

Writing Advice

Effective Writing Center



UMUC

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your progress in writing this assignment for Sociology. You and your group have presented a lot of interesting information about non-traditional students. I believe the term should be eliminated, because they are common and traditional now!

My name is Michelle, and it is my pleasure to work with you today. I have been a Writing Advisor for over a year and love working with so many diverse students on a daily basis. You might find this surprising, but I learn a lot from you too! I work with students from every major, therefore; I have acquired a lot of knowledge about every discipline! ☺ While I learn about your particular assignment topic, my main goal is to present you with writing skills that you can carry with you throughout your entire college career.

You are welcome to come to the Effective Writing Center for help at any stage in the writing process, whether you are having trouble understanding an assignment or want feedback on a rough draft. At the EWC we are attentive readers who help you improve as a writer by explaining and modeling effective writing skills. For a more detailed discussion of our services, please consult the [EWC Web site](#).

PLEASE NOTE

- *Advisors may not be experts in the topic your paper covers.*
- *Advisors will not make any judgment about the grade your paper may receive.*
- *Advisors do not copyedit papers. The advisor will use sections of your paper to model editing you should do.*
- *Advisors know only as much about the assignment as you have shared. Please provide an assignment description in the submission form.*

Advice Overview

Resources to help you revise your writing assignment are hyperlinked within this letter and in the [Resources](#) section at the end. If you have time, I would like you to read your paper again before reading this advice. Since sending your paper in to the Writing Center, you have had a break from it and reading it again will allow you to connect with what you have written. My suggestions and advice will make more sense if the material is fresh in your mind. Thank you!

Assignment Requirements

According to your assignment guidelines, you are to work as a group and write a paper on a group or subculture that you are familiar with. You are to use sociological terms and APA style. We will be going over all areas of your paper now.

Thesis & Organization

Thesis Development:

The thesis statement is the most important area of your paper. It should express your point or argument clearly, in the last sentence of your introduction paragraph. Thesis statements always have an academic tone, so they should not include wording such as: “In this paper I will,” or “The point of this paper.” Here is an example of a well written thesis statement: “Although many might disagree, the death penalty is a just method of repaying criminals that have murdered or committed horrendous crimes.” This thesis has a clear argument. If you are not arguing a point, but writing more of a research paper, your thesis would look something like this: “When making steps to improve children’s lives, adults must examine their health and wellbeing, family dynamics, and quality of education.” If this thesis statement was used, the body of the paper would discuss health and wellbeing, family dynamics, and quality of education.

Every paper needs to have a thesis statement to showcase a point. The thesis should be in a clear introduction so that your audience knows where your paper is going and what will be discussed. I do not see a thesis or introduction in this paper. This could lead to your audience wondering what the point of your paper might be. You never want to leave your audience wondering. Please read over all of the information I have here on thesis statements and introductions. You will need to include this in your paper to make it complete and to receive full points from your professor. If you have any questions on thesis statements, please visit:

[The Writing Center UNC](#)

Introduction Development:

Your introduction has three jobs: 1) grab attention on your topic 2) present general information on your topic (citation or quote free) and 3) ease into a focused thesis statement. The first sentence should be an attention grabber. Whether you use a statistic, quote, or shocking rhetorical question, the point is to gain some interest from your audience.

Perhaps you could begin your paper by presenting a statistic about how many people are non-traditional students. This would give your audience an idea about how common this type of education is. Then you should proceed with some general information about why adults chose non-traditional education. After you have done this, you will want to smoothly launch into a thesis statement that represents the main points you will make about non-traditional students. If you have any questions about your introduction, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorial: Introductions](#)

Development & Research

Paragraph Development:



Paragraphs are many sentences dealing with a single topic that should possess clarity, unity, and a clear topic sentence to begin every new paragraph. Each of your paragraphs should stick to one topic and ease smoothly into the next paragraph.

