

Anthropology

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Overview

What is anthropology?

Though its definition is a bit ambiguous, anthropology is the holistic study of humanity through time and space. It is a comparative look at how human societies and cultures have changed over time. American anthropology is often divided into four subfields: sociocultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, biological/physical anthropology, and archaeology. Each subfield explores the overarching themes of anthropology in different ways: sociocultural anthropology studies the social and cultural forces that shape the ways of life all around the world; linguistic anthropology explores how language shapes social identity and influences cultural beliefs; biological anthropology focuses on human evolution and examines how biological forces can help explain the significance and emergence of human characteristics; and archaeology explores past lives through their material remains, studying artifacts and landscapes to understand the emergence and experiences of past societies.

What does writing look like in anthropology?

Since the subfields of anthropology approach the study of human cultures in slightly different ways, it makes sense that the writing assignments associated with each one are different as well. Sociocultural anthropology places great emphasis on qualitative data (e.g. ethnographies, narratives, etc.), which means assignments could be personal and cultural narratives, reading summaries, journal analyses, book reviews, etc. Assignments in linguistic anthropology are similar to these, but also focus on the interpretation of linguistic data to support various arguments. Biological anthropology and archaeology are a bit more scientific in their methods, which affects the types of assignments found in these courses. Oftentimes, there will be scientific articles that must be analyzed or documents from archaeological excavations that need interpretation. Still, there are many writing assignments common to all of the subfields, including research papers, book reviews, journal analyses, synthesis papers, annotated bibliographies, peer reviews, literature reviews, and mock grant proposals.

Ethics and Writing

Ethics is a primary concern of anthropologists, as all research and writing in the discipline affect the stories and identities of real people and real societies. The American Anthropological

Association has strict guidelines for ethical research and writing; for undergraduate writers, there are a few notes in particular that are critical:

Avoid Generalizations – “Cultural Relativism”

Cultural relativism is a central standard in anthropology. Basically, the term speaks of the imperative to respect cultural differences, understanding that cultural contexts and perspectives of the world vary from one place to the next. Furthermore, as cultural forces are so complex and the world is ever changing, cultures can never be singularly defined. Rather, it is vital to avoid generalizations and instead point out trends or patterns, ideas and themes. Rather than saying “people in Culture A do this,” you can instead observe that “this is an activity seen in Culture A”

Avoid “Othering”

Similar to avoiding generalizations, it is important not to “other” people and cultures. Historically, anthropology has been accused of establishing “laws of nature” and classifications of human societies that placed a superior/inferior hierarchy on human diversity. The “us” vs. “them” mentality is unethical; such comparisons solidify a metaphorical division between groups and, inherently, create a moral hierarchy. Modern anthropology aims to embrace human diversity and explore the vast array of perspectives held by groups from all corners of the globe. Anthropologists must actively avoid distancing one group from another, and instead they must strive to critically explore the ways diverse cultures interact with the world around them.

Use Pseudonyms

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Here are a few other important notes to consider when writing anthropologically:

“Culture” and “Exotic” Are Not Synonyms

Especially if you are new to anthropology, it can be easy to assume that anthropologists are interested in studying the “exotic” or “native” (i.e. people who are “different” from you). Truthfully, this is how anthropology started (i.e. studying only non-Euro-American peoples to “preserve” those “dying” cultures). It is NOT, however, where the discipline is today. Most anthropologists today assert that ALL culture is the subject of study and, as stated above, that cultures are neither static nor some kind of closed bubble that we go around and report on.

“Exotic,” “primitive,” “native” (used synonymously with primitive)—these are terms and ideas that are no longer acceptable and thus not appropriate in anthropological writing. From “macro cultures” such as Mayan culture, American culture, or Indian culture, to more “micro cultures” such as college culture, Facebook culture, or the culture of anthropology itself, anthropology is concerned with exploring all human cultures with the intent of creating a comparative framework in which to more fully explore the richness of human diversity. Similar to tip I, be conscious of the kind of language you use as you write and how readers may interpret it (remember that readers, especially if your audience is not familiar with anthropology, may not always garner the same things from your writing as you intend—try to be as clear as possible). Language that marginalizes or “Others” should be avoided.

