



Writing About Anthropology

I. General Purpose and Audience

Anthropologists study all aspects of humans from four perspectives: linguistic anthropology (issues related to culture and language); socio-cultural anthropology (the study of primarily contemporary human culture); archaeology (the study of the unwritten record of the human past); and biological anthropology (the study of the biological nature of humans and human evolution). The **audience** for these types of writing can include teachers, the general public, students, researchers, and other anthropologists.

II. Types of Writing

- Research papers
- Research proposals/ grant proposals
 - Propose a question to be answered or problem to be solved
 - Provide literature review on scholarly research
 - Explain methods of research, including
 - the research site
 - the specific methods of gathering data
 - the type of sampling used to select participants
 - interview questions to ask
 - anticipated findings
 - time schedule
 - Cite references
 - Include short résumé
 - Estimate budget for all expenses
 - Identify living arrangements of researcher(s)
 - Include interviewee consent forms (if applicable)
- Field Notes
 - Usually informal notes taken when observing people
 - Entails details and descriptions
 - Basis for ethnographies
- Ethnographies (portraits of a specific group of people)
 - Ethnographers usually live with the group being studied for long periods of time

- Data are gathered by means of field and laboratory observations, measurement, and personal interviews
(*For more information, see the “How to Write an Ethnography” handout of Appalachian State’s University Writing Center.)
- Journal Articles
- Technical Reports
- Literature Reviews

III. Types of Evidence

- Qualitative Data – non-numerical information; categories, qualities, meaning, effect, values
 - Interviews
 - Observations (field notes)
 - Other written documents (books, journals, newspapers, magazines, etc.)
 - Formal and informal interactions
 - Language
- Quantitative Data – information that can be expressed numerically
 - Facts containing numbers
 - Statistics
 - Numbers of people or things
- Past ethnographies or research

IV. Writing Conventions

- Base research on credible, reliable sources.
- Credit the use of others’ work.
- Emphasize data, but also make the writing interesting for your audience.
- Use active voice.
- Include visual aids when possible (images, tables, charts, kinship diagrams, etc.).
- Write in first person to refer to observations or when writing field notes.
- Avoid judgmental, offensive, and ethnocentric language.

V. Terms / Acronyms / Concepts

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| ○ AAA: American Anthropological Association | ○ Linguistic Anthropology |
| ○ Archaeological Anthropology | ○ Literature review |
| ○ Biological Anthropology | ○ Participant observation |
| ○ Cultural Anthropology | ○ Qualitative data |
| ○ Ethnography | ○ Quantitative data |
| ○ Field notes | ○ Research methods |
| | ○ Emic vs etic |
| | ○ Sampling |

VI. Documentation Styles

AAA (American Anthropological Association) uses

- Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)
- Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

SAA (Society for American Archaeology)

Sources consulted

Cuba, Lee. *A Short Guide to Writing About Social Science*. 4th ed. Longman, 2002.

Driscoll, Dana Lynn and Brizee Allen. "Resources for Documenting Sources in the Disciplines." *Purdue OWL*. 4 June 2012. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue University.

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "Handouts: Anthropology." *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*. 2013.



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