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## Successful Writing at the Upper Division Level

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At the upper division level in college, it is expected that students have already honed their writing skills, and are able to demonstrate their analytical and critical thinking skills in written form. It is also expected that students are well equipped to handle the sometimes daunting task of finding scholarly articles that are truly appropriate and meaningful to their specific assignment goal. Lastly, there exists the expectation that students are well versed in the art of properly utilizing the American Psychological Association's (APA) style of paper format, in-text citations, and references. These three areas of writing mastery are the keys to successful writing at the upper division level.

### **I. Demonstration of analytical and critical thinking skills in written form**

- A. While a student may be successful at expressing his or herself in oral form that does not always translate to effective written expression
- B. Effective demonstration of analytical and critical thinking skills in written form requires three key elements:
  1. Planning
    - a. Establishing a clear understanding of the assignment goal
    - b. Every written assignment will have at least one specific goal, if not multiple. These goals include, but are not limited to, the following:
      - 1) Empirically-based analysis of a specific hypothesized relationship between at least two variables
      - 2) Critical analysis of a specific theory
      - 3) The application of a theory to a hypothesized relationship between at least two variables
    - c. Making a firm decision about a paper topic should be accomplished quickly
      - 1) Professors most likely will not allow two students to cover the same topic; therefore, if you have something in mind, make it known as soon as possible.
      - 2) Professors will also likely require that topics be approved before proceeding with an assignment, as such never make the assumption that your topic is acceptable. Students frequently will need to refine their initial topic to something more specific. Initial topic choices are usually considered too broad.
      - 3) Once you have an approved topic, do not procrastinate on finding the appropriate number and type of articles needed to complete your paper.
        - a) The library may not have a subscription to the journal you wish to get an article from, which will increase the time it takes to get it.
        - b) Interlibrary Services are available to all students online. The earlier an article is requested the faster you will receive it, generally within one week. Articles can be held for pick up, emailed to you, or a hardcopy can be mailed to your home.  
<http://www.sjlibrary.org/services/request/ill.htm>
  2. Organization
    - a. Once you have obtained the articles you need for your assignment, it is time to get organized before you begin to write.
    - b. Outlines are the key to an organized thought process that translates into effective and persuasive writing.
    - c. Begin by organizing and sorting out your articles according to whether they are theoretical or empirical in nature. The order in which information from these articles is presented does

make a difference. In general, your review of the literature should begin with the theoretical sources, followed by appropriate empirical sources which will be used to “back up” your theoretical proposition.

- d. The next step in the organization process, although a bit time consuming, is to outline all of your sources. Scholarly articles will frequently be fairly lengthy; thus making it difficult to refer back to specific sections of the articles when you are ready to begin writing. Outlining each article will not only increase your understanding of the article, but will be of great assistance in helping you to piece together key ideas and concepts. Effective organization of these ideas and concepts will go a long way toward ensuring your writing follows a thoughtful process that links key theoretical propositions with empirical support.
- e. Once you have outlined your sources, it is time to create an outline for your paper.
  - 1) Following an outline for your paper will help to ensure that you do not leave out any key points.
  - 2) The introduction of your paper should end with a summary of the goals of your paper, and how those goals will be accomplished. For example:

The goals of the present paper are to: (1) explore the prevalence and the need for early detection and diagnosis of psychiatric disorders among juvenile delinquents; (2) examine the relationship of severe mental illness (e.g., psychopathy) to the behavior exhibited by SVC juvenile offenders; and (3) present potential ameliorating solutions to the problem posed by severe mental illness among SVC juvenile offenders. These stated goals will be accomplished in the following manner: (1) documentation of the prevalence of mental illness amongst juvenile delinquents; (2) examination of mental health assessment among juvenile offenders; (3) an examination of the role of psychopathy in the antisocial behavior of SVC juvenile offenders; (4) an exploration of promising prevention, early intervention, and treatment options; and (5) a discussion of possible impediments to the implementation of these prevention, early intervention, and treatment options.

