

M.A. Internship Paper Guidelines
Department of Sociology
University of Houston
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Your Sociology MA internship paper will report on results derived from a sociological analysis conducted as part of your internship with an organization. The internship project itself can vary in content dependent on the organization's needs and the student's interests, and could include research such as program evaluation or a needs assessment; development of a research instrument, tool, or product; policy analysis or critical literature review; or other approved project that utilizes sociological theory and/or research skills in an applied setting.

Your project requires you to conduct sociological analysis that could include drawing on some of the following skills obtained during your program: engage with past theories and research; articulate research questions; draft research instruments; conduct statistical analyses; collect and analyze data to address your research questions; and report and interpret research findings. When complete, your internship paper (including references, but excluding appendices) should be approximately 30-40 pages (maximum 80 pages).

Given the variation in internship projects, this document should serve as general guidelines for the paper format. You should work with your Chair to determine what sections are necessary to include in your final internship paper, particularly if your project does not involve conducting research.

Title Page

Use the title page template provided by the University of Houston that is available from the graduate faculty advisor and on the CLASS website.

Executive Summary

Your executive summary is a complete summary of your project. It should be about one page in length. It should present the problem for your organization, briefly review your approach to answering the question, and describe the major findings or implications of your project. Finally, your executive summary should identify any key recommendations or policy implications for the internship organization that emerged from your project.

Introduction

Your introduction should situate your project by answering the following questions:

- (1) *What organizational problem does your project address?*
- (2) *How did you go about examining this problem?*
- (3) *Why is studying this problem important for the internship organization?*
- (4) *What are the primary results of your project?*
- (5) *What will the rest of the paper reveal?*

Answering these questions means that your introduction will identify your problem, goals, and questions, as well as show why your project is important. It will also provide a roadmap of the entire paper, including a brief summary of any major theories and bodies of empirical research that inform your study, an overview of your approach (including any research methods employed), and a brief summary of your findings.

Literature Review/Theory

Your internship project will typically require you to draw upon prior sociological theory or research to motivate and situate your project. If applicable, this section should include answering the following question:

- (1) *How do prior theories and research findings guide and inform your project?*

The literature review is not simply a summary of past research. Rather, it is a forum for developing your argument within the context of what social science already knows. This will involve identifying key theoretical debates and arguments, along with bodies of empirical research that inform your project. If developing quantitative hypotheses, you should use the literature to build your hypotheses. For qualitative research, you might consider articulating some anticipated findings.

Methods or Description of Project Approach

Your next section should explain how you conducted your project. If your internship project involves research, this section will be your methods section. If your internship project involves a task such as developing a tool or product, you will provide a detailed description of how you completed your task.

You should answer the following questions, if applicable to your project:

- (1) *Is (are) your method(s) appropriate for your project questions?* Different methods have different strengths and weaknesses, so not all methods are appropriate for all research questions. Consequently, your methods section should defend your research strategy in light of your research questions. It should also justify all major methodological choices.
- (2) *Who or what are you studying?* Identify your population and who/what is in your sample, along with the times and places of data collection. If secondary data are being used, describe the data source and who is included within the sample.
- (3) *How did you collect your data?* Describe how you recruited/collected your sample (including your specific sampling strategy, e.g., purposive sample) and your sample size. Describe the key components of your research instruments (e.g., survey questionnaire, interview guide, content analysis code sheet), including (if relevant) how long it took participants to complete the instrument. For quantitative research, describe your key variables and how you conceptualized and operationalized them. If you are using secondary data, you should describe the structure of the dataset.
- (4) *What are the ethical considerations of your project?* Describe the major ethical issues with your project such as obtaining informed consent, participant anonymity or confidentiality, and minimizing harm (e.g., psychological, physical, or social harm) to your participants.
- (5) *How have you ensured the validity and reliability of your data and results?* Address how you ensure your quantitative measures have produced accurate and consistent data. For qualitative research, consider how your findings and conclusions might be wrong. Examine and address any threats to validity, including how researcher positionality impacts validity.
- (6) *How did you analyze your data?* Describe your analytical strategy. For qualitative research, considerations include how you transcribed, coded, and analyzed your data (e.g., thematic analysis, a grounded theory analysis, etc.). For quantitative research,

briefly describe your statistical models (e.g., Chi-square tests, ANOVA, logistic regression, etc.).