Use Research, But Be Wary of “Proving”

Like in other social sciences, anthropological knowledge is produced primarily through research and writing and thus when you are writing it is critical to acknowledge and use current research to argue your thesis. However, remember that in anthropology, just like in sociology or psychology, a thesis is never “proven” but rather is supported. When talking about people, a mentality of “proving” can lead you to write in such a way as to fall victim to the issues described in the first two tips above. Your goal is to craft an argument and support it with the larger goal of having your argument contribute to the comparative framework that Professor Wesson describes above. Trying to “prove” insinuates that what you are talking about is something static, “true,” and/or universal which is just not the case when it comes to people and cultures. Doing anthropology is about exploring human diversity, not cataloguing it.

Getting Started

Prompts

If you’re lucky enough to get one, start with the prompt. When provided with a prompt, it is usually complex. Do not skim the prompt. You must make sure you understand everything the prompt is asking you to do, and do just that. It helps if you break down the prompt into each individual component, and think about how you can complete the components individually while writing the paper as a whole. In the intro classes, complex prompts are usually broken down quite well.

This [sample prompt \(anthrosampleprompt.pdf\)](#) from a Linguistic Anthropology class is extremely detailed and a good example of how to break down prompts.

Topics

If you don't get a prompt, you'll get at least a basic idea of what the professor wants. Think of topics you discussed in class that you enjoyed or a different topic that might interest you.

If you're having trouble thinking of a topic, ask yourself these questions:

- Are there any readings I remember really well? Why?
- Is there anything that I've covered in another class that would be relevant?
- Is there any way I can apply my favorite book/movie/magazine/cd in a relevant and meaningful way?
- What is a group of people/cultural practice that fascinates me? That I know nothing about? That terrifies me?
- Do I have any personal experiences that I can use?
- What is something that my professors have never seen? How can I knock them off their feet?
- And don't just start writing about your love for Harry Potter. Make it relevant. Apply concepts you learned or talked about in class. And please, run them by your professor for early feedback and direction.

Intros

Sometimes just getting started is the hardest thing to do. Having a solid introduction is the base for any paper. This [sample introduction \(anthrosampleintro.pdf\)](#) of an anthropology paper might help get those creative juices flowing.

Primary Research

How to Conduct an Interview

Conducting interviews in Anthropology will likely be a new thing to you, but don't worry! They really aren't as scary or as difficult as they might seem. Just follow these simple guidelines and it will be a breeze.

1. Make sure you are always prepared for an interview by being familiarized with relevant notes on your topic and have your questions at hand.
2. Make sure you have some good background knowledge on the subject you'll be talking about.
3. Don't be afraid to stray from your questions if that is where the conversation leads. Be flexible.
4. Make sure the interviewee is comfortable and honest with you. Always be friendly, even if the interviewee is annoying you.
5. Make sure you know the interviewee's background and have their permission to use your discussion in your paper.
6. You must quote and paraphrase accurately. Do not change thoughts around to better suit your paper. Do not take quotes out of context; be true to the interviewee's ideas and intent. Be a good listener.

7. If you aren't a fast writer/typer, you can rent a recorder from Bailey/Howe, and transcribe the interview afterwards.
8. You may be wondering how you can find an interviewee. It will always depend on the subject at hand, but you will probably have plenty of options available via your family or the UVM students, workers, and faculty. If you can't think of anyone at all—despite the 12,000 plus students, faculty, and staff on campus—ask your professor or TAs for guidance.

How to Research an Anthropology Paper

Once you have your paper topic, you may be unsure of where to find the best information. If you don't have any class-texts related to the subject, or aren't allowed to use them, here are a few good resources to help you find what you need.

Where can I find sources?

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Library

- Bailey/Howe is one of your most valuable resources for finding books about your topic, and you don't even have to leave your dorm room to search it! Bailey/Howe's Catalogue is really convenient and easy to use. And if you find something that BH doesn't have, Inter-Library Loan is painfully easy (though make sure you give yourself plenty of time for the material to come in.)
- If you aren't seeing exactly what you're looking for in the catalogue, try looking at the call numbers that pop up and go to the actual shelves. You might find some surprisingly useful texts that didn't show up in the catalogue.
- The library also has the benefit of having librarians. These faculty and staff members are paid to help you research! So if you don't know where to start, or just want an extra boost, go talk to one!
- If books just aren't your thing, the library's website also has connections to many electronic resources. BH has research guides by subject, and they have a [great page on anthropology \(http://researchguides.uvm.edu/anthropology\)](http://researchguides.uvm.edu/anthropology).

Internet

- Journal databases like JSTOR and ANTHROSOURCE are your best bet for finding current, peer reviewed articles. Google Scholar is another great source to use.

