



Anthropology Writing Guidelines

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Writing is an essential part of studying social and cultural anthropology, as all courses include written assignments in one form or the other (such as theses, papers, book reviews and exams). Accordingly, students need a good understanding of academic writing conventions and train their writing skills. These guidelines offer a number of insights and requirements.¹ In addition, it is advisable to consult books about academic writing (e.g. Becker 2008; Ghodsee 2016; Harries 2014).

How to structure a paper

In general, a paper has a title page, an introduction, the main body of text (with theory, empirical material and analysis) and a conclusion. In a long text, such as a thesis, a table of contents should be included after the title page. For a relatively short paper this is not needed.

The introduction and conclusion are noticeably shorter than the sections in which you present your theory, data and analyses. The introduction contains the main question you wish to ask. The main body, i.e. the subsequent chapters or sections, is where you present the evidence that provides insights into your question and/or answers to your question. In the conclusion, return to the main question or problem and briefly summarise the results of your analysis.

¹ These guidelines have benefitted from existing guidelines, in particular University of Amsterdam 2015; University of Adelaide n.d.; Johnson n.d.).

Design a logical structure

You can number the chapters and sections, but do not make very detailed subsections (so avoid writing something like ‘section 3.4.2.1’). Start by making a preliminary outline. Make a schematic overview (an outline or a writing plan) with your research question, topics per section, and conclusions. It may help to summarise in a few words what the main content and/or argument will be for each section. Throughout the writing process, ask yourself several questions: is the structure of the text logical, do I make it clear how I arrive at my answer to the main question, does every part of the argument connect with the previous part (or paragraph), and have I brought all the lines of my argument together in the conclusion? Also, from the start think of a title and subheadings. Titles and subheadings have two aims: to indicate what the paper or section is about, and to invite readers to read the paper. The main title often speaks to the imagination, while subtitles can be explanatory.

The argument

Bear in mind that a paper or thesis is almost always an argument: an attempt to prove something and to convince the reader of the arguments you present. This argument is usually factual (e.g. ‘up to the age of 11, girls do better than boys at school’). In addition, you may want to make a judgement (e.g. ‘boys need extra support in reading after the age of 11’) or an evaluation (e.g. ‘more resources are needed to provide appropriate reading materials to improve boys’ reading skills’). In all cases, you will need to substantiate your arguments with evidence. Consider whether there are several arguments that support your position. If they are not equally important you should distinguish between main and secondary arguments or issues.

The references

An argument is built upon the existing body of knowledge and theory. Demonstrate that you know and have read this literature and refer to it throughout your work. It is like engaging in a conversation with those who have written on the topic before: agreeing with them, disagreeing with them, pointing out subtleties they have missed, elaborating on them, as well as showing the reader what conversation you are part of and helping them to find the works you have referred to (in the reference list). Obviously, the number of references depends on the length and nature of your paper, so there is no fixed number – but for a paper of between 6,000 and 9,000 words you should have at least 10 references.

How to structure the introduction

A clear argument starts with an introduction – with a clearly formulated question or problem. Explain why the topic is important, what the purpose of your argument is, and what steps you will take to come to a conclusion about it. References to ongoing debates are also common in the introduction, as scholars usually take up a position themselves within an ongoing debate or in relation to earlier work or other debates (as described in the previous section).

Start the introduction with a catchy opening. There are many possible openings, such as describing something that touched or intrigued you personally, presenting an anecdote, like something from everyday life or the newspaper that touches on your subject, putting forth a provocative proposition, or referring to a theoretical debate. The most important to keep in mind, is to make readers curious and convince them to read the text. After the opening, introduce your argument. This should logically lead to your main question. In the case of a long text, you can then also present the outline of the paper to explain what you intend to do and in what order.

How to structure the main body

In nearly all academic papers the main body includes information about the theory you are using, your explanation of the theory used, your methodology, your ethnographic data, and an analysis of how the data obtained support or contradict the theory. This approach helps you to work out your argument systematically over a number of chapters or sections.

The structure and arguments of the paper derive from the main question presented in the introduction. Often the main question can be subdivided in sub-questions or topics, which must all be addressed in this middle part of the paper. Build your argument cumulatively: each step of the argument should follow logically from the previous step. Lead your readers clearly in and out of each chapter or section. Use subheadings every time you begin a new section with a new topic (use **bold** or *italic* text). The subheading signals that you are moving on to another part of your argument.

