

Teaching Guide for GSIs

Working with Student Writing

Writing, more than simply a mode of communication, is a powerful means of learning. Within each discipline students must learn techniques of observation, critical thinking, conceptualization, and particular terms and modes of discourse. The process of writing affords students with needed practice in all these areas. Often the practitioners of a given discipline are in the best position to teach students how to write for that discipline. Further, people learn to write more fluently by writing often, receiving frequent feedback from instructors and peers, and revising their work.

GSIs encounter many kinds of student writing, from short essay answers on exams to fully executed research papers. Reading, evaluating, and responding to these can be daunting. However, because writing is such an important way for students to process material and show the extent of their understanding, this section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs addresses strategies for creating useful assignments, teaching students through these assignments, and evaluating student writing on a tight time budget.

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Creating Writing Assignments

Many instructors struggle with crafting writing assignments that are accessible yet challenging for students. We suggest you consider the scale of the assignment — in terms of time, length, and scope — and the learning objectives of the assignment: what do you want your students to learn or show that they've learned through the assignment, and is it evident to them just what kind of project the assignment asks for?

[Getting a Sense of Scale](#)

[Articulating Objectives](#)

[Taxonomy of Learning Objectives](#)

[Exercise in Assignment Design Using Bloom's Taxonomy \(doc\)](#)

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Creating Writing Assignments: Getting a Sense of Scale

Instructors sometimes assign papers that are beyond the range of what most students can realistically complete. But they will try. A vague, poorly conceived, or disproportionately laborious assignment can turn students away from the learning process and lower their motivation quickly. On the other hand, a well-crafted and well-proportioned assignment with clearly articulated objectives can be highly motivating.

If you want to know how well students understood the explanation of Ohm's law in lecture, you can assign a minute-paper at the end of the class in which students briefly jot down and explain the main points. If you want them to explore on their own the importance and applications of Ohm's law, a five-page research paper might be more appropriate and could take them weeks to prepare. If all the material for such a paper has been presented in course materials already, the same objective could be reached with a two-page brief due at the next section meeting.

Consider a list of prompts for a writing assignment. How would you order them on a scale of least sophisticated to most sophisticated? Least time-consuming to grade to most?

- Distinguish Marx's main ideas about ideology from Althusser's.
- Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition.
- Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition, and determine which form of competition predominates in the example provided.
- Write a position paper on one major environmental justice issue in the Bay Area.
- Define "simile."
- Define "simile," identify one in the poem, and explain what it contributes to the poem.
- Restate Ohm's law in your own words.

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Creating Writing Assignments: Articulating Objectives

Writing assignments are more successful in promoting student learning if you have articulated clear learning objectives. To construct learning objectives (i.e., what students should be able to do or demonstrate), many instructors use a classification system designed in the mid-1950s by Benjamin Bloom et al., commonly referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy. Simply put, this classification system (presented in greater detail on the page [Taxonomy of Learning Objectives](#)) consists of six different levels of cognitive skills, starting with the simplest, lower-order thinking skills of knowledge or comprehension and moving to cognitive skills that demonstrate higher-order thinking skills such as an ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate material.

When we create assignments or develop test questions, we can use verbs associated with each of these levels to promote or test how deeply students have learned something. If, for example, a student is able to list the major battles of the Civil War, the student demonstrates knowledge. If a student is able to compare two different theories about the causes of the Civil War and evaluate their merits and limitations, they have demonstrated a more complex set of cognitive skills, the ability to compare and evaluate. Each level in the classification has verbs associated with it that you can use to tailor your writing assignments and exam questions to specific learning objectives. Using appropriate verbs from the italicized lists on the page [Taxonomy of Learning Objectives](#), think about assignments you might create for students to promote learning or to evaluate how well they have learned course material.

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Creating Writing Assignments: Taxonomy of Learning Objectives

Bloom et al.'s (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for the Cognitive Domain (with Outcome-Illustrating Verbs)*

Designing Assignments: [Exercise in Assignment Design Using Bloom's Taxonomy \(doc\)](#)

Knowledge

Remembering (recalling) appropriate, previously learned information, such as terminology or specific facts.

Verbs to use in assignments to have students demonstrate knowledge: define; describe; enumerate; identify; label; list; match; name; read; record; reproduce; select; state; view.

Example: Ask your students to do a free-write in class, in which they **identify** three causes of the Civil War, or **define** Progressivism. Use their responses as a starting point for discussion or have the students discuss their responses in small groups.

Comprehension

Understanding the meaning of informational materials.

Verbs to use in assignments to have students demonstrate comprehension: classify; cite; convert; describe; discuss; estimate; explain; generalize; give examples; make sense of; paraphrase; restate (in own words); summarize; trace; understand.

Example: Ask your students to **paraphrase** an author's argument, or a part of their lecture notes, in one paragraph. Then divide the students into pairs and ask the students to **discuss** any gaps or discrepancies in their comprehension and to construct a new and better paragraph together.

Application

Using previously learned information in new and concrete situations to solve problems that have single or best answers.

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Verbs to use in assignments so that students can demonstrate their ability to apply: act; administer; articulate; assess; chart; collect; compute; construct; contribute; control; determine; develop; discover; establish; extend; implement; include; inform; instruct; operationalize; participate; predict; prepare; preserve; produce; project; provide; relate; report; show; solve; teach; transfer; use; utilize.

Example: Ask students to **relate** classroom instruction on the immigrant experience in the United States to primary sources which you provide (or which they **collect** on their own). Ask the students to **use** the primary sources to **teach** a course theme to their peers or have them **report** their observations on a threaded discussion list.

Analysis

Breaking down informational materials into their component parts, examining (and trying to understand the organizational structure of) such information to develop divergent conclusions by identifying motives or causes, making inferences, and/or finding evidence to support generalizations.

Verbs to use in assignments so that students can demonstrate their ability to analyze: break down; correlate; diagram; differentiate; discriminate; distinguish; focus; illustrate; infer; limit; outline; point out; prioritize; recognize; separate; subdivide.

Example: In an exam essay question, students may be asked to **analyze** the reasons for European settlement in the “New World.” Beyond simply identifying the reasons, they are asked to **prioritize** the reasons in order of significance and to **distinguish** between the reasons for settlement in New England vs. Virginia.

Synthesis

Creatively or divergently applying prior knowledge and skills to produce a new or original whole.

Verbs to use in assignments so that students can demonstrate their ability to synthesize: adapt; anticipate; categorize; collaborate; combine; communicate; compare; compile; compose; contrast; create; design; devise; express; facilitate;

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formulate; generate; incorporate; individualize; initiate; integrate; intervene; model; modify; negotiate; plan; progress; rearrange; reconstruct; reinforce; reorganize; revise; structure; substitute; validate.

Example: In preparation for a research paper, students may be asked to **create** a prospectus, in which they **formulate** a hypothesis, **compile** a bibliography, and **plan** a research schedule.

Evaluation

Judging the value of material based on personal values or opinions, resulting in an end product, with a given purpose, without real right or wrong answers.

Verbs to use in assignments so that students can demonstrate their ability to evaluate: appraise; compare and contrast; conclude; criticize; critique; decide; defend; interpret; judge; justify; reframe; support.

Example: Have students write a five-page essay in which they **compare and contrast** two authors' arguments on a given topic, **evaluate** their use of evidence, and **defend** one interpretation over the other.

*Lorin Anderson, David Krathwohl, et al. published a revision of the taxonomy in 2000: *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman.

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Exercise in Assignment Design Using Bloom's Taxonomy

On the chart below are listed writing assignments that might be given to a class. With the aid of Bloom's Taxonomy, try coming up with ways to fill in the fields of the chart.