- When searching for your topic, don't start off too narrow—you will barely find anything and what you do find probably won't help. Starting broadly and sorting through the articles while narrowing your search is a good way to find plenty of information and resources.
- You should NEVER cite Wikipedia as a source. However, if you know absolutely nothing about your topic, Wikipedia is a good place to start. You'll get a brief overview (which you shouldn't trust entirely) and you'll be able to look at the sources cited in the entry to see where the author(s) got their information, which can lead you in a good direction.

Sources you might already have

- Any type of scholarly source you are using should have a bibliography of where they got their information. These references can lead you to good books and primary sources for your own paper.

What is a good source?

- Sources must be scholarly, and articles must be peer reviewed. What that means is non-fiction books by reputable authors in the field and preferably published by academic presses, and journal articles that have been reviewed by other scholars in their field. Some of the main peer-reviewed journals in anthropology are *American Anthropologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Anthropology Quarterly*, and *Critical Anthropology*. Most online databases either only look through peer-reviewed articles or have the option to.
- While this generally excludes newspaper articles, magazine stories, encyclopedias, and random websites on the internet, for some topics, newspaper articles could be extremely pertinent. For example, if you were trying to trace the growth of popularity of a certain musical group in the 1930s, looking for old show announcements in newspapers and reviews would be just the thing you need. In this instance, they are being used as primary sources.
- A *recent* source is generally the best. Anthropology is always updating itself as new information and more in-depth studies come to light, so that book from 1903 might not be relevant anymore—unless it contains primary sources. Just remember, "recent" can include books published decades ago. It depends on the field and the state of research on the topic.
- When in doubt, ask your professor!

What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source?

Scholarly sources provide the backbone for your paper, and there are many types you have to choose from. They can be divided into two simple categories, though each category could theoretically be broken down even more. *Primary sources* are first-hand documents. They come from the person or group who experienced the event or topic in question for themselves. A *secondary source* comes from the person or group who didn't experience the event/topic, but heard about it or talked about it. For instance, if you are researching the social stratification of

the native people of the Andes region, accounts from the native people would be your primary sources or evidence. Accounts from the foreign explorers who spied on the native people would be secondary.

Primary sources (sometimes known as original sources, evidence, data, etc...)

- Interviews with subjects directly involved (recordings, transcriptions or videos)
- Field notes
- Historical documents (letters, diaries, contracts, etc...)
- Artifacts and archaeological evidence and excavation reports

Secondary sources

- Everything else

How do I cite my sources?

Depending on which journal anthropologists choose to publish their work in, the citation style required will be slightly different. A pretty standard style in the field is the style required by the American Anthropological Association's publications (AAA style). Many professors at UVM like students to be familiar with and practice using this style in their papers. Not *all* professors will ask that you use this one; some may specify a different one or let you choose a style that you feel most comfortable with. The important thing once is to be consistent and stick to one style throughout the paper.

Here, we break down the most common elements of AAA Style so you can familiarize yourself with them. For types of sources not shown here, or any questions you have, always refer to your professor as well as the official [AAA Style Guide \[link to AAA Official Style Guide.pdf\]](#) for more details.

Given examples are fictional and do not reference actual published works or authors. Any resemblance to real work, authors, or publishers is unintentional.

Book with One Author

*Black punctuation/words
stay constant for each
source of the same type*

Last Name, **First Name of Author**

Date of Publication **Title**. **Place of Publication**: **Publisher**.

Doe, John

2012 Figuring Out Citations in Anthropology. New York: Example Press.

Book with Two (or more) authors

Last Name, First name, Second Author, and Last Author

Date of Publication Title. Place of Publication: Publisher.

Doe, John, Earl Test, and Stu Dent

2007 Being an Anthropology Major. Boston: University of Nowhere Press.

Chapter in an Edited Volume

Last Name, First Name of Author of the Chapter

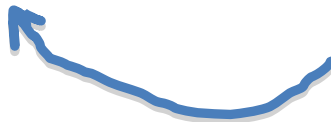
Date of Publication Title of Chapter. *In* Title of Whole Volume. Name(s) of Editor(s) of the Volume, ed. Page Range. Place of Publication: Publisher.

Micah, Sarah

2009 The Rise of Digital Culture and What it Means for Us. *In* Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future. Charles Gisby and Alicia Cortis, eds. Pp. 200-220. London: Nothing Press.

Journal Article

Last Name, First Name of Author



If there is more than one editor, make it "eds."

Date of Publication **Title of Article.** **Name of Journal** **Volume Number**(**Issue Number**):**Page Range.**

Zuke, Whitney M.