Findings/Results

After summarizing your approach to addressing your internship problem or research, you should summarize your output – whether it is in the form of an instrument produced, statistical analyses conducted, or research findings.

Your results or findings section should follow from your project questions. This means that you should restrict your discussions to those that answer the questions you ask. Your findings/results section should be oriented around one question: *What did you find?*

If you conducted research, you should begin by describing the key characteristics of your sample. For quantitative studies, this often means presenting a table of descriptive statistics. You will have a lot of data and it is not necessary to report every finding. Revisit your research questions and address each sequentially. Show how you address each question and what you found. Relate your findings to your hypotheses (or predictions). Ensure that you properly label all tables, charts, diagrams, maps, etc., (e.g., table 1, figure 3, etc.) and walk your reader through this information. For qualitative data, be sure to tell a story with your data. You should not just string quotes together, but show what the quotes illustrate. Set up quotes by identifying the participant's pseudonym and key demographic information without compromising identity (e.g., Stephanie, age 36, teacher). Consider paraphrasing participants' responses.

Discussion and Conclusion

After you have presented your internship project output, you should discuss why it is important. These questions should motivate that discussion:

- (1) *How do you make sense of what you produced or what you found?*
- (2) *How do your results or does your product relate to the extant theories and empirical research described in your literature review?*
- (3) *What are some limitations of your project for the internship organization?*
- (4) *What are the implications of your project for the internship organization? What recommendations can you make to the organization based on this project?*

Essentially this section should summarize your main output and then interpret it in light of the extant literature and the organization's needs. It should also highlight any limitations of your project. This, in part, involves anticipating and countering any possible alternative explanations. Finally, in this section you should discuss the implications of your work for the internship organization.

References

Include a list of all sources cited in the internship paper. Use ASA formatting for both in-text citations and references.

Appendix

Include your research instruments, as well as any recruitment materials (letters and advertisements).

Formatting

Use Times New Roman, 12-point font. Double-space and number your pages (center, bottom), starting with the first page of your introduction. Follow the formatting recommendations of the *ASA Style Guide* and as indicated in the guidelines available on the CLASS website for theses.

Tips

Time Management: Plan ahead and remember that things always take longer than you think they will take. Be realistic when you begin your project. It is better to do a smaller project well than to do a larger project poorly. Meet regularly with your Chair and allow ample time for your Chair and committee members to read your work.

Keep in mind that the first draft that you submit to your Chair will undergo many revisions; this means that you cannot submit a first draft shortly before you plan to defend the internship paper. You must allow sufficient time for you and your Chair to process multiple drafts prior to submitting the final version to your other committee members.

Create a timeline that states both short and long terms goals. Try to work every day. Refer to the general timeline (departmental and university) given to you by your graduate faculty advisor during the beginning of term meetings. You should be in regular contact with your Chair to discuss your progress and communicate any unexpected obstacles that arise. Be mindful that delays could affect your timely completion of the program.

Writing: Make an outline before you begin writing. Remember that writing is a process that involves constant revision. Think of the internship paper in small parts; it will seem less daunting this way. It is acceptable to jump around when you write your paper, e.g., write your methods or project approach section first and introduction last. Keep in mind your audience and explain key terms. Avoid passive voice as well as emotive and normative statements. Cite sources when appropriate and limit direct quotes from reference materials.

Finally, remember that all drafts submitted to your Chair should already be edited for spelling and grammatical errors either by you or by someone else; these drafts should be in what you feel is a “final” format, rather than your first, unedited draft.

Recommended Readings

American Sociological Association. 2014. *American Sociological Association Style Guide*. 5ed. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Becker, Howard S. 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. 2ed. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Bolker, Joan. 1998. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*. New York, NY: Owl Books.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3ed. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Campbell, Donald T. and Julian C. Stanley. 1963. *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*. Cengage Learning.

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University. 2009. *A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Sociology*. Boston: Harvard University.

- Furseth, Inger and Euris Larry Everett. 2013. *Doing your Master's Dissertation*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Massengill, Rebekah P. 2012. *Writing Sociology: A Guide for Junior Papers and Senior Theses*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. 2013. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. 3ed. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. April 1979. *The Belmont Report*. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Ragin, Charles, Joane Nagel, and Patricia White. 2004. *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research*. Washington, DC: National Science Foundation.
- Rossi, Peter, Mark Lipsi, and Howard Freeman. 2004. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach, 7th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Recommended Resources:

University of Houston Writing Center: <http://www.uh.edu/writecen/>