Sample Assignment #1: Annotated Bibliographies

# Description

An annotated bibliography is a compilation of brief descriptions of scholarly works that can be used for future reference. Over the course of the semester, students complete a specified number of annotated bibliographies. Each annotation must be between 100 and 150 words and include: 1. a summary of the main argument or arguments, 2. the basis of the argument (how does the scholar support their thesis?), and 3. a consideration of the other major scholarly works with which the piece is in conversation (this may be direct or indirect). Students must use their own words to describe the work—I deduct points for direct quotations. Citations must be in AAA style; links to the AAA style guide and sample annotated bibliography entries are on the course site. Annotated bibs are due at the beginning of class every week unless otherwise noted.

# Modifications

Undergraduate students are responsible for 5 readings and 3 annotated bibs per week.

Graduate students are responsible for 5 readings and 5 annotated bibs per week.

# Rationale

Annotated bibliographies help students understand passages of theory and their contributions to the discipline of anthropology. Students must submit their bibs before we meet to discuss the readings—this ensures that students have read the essays and are prepared to contribute to class discussions. These assignments also help students build a database of readings for future reference. Finally, the assignment requires students to prioritize clarity and precision in their writing.

# Evaluation

I typically assign low points values to each bibliography and offer some “freebies,” which provides students with lots of opportunities to improve their bib grades over the course of the semester.

Sample Assignment #2: The Theory Paper

# Project Description

The purpose of this assignment is for you to demonstrate mastery of two theoretical paradigms in anthropology by applying them to a contemporary cultural phenomenon.

You will choose an element of “culture” that is familiar to you. The more familiar you are with your topic, the better you will be able to analyze it theoretically. Then, you will write a 1,000 to 2,000-word essay that analyzes your topic from two distinct theoretical perspectives. Papers should be organized into the following sections:

1) The first part of the paper will introduce your topic and pose a research question (something akin to “what is the best way to make sense of this cultural phenomenon”?), followed by a narrative outline. Aim for 2 - 3 paragraphs.

2 & 3) The following two sections will explore and explain your topic according to two theoretical perspectives of your choosing. You must clearly articulate the theoretical orientations you have chosen and cite key theorists in each paradigm as you make sense of your topic using theory. You must also reflect on both the usefulness and limitations of the theoretical paradigms for explaining your topic. Aim for 2 - 3 paragraphs per section.

4) In the concluding section, you may summarize your main points and consider which theoretical perspective you found more convincing, and why. 2 - 3 paragraphs are usually enough for an adequate conclusion.

# Errors to avoid

By far, the most common mistake that students make is failing to follow the directions of an assignment. For example, the purpose of this essay is NOT to describe the cultural phenomenon you have chosen as your topic, but rather to analyze it theoretically. Of course, you will need to introduce your topic and present enough information about it to make your analysis cogent, but the bulk of the paper should be dedicated to theoretical analysis that uses description to illustrate theoretical concepts.

# Project Evaluation

I will evaluate and grade your fieldwork paper using the following criteria:

## Does your paper present a theoretically informed and sophisticated analysis of your chosen topic?

This criterion evaluates how well you demonstrated theoretical mastery in your essay. Did you analyze your topic from two different theoretical perspectives? Did you show that you understand the theories and can apply them to your topic? Did you demonstrate a sense of the strengths and limitations of each perspective in relation to your topic? Is your analysis coherent, insightful, plausible, and crystal clear?

Topic introduction: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ points: \_\_\_/10

Theory One: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ points: \_\_\_/25

Theory Two: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ points: \_\_\_\_/25

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Is your paper written and organized at the expected skill level?