Assignment	Possible format	Cognitive skills exercised	Time investment for students and instructors
Distinguish Marx's main ideas about ideology from Althusser's.	<i>e.g.</i> , two-page essay (lower-division course)	Comprehension	Low
	fifteen-page research paper (upper-division course)	Analysis, Synthesis	High
Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition.	In-class short paragraph	Comprehension	Low
Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition. Determine which form of competition	Forum discussion in bSpace	Application	

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predominates in the example provided.			
Define "simile."	In-class short answer		
Define "simile," identify one in the poem, and tell what it contributes to the poem.			
Restate Ohm's law in your own words.			
Write a position paper on one major environmental justice issue in the Bay Area.			

Students could be asked to complete some of the assignments in a number of different formats (ten-page essay, five-minute writing assignment, quiz, position paper, lab journal, etc.) in order to address these prompts. Try to complete this table. Identify the level of cognitive complexity that each assignment requires.

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Words like “knowledge,” “evaluation,” and “comprehension” may come in handy. Quickly propose an appropriate size and time frame for the assignment. Approximate the amount of time that students would need to complete each assignment and the time the GSI would need to grade a set. Sample scenarios can be viewed on the following page.

Assignment	Possible format	Cognitive skills exercised	Time investment for students and instructors
Distinguish Marx’s main ideas about ideology from Althusser’s.	two-page essay	Comprehension	Low-Moderate
Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition.	In-class short paragraph	Knowledge	Low-Moderate

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Explain the difference between interspecific and intraspecific competition. Determine which form of competition predominates in the example provided.	Forum discussion in bSpace	Application	Low-Moderate
Define "simile."	In-class quiz	Knowledge	Minimal
Define "simile," identify one in the poem, and tell what it contributes to the poem.	One-page response paper assigned as homework	Knowledge Application Analysis	Student: Moderate GSI: Minimal
Restate Ohm's law in your own words.	five minute, in-class writing assignment	Comprehension	Minimal

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Write a position paper on one major environmental justice issue in the Bay Area.	ten- to twelve-page paper, divided into segments, across ten weeks	Analysis Synthesis Evaluation	Very High
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Guiding Research Papers in the Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities

Although research is conducted in many different ways, and the written reporting of research comes in many different forms, there are some key similarities in the needs of students who are in the process of learning to conduct and report on research. Similarities include the following:

- Breaking a project into manageable steps — helping students concentrate on one significant part at a time as they construct a much larger whole
- Support for learning the processes involved in the research and reporting
- Accountability to complete the processes — that is, an instructor and a research community
- Refining a question of appropriate scope for a particular assignment
- Scoping relevant literature to find out what research has been done on their question — depending on the course level, this may be their first foray into scholarly databases and literature
- Getting feedback on their work so they can develop it further

In the following pages you will find instructional materials from experienced GSIs in different fields. They reflect important differences among their fields of scholarship, as well as differences in the level of coursework. You may or may not want to segment a research assignment into the particular steps explained here, but the approaches in these assignments are meant to help both GSIs and their students appreciate all the component steps and skills that their research project will entail. Think about ways you could organize students' work on a research assignment so they come up with the best written product they can.

- [Integrative Biology Research Assignment](#)
- [Sociology 190 Research Assignment](#)
- [English R&C Research Assignment](#)

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Integrative Biology Research Assignment

by Natasha Teutsch, Integrative Biology

[Example of a Semester-Long Assignment](#)

[Designing a Scaffolded Assignment](#)

Example of a Semester-Log Assignment

Your GSIs have prepared a list of potential projects for this course (see below).

Some projects are fairly narrowly defined while others allow you the freedom to ask a broad range of questions about plant ecophysiology. They are all designed to give you exposure to asking questions about ecophysiology and to the methods that are commonly used in this field. You will carry out these projects in groups of two to four students.

During our first lab, we will ask you to choose a project topic that is most interesting to you. In the second week of lab, we will set up those experiments together so that you will be ready to make your measurements on established plants later in the semester. By week 6, you will need to turn in refined questions for your project. Two weeks later (week 8), you will turn in a research proposal (100 points) that outlines the research you plan to carry out for your project. The proposal must include five parts:

1. a statement of the research objective(s) and goal(s)
2. a description of the methods to be used, including what you will measure, how you will measure it, what your experimental design is, and the equipment you will need to carry out your project
3. a short discussion of the predicted results for your experiment
4. a list of references (five to fifteen) on the research topic that clearly indicate you are aware of the relevant literature
5. a list of references in which the authors employ the methods you plan to use

After your proposal has been approved, there will be a sign-up sheet for equipment that you must put your name on if you hope to have access to any of it.

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You will begin your research during the ninth or tenth week of the semester and will be able to collect data for approximately four weeks. This should allow sufficient time to collect enough data so that you can draw some firm conclusions. We will be available for consultation throughout the semester.

After you complete your project, you will have two things to accomplish: A written report to be handed in on May 6 and a fifteen-minute oral presentation of your study, its results, and implications. You should be prepared to give it at the bi-annual UCB Plant Physiological Ecology Symposium on May 12.

If you are not thoroughly aware of how to use the library for tracking down references, following up specific reference citations, and on how to use the various abstracts, please see one of the instructors — we have handouts to help you.

If you are not thoroughly familiar with how to write a scientific paper, or what is expected for the research project, please see one of the instructors — we have handouts to help you.

Designing a Scaffolded Assignment

Writing a substantial paper is a daunting task for many students. You can help relieve some of their uncertainty or anxiety in the way you structure and support it. Effective design of writing assignments involves three basic stages:

[Scaffolding the Assignment](#)

[Helping Students Organize Essays](#)

[Developing a Strategy for Evaluation](#)

Scaffolding the Assignment

“Scaffolding” as it’s used here is a metaphor for an instructional strategy that gives students some external support for a specific element of a challenging task, then moves on to another challenging task, and so on until the entire project is completed. For example, segmenting a complex technical or scientific paper into smaller, manageable phases is one scaffolding technique that is often very helpful for students.

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- Acknowledge that writing is a difficult process, even for the most seasoned academics.
- Give students clear, concrete instructions.
- Help students understand that good writing takes hard work, and that they shouldn't expect to write things perfectly on their first try.
- Build in class time to do peer reviews so that students learn to edit their own work and the work of others.

If your course allows you the freedom, plan for students to carry a research project throughout the semester. You can help break down the process by asking them to turn in a series of smaller assignments:

- At the beginning of the semester, ask students to propose a research question or topic.
- Have students clarify this question and provide an annotated bibliography to demonstrate that they are familiar with the literature on the topic. This would be a good time to ask students to have well-developed, testable hypotheses.
- Ask students to write a research proposal with a developed introduction and a description of the methods they plan to employ. In the proposal, they should focus on providing a context and rationale for their research.
- If time permits, allow students to carry out their research and analyze their data. You may ask them to turn in tables, figures, and graphs with legends. This will allow you to converse with students about effective ways to communicate quantitative information. It will also provide the framework for the results and discussion sections.
- As a grand finale, have students write up their results in a formal report using the format that is most common in your discipline. They should have most of the paper already written by this point since they have already developed the majority of the information for the introduction and methods in their proposals.

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Helping Students Organize Essays

Teach students how to organize science papers by providing them with examples and analysis.

For example, provide students with a published example of science writing.

- Ask students to comment on the paper's organization. Emphasize the divisions and subdivisions in the paper (e.g., in the "Methods" section, there are subsections that address the study site, the statistical analyses used, the sample methods, etc.).
- Ask students to comment on the clarity of the writing. Provide (or generate as a class) a list of attributes to evaluate:
 - precision of the language
 - thoroughness and detail
 - formatting and appropriate use of references and citations
 - effectiveness of tables, graphs, and figures
- Provide students with a written analysis of the organization of the paper, paying special attention to the "Results" and "Discussion" sections. You may want to discuss how information was effectively (or ineffectively) communicated in the figures, tables, or graphs. Emphasize that the discussion section should place the study in the larger context of what we know and evaluate the data. It should answer questions the author proposed in the beginning.
- Have small groups of students choose a short journal article to evaluate. Ask them to critique the paper for organization and clarity. These assignments could be turned in for a grade.

Use this same model for peer editing when the students write their first lab reports.