A section usually consists of several paragraphs, with each paragraph beginning on a new line. One paragraph usually consists of several sentences. The sections and paragraphs together form an argument. By distinguishing between primary and secondary issues you will minimise the tendency to digress and go off on a tangent. You can digress slightly, but only if it is useful

to your argument. If you wish to make relevant supplementary comments, make (sparse) use of footnotes or endnotes – and place them after the punctuation. To avoid any gaps in your argument, create good transitions from chapter to chapter, from section to section, and from paragraph to paragraph. With the help of bridges (connecting words and sentences) and signposts ('first', 'finally'), you can make they paragraphs and sections hang together more clearly. Ask yourself how each section contributes to your argument. Make sure the various elements of your argument (structured in chapters, sections and paragraphs) are linked to each other in order to form a coherent and elegant whole. Ask yourself, and indicate, how each section contributes to your main argument.

Structuring your conclusion

In the main body, you work towards a conclusion by providing answers to your main question(s) with the help of a number of different chapters or sections. The conclusion then follows logically from the main body. Bear in mind, that generally speaking a conclusion does not present new empirical data, as you have already given the evidence or facts upon which you have built your argument.

In the conclusion bring all the threads of your argument together. Return to the main question and briefly show how you have answered it. Then formulate an answer to your question as concisely as possible. Try to do this in a more reflective or contemplative way than you did in the main body. Once again, attempt to connect all the parts of your conclusion smoothly, and take care to avoid repetitive or redundant sentences. And pay attention to your final sentence!

Citing, quoting, paraphrasing and referencing

Correct referencing is of the utmost importance in all academic writing. Readers have to be able to easily track down your sources, so they can see what (theoretical) conversation you are joining, distinguish your ideas from the ideas of others, and assess whether you have correctly quoted and interpreted the literature. If you do not reference ideas and material of others properly, this is considered plagiarism. All the sources you use should thus be cited in the text, not only when sources are literally quoted (using quotation marks '...') but also in case of paraphrasing (without '...').

While different anthropological journals use their own citation style, there are some broadly shared conventions in the discipline. Anthropologists use an in-text reference system (author,

date, page) with a list of references at the end. This is different from, for example, historians, who put the references in footnotes. The guidelines below are based on *The Chicago Manual of Style's* (2017) author-date style.

In-text citations

Whenever you mention ideas, evidence and examples from the literature or other sources, you have to add a citation. If not, you may be accused of plagiarism, one of the main sins in academic writing.

If you cite an entire work, just use the author's last name and year of publication; for example: (Cohen 1981). If a work has more than three authors, write the name of the first author followed by '*et al.*', for example: (Borras *et al.* 2013). If you use various works in a single citation, separate their entries with a semicolon and a space, for example: (Cohen 1981; Geertz 1983).

If your paper refers to images, films, artworks or information on websites, make sure you also mention the authors or makers every time you use a phrase, concept, idea or creation from another person.

Quotes

For quotes: make sure you cite carefully and accurately, as even a very small change could distort the author's original meaning. Put quotes between quotation marks. After the quote, give an in-text reference including the page number(s) where you found the passage. Note the punctuation: the period comes after the final parenthesis: 'Indeed, in the liberal societies of the West, elites are not recognized as such, i.e., as part of the formal social structure' (Cohen 1981, xvi) – thus not, '... formal social structure.' (Cohen 1981, xvi).

If there are quotation marks in the passage, you can use double within single (or single within double in the case of US English) quotation marks: 'The cultural variable is expressed in terms of a number of *symbolic forms*, or cults: those of "origin" – the church, the family, the dead, secret rituals – and decorum' (Cohen 1981, 15; emphasis in the original).

If you quote several sentences (at least 40 words), you can create a block quote. Put the quote between two blank lines, with an indent on the left, and omit the quotation marks at the beginning and end:

An elite is a collectivity of persons who occupy commanding positions in some important sphere of social life, and who share a variety of interests arising from similarities of training, experience, public duties, and way of life. To promote these interests, they seek to cooperate and coordinate their actions by means of a corporate organization (Cohen 1981, xvi).

