pertaining to your introductory observation, or point, or claim, or position, or thesis.
4. The conclusion should be a thoughtful, insightful, summary of the way in which the body of your paper illustrated your introduction. In addition, discuss any insights you've gained, meaningful conclusions you've reached, or the significance to you of your topic.
5. Include at the end a "References Cited" bibliographic list of sources used to write the paper.
6. Finally, see that your paper reads well, meaning that it is mechanically correct (check spelling, grammar, punctuation, make sure paragraphs start with topical sentences, etc.) and stylistically smooth, expressive, clear, and succinct (sentences and words well chosen).

The Anthropology Dept. recommends you follow the steps laid out in The Writing Center's guide to writing a longer paper which has been included below. Please use it and the Center for help in carrying out your writing assignments.

## THE WRITING CENTER

is located at Waldo 123 telephone (737-5640).

**Or better yet, go to their web site:**



### WRITING A LONGER PAPER

Here are some tips if you are asked to write a paper longer than five pages, have more than a week to develop the paper, and are not writing a formal technical report.

#### Step One: Choose a Topic

Sometimes you won't have any choice; your topic will simply be part of the assignment (if that's the case, go on to Step Two). If you do have a choice, begin by identifying at least three directions your writing could take. Jot down on a piece of paper, I could write on \_\_\_\_\_ or, I could write on \_\_\_\_\_, or I could write on \_\_\_\_\_. Then use a phrase or sentence to fill in the blanks. If it seems easier, try identifying three questions you have as you think of the subject area. Once you have three possibilities, consider these sorts of questions in order to make a decision:

- which topic interests you the most?
- which will require the most research (and will sources be available)?
- which topic are you willing to devote your time to?

Taking time with these questions will reduce the chances that you'll have to switch to a new topic later. If you're really stuck, don't procrastinate--talk to your instructor. Remember that Writing Center assistants are adept at helping you with this kind of brainstorming. Call us at 737-5640.

#### Step Two: Determine What you Know and What You Need to Know

Some writers will actually try to outline (or forecast) a paper at this stage, and that may work if you already know a lot about your topic. More likely you will have some large or small gaps in your knowledge. Use a sheet of paper folded down the middle. Open it flat, and on one side sketch what you already know. Use the other side to list questions you still need to answer.

#### Step Three: Do the Research

Use your list of questions from Step Two as a way of focusing your library work. Remember to record the necessary information for your bibliography (title, author, publication, publisher, place of publication, date, page number). Consider the possibility of an interview or two as a way to obtain more recent information. Talk to your instructor; talk to a campus or community authority on your topic; make email contacts. Face-to-face discussion with someone makes a topic literally come alive.

#### Step Four: Write the Rough Draft

You can begin by outlining. You can begin by writing an introduction. You can begin by starting in the middle (i.e. writing up some portion of the paper you know well). But you do need to begin writing. Do not worry about sentence structure or spelling or even paragraphing unless such concerns propel your thought forward. Use the writing to help you think your paper through. Save all your notes and versions. Sentences need not be perfect. If you get stuck at this point, try to

crank out at least a page. Talk with someone about your ideas. Speak with your instructor or talk to a writing assistant in the Writing Center. Bring in your notes and scribbles and seek help to make order out of chaos. For an appointment, call 737-5640.

#### **Step Five: Take a Break**

Work to complete the rough draft, then stop. Do something else. Take a walk or lift weights or watch M-TV. The idea is to set the draft aside so that you can return to it fresh. When you do return to it, you will find that the problems are not as daunting as they appeared earlier.

#### **Step Six: Revise/Add/Delete**

Your rough draft is more or less complete. Now what? Now you need to switch roles and view your draft as your reader might. What explanations need fine-tuning? Does your paper have holes--things that come to mind but have not been written down? Remember, readers can skip some parts, but if something is missing, they will be forced to guess (and will probably not guess correctly). Make sure your introduction does in fact introduce the paper you've written. Many folks will actually wait until this point to write an introduction. Remember that this part of the writing process is probably the most variable. Sometimes you'll find yourself with a very nearly complete and sensible rough draft. Other times, you may have to go back to the research stage and work forward again. Seek an independent reading of your paper from a friend or Writing Center assistant. For thirty minutes or an hour, you and a writing assistant will discuss your draft, identifying its weaknesses and its strengths. Once your draft is pretty much as you want it to be, take another break (if time permits).

#### **Step Seven: Edit**

This is actually a two-step process. Look first at your paper at the paragraph level. Do the paragraphs group information in ways that are helpful to readers? Are the transitions between paragraphs smooth and clear? Once you are satisfied on those counts, concentrate on individual sentences. **One useful thing to do at this point is to read your paper out loud.** Every time a sentence sounds somehow "off" to you, mark that sentence in the margin, and continue reading. Your ear will often tell you when a sentence should be reworded. Don't forget your bibliography. Check the format for consistency and completeness. Once you read the entire paper, go back and rework the places you marked. Though writing assistants will not proofread for you, they will be happy to help you find answers to your questions about grammar or punctuation. If all else fails, consult your style guide

#### **Step Eight: Finish**

Make the final copy. Be sure your name and a page number are on each page. Reward yourself; feel good about what you've written!