Provide students with a guideline for writing and grammar.

Always review the effectiveness of your assignment design as the students are doing it and afterwards. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the

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assignment you've designed? What will make it clearer and more beneficial for students next time around?

Developing a Strategy for Evaluation

When developing a method for evaluating student writing, you may want to incorporate the following components in your [grading rubric](#):

The **content** of the writing:

- Was the student thorough with his or her explanations?
- Did the student complete the appropriate background reading/research?
- Did the student argue his or her points logically?
- Was the content effectively organized?

The **clarity** of the writing:

- Does the paper communicate the student's ideas effectively?
- Is the writing concise and direct?
- Are all sources cited properly?
- Did the student adequately proofread the paper?

Again, your students are most likely to succeed in each of these aspects of their writing if you have explained your expectations with them clearly, and if they have received substantive feedback at each major step in the project.

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Sociology 190 Research Assignment

by Sarah Macdonald, Sociology

Context

[Assignment 1: Paper Proposal](#)

[Assignment 2: Literature Review](#)

[Assignment 3: Abstract and Outline](#)

[Assignment 4: Research Presentation](#)

[Assignment 5: Final Paper](#)

Context

Sociology 190 is a senior capstone course in which students engage in small seminar discussions of a particular topic. In my section of Soc 190, *Transnational Adoption from a Sociological Perspective*, I paired in-depth discussions on the topic of adoption with a semester-long research project — each student designed a research question, collected data, and wrote up a 15–20-page research paper on a topic of their choice. I knew that because the research paper seemed overwhelming to my students, they would need guidance and feedback throughout the process. In designing my syllabus and assignments I consulted with syllabi from others in my department that had previously taught similar courses. The resulting assignments are included in this section.

In the process of setting the assignments I learned that students needed very explicit instructions on the format of a formal research paper, the opportunity to discuss their progress frequently in class, and structured opportunities to learn about how to do sociological research. Throughout the semester we had discussions, both as a large group and in smaller groups, about the students' progress on their projects, which allowed students a chance to receive feedback more often than I was able to give in writing. We also had several formal opportunities to learn about research, for example when I gave presentations to

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the students on research methods, or when we had a guest speaker talk about their research, or when students had a session with a subject-specific librarian to learn about how to locate secondary sources. Each assignment then served as a research milestone where students got formal feedback from me about their progress. Before each assignment we had in-depth discussions of how to formulate the different components of a research paper, so the assignments include detailed lists of the parts we had already discussed in class. We ended the semester with a mini research conference where students presented their arguments to their peers and received feedback. They then used this feedback and my feedback on the smaller assignments to produce their final research papers.

Assignment 1: Paper Proposal

Paper Proposal

In no more than 2 double-spaced pages (Times New Roman, size 12 font, one-inch margins) you will:

1. Briefly describe and explain your research topic and its importance. You should describe why you think this topic is particularly relevant to our course and why it is an important area of study.
2. Clearly present and explain your central research question.
3. Identify your data source and method of analysis. How will you collect data and what will you do with the data?
4. Explain why these sources of data are appropriate for your research question and how they will help you to answer your question.

Choosing a Research Topic and Question

Your research topic and question must relate to the topic of transnational adoption, but beyond this requirement there are no limitations on the topic that you choose. I recommend that you look through the topics in the syllabus to help you to begin to determine what you are most interested in studying. In addition, the reading entitled "International Adoption: A Sociological Account of the US Experience" (Engel

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et al., 2007)[1], should help you to understand the various topics related to transnational adoption that are of particular concern to sociologists.

Choosing a Data Source

Once you have identified your research question, you must choose one of the research methods listed below that will be most appropriate for answering your question.

- **In-depth Interviews:** You must conduct 3 to 5 in-depth interviews (lasting at least 45 minutes each) with individuals.
- **Textual Analysis:** You can choose to analyze a set of written or visual texts (books, newspaper articles, news stories, images, films, court documents, government proceedings, etc.). You must choose at least three texts to analyze and may need to choose several texts depending on the types of texts you are analyzing.
- **Participant Observation:** Spend 5 to 10 hours observing social interaction at a relevant research site. If you decide to do this you must get advance permission from the organization and/or individuals before conducting your observation.
- **Quantitative Analysis:** You can complete a basic statistical analysis of a data set. You can either use an existing data set or design your own survey and distribute it to at least 30 people to create your own dataset.

[1] Engel, Madeline, Norma K. Phillips, and Frances A. Dellacava (2007).

“International Adoption: A Sociological Account of the US Experience.” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27: 257–270.

Assignment 2: Literature Review

For this assignment you will submit a review of current literature on your topic that will:

1. Summarize and synthesize 5 to 10 sources (books or journal articles, not websites or news stories) that are not included in course readings. This means that you should not simply provide summaries of the sources, but

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should explain how they relate to each other (synthesize how they draw on similar theories, come to similar conclusions, etc.) and/or offer a critique of their content that is relevant to your own research. You may also choose to cite course readings; in fact, I encourage you to do so, but you must cite at least 5 additional sources.

2. Explain how your research project is likely to challenge, confirm, complicate, or contribute to existing work on your topic. You must make an argument for what your research will add to literature that already exists on the topic.

The literature review should be 4 to 5 double-spaced pages, size 12 Times New Roman font, one-inch margins.

Additional tips for writing your literature review:

- Do not just choose the first 5 sources that you find; make sure that they are relevant to your research question and topic.
- Think about the literature review as a window into a conversation between researchers about your topic. You'll want to explain what they have already found out about the topic and then you'll want to make a strong case for how your research is adding to the conversation.
- Keep your summaries of the articles or books concise and relevant. You don't need to summarize their entire argument, you just need to give us an idea of what parts are particularly pertinent to your own research.
- The format of your literature review should not just be a list of summaries. Instead you will want to identify some way in which the previous literature has fallen short and has not considered the question that you are interested in studying. This takes quite a bit of work in most cases and will mean that you will have to explain clearly how your research will challenge, confirm, complicate, or contribute to existing work on the topic.
- Edit, edit, edit. You should spend a fair amount of time putting this together and editing as much as possible. If you do a really good job on this portion, it's likely you'll be able to paste it into your final paper with minimal changes! Take it very seriously.

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- You must use the American Sociological Association's Style Guide to format your citations. If you use Zotero, it will do it for you automatically. Make sure your in-text citations are also properly formatted. The ASA Style Guide is posted on our course site.

Assignment 3: Abstract and Outline

Part One: Abstract

For this assignment you will write an abstract of no more than 500 words that details the argument you will make in your final paper. The abstract should have the following components:

1. **Research Question:** 1 or 2 sentences describing your topic or research question; this doesn't need to be in question form.
2. **Contribution:** A statement that explains what empirical or theoretical contribution your research makes to existing literature.
3. **Methods and Data:** An explanation of no more than 1 sentence that explains your methods, i.e., how you collected data to answer your research question.
4. **Findings:** A few sentences that describe the main argument you will make in your paper and what you found as a result of doing your research. It is okay if you haven't yet finished your research and these findings are only preliminary.
5. **Concluding Statement/Implications:** You will want to include at least 1 sentence that connects back to the problem that you identified at the beginning and that explains any important implications of your research.

Note: The abstract should not include any citations.

Grading: Your grade will be based on the organization and coherence of your writing, the inclusion of all aspects detailed above, and especially on the clarity, feasibility, and appropriateness of the argument that you plan to make in your final paper.