2012 Understanding Citation and its Functions. *Writing and Research* 20(3):23-37.

How do I keep track of my sources?

- I recommend Endnote, Zotero or RefWorks for keeping your sources organized and for formatting your citations and bibliography. The library has an [amazing page](http://library.uvm.edu/guides/manage/index.php) (<http://library.uvm.edu/guides/manage/index.php>) that describes the pros and cons of each, and everything you need to know about citation in general.

Sample Papers

Sample 1:

Sample Ethnography

This is a [sample ethnography](#) I wrote for ANTH 195: Doing Anthropology with Professor Luis Vivanco. It received an A. Throughout the course of the semester I performed field research on campus to see how students engaged with reusable water bottles in order to fully understand the materiality of my proposed object (the reusable water bottle). I assert that the value instilled by college students in the reusable water bottle is twofold: it is both a functional tool for ensuring hydration as well as a platform for personality representation.

Ethnography is qualitative research that provides a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice within a certain community or culture. The ethnographer must go beyond reporting events to interpret what they mean for the community being studied. Essentially, it's looking at the world around you to interpret larger meanings.

I have annotated this paper to illustrate key features of ethnographic writing, and anthropological papers more broadly. The structure of anthropological reports, especially ethnographies, is malleable to the writer's needs; there is no formulaic approach. It just has to be sensible, have assertions supported by academic quotations or field data, and make a clear point. I included bolded headers for each section to organize my writing-this is not necessary in the field, but an option.

~ Erin Lucey, UVM Writing Center Tutor

Sample 2

Service Learning Sample Outline

Some anthropology classes (as well as classes in other disciplines) are offered as service learning classes. This means that in addition to normal classwork there is a service-learning component, which most often involves volunteering in your community. Service learning is extremely helpful in that it allows you to connect relevant readings and discussions in the classroom to social spheres in your own community or world. These classes are often writing intensive and may require you to keep a journal and write, reflections, essays and papers which integrate and connect class readings, class discussions, outside scholarly resources, past experiences and your service learning experience.

I took a service learning class for which I worked with a group of four other people throughout the entire semester. As a group we would plan activities and complete our service learning hours together. During the semester I completed a lot of individual writing pieces, but for the final project we were assigned a large group paper. As a group we had to come up with a research question and then form a thesis statement and argument in response to the question, both of which had to connect to our service learning and class material. Because it was a fairly long paper that five different people were working on, our professor required us to complete and submit an argument-based outline. This outline laid the foundation for the paper, helped the group stay organized and made it easier to divide up the work. While not all professors will require you to write and turn in an outline, they are extremely helpful. Professors are more likely to require you to hand in an outline if it is a group project.

~ Halle Apelgren, UVM Writing Center Tutor

Professor Tips

Just in case you don't trust my writing advice, here are some tips straight from the professors!

What is one thing that students must never forget about writing in Anthropology?

- Back up generalities with data or specific examples/cases. —*Professor Crock*
- Realize that anthropology is not just about collecting or presenting odd facts about other cultures. Anthropological data are only really important if they allow us to make larger statements about human cultural development in a comparative framework. —*Professor Wesson*

What makes you go "Wow" when reading papers—in a good way?

- When students go beyond reporting and repeating information and present critical thoughts of their own on a subject and back them up.—*Professor Crock*

In a bad way?

- When students slip into conversational style or slang. —*Professor Crock*
- A lack of coherent organization is perhaps my biggest pet peeve. Some students don't really grasp the nature of paragraph structure or a logic flow of information. These issues usually develop out of poor preparation and a lack of understanding regarding the subject. —*Professor Wesson*

What can turn a good paper into a great paper?

- The simplest answer is to go beyond what you were asked to do in the assignment. Too many students see a 5-page limit requirement and strive to produce a 4 1/2 page paper before they ever start writing. Those students who produce superior papers are those that take the time to address the issue, even if it means writing an 8 page paper. —*Professor Wesson*

What is your favorite database for online research?

- Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, AnthroSource and Wiley InterScience. —*Professor Blom*

Any last advice for writing in anthropology, whether for the intro courses or upper levels, or for linguistic anthropology specifically?

- Students really should consider writing from an outline. In addition, I think too many students wait until the night before to start their writing assignment and they are just relieved to have produced anything under those circumstances. Furthermore, students should always complete a first draft of their assignment weeks ahead of time for their professors to critique. This allows the student to know exactly what their professor wants to see in the final draft. —*Professor Wesson*