As I mentioned before, you have a lot of interesting information. Between the lists, graphs, and outside information, there is a lot to sift through. I am a little concerned about the amount of reliance on word for word information. This information should also have quotes around it. Using outside sources is a way to supplement the information that you know. There is a fine line between using the information as a supplement and relying too much on the information. You will want to try and put some of the information into your own words. You will still cite it of course, but skim down some of the reliance on verbatim information.

As a reader, I would like to see more depth in the Shared Beliefs and Values section of your paper. It seems incomplete and does not have a lot of information to share. Being a non-traditional student yourself—and your group members—I think you could all come up with a lot more to say in this section. You could go into more detail about family obligations, career obligations, time and flexibility, ect. There are many areas to elaborate on in this section and most of it could be done with little reference to an outside source. As a reader, I would like to see more of yours and your groups' experiences and writing and less reliance on outside sources. I am going to give you some information here on how to integrate outside sources effectively.

USING SOURCES EFFECTIVELY – DIRECT QUOTES, PARAPHRASING, AND SUMMARIZING

When you write essays that require you to use outside information from material such as books, Internet articles, online journals, and other sources of research, you will need to effectively integrate that research into your own writing. This is not quite as easy as you may expect it to be. When writing a research essay, it is important to remember that the research is there to support **your** ideas, not the other way around. So often students rely too heavily on their outside sources and they lose their own voice in the process. The following advice will, hopefully, keep you all from the doing that.

First, let us talk a bit about when and how to use outside sources. There are three different ways to use outside sources:

1. Direct Quotes
2. Paraphrasing
3. Summarizing

Each method is different and in this handout, we will talk about all three. In addition, a good research essay will rely on all three. Let's talk about using direct quotations first.

USING DIRECT QUOTES

A direct quote is putting the exact words from a source into your writing setting it off with quotation marks [“”]. Generally, you should use a direct quote when the author is saying something in a way that is interesting, to the point, and in a manner that you cannot put into words yourself. You should avoid directly quoting things that just about anyone can put into words. But if the tone and language of the quote is colorful

and says something you can't, quote it. Once you have decided to directly quote something, you need to effectively integrate it within your paragraph. To do so, I have a few helpful tips:

1. Avoid starting a paragraph with a quote. The first sentence of every paragraph should be the topic sentence in which you explain the paragraph's purpose. A quote does not make for an effective topic sentence. In addition, you always want to begin and end every paragraph with your own voice.
2. Quotes should never stand alone as one sentence. You must always introduce the quoted information. This can be done by stating something like, "According to John Doe's article" or "As Mr. Doe argues" or something similar. This will alert your reader that a quote is coming. In addition, it tells the reader a little about your source, which adds credence to your own writing.
3. Never force the reader to come to her own conclusions about your source material. Always explain why the source material is important to your paragraph and how it helps support your paragraph topic.
4. Avoid ending a paragraph with source material. First, this does not allow you to comment on the material. Second, as I mentioned earlier, you should always begin and end each paragraph with your own voice.

If you follow the tips above, you will be sure to make your source material that you want to quote directly, work for you. In addition, you will avoid having your source material take over your essay.

RESOURCES

[University of Virginia's Integrating Quotations](#)

[The University of Wisconsin at Madison Integrating Quotations](#)

PARAPHRASING

Many times, when writing papers that require research, you will come across information that you want to incorporate into your paper without directly quoting it. There are two ways of doing this—the first way is paraphrasing. Paraphrasing reports the information from the source text in about the same number of words as the original. As with direct quotations, you should follow the same guidelines—start with a signal phrase that mentions the author, publication name, and date and then start your paraphrase. When you are done paraphrasing, put a citation. This will signal to you readers you are done paraphrasing the source.

[INSERT EXAMPLE HERE]

The only time you do not need to use a signal phrase is when you are citing a statistic or a specific fact because by putting a citation after the statistic or fact, your reader should be able to understand where that statistic or fact came from.

RESOURCES

[Paraphrasing—putting it into Your Own Words](#)

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is similar to paraphrasing except while paraphrasing is keeping to the about the same length of the original material, summarizing is condensing the material resulting in a shorter passage. Also, you should follow the same guidelines as with using quotations and paraphrasing.

