

Political Science 110J
Paper Writing Guidelines
Winter 2012

Writing assignments are often punitive—they are assigned simply as tools for evaluation. As a result, you may have fallen into the trap of using writing as a means of showing the instructor that you ‘know a lot.’ The longer sorts of paper assignments encountered in college, moreover, tend to encourage soft plagiarism—using someone else’s ideas and thoughts in your papers because you haven’t done any thinking of your own. But writing can also be an end in itself, insofar as it can become a *process of thinking*. In a way, you don’t really *have* thoughts until you express and communicate them. (We have all been caught saying “I know what I mean, I just don’t know how to say it”; but perhaps this is equivalent to saying, “I don’t really know what I think, I’m confused.”)

The papers in this course are designed to provide opportunities for you to sharpen your thinking through analytical dialogue with important works of political theory. By analytical I mean papers that show the results of clear, focused and sustained thinking about the hidden or underlying dimensions of a specific issue, problem or confusion in the readings. Teach yourself to sit and ‘think’ (literally) about the aims, strategies and relative merits of each of the readings. Keep in mind that you can’t understand a difficult text ‘all at once’; instead, you get a feel for the whole only after carefully exploring one specific section of it. Focus on what you take to be a particularly noteworthy or interesting problem in the text and then go about the step-by-step work of digging between the lines in order to expose and evaluate the deeper-lying aims and assumptions of the text. A good piece of analysis is always the final result of a sustained period of reflection, note-taking, writing, editing and re-writing.

Some Guidelines for Writing

1. A descriptive paper merely *summarizes* what the author has said; an analytical paper *analyzes* what the author has said. It does this by asking questions of the text, questions which might clarify the material and lead to your own critical evaluation of it. Does the author’s point (claim, idea, etc.) make sense? What does one have to assume for the point to make sense? Does the author ‘argue for’ the point—give reasons that are not dependent upon a prior acceptance of the point in question—and if so, what are those arguments? Or does the author simply ‘state’ the point? What would count for the author’s point? What against it? Can we get clear about the author’s basic assumptions or premises? Are these premises true? Does the author ‘sneak in’ assumptions?
2. Work to convince, not to please, the reader. Writing analytical prose is like arguing a case in court—you need reasons and arguments to persuade the jury. If you are making an interpretive or evaluative claim, show how and why.
3. A good paper has a logical structure. The first paragraph of your paper should contain a clearly stated thesis. Don’t leave your reader in the dark—state the purpose of your paper, and briefly describe the interpretive claims you will be making. All subsequent paragraphs should be written with an eye to providing ‘evidence’ substantiating the claims you make at the start of your paper.

4. An analytical paper is *not* encyclopedic or sweeping, but focused and to the point. Concentrate on composing tightly-knit essays; if you find that you are going beyond the page limit, narrow your focus, don't lengthen your paper.
5. Don't be intimidated by the authors. No one in the class is expected to offer the "definitive" answer. As long as you give reasons for your comments, you need not feel shy about offering them.
6. Cite the text to substantiate your arguments. Textual evidence helps demonstrate that an author holds a particular view. Without analysis, however, citations may leave your reader confused. When you quote from a text, explain what the passage means, why it is important, or how it helps prove your point. Note that citations need not be direct quotations. You may paraphrase an author, using your own words to clearly and concisely convey his or her ideas. Be careful, however, to indicate the place in the text you are drawing from.
7. Always be fair to the authors. Read the entire assignment, even if you are focusing on just a small portion of the text. The author may speak to your point elsewhere.
8. Use the conclusion of your essay to 'sum-it-up.' Restate your thesis, and briefly indicate some of the broader implications of your analysis for our understanding of the author's work.

Style

1. Please be attentive to the role of gender in your own writing and in that of the authors under consideration. The *Declaration of Independence* proclaims that "all men are created equal," and it would be a mistake to suggest that Jefferson's argument was gender-neutral document. On the other hand, the species of which we are a part is not by definition male, and it is more appropriate to use 'humans' or 'humankind' than 'man' or 'mankind' when referring to it.
2. Every quotation or paraphrase should contain a reference citation, including the author's name and page number. For example: (DuBois, 22), (Addams, 225).
3. A useful introduction to the art of writing can be found in Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style* (<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/>). On the techniques of argument, try consulting Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*.

A Note on Plagiarism

The word *plagiarism* derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author's text, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism. It is an act of intellectual dishonesty, and a violation of the UCSD student code of conduct. The academic consequence of plagiarism is course failure; the administrative consequence of plagiarism is determined by college deans.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to: turning in someone else's work as if it were your own; quoting, paraphrasing, or borrowing ideas from published or unpublished material written by someone else without specifically acknowledging the source. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask. Citation formats for books, articles, manuscripts, and Internet sites can be found at the library reference desk.