WRITING TIPS

Content
Make certain you are answering the question/sticking to the assignment. Avoid tangents and unnecessary information. Make sure your main points are clear and well supported/explained.

Tone
I ask that everyone write in an academic manner and try to keep an academic tone. This means avoiding phrases like “---- really pisses people off.” or “I completely disagree with the author – his ideas are insaaaaaaane!” or using acronyms like “LOL”, “BTW”, etc.

Also, please avoid writing me a narrative when it comes to your essays. I’m already aware that you’ve read/written the assignment and I’m looking for your response to the question, not your narration of the process. Please don’t begin your essays with “When I sat down to write this assignment I wasn’t sure what to write. Maybe it was the intimidation of the blank, glowing computer screen, or maybe it was the lack of sleep.” It’s not that the reader doesn’t care; it’s irrelevant and you’re not graded on how you felt while writing the paper. 😊

Terms and Concepts
Every essay, regardless of topic, must use relevant terms and concepts when discussing the topic at hand (talk like a sociologist!). Using a term is great, however, you must define the term when you use it. Many students have a hard time keeping with the flow of the paper when having to insert definitions. Here is an example of how to smoothly incorporate a definition into your paper:

Ex. According to Henslin (2009) a subculture is a group of people that exist within a larger culture, but share unique traits, such as language, values, or norms, that distinguish the group from the dominant culture. Therefore, doctors can be considered a subculture due to their use of medical terminology, work uniforms/attire, extensive knowledge of human body, and relatively high level of prestige.

Do NOT put definitions in parentheses, as footnotes, as endnotes, or randomly inserted into the sentence.

Citations
You need to be sure to cite your sources when paraphrasing. Paraphrasing refers to when you are not stating what someone else has said word for word, but *using your own words to summarize what they have said* whether it is one sentence or an entire article (think about this when defining terms – there must be a citation following each definition, even if written in your own words). When paraphrasing you need to point out the author and year (try to include a page number if referring to specific data and statistics).
Examples of paraphrasing:

According to Henslin (2007) gender refers to the expected behaviors that a group deems appropriate for each sex.

OR

Gender refers to the expected behaviors that a group deems appropriate for each sex (Henslin, 2007).

Examples of direct quotes (Don’t forget the quotation marks!):

Henslin defines gender as "whatever behaviors and attitudes a group considers proper for its males and females" (2007, pg 256).

*Note, since I mentioned Henslin in my statement I do not need to include his name in the parenthetical citation, but I must give a page number).

If you don’t mention the author in your intro to the quote you would cite it as such:

Gender refers to "whatever behaviors and attitudes a group considers proper for its males and females" (Henslin, 2007, pg 256).

*Close quotation marks before the citation. Punctuate sentence after the citation.

Religious Texts
You do not need to cite popular religious texts. But be careful how you use them. The words/phrases do not mean the same thing for everyone; meaning depends on one’s religious beliefs. Avoid using a religious text to back up a point and use an academic source instead – unless of course you are talking specifically about the religion that follows that particular text.

Ex: "--- is wrong because the Bible says so" is not a relevant statement considering not everyone follows the Bible or interprets it in the same way. "Many Christians believe that --- is wrong because the Bible states ---" is a more accurate statement.
Some Issues You Might Run Into

Not all papers will require an intro, conclusion and/or cover/title page. Check with your instructor to find out what they require/prefer.

Online sources won’t always have page numbers or dates. Consult an APA style guide for source specific formatting details. If there is no date of publication simply put n.d. in place of the year (but in the full citation in the reference list provide the date you accessed the website since they change over time).

Ex: (Smith, n.d.)


If you are quoting a quote or ideas of someone other than the author of the source you credit both but cite the source you’re using (that same source will be in the reference list).


For quotes over 4 lines separate them from your discussion and indent the left side. Don’t use quotation marks.

Ex: Jones’s (1998) study found the following:

Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time citing sources. This difficulty could be attributed to the fact that many students failed to purchase a style manual or to ask their teacher for help. (p. 199)

When to cite, when not to cite – that is the question. The answer: ALWAYS PLAY IT SAFE!

Ex: This is someone else’s idea (Someone, 2008). This following sentence is my idea, response to someone, or criticism of someone’s idea. However, this next sentence is now “including a quote from someone” (Someone, 2008, pg 9).

Yes, it’s annoying, but the reader needs citations to clarify sources so that the can follow up on your fascinating and gripping research. 😊
The CRAP Test

Currency

- How recent is the information?
- How recently has the website been updated?
- Is it current enough for your topic?

Reliability

- What kind of information is included in the resource?
- Is content of the resource primarily opinion? Is it balanced?
- Does the creator provide references or sources for data or quotations?

Authority

- Who is the creator or author?
  - What are the credentials?
- Who is the published or sponsor?
  - Are they reputable?
- Are there advertisements on the website?

Purpose/Point of View

- Is this fact or opinion?
- Is the creator/author trying to sell you something?
- Is it biased?