Writing should demonstrate:

Analytical strength: Demonstrated mastery of anthropological thought in discussions of the connections between observations and anthropological concepts. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/10

Logic and argumentation: Inferences, insights, and conclusions drawn are valid and logical, being fully supported with strong evidence and/or appropriate authorities. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/5

Organization: The whole paper coherently develops a central thesis. The introduction and conclusion logically lead into and flow out of the body of the paper, whose structure is clear and appropriate to the thesis and topic. Referencing Guidelines are followed consistently. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/5

Paragraphs: Every paragraph is organized with an attention to its internal content and position in relation to paragraphs before and after. All paragraphs include a topic sentence, supporting evidence, and closing or leading sentence. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/5

Sentence construction and mechanics: Correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; no run-on sentences or comma splices. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/5

Points: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/30 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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## 3. Did you follow the guidelines of the assignment?

This criterion is based on how well you satisfied the guidelines of the assignment: is your paper the appropriate length? Did you follow instructions on font size, margins, spacing, etc.?

Points: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/10 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Overall Grade: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/100 = \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_%**

Sample Assignment #3: The Unessay

# Overview

Rather than writing a typical paper, you can choose to do an *Unessay*: a creative project that allows you to engage the course material in any way you want.

Want to sing a song about anthropological theory? Go for it.

Want to paint the difference between islands in a far sea and a sea of islands? Do it.

Want to write about a poem about why you love DuBois? I want to read that poem.

The rule is that you must engage effectively with course material. Everything else is up to you!

# Interested? How to Proceed

Which theoretical topic or scholar do youfind most interesting, compelling, and relevant? Choose one of the paradigms or readings or scholars we’ve covered and figure out **what you want to convey** about it. Then, figure out **how you want to present** it.

Possible Products:

Music video

Play

Song (make sure to submit lyrics)

Cartoon

Painting

Buzzfeed-style video

Craft

Podcast

Or, you can always choose to do a paper!

# What to Turn In

1. Your unessay (or a video of it if it’s a craft)
2. A statement that explains what you did, why you did it, and how you went about producing the unessay. The statement should be about a page long.

# How I Will Grade the Unessay

I will evaluate your Unessays based on how effectiveand compellingthey are (see https://s18tot.ryancordell.org/assignments/unessay/). Effective Unessays demonstrate a thorough mastery of the topic you chose and communicate that mastery creatively. Compelling Unessays are complete, interesting, and honest. Meeting these criteria is a lot easier if you pick a subject of interest to you.

GRADING RUBRIC for the UNESSAY:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IF YOU… | GRADE |
| * Show active engagement with the material in the course and clear, critical understanding of the central themes, issues, and their contexts * Choose a medium that works with the theme and demonstrates substantial effort and thought * Present a product with high production value that is presented in a compelling way * Write a clear statement that connects the project with the course materials | A |
| * Show engagement with the material in the course * Choose a medium that works with the theme but would benefit from additional effort and thought * Present your topic with high production value and in a compelling way * Write a clear statement that connects the project with the course but it not a complete explanation or misrepresents some part of your topic/theorist | B |
| * Engage generally but not specifically or accurately with course material * Submit a project that seems to lack substantial effort and forethought * Choose a medium with low production value * Write a statement that is not clear or not connected with the project | C |
| * Weakly engage or explain course material * Submit a project that seems to lack effort and forethought * Choose a medium that is not convincing * Fail to write a statement | D |
| * Fail to complete the assignment | F |

Sample Assignment #4: Theory Jeopardy

# Description

Anthropological theory is notoriously difficult to understand. Every third week, students

work in groups to rewrite key passages of theory in their own words. They will need to bring their books for this. First, I divide students into small groups and have them draw a theorist from a hat—they are not to tell students outside of their group which theorist they have. Then, students work together to identify a passage (usually 3-4 sentences) that articulates the scholar’s main thesis and translate that passage into their own words. The clearer, the better. Then, we play “Theory Jeopardy,” in which groups read their passages to the class and other groups have 30 seconds to guess the theorist.

# Rationale

Rewriting complex theoretical arguments with precision and clarity encourages mastery of course material, and students enjoy working together to puzzle through key passages of text and guess each other’s theorists.

# Evaluation

Members of each group are graded on their translations (this is a low-stakes assignment that I usually grade check-plus, check, check-minus), and the group with the most correct guesses at the end of the semester also receives two extra credit points.