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Part Two: Paper Outline

For this assignment you will write an outline of your final paper that details each of the sections of the paper and the overall argument that you will make in each section. The outline can be as long as you would like, but cannot exceed 5 single-spaced pages, size 12 font, one-inch margins. *I recommend that you include as much detail as possible as this will be your last formal opportunity to receive feedback from me.*

Please label all sections. For each section you will include a brief paragraph (2–3 sentences) that outlines what you will argue/explain in that section. Then you will outline each paragraph or part of that section (please use the numerical outlining function in Word; you may also use bullet points where necessary). The outline should be *as detailed as possible* and should include quotations, examples from your research, data that supports your points, etc. You should include the following sections:

1. **Abstract:** A revised abstract for the paper that is no longer than 250 words. This means you may have to substantially cut down the abstract that you handed in for the previous assignment.
2. **Introduction:** This section should contain the argument you will make in the paper, your specific research question, any background necessary for the reader, and a short introductory explanation of why your topic is sociologically relevant and interesting and how it contributes to existing literature.
3. **Literature Review:** This section should contain a summary and synthesis of existing research related to your topic and an explanation of how your topic contributes to existing research, either theoretically or empirically.
4. **Methods:** This section will describe the research method(s) you used to answer your question and why the method(s) was (were) appropriate for helping you to answer your research question. You should include the specifics of what exactly you did, for example: How many people did you interview? How many surveys did you post? How many people responded?

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How did you contact the people that were included in your study? If you did textual analysis, how did you select the texts that you analyzed? Why? How did you go about analyzing them? Include as much detail as possible.

5. **Findings:** This is the section where you will make the central argument of your paper. You will explain the answer to your research question. If you are making your argument in several parts or sections, make sure to include those sections in the outline. The outline for the findings section should show me, in a very detailed way, what the argument is that you are making and how you expect to make the argument. It should include support from your research (quotes, percentages, or whatever other type of data you will use to support your argument).
6. **Discussion and Conclusion:** In this section you will summarize the argument that you make in the paper and you will reiterate how your findings confirmed or challenged (or both) the findings from the research that you outlined in the literature review. You will explain how your findings contribute to existing literature. You may also suggest questions that still need to be answered and suggestions for further research that should be done on your topic.

Assignment 4: Research Presentation

For this assignment you will prepare a very brief presentation of your research for the class. The purposes of this assignment are: a) to learn about the research that students have done as part of this class, b) to have the opportunity to give feedback and suggestions to other students, c) to discuss several topics related to transnational adoption using the foundational knowledge you have gained this semester.

Guidelines for your presentation:

1. Your presentation should be about *5 minutes*. Please practice ahead of time so that you can make sure that you can fit what you want to say in this time period.

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2. You should briefly explain your research question, your method, and your most interesting finding. In your presentation you should make some connection back to the topics and/or readings that we have discussed in this class — you can either connect your finding to course material or explain how your research contributes to the literature we have read together as part of this course.
3. After your presentation the class will ask questions of you and your panel. Please come prepared to talk in depth about your research and to answer questions about the research process, your findings, how the findings relate to the course, what contribution you are making to the existing literature on your topic, etc.

Grading: You will be graded on your ability to clearly and concisely present your research, the connections that you make between your research and course material, and your engagement in a discussion about your topic with other students in the class during the Q&A period.

Assignment 5: Final Paper

For this assignment you will draw on the research proposal, literature review, abstract, paper outline, and the data you have collected through your research to write a polished research paper on your topic. The paper must be 15–20 pages, size 12 Times New Roman font, one-inch margins. Please note that your bibliography/works cited and any appendices you choose to include will not be counted in the 15-page minimum.

Required Components for the Final Paper:

Please make sure to label each section with either a section title (e.g., literature review) or a title that communicates the content of the section (e.g., previous research on culture keeping).

1. **Cover Page:** The first page of your paper should be a cover sheet that includes a title that communicates the content of your paper, your name, date, title of the class, and any other information you feel is necessary.

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- 2. Abstract (~250 words):** A revised abstract for the paper that is no longer than 250 words. This means you may have to substantially cut down the abstract that you handed in for the previous assignment. It should be *single-spaced* and should be placed immediately preceding the introduction.
- 3. Introduction (1–3 pages):** This section should contain the argument you will make in the paper, your specific research question, any background necessary for the reader (e.g., historical context), and a short introductory explanation of why your topic is sociologically relevant and interesting, and how it contributes to existing literature.
- 4. Literature Review (4–6 pages):** This section should contain a summary and synthesis of existing research related to your topic and an explanation of how your topic contributes to existing research, either theoretically or empirically.
- 5. Methods (1–2 pages):** This section will describe the research method(s) you used to answer your question and why the method(s) was (were) appropriate for helping you to answer your research question. You should include the specifics of what exactly you did, for example: How many people did you interview? How many surveys did you post? How many people responded? How did you contact the people that were included in your study? If you did textual analysis, how did you select the texts that you analyzed? Why? How did you go about analyzing them? Include as much detail as possible. You should also explain why your sample is likely not representative of the general population you are studying and what biases are present as a result of your research design.
- 6. Findings (7+ pages):** This is the section where you will make the central argument of your paper. You will explain the answer to your research question. It should include support from your research (quotes, percentages, or whatever other type of data you will use to support your argument). You may choose to divide this section into sub-sections, but each sub-section should have a clear title. Make sure that you are making an argument and that each paragraph in this section connects back to your central argument.

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7. **Discussion and Conclusion (2+ pages):** In this section you will summarize the argument that you have made in the paper and you will reiterate how your findings confirmed or challenged (or both) the findings from the research that you outlined in the literature review. You will explain how your findings contribute to existing literature. You may also suggest questions that still need to be answered and suggestions for further research that should be done on your topic.
8. **Appendices:** If you did interviews or a survey you must include an appendix with your questions. You should refer to the appendix in the methods section. You can also include appendices with additional information (e.g., coding, statistics) if you feel that it is necessary. The appendices do not count in the page count.
9. **Bibliography/Citations:** Remember that you must cite *at least ten sources* in your paper. While many of these will likely be in the literature review, you should also cite where necessary in the other sections of the paper. At least 5 sources must come from readings that were not included in the course syllabus. All parenthetical citations and the works cited/bibliography page must be in ASA format. Formatting instructions are posted on our course website.

In writing this paper please make sure to look back over your previous assignments at my comments and to incorporate changes into your final paper. You are welcome to use any part of your previous assignments verbatim, but I urge you to edit carefully. This paper should be a polished, final paper and not a draft. This means that you will need to finish the paper in advance of the deadline to allow ample time for editing.

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English R&C Research Assignment

by Diane Matlock, English

[This is a very general assignment that challenges first- and second-year students to apply their developing critical skills to a question of interest to them. R1B is a course that satisfies the campus's Reading and Composition requirement. The materials below are instructions for the students.]

[What Is a Research Paper?](#)

[Preparing for a Research Project](#)

[Beginning the Research Project](#)

[Evaluating Sources](#)

[Assessing an Argument](#)

[Managing Information](#)

[Working Sources into the Paper](#)

[Your Working Title and Introduction](#)

What Is a Research Paper?

A research paper should provide its writer and its reader with new knowledge and a new understanding of a specific topic. The success of your research paper depends primarily on your critical judgment in selecting sources and on the originality and thoughtfulness of your treatment of the topic.

To write an effective research paper, one that makes an argument about your topic, you must review relevant resources and, using powers of analysis and integration, develop a paper that reveals understanding and original thinking. You want to think of your research topic as a question or problem — not a topic area — that your essay is going to address and/or resolve.

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If you take seriously the importance of using sources judiciously and of learning something new through the research process, the paper should embody all of the following characteristics:

- Originality
- Expression of an evaluation or attitude
- A reasoned approach to an argument
- A synthesis of information from several sources
- Systematic documentation of sources
- The result of a time-consuming research process

Preparing for a Research Project

If you have been assigned a research project, be sure you understand the requirements and the limits of the assignment before you begin your research. If you have been assigned a specific research project, keep in mind the cue words in the assignment. Are you to describe, survey, analyze, explain, classify, compare, or contrast? What do such words mean in this field? You also need to know the audience, rhetorical stance, scope, length, and deadline for your project.

Research log

You should keep a research log — either on paper or digitized — to jot down thoughts about your topic, lists of things to do, and ideas about possible sources; also use it to keep track of library materials. You can also use the log as a means of analyzing and developing your research process. What things worked? What didn't work? How will you do things differently next time?

