



Writing About Criminal Justice and Criminology

I. General Information and Audience

The Criminal Justice field studies official and unofficial responses to criminal and delinquent behavior, while criminology focuses on theories that explain criminal and delinquent behavior. This is a multi-disciplinary field (combining sociology, political science, public administration, psychology, history, and/ or law) with a focus on justice and justice policies. Writing is used to inform, explain, document, persuade, or make a request of an audience. Specialty fields within this discipline include law enforcement, juvenile justice, corrections, law and courts, homeland security, and justice administration. **Audiences** include peers, supervisors, readers of professional and academic publications, the general public, and members of the court system, such as defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges.

II. Types of Writing

1. Research Papers
 - Review existing research and literature on a subject
 - Apply theory or competing theories to subject
 - Combine primary research (interviews, surveys, observations) with secondary sources (previous writing about topic)
2. Analytical Papers
 - Analyze or apply theory to situations, existing literature, legal cases, personal accounts
3. Argument or Position Papers
 - Present both sides of an issue in an unbiased manner;
 - Take a position based on analysis of course readings, lectures, research—not personal opinion
4. Investigative Reports
 - Crime, Arrest, Incident and Accident reports; pre-sentence reports for court [All include timeline of events; where and when interviews occurred; who else was present; witnesses' names and details]
5. Administrative Reports
 - Description of problem, backed up by research and data

- Recommendations based on analysis of data
6. Policy Memos
 - Typical purpose is to help audiences understand an issue and interpret policy
 7. Case Briefs and Legal Briefs
 - Description of case with key issues, relevant facts, related court decisions; analysis and interpretation; legal principles
 - Analyze documents and argue a position
 - Two models in legal briefs :
 - IRAC model: (Issue/ Rules/ Analysis or Application/ Conclusion)
 - PEAR model (Position/ Explanation/ Alternatives/ Response)
 8. Case Plans/ Case Notes
 - Memos to public defenders, prosecutors, judges, probation officers, social workers, treatment providers

III. Types of Evidence

- Quantitative, qualitative, historical and legal evidence
- Interviews, observation, survey, narrative analysis, experiments
- Analysis of demographics, statistics, legalities, geography and history
- Theory-based evidence or history of theory and criminal justice policy
- Both primary and secondary sources

IV. Writing Conventions

- Independent thought is valued in student papers and essays; in professional writing, accurate and concise discussion is valued.
- Gather, synthesize, and analyze evidence from various sources.
- Interpret theory and apply it to practice and practice to theory.
- Writing must be clear, concise, accurate, objective, and well organized with clear statement of purpose and main points.
- Voice, tone and format should be appropriate to purpose and audience.
- Present facts in an objective, balanced manner; accuracy is crucial.
- Factual description is important (dates, times, locations; identifiers of people involved).
- First person is rarely used in research, reports, memos, briefings, or analysis.
- Memos may include *I*, but recommendations must be based on analysis of evidence, not personal opinion or bias.
- Use active voice; paraphrase rather than use long, quoted material.

V. Documentation Style

- APA (American Psychological Association) or CMS (Chicago Manual of Style)
- *Bluebook* style may be used for briefs: used by courts, law schools, and attorneys



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Source consulted

Cullick, Jonathan S. and Terry Myers Zawacki. *Writing in the Disciplines: Advice and Models*.
Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011. D-31-38.



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