RESOURCES

[How to Summarize from the University of Idaho](#)

If you have any questions on writing paragraphs, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorials: Paragraphs](#)

Transitions:

Transitions hold our ideas together, connecting sentences and paragraphs. Transitions are needed to help your reader understand and connect to your ideas in a logical way. We also use transitions to help explain a relationship, whether it is compare and contrast or cause and effect. One of the most common places to include transition is in topic sentences. Here is an example of a smooth topic sentence: “Consequently, the character in the movie did end up moving away.” This is a vague example, but shows the tone you want to achieve at the beginning of your new paragraphs.

Here is an example of one of your topic sentences: **Non-traditional students share many norms of the traditional student, but must learn other norms of online communication.** If you read this sentence aloud, does it sound abrupt to you? Beginning new paragraphs with a smooth topic sentence is important for the readability of your paper. If you added the transition word “while” to the beginning of this sentence, it would sound much better. “While non-traditional students share many norms of traditional students, they must learn other norms of online communication.” Doesn’t that sound better? You will want to link all of your topic sentences with your new paragraphs in this way. If you have any questions about transitions, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorial: Transitions](#)

Conclusion Development:

Some important points to remember when writing your conclusion include:

- A brief summary of main points.
- Restatement of thesis in different chosen words.
- Result or consequence of what you have written about.

You and your group also need to develop a conclusion to your paper. This will wrap ideas up and give a nice review of your thesis and main points. As of now, you stop abruptly in the last subheading of your paper. If you have any questions on conclusions, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorial: Conclusions](#)



Formatting & Citations

There is a repetitive small mistake in your APA citation. Here it is: Muirhead communicates that “Educators need significant amounts of time to develop on-line courses that provide real opportunities for good student-teacher dialog (Muirhead, 2000).” Here would be the correct way to cite this sentence:

Muirhead (2000) communicates that “educators need significant amounts of time to develop on-line courses that provide real opportunities for good student-teacher dialogue (p. ?). Whenever you use quoted information, you need a page number as well.

In case your group has any more questions about APA citation style, I will present some more information here.

[APA Sample Paper](#)

<http://www.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/APAsample.pdf>

It would be helpful to you if you printed this sample paper out so you can refer to it now and for future papers.

A general tip to keep in mind with APA is the in- text style, which is:

You will want to cite your sources in the body of your paper by including parenthesis at the end of the author’s piece with the author’s last name and the year the work was published. Example: (Bowman, 2006). Or, if there are page numbers involved, you would cite it like this: (Bowman, 2006, 6).

There are different ways to cite journal articles, books, and internet sources in a reference page, which is at the end of your paper. It is important to know these differences when constructing the reference page as well as the overall format of an APA reference page. Here is a great website for citing APA sources:

[APA Citation Style](#)

<http://www.liu.edu/cwis/CWP/library/workshop/citapa.htm>

I also have a website that will benefit you in terms of the reference page format, which you will need for your paper:

[English Works! APA Sample Reference Page](#)

<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks/writing/aparef.htm>

This website has a sample reference page, which you can benefit from by printing out and using as a reference when you construct your own.

Grammar & Mechanics

Clarity/Unity:

There are some small typographical errors throughout your paper that can be picked up with some proofreading aloud. Here is one of them: Each student expected to master the concepts and turn in assignments in a timely manner. I believe you forgot the word “is” after “student.”

Importance of Proofreading:

Please also remember to use your spell check and proofread your paper aloud. Reading your paper aloud helps find any errors that you might not have noticed when writing it. Sometimes we can repeatedly read our own words silently and not notice an error and then read it aloud and find many.

Summary

Good luck! As you continue your work on this project, be sure to:

- Create an introduction with a thesis statement.
- Begin with an attention grabbing statistic.
- Rely less on word for word outside information.
- Get more feedback and further development in some of your sections. Elaborate with more detail.
- Include transition in your topic sentences.
- Create a conclusion to make your paper complete.
- Read over the APA information and correct any errors.
- Proofread your paper aloud.
- Have a great day!

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More Resources

[The Effective Writing Center](#)