If you want to add a few words to a quote in order to clarify something, you can do this in between square brackets: 'Indeed, in the [so-called] liberal societies of the West, elites are not recognized as such, i.e., as part of the formal social structure' (Cohen 1981, xvi).

A quote should be introduced and then followed up. In other words, make it clear what you want to argue by using the quote. In most cases, you follow the quote with an analytical or explanatory sentence.

Use quotes sparingly. A paper or thesis never consists of a series of quotes. Quotes are particularly useful when you want to exactly repeat another author's words, for example to critique the author's argument; otherwise, it is often much more efficient to paraphrase an author (this means that you summarise an author's idea in your own words).

Reference list

At the end of a paper or thesis, there is always a complete reference list. You must include all of the references you used in the text, including books, articles, websites and any films or images you may have referred to. Do not include any literature that is not mentioned in the text.

Place the reference in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author. If you use several works by the same author, list them chronologically by year. If there are several references published in the same year by the same author, then add a lower-case letter after the year, both when citing the literature in the main text body (2000a, 2000b, 2000c) and in the reference list.

Academic references

In the case of a single-authored journal article, use:

Wolf, Eric R. 1990. "Facing Power: Old Insights, New Questions." *American Anthropologist* 92 (3): 586–96.

In the case of several authors:

Janes, Craig R., and Kitty K. Corbett. 2009. "Anthropology and Global Health." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38: 167–83.

In the case of a book chapter in an edited volume:

Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the Anthropologist – Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." In *Reinventing Anthropology*, edited by Dell Hymes, 284–311. New York: Pantheon Books.

And in the case of a book:

Veltmeyer, Henry, and Raúl Delgado Wise. 2018. *Critical Development Studies: An Introduction*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

In the case of an edited volume:

Hymes, Dell, ed. 1972. *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Note that chapters in edited volumes must always be cited separately by reference to their authors as in the example above. Edited volumes should only be cited when reference is made to the entire volume rather than to a specific chapter.

In the case of an online academic journal or a pre-print article in a regular journal, you can add a doi (digital object identifier). If there are no page numbers, instead you can write: 'published online':

Benadusi, Mara. 2020. "Blurred memories: War and disaster in a Buddhist Sinhala village." *Focaal* 88: 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2019.032101>.

Figures and tables

If you use tables and figures (charts, photos, line drawings), refer to them in the text (e.g. 'see Table 1') and provide a brief explanatory caption with the table or figure. When you use an existing table or figure, include the source both in the caption and in the reference list. Make sure you do not infringe copyright rules by taking an image created by someone else without giving its source in the caption or, in some cases, getting permission from the copyright holder to reproduce the image.

Websites

If you use articles or other kinds of information on the internet, beware: not all the sites you may consult are accurate or useful. Internet sources often do not go through an editorial or peer review process, so they should be used with critical awareness of their purpose and possible shortcomings. Refrain from using too many such sources in academic papers (unless the paper reports an empirical research project, e.g. one examining how a topic is represented online).

References to websites can be included in footnotes or endnotes or in the reference list. If the website does not mention a date of publication, you can use 'n.d.' (no date) instead of a year. Include information about the date that you accessed them. This is because information does not always remain on the web or the content may have been adapted.

University of Vienna. n.d. "Provenance Research." Accessed July 1, 2020.
<https://bibliothek.univie.ac.at/en/provenienzforschung.html>.

Images, films and podcasts

If you refer to photographs, films, drawings, music, podcasts or any kind of (audio-)visual productions or art works in the text, these must be just as carefully referenced as the textual resources. Remember that images have an 'author' too, and include a reference in a footnote or endnote or in the reference list.

Images need an explanatory caption, which clarifies why it is relevant in a particular section or argument. A cover image does not need explanation in the text but still needs to be included in the reference list. An example, for an image that appeared in a newspaper:

Eckert, Alissa, and Dan Higgins. 2020. "Beauty Shot of the Corona Virus." *New York Times*, 1. April 2020. Accessed July 1, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/health/coronavirus-illustration-cdc.html>.

For films include the director, year of publication, title and the producer. The place of production is not usually mentioned, but sometimes the duration of the film is added:

Meyknecht, Steef, Dirk Nijland, and Joost Verhey. 1998. *Rouch's Gang*. Documentary Educational Resources. 70 minutes.

