

GUIDELINES FOR JOURNAL WRITING IN SOCIOLOGY

THE SENIOR CAPSTONE COURSE

Several Tips on Producing an Interesting Journal

One of the writing assignments for this course is to maintain an ongoing journal throughout the semester. There are several tips on how students can produce informative and interesting journals.¹ These points are listed below and include guidelines on how to develop a creative journal that is substantive and exciting to write.

Reference: You may use a notebook, put the date and time on each entry and identify the topics discussed in class. Students often prepare entries on their word processing program, bring this draft to our weekly classes, review their entries with the instructor, then make necessary additions and revisions for the final copy of the journal that is due at the end of the semester.

Observation: Write informally about whatever you have observed or discussed on a particular class day. Describe experiences in detail and include supporting facts and measurements of your observations. Remember that you are focusing on the observation of sociological ideas and concepts and how they operate in the real world.

Speculations: Write down all speculative thoughts about why a sociological situation exists or offer a sociological explanation of why a situation occurred. Incorporate various sociological theories such as the symbolic interaction theory, functional theory or conflict theory to provide a basis for your speculations.

Questions: Use critical thinking skills to pose questions about why some condition exists or doubts about reasons given for a sociological outcome. Remember that sociological questions go beyond looking for the cause of a situation. Sociological questions often look for the cause of the causes.

Conclusions: Write about any conclusions that you have reached on the basis of your observations and experiences on a particular day. Are there any sociological concepts that were exemplified by your observations, speculations, and questions? Conclusions are an important part of your journal and often require taking a position on issues that are sensitive or problematic.

Connections: Write about how course content (concepts, theories and principles) are related to personal life experiences. Offer explanations for the connections you have observed.

Information: Use the journal as a scrapbook for interesting material and information. You may clip and paste the information into the journal, if possible, and then write your reaction to material. You may also include supplemental materials related to course content--i.e., current event articles, newspaper clippings, copies of table and charts, public service information, etc.²

Synthesis and application: Use the journal as a means of blending what you have learned in class and what you have experienced in society. The information you have obtained is most valuable and rewarding when you have applied that material to understanding of the social world.

¹Basic guidelines on journal writing are available in a variety of disciplines. One useful source on journal writing is a book by Diane E. Schmidt, Expository Writing in Political Science: A Practical Guide, Southern Illinois University: Harper Collins, 1993, p. 228.

²Students are often willing to share their journals with other students in the major. Many of our sociology majors have completed excellent journals for their courses, and they have expressed their willingness to permit other students to review their completed work.