

Some Paper Writing Tips

COMS 210 – Jonathan Sterne

1. The sooner you choose your example, the more time you have to think about the other important parts of your paper, like the ideas and the writing.
2. Make sure you do everything the assignment tells you to do. Students often lose points simply for not doing everything on the assignment sheet. Don't forget a works cited page if you cite outside work.
3. Remember that all the parts of the assignment are important. Often the last step is the most important (it just requires the prior steps).
4. Don't just tell us, show us: explain your thinking in clear detail. Remember that we can only grade you based upon what you put in your paper. We can't guess what you're thinking.
5. Use specific concepts from the readings (and the lecture if you wish). Directly citing material from lecture and readings will help you connect the ideas in your paper to the ideas we've discussed in class. Also, be specific in your claims. For instance, rather than using a big term like "society," find a more specific term to use.
6. When you cite something, be sure to tell us what it means and how it links up with your argument. Don't just drop a name or a concept.
7. Use a recognized citation style: APA, MLA, or Chicago (Chicago with footnotes is the prof's favorite, for what it's worth).

[You can now view most of the Chicago Manual of Style online](#) if you are logged in from campus or using a VPN if off campus.

There are also many online guides to source citation. Try http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/cite/works_cited.htm and <http://www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/cite/within.htm>

or <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citation.htm> .

8. If you cite a lecture, you can just cite it thus: (Lecture 15 Jan). If you're using notes instead of parentheticals, just put the list it as "Lecture 15 January" in your notes. Lectures do not need to be included in your bibliography.
9. Once you have your paper written, look at each paragraph and ask yourself "so what?" Think about why this might matter to someone who's not enrolled in the course. Put the answer in as the topic sentence of your paragraph and adjust the rest of the paragraph

accordingly.

10. Revision is the key to success. Everything you read for this class has been revised many times before it reached you. Bring us a draft of your paper in office hours, or make an appointment. Students who consult with us generally do better. Please note that we will not comment on drafts over email.

11. A simple way to proofread your paper: read it out loud to yourself. If a sentence sounds funny, it probably needs to be reworded or rewritten. Some students will make the mistake of trying to sound “academic” by putting in too much passive voice or using words without looking them up—both these techniques make your paper harder to read, not easier.

12. Put your most important ideas at the top of each paragraph; use the rest of the paragraph to back up your assertion.

13. Remember that fulfilling the minimal requirements for the paper will result in a C grade. Doing a decent job gets you a B grade. If you want to go for an "A", you need to go above and beyond the basics of the assignment.

14. If you have fun with this assignment, it's more likely that we'll enjoy reading it.

15. You can use the Writing Centre for paper help as well. Appointments are required, so plan ahead. Call 398-6960.