3. Due diligence in execution
  - a. Often times the hardest part of writing a paper after you have collected the articles you need, is quite simply beginning to write. It is sometimes helpful to begin by formatting your cover page, typing up your references, and inserting the appropriate main and subheadings. This process will often kick start the rest of your paper.
  - b. Another tactical approach to writing your paper is to tackle each subheading section one at a time without concerning yourself with making the logical connections amongst them. Once you have information written out for each subheading section, it will make it easier to tie them together.

- c. It is sometimes helpful to create an “action plan” for yourself. You will most likely have more than sufficient time to write your paper; as such, you can plan to tackle a few subheading sections per day instead of overwhelming yourself by trying to do it all at once.
- d. No matter what approach you take to writing your paper, ALWAYS proof read your work before submitting it. If at all possible, leave yourself the opportunity to proof read a couple of times with at least one day in between. Giving yourself a little distance from your paper for a day will often help you to find mistakes that you did not see the first time, and may spark additional thoughts about what you have written.

## II. Finding appropriate and meaningful scholarly articles specific to an assignment goal

- A. Depending on the goal of the assignment, you may need to find mostly theoretical, mostly empirical or both types of articles (see section IB1b).
- B. A student can always physically go to the library to photocopy articles; however, this can become a very time consuming and expensive venture, especially when the articles may be upwards of thirty to forty pages in length at times. A more convenient and cost-effective solution is to search online from home at your convenience. There are a vast number of scholarly journal articles available in full-text, PDF format. As aforementioned, students may also take advantage of Interlibrary Services to obtain hard to find articles that the Martin Luther King (MLK) Library does not have on-site access to. This is a reliable, and fairly fast process if articles are requested early in the semester.
- C. If you are unsure of which databases to search, you may refer to databases predetermined to be related to the area of Justice Studies by the library:  
<http://libguides.sjsu.edu/content.php?pid=57768&hs=a>
- D. A good starting point for finding articles guaranteed to be related to your topic is to search the *Criminal Justice Abstracts*. From there you may proceed to search the MLK Library databases, or utilize the Interlibrary Services if needed.

## III. Proper utilization of APA style paper format, in-text citations, and references

- A. Every Justice Studies student should own the most current edition of the American Psychological Association’s Publication Manual (presently the 6<sup>th</sup> Ed.), an abbreviated version of the manual, or have access to a reliable on-line source for help with APA.
- B. Some of the key aspects of a paper properly formatted in APA style are:
  1. Proper placement and format of page numbers, a running head, title, student information, and institution identification
  2. Proper margins, spacing (double space), accepted fonts, and font size
  3. Proper formatting of heading levels
  4. Proper formatting of in-text citations, references, appendices, tables and figures, and measures
- C. Book marking key sections/pages in the manual fosters an efficient method for referencing the proper formats for various in-text citations and references. While writing a paper, it is far too time consuming to have to resort to the index in order to locate the appropriate format examples. Some of the key format examples that should be marked are:

1. In-text citations for a single author, multiple authors (less than six), and multiple authors (six or more)
  2. In-text citation for a secondary source
  3. Reference for a scholarly journal article with only one author, multiple authors (seven or less), and multiple authors (more than seven)
  4. Reference for a book with only one author, multiple authors (seven or less), multiple authors (more than seven), and edited books
  5. Reference for a government report/publication
  6. Reference for a doctoral dissertation
- D. Knowing how to properly cite a direct quote is of great importance; however, direct quotes should be used sparingly. Anyone can fill a paper full of direct quotes that are obviously related to the topic area; however, keep in mind that the utilization of numerous quotes does not demonstrate that a student has a clear understanding of the meaning behind the article content. The use of too many direct quotes will not be looked upon favorably by any professor.
- E. Attention to detail is imperative when it comes to the proper execution of APA style. Things such as proper placement of a period, a space, and capitalization are absolutely essential to APA style.
- F. While searching for journal articles, sometimes links will be provided to what are reported to be APA reference citations; however, it is always best to double check their format against examples in the actual APA Publication Manual.