In a paper written for study purposes, most images can be reproduced if you cite the source properly. Reproducing images for publication is another matter. If you publish your paper beyond the classroom space (e.g. online), the producer of the image (or the copyright owner) can object, or demand financial compensation (even when the source is properly referenced). To prevent this, ask the producer for permission prior to publication. If recognisable faces appear on the image, you may need additional permission from those portrayed as well. In general, take care not to violate others' rights, including those of other students (MA and PhD theses are published online too). The university has published a checklist for using images (in German).²

Referring to fieldwork notes and interviews

Many works include empirical findings and fieldwork notes. When interviews are recorded on audio and transcribed (by mutual consent), it is possible to quote directly from these interviews. If there are more than one or two interviews in your paper, a list of interviews following the reference list is recommended. Consult your lecturer or supervisor about anonymisation and the use of pseudonyms.

Sometimes informal conversations and observations are included. In such cases it is common to paraphrase or to describe the content in your own words.

Reference systems

Advanced students could use a tool such as *Citavi* or *EndNote*. These programs not only help with correct citations but also make it possible to access previously prepared citations or excerpts, which supports the cumulative process of (re)reading scientific literature.

Format and layout

Start the paper with a title page with the title, author's name, student number, name of the course, professor's name, total word count of the text, and date. Please note that a compulsory MA thesis title page template is provided by the university.³

² <https://studienpraeses.univie.ac.at/infos-zum-studienrecht/wissenschaftliche-arbeiten/urheberrecht-bildnutzung/>, accessed 12.01.2021.

³ <https://ssc-sozialwissenschaften.univie.ac.at/master/deckblatt/>.

The paper should be A4 in size, with margins of approximately 2.5 cm., line spacing of 1.5, and a 12-point font. Insert page numbers.

Use a consistent format. Use one font throughout the text. Either indent all paragraphs except the one immediately following a heading, or use blank lines between paragraphs. Use consistent formatting for each heading and subheadings level (**bold**, *italicised*, etc.).

Style tips

Comprehensibility is important. Vague formulations, unclear sentences and repetition can negatively influence an otherwise strong argument and can even lead a reader to put away the text. Hence, write accessibly, precisely and engagingly. Do not use complicated jargon and explain the concepts you do use. Keep your sentences short. Avoid sentences in the passive form and use the active form. Stick to either UK English or US English – and use punctuation and spelling to match.

Try to translate words from another language unless a translation simply does not do justice to the term. In that case, *italicise* the word. If you wish to emphasise something, you may also use *italics* (do not use bold font or underlining). If you wish to distance yourself from certain words, you may use quotation marks (e.g. the author writes about ‘natural’ behaviour). However, use these stylistic devices only when they are absolutely essential to understanding your stance vis-à-vis the respective terms, and only once in the text at the time you first use the terms.

The revision phase

Writing is rewriting. A text will almost never be satisfactory after a single round of writing. Even for experienced writers it is common to revise a text several times. With all text on paper, and (deadlines permitting) a few days’ before you submit, you can read through to see whether your argument is clear and coherent, and whether your conclusion is justified and based on the evidence that you have presented. In the revision phase use the topics explained above to check if improvement is possible. Assess whether or not the structure of your text is logical, and if necessary, move your sections or sentences accordingly. Avoid abrupt changes in topics. Correct poorly written sentences. Turn passive sentence constructions into active ones. Delete unnecessary words and phrases. Delete passages you are attached to, if after reconsideration you realise that actually they do not add much to your overall argument.

It can be very useful to ask someone else to read and comment on a first draft of your work. If the reader has criticisms, don't worry (it is just a first draft) and use their comments to your advantage in revising the paper.

And finally, enjoy the writing process.

Use of artificial intelligence in the writing process

A supplement on the use of artificial intelligence in the writing process can be found in the separate PDF "Student scientific writing with AI-supported tools" on the [Department's website](#).

References

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- University of Amsterdam. 2015. *Writing Skills and Style Guide: For the Bachelor Program in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology and the Master Program in Cultural and Social Anthropology at the UvA*. Accessed January 26, 2021. <https://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/fmg/sociale-wetenschappen/thesis/writing-skills-and-style-guide-2015-v.1.pdf>.