Project Calendar

Before beginning a research project, you should also map out a rough but realistic schedule for your research. It can include the following action items and the dates they need to be completed:

- Analyze project; decide on primary purpose and audience; choose topic
- Set aside library time; develop search strategy (see below)

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- Send for materials needed from Interlibrary Loan
- Do background research, narrow topic if necessary
- Decide on research questions and a tentative hypothesis
- Start working on bibliography; begin tracking down sources
- Gather or develop graphics or visuals needed
- Develop working thesis and rough outline
- If necessary, conduct interviews, make observations, or distribute and collect questionnaires
- Read and evaluate sources; take notes
- Draft explicit thesis and outline
- Prepare first draft, including visuals
- Obtain and evaluate critical responses to your draft
- Do more research if necessary
- Revise draft
- Prepare list of works cited
- Edit and revise draft; use spell checker
- Prepare final draft
- Do final proofreading

Beginning the Research Project

You should see your research project as an essay that responds to an interesting question. For an academic, one of the fundamental roles is asking questions. To initiate your project, you should begin by formulating a research question. Pose possible questions that are worth exploring and challenging. You should also choose a narrow question that can be answered fully within the page limits set for the assignment. You want to create a discipline-appropriate question that is interesting, significant, and pursuable. Before beginning, consider:

- What is the research problem or question you intend to address?
- Why is it an interesting question? Why is it problematic?
- Why is it significant?

Your instructor can help you think through these questions if you get stuck.

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Evaluating Sources

Once you have selected your research topic and begun exploring the primary and secondary sources available, you will work to evaluate the sources you find: determine which ones are most relevant to your research question; identify which sources will provide the best context for answering your question; and collect the sources that you will be able to use as evidence for the argument you will eventually make. To do this, you will need to eliminate inappropriate sources — such as those that are outdated, are unreliable, use uncited sources, or make unsubstantiated claims.

Don't try to read everything - be selective

You want to select sources that are worth your time and attention. Begin by looking at the title, abstract or introductory paragraphs, date, name of publisher or periodical, and length of text. Consider carefully each source's relevance, currency, scholarship, and scope.

Next, you need to determine the rhetorical situation of the sources you will work with.

What is the rhetorical situation of the source?

Every text originates in a particular situation; you need to learn about the situation or conversation a text belongs to. What question is being posed, and how does the writer shape it? You need to consider a real author, writing for some important reasons, within a real historical context, from a certain perspective. Whether argumentative or informative, sources present particular perspectives. This is true of primary sources as well as secondary sources. For example, the editorial staffs of different magazines and newspapers can have distinct political orientations, and emphasize issues in particular ways to appeal to their assumed audience. For this reason, before reading closely through a whole article or book, you need to try to determine the rhetorical situation of the source and the argument. Ask yourself:

- What kind of text is it? What are its qualities and features?

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- Who is the author? What is the reputation of the author? What is her or his perspective or bias?
- When was the source written?
- Where did the source appear? (There are different degrees of scholarly prestige for different journals and presses.)
- Why was the book or article written?
- What is the author's aim?
- How is the source organized?
- What sources are included in the bibliography and footnotes?

Answering these questions will help you understand the rhetorical situation of a source

Evaluating websites

The same criteria that apply to printed sources apply to websites. When using websites to conduct research, consider the following:

- Is an author named? (Check the home page or "About This Site" link). Who, if anyone, sponsors the site? (If the authorship and the sponsorship of a site are both unclear, be extremely suspicious of the site.)
- The domain often specifies the type of group hosting the site: commercial (.com), educational (.edu), nonprofit (.org), governmental (.gov), military (.mil), network (.net), etc. What does the domain of this site tell you about the source?
- Why was the site created? To argue a position? To sell a product? To inform readers?
- Can you tell whether the author is knowledgeable and credible?
- Who is the site's intended audience?
- How current is the site?
- How current are the site's links?

The UC Berkeley Library has an extensive guide you may find helpful on [Evaluating Resources](#).

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Assessing an Argument

After learning about the rhetorical situation of a source, read its argument critically. If it is book-length, look at the introduction, conclusion, and one essential chapter. You should choose the chapter that most specifically relates to your research project. Just as you close-read a literary passage by breaking it down into smaller parts, you analyze an argument by examining elements of its form and manner of presentation. Consider what the author states and how she or he states it.

Be alert to biases

- Is the purpose of the argument to inform or to advocate?
- Does the author or publisher have political leanings or religious views that affect the argument they make? For example, is the author or publisher associated with a special-interest group, such as Greenpeace or the National Rifle Association, that might see only one side of an issue?
- How fairly does the source treat opposing views? Does it over-generalize and attack them, or does it engage them respectfully?
- In what ways does the bias of the source limit its usefulness for your research question?

Analyze the argument

- What is the author's central thesis?
- What is the basic structure of the argument for the thesis? Are there any logical fallacies in the structure?
- What assumptions does the argument make? Are any of the author's assumptions questionable?
- What counts as evidence for the argument? Is the evidence current? Is it accurately presented and interpreted? Is it relevant? Does the source have the expertise to handle the evidence fairly?
- Does the author consider opposing arguments fairly and refute them persuasively?

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Finally, you want to ask yourself how you might **use** the source. Is the evidence useful, relevant, and accurately reported? Or does the article provide an example of a point of view you want to discuss? How might the source be used to provide evidence for and/or to contextualize your argument?

[For more tips on helping students read critically, see [Teaching Critical Reading](#). For a consideration of ways writers construe their sources, see the Teaching Excellence Award essay [Sources into Evidence](#) by Leonard von Morz .]

Managing Information

An effective researcher is a good record keeper. You need to find a systematic way of managing information. You will need methods for maintaining a working bibliography, keeping track of materials, and taking notes without plagiarizing your sources.

Record complete bibliographic information for each of your sources, and do not forget to include the page numbers of any passages you might cite as evidence in your essay. The following entries are examples of the MLA format for a bibliography:

Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Norris, Margot. "Narration under a Blindfold: Reading Joyce's 'Clay.'" *PMLA* 102 (1987): 206–15.

Maintain a working bibliography

Keep a record of any sources you decide to consult. You will need this record, called a working bibliography, when you compile the list of works cited that will appear at the end of your paper.

Keep track of source materials

The best way to keep track of source materials is to photocopy them or print them out.

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As you take notes, avoid unintentional plagiarism

You will discover that it is amazingly easy to borrow too much language from a source as you take notes. Do not allow this to happen. To prevent unintentional borrowing, resist the temptation to look at the source as you take notes — except when you are quoting. Keep the source close by so you can check for accuracy, but do not try to put ideas in your own words while you have the source's sentences in front of you.

As you take notes, be sure to include exact page references, since you will need the page numbers later if you use the information in your paper.

There are three kinds of note-taking: summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting.

A **summary** condenses information, perhaps reducing a chapter to a short paragraph or a paragraph into a single sentence. A summary should be written in your own words; if you use phrases from the source, put them in quotation marks.

A **paraphrase** is written in your own words; but whereas a summary reports significant information in fewer words than the source, a paraphrase retells the information in roughly the same number of words. If you retain occasional choice phrases from the source, use quotation marks so you will know later which phrases are your own.

A **quotation** consists of the exact words from a source. In your notes, put all quoted material in quotation marks. When you quote, be sure to copy the words of your sources exactly, including punctuation and capitalization.

Working Sources into the Paper

You want to work quotations and paraphrases into the texture of your own prose, carrying an argument in your own voice. Remember that you are using your sources as evidence for your own argument. In other words, you need to construct a thesis and argument that present your ideas, not those of the primary and secondary sources you read.

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Choose a documentation style

The format of citations depends upon the documentation style you are using — for example, MLA, APA, or CMS. Select a style appropriate for your discipline. Consult a style guide (your instructor may recommend one, or there may be a standard one for your discipline).

Your Working Title and Introduction

A good **title** is an important part of your project as it is your reader's first introduction to your essay. Your working title can be a question, a summary of thesis or purpose, or a two-part title with a colon. For example:

- Is Patriarchal Management Extinct?
- The Relationship between Client and Therapist Expectation of Improvement and Psychotherapy Outcome
- Money and Growth: An Alternative Approach
- Fine Cloth, Cut Carefully: Cooperative Learning in British Columbia (this one begins with an interesting mystery phrase that will become clear after reading the essay)

An **introduction** has three main parts:

- The first part introduces the reader to the problem the paper addresses. This section usually contains needed background on the problem and often reviews previous scholarship that has addressed it. Frequently, the writer explains why the problem is a problem (for example, why earlier attempts to solve the problem have been unsatisfactory) and why the problem is significant and worth pursuing.
- The second part explains the focus and purpose of the essay, and includes the thesis.
- The third part gives the reader an overview of the research project.

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Drafts, Edits, Revisions

Writing is a difficult and complex craft. Writing to learn new material or exercise higher-order intellectual work is all the more complex. Many students believe that “real” writers can whip out a paper from scratch the day before it’s due in a single inspired (or desperate) effort, so that is what they as student writers aim for. When GSIs start grading a pile of these last-minute “inspired” papers with all their careless errors and underdeveloped ideas, they may well despair of deciphering them, let alone evaluating them for a grade. Many of the papers just don’t seem finished.

GSIs can make the students’ job, and their own, much more productive by making students responsible for producing finished work. Drafts, revisions, and proofreading should be the norm for students’ writing process. The result of this is that GSIs will grade papers focusing more on the students’ intellectual accomplishment than on defective or incomplete writing.

Drafts

Require students to bring a draft of a major assignment to class and give some kind of homework credit for drafts that really show substantial effort toward completion. By definition these drafts will not be polished — but there’s no point in polishing at this stage, when the content is subject to review and revision. (Ease student fears of showing work in progress by letting them know what you do and do not expect at this stage.)

GSIs may or may not have time to read through all the drafts and give feedback (though it’s most effective if they do), but they can give students the set of standards they would use to give feedback and give some class time to peer editing. Provide students with a worksheet (you can [view an example of a peer review worksheet](#)) showing the kinds of questions you would be asking about a paper, questions that reflect both the learning objectives of the assignment and the grading rubric. It is also helpful to provide the student writer with a separate worksheet for deciding how to use the peer reviewer’s comments. This isn’t about making students do the GSIs’ work. Rather, it’s about developing students’ sense of

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what constitutes excellence and practicing the kind of review that happens in many professional settings.

Revisions

Many students completely misunderstand the notion of revision. They tend to make whatever superficial improvements are suggested, but when faced with a paragraph or a section of a paper that needs to be strengthened or rethought, they will often leave it substantially as it is with minor corrections or word changes. GSIs can help students understand what to do with the feedback they receive, whether it comes from the GSIs or from fellow students.

One strategy for teaching revision is to demonstrate revision of a spotty or disorganized paragraph in class, then follow it up with some group work revising a different paragraph. Another strategy is to have students reflect on the comments their paper received, write down the issues that are most important to rework, and come up with a revision plan. They must do this directly after peer review so the issues are fresh and the students can remember what to work on when they later sit down to revise.

Another strategy is to work on a student's document using [collaborative editing in bDrive](#) (Google Docs). The student shares a paper draft with you, which you work and comment on together simultaneously. This is also another useful tool for conducting peer review assignments.

Proofreading

Finally, emphasize proofreading by making it a discrete step, the last step, in the writing process. Distinguish proofreading from revision. While revision addresses large-scale and substantive issues such as coherence of argument or appropriate degree of detail or changing a summary into an analysis, proofreading identifies and eliminates surface errors such as improper word usage, misspelling, or mistakes in sentence structure. Consider providing students with a checklist of common errors to correct and usages particular to your field. For an example, see [Checklist for All Assignments \(Biology\)](#).

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Some GSIs are reluctant to give class time or their prep time to drafts and peer editing, but that time invested saves a great deal of time in the grading process later on. The papers read better, problems are reduced, and the GSIs can evaluate the quality of learning and content — the objectives the instructor had in mind in assigning the paper.

Each of these steps is the students' responsibility to master, but the GSI can help students take on these responsibilities and at the same time help themselves when it comes time to grade.

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Writer's Name _____

Reader's Name _____

Peer Review Worksheet

Instructions: Read your partner's essay through, making notes about content. You can also make marks on the draft itself. Begin by noticing the larger features of the essay and work toward smaller-scale issues. Be ready to explain your concerns about the paper directly to its author. You don't need to do any proofreading since the draft you are reading is subject to change.

Your thesis is:

Your major supporting points are:

Strengths I saw in your essay:

Things I didn't understand, logic I didn't follow, parts you should think about revising for clarity or reader comprehension:

Something new I learned from your essay:

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Writer's Name _____

Reader's Name _____

Writer's Response to Reviewer's Comments

Which of your reader's comments are most important? Consider the large-scale issues of your essay: argument, logic, coherence, organization, persuasiveness, interest.

Which comments may have some value, but you're not sure about them?

Which comments do you disagree with? Why?

What did you learn about your writing or about this particular paper? Strengths? Tendencies to watch out for?

What discrete steps will you take next to revise your paper? When will you work on each step? Make a concrete plan to follow for your revision process.

Issue 1

Issue 2

Issue 3

Issue 4

Proofreading

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Checklist for All Assignments (Biology)

Please complete this checklist and hand it in stapled to your assignment.

- The first page includes your name, date, and the scientific paper's citation in this format: Author(s). Year published. Title of article. Journal. Journal Volume (number): pages in journal volume.
For example: Jones, T.M. 2004. A new view of trilobite phylogeny. *Paleobiology* 35(3): 229-256
- Text is in 11- or 12-point font and is double-spaced.
- Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence.
- Spelling has been checked.
- All paraphrased, summarized, and quoted ideas and statements of an author other than you are cited (author, year) in text.
- Data, findings, and/or discoveries are discussed as evidence, not proof. The word *proof* is used appropriately in courtrooms and in math, but not in scientific writing.
- Slang, jargon, and wordiness are avoided. For example, try not to use *as to*, *due to*, *in order to*, *it is suggested that*, *first of all*, *the fact that*, *with regard to*, etc. If you use *to*, *that*, *in* or *of* in a phrase, try choosing a more precise word. For example, *in order to* could be better said *because* or *so*. *First of all* is better said *first*. *Previous to* is better said *before*. *In some cases* is better said *sometimes*.
- Genus and species names (e.g. *Gorilla gorilla*, *Drosophila melanogaster*) are italicized with the first word (the genus) capitalized and the second word (the species) in lowercase.
- If used, i.e. is followed by an explanation and e.g. is followed by one or more examples.
- The Latin i.e. (*id est*) translates to "in other words" in English, and e.g. (*exempli gratia*) means "for example."
- Correct plurals are used. Note the examples below.

Wrong	Correct
This data	these data

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Data is	data are
Phenomenons	one phenomenon, two phenomena
Genuses	one genus, two genera
Taxons	one taxon, two taxa
Phylums	one phylum, two phyla

- The tone of your writing is professional
- No conjunctions (don't, won't, etc.) are used. They make writing too casual for essays. Also note: "its" is a possessive pronoun (e.g. its fauna). By contrast, "it's" means "it is."
- "Which" and "that" are used correctly. "Which" usually refers to a whole group and is used in a general case (and with a comma) while "that" is used in a specific case.
- Examples:
 - (1) The neighborhood dogs, which bark, wake me up at night.
 - (2) The neighborhood dogs that bark wake me up at night.In (1) all neighborhoods dogs bark and wake me up at night. In (2) the dogs that bark are a subset of all neighborhood dogs, and only the barking dogs wake me up at night.

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Grading Essays

[Grade for Learning Objectives](#)

[Response to Writing Errors](#)

[Commenting on Student Papers](#)

[Plagiarism and Grading](#)

Information about grading student writing also appears in the [Grading Student Work](#) section of the Teaching Guide. Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when grading student writing.

Grade for Learning Objectives

Know what the objective of the assignment is and grade according to a standard (a rubric) that assesses precisely that. If the purpose of the assignment is to analyze a process, focus on the analysis in the essay. If the paper is unreadable, however, consult with the professor and other GSIs about how to proceed. It may be wise to have a shared policy about the level of readiness or comprehensibility expected and what is unacceptable.

Response to Writing Errors

The research is clear: do not even attempt to mark every error in students' papers. There are several reasons for this. Teachers do not agree about what constitutes an error (so there is an unavoidable element of subjectivity); students do not learn when confronted by too many markings; and exhaustive marking takes way too much of the instructor's time. An excellent essay on this topic is "On Not Being a Composition Slave" by Maxine Hairston (available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center). Resist the urge to edit or proofread your students' papers for superficial errors. At most, mark errors on one page or errors of [only two or three types](#).

Commenting on Student Papers

The scholarly literature in this area distinguishes **formative** from **summative** comments. **Summative** comments are the more traditional approach. They render judgment about an essay after it has been completed. They explain the instructor's judgment of a student's performance. If the instructor's comments contain several critical statements, the student often becomes protective of his or her ego by filtering them out; learning from mistakes becomes more difficult. If the assignment

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is over with, the student may see no reason to revisit it to learn from the comments.

Formative comments, on the other hand, give the student feedback in an ongoing process of learning and skill building. Through formative comments, particularly in the draft stage of a writing assignment, instructors guide students on a strategic selection of the most important aspects of the essay. These include both what to keep because it is (at least relatively) well done and what requires revision. Formative comments let the student know clearly how to revise and why.

For the purposes of this guide, we have distinguished **commenting** on student writing (which is treated here) from **grading** student writing (which is treated in the **Teaching Guide section on grading**). While it is true that instructors' comments on student writing should give reasons for the grade assigned to it, we want to emphasize here that the comments on a student's paper can function as **instruction**, not simply as justification. Here are ten tips.

1. Use your comments on a student's paper to highlight things the paper accomplishes well and a few major things that would most improve the paper.
2. Always observe at least one or two strengths in the student's paper, even if they seem to you to be low-level accomplishments — but avoid condescension. Writing is a complex activity, and students really do need to know they're doing something right.
3. Don't make exhaustive comments. They take up too much of your time and leave the student with no sense of priority among them.
4. Don't proofread. If the paper is painfully replete with errors and you want to emphasize writing mechanics, count the first ten errors on the page, draw a line at that point, and ask the student to identify them and to show their corrections to you in office hours. Students do not learn much from instructors' proofreading marks. Direct students to a writing reference guide such as the Random House Handbook.

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5. Notice patterns or repeated errors (in content or form). Choose the three or four most disabling ones and direct your comments toward helping the students understand what they need to learn to do differently to correct this kind of error.
6. Use **marginal** notes to locate and comment on specific passages in the paper (for example “Interesting idea — develop it more” or “I lost the thread of the argument in this section” or “Very useful summary here before you transition to the next point”). Use **final** or **end comments** to discuss more global issues (e.g., “Work on paragraph structure” or “The argument from analogy is ineffective. A better way to make the point would be...”)
7. Maintain a catalogue of positive **end** comments: “Good beginning for a 1B course.” “Very perceptive reading.” “Good engagement with the material.” “Gets at the most relevant material/issues/passages.” Anything that connects specific aspects of the student’s product with the grading rubric is useful. (For more on **grading rubrics**, see the Grading section of the Teaching Guide.)
8. Diplomatic but firm suggestions for improvement: Here you must be specific and concrete. Global negative statements tend to enter students’ self-image (“I’m a bad writer”). This creates an attitudinal barrier to learning and makes your job harder and less satisfying. Instead, try “The most strategic improvement you could make is...” Again, don’t try to comment on everything. Select only the most essential areas for improvement, and watch the student’s progress on the next draft or paper.
9. Typical in-text marks: Provide your students with a legend of your reading marks. Does a straight underline indicate “good stuff”? Does a wavy underline mean something different? Do you use abbreviations in the margins? You can find examples of standard editing marks in many writing guides, such as the Random House Handbook.
10. The tone of your comments on student writing is important to students. Avoid sarcasm and jokes — students who take offense are less disposed to learn. Address the student by name before your end-comments, and sign your name after your remarks. Be professional, and bear in mind the sorts of comments that help you with your work.

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Plagiarism and Grading

Students can be genuinely uninformed or misinformed about what constitutes plagiarism. In some instances students will knowingly resort to cutting and pasting from unacknowledged sources; a few may even pay for a paper written by someone else. Your section syllabus should include a clear policy notice about plagiarism so that students cannot miss it, and instructors should work with students to be sure they understand how to incorporate outside sources appropriately.

Plagiarism can be largely prevented by stipulating that larger writing assignments be completed in steps that the students must turn in for instructor review, or that students visit the instructor periodically for a brief but substantive chat about how their projects are developing, or that students turn in their research log and notes at intermediate points in the research process.

For further guidance on preventing academic misconduct, please see [Academic Misconduct — Preventing Plagiarism](#).

UC Berkeley has a campus license to use Turnitin to check the originality of students' papers and to generate feedback to students about their integration of written sources into their papers. The tool is available in bCourses as an add-on to the Grading tool, and in the Assignments tool SpeedGrader. Even with the results of the originality check, instructors are obligated to exercise judgment in determining the degree to which a given use of source material was fair or unfair.

If a GSI does find a very likely instance of plagiarism, the faculty member in charge of the course must be notified and provided with the evidence. The faculty member is responsible for any sanctions against the student. Some faculty members give an automatic failing grade for the assignment or for the course, according to their own course policy. Instances of plagiarism should be reported to the Center for Student Conduct; please see [If You Encounter Academic Misconduct](#).

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Working with the Writing of Multilingual (“ESL”) Students: Frequently Asked Questions

GSIs often want to know more about working with multilingual writers — students whose first language is not English. Although people often use the term “ESL” (English as a Second Language) to refer to students whose first language is not English, professionals in the field now usually prefer “non-native [English] speakers” (NNS) or “multilingual students.” The term “multilingual” respects both students’ ability to function in more than one language and the challenge they face when writing in English. “NNS” and “multilingual” are often more accurate expressions than “English as a Second Language” because English may be a person’s third or fourth language or beyond.

This page addresses questions that often come from GSIs who work with multilingual students in courses that require a substantial amount of writing, but in which developing writing skill is not necessarily a primary learning objective. GSIs who work in courses that are designed to improve student writing should read, in addition to this page, [Working with Multilingual Writers](#) in the Reading and Composition section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs.

Frequently Asked Questions

[Why is there such a wide range in student writing at Cal?](#)

[How can I respond to a multilingual student’s writing when I’m not an ESL specialist?](#)

[Should I correct all the errors and let the student learn from my corrections?](#)

[Should I make special accommodations for multilingual students such as allowing them more time than other students on writing assignments?](#)

[Should I grade the work of people with language difficulties differently?](#)

[What about plagiarism? I’ve heard that copying is considered a good practice in some cultures.](#)

[What if I’m finding a student essay really, really hard to read?](#)

[How can I learn more?](#)

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Why is there such a wide range in student writing at Cal?

Linguistic variety in a world language such as English is inevitable and normal, and UC Berkeley students come from a vast array of linguistic backgrounds.

International students bring the varieties of English they learn in other English-speaking countries (for example Australia, Canada, or India) or in their previous schooling in non-English-speaking countries. International students who come from non-English-speaking countries show evidence of English proficiency through standardized testing before being admitted to Cal. For many of these students, the volume and sophistication of the writing expected in their classes here may present a new order of challenge.

Students who have difficulty composing in Standard Written English may be international students from non-English-speaking countries. Or they may be students from English-speaking countries for whom the language of the home was not English, or they may be students whose first language is English. People in the latter two groups often share in common that they have learned the language well by ear but are still working to become fluent on paper.

Of course there are many accomplished English-language writers among multilingual students. It's best not to generalize or prejudge students' abilities or needs based on linguistic background.

How can I respond to a multilingual student's writing when I'm not an ESL specialist?

GSIs are not asked to perform like ESL professionals. What GSIs are generally tasked to do is to evaluate students' mastery of specific course materials or awareness about a topic based on their writing assignments, using an appropriate [grading rubric](#) (a specific set of standards).

More helpful than singling out multilingual student writers for special attention is to consider all student writing as falling somewhere along a continuum from very correct, elegant, and effective to ungrammatical, awkward, or incoherent. Almost all

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of our students' writings will fall somewhere along this spectrum, and within a single paper there are often passages that differ in quality.

Should I correct all the errors and let the student learn from my corrections?

No. A GSI's markings and comments on student papers should primarily help students understand the degree of their achievement and how they can improve their knowledge and performance in the future. Usually when an instructor sets out to correct errors, he or she is merely copyediting surface mistakes without attending to patterns of error or even the quality of the students' thought. This can distract students from the main learning objectives that the piece of writing is meant to assess. Correcting errors can also take up an inordinate amount of a GSI's time.

Students can't really process comprehensive error marking, but they can understand a pattern to correct if the GSI can help them learn to identify and work on it themselves. If improvement of student writing is a major course objective, please see the page [Working with Multilingual Writers](#) for further elaboration and productive strategies.

Should I make special accommodations for multilingual students such as allowing them more time than other students on writing assignments?

No. "[Accommodation](#)" is a technical term for specific measures stipulated for individual students with specific mental, physical, or other disabilities, and these measures are formally determined case-by-case by specialists at the [Disabled Students Program](#). Multilingualism is not a disability.

Should I grade the work of people with language difficulties differently?

No. The grading standards for all students' work should remain the same. Grading, however, is not the only thing GSIs do with student papers; they also respond with [comments](#). The response and commenting strategy can vary: you can, for example, comment on the paper's features based on the grading criteria and also comment on one or two prominent kinds of writing error for a student to work on.

What about plagiarism? I've heard that copying is considered a good practice in some cultures.

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There are several reasons a multilingual student or someone raised outside the U.S. might try to fill a written assignment with other people's material. Many of the reasons are the same ones native English speakers might have for plagiarizing: the stress of thinking their own written English is not good enough; getting desperate at the last minute before an assignment is due; not understanding that merely cutting and pasting from the internet is an unacceptable practice; not sufficiently understanding the norms for acknowledging sources in U.S. academic culture. Cultural difference could be relevant in some cases: for example, in some cultures certain texts may be regarded as so authoritative or so well known as to render citation, and student analysis, trivial. However, even if cultural difference does enter in, all college students in the U.S. need to understand and follow the norms of the academic community here. Any paper a student turns in as his or her own work must in fact be the product of the student's own intellectual labor; if students use other sources, they are required to give proper citations. GSIs are in a great position to help all students learn about this issue. For more information on plagiarism, please see the Teaching Guide section [Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism](#).

What if I'm finding a student essay really, really hard to read?

When a GSI feels that a student writer's work is so problematic that the GSI really can't tell how much the student has learned or what he or she means to say, there are several options.

- The GSI can put it back into the stack of ungraded papers and look at it again later; often when a GSI first reads a paper it seems incomprehensible, but with some patience and a second read the GSI may understand it more fully.
- The GSI can consult with the Instructor of Record and other GSIs in the course for perspective, tips, or instructor policies on how to proceed.
- The GSI can invite the student to office hours and discuss some of the difficulties the GSI had as a reader. It is best to choose just one or two major difficulties, preferably as patterns. An office-hour conversation is also helpful because sometimes just getting used to a student's manner of speech helps a GSI understand the writing.

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- The GSI can suggest that the student take advantage of tutoring to work specifically on writing skills. Note that students cannot be required to use the tutoring programs. The following campus units provide tutoring:
 - [Student Learning Center Writing Program](#). Tutoring and workshops available for all UC Berkeley undergraduates.
 - [Academic Support in the Residence Halls: Tutoring](#). Writing tutors available for students in the residence halls on a drop-in basis; drop-in hours are posted at their website.
 - [Athletic Study Center](#). Individual and group tutoring for student athletes.

GSIs needn't feel like they are putting a student off or singling a student out by suggesting outside tutoring; it's actually a great resource. Research shows that one-on-one instruction with a tutor is an extremely effective strategy for students to improve their writing.

How can I learn more?

If you would like to learn more about working with multilingual students on their writing, please see [Working with Multilingual Writers](#) in the Reading and Composition section of the Teaching Guide.

If you would like to see a list of resources for student writers and their GSIs, please see [Additional Resources](#) at the end of this Teaching Guide section or the [Additional Resources](#) page in the Reading and Composition section of the Teaching Guide.

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Time Management Suggestions for Grading Student Writing

- Articulate your learning objectives for the assignment. Do you want students to simply demonstrate an understanding of the material, or would you rather they extend that knowledge by synthesizing or applying what they've learned? This saves grading time by helping students write the right kind of essay and by helping you keep firmly in mind the traits that are most important to evaluate and provide feedback on.
- Provide your students with a handout or rubric that gives specific guidelines, or a checklist to clarify your expectations. Use it when grading the written assignment.
- Create and use a grading rubric. This can save you time by reducing grade challenges, because students will more likely understand the rationale for their grade.
- Good papers are easier and less time-consuming to grade than poor ones. Extra time spent giving students guidance through stepped assignments and multiple drafts reduces the amount of time spent on grading, and the students learn more through the process.
- If you are parsing an assignment someone else has created, zero in on the steps and the learning objectives of each step in completing the assignment.
- If you are designing your own assignment, consider: how compressed is students' time in your course already? What do they have time for? How packed is **your** time? How long can you afford to spend teaching the assignment (if necessary) and reading through the students' papers?
- Define your policies about receiving, proofreading, and editing drafts.
- Teach and require students to review each other's work effectively in peer review teams.
- When you evaluate student work, keep your focus on the learning objectives of the assignment or the particular knowledge and skills it was designed to assess. Don't be distracted by extraneous matters, such as marking superficial mistakes.

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Working with Student Writing: Additional Resources

The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style (2005). Boston and New York: Houghton-Mifflin. Discreet or discrete? Myriad reasons, or a myriad of reasons? If you do take time to correct usage in a student's writing, it's a good idea to back up your judgment with a reliable source. Many standard writing handbooks also include brief usage guides.

Bean, John C. (1996). *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Center for Teaching and Learning, UC Berkeley. [Resources for Non-Native English Speakers](#).

Davis, Barbara Gross (2009). "Helping Students Write Better in All Courses." Chap. 24 and 25 in *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Print edition available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

George Mason University Writing Across the Curriculum. [Teaching with Writing](#). Gateway to several useful and concise pages on learning through writing.

Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj (2004). *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Harvey, Michael (2003). *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing. Concise, approachable, and inexpensive guide for students and for instructors looking for useful ways to talk about writing with students.

Hedengren, Beth Finch (2004). *A TA's Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Tollefson, Steve (1988). [Encouraging Student Writing](#). Berkeley: Office of Educational Development, University of California. Excellent resource for non-writing specialists; in addition to essential pointers for instructors, it includes several pages of handouts giving tips for student writers.

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[Purdue University Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#). General and specific resources for instructors and students.

Walvoord, Barbara E. Fassler (1986). *Helping Students Write Well: A Guide for Teachers in All Disciplines*. New York: Modern Language Association of America. Available in the University's Main Library.

[The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina](#). Materials for students and instructors. Scores of [handouts](#) about many, many writing issues.

UC Berkeley College Writing Programs [Multilingual Student Writing Consultant for Instructors](#). Available to discuss specific issues in working with multilingual student writers.

Further resources on writing are listed on the [Resources page of the Reading and Composition chapter](#).