

Assignments Winter and Spring Semester

Introduction to Sociology, Social Anthropology and Nationalism Studies II. Group 2
Central European University, Special Projects Office
Roma Graduate Preparation Programme

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Purpose and goal:

To help students prepare high quality research papers to be presented at the annual RGPP conference to be held on June 10-13. With this in mind, all assignments during the Winter and Spring semesters are designed to help students develop, in manageable sections, this paper. According to RGPP regulations, "All students should submit a final research paper of 4,000 words by 27 May 2013. This should be a research paper, not a literature review or a policy brief." The paper can be on a topic of the student's choosing.

The paper is broken down into a number of manageable sections that build and develop on one another. Accordingly the assignments consist of:

1. Reaction papers (weekly except during weeks when there are exams, mid-terms or final papers). *These will help students develop the critical thinking skills needed to make textual and experiential connections. This will lead directly to the Winter Semester final assignment: 'theoretical framework'. The better these are done, the easier the final paper will be.*

2. Midterm assignment winter semester (due February 23rd) Making the case for your paper: framing, context, reflection
This will be an exercise in using your 'sociological imagination'.

3. Final assignment winter semester (due March 30th) Theoretical framework
Building on the reaction papers this will be your first attempt to develop a theoretical framework that will help with the analysis of your case.

[research period]

4. Midterm assignment spring semester (due May 18th) Applying theory to case
Using the theoretical frame developed in the previous semester you will analyse and theorise your case.

5. Final assignment (June 1st: draft submitted for tutor and peer feedback. June 8th: final paper due)
You will bring together all previous assignments into one paper adding a conclusion, and reworking the previous assignments to

6. RGPP annual conference June 10th-13th
Free pogácsa and bad coffee

Assignment	Due date
Reaction papers	Weekly before class
Making the case for your paper	February 23 rd
Theoretical framework	March 30 th

Applying theory to case	May 18 th
Final Paper Draft	June 1 st
Final Paper	June 8 th

1. RGPP Reaction Papers

One page

You have to write a one page reaction paper per week. The paper can be on either the reading from the first session or the second session but must arrive no later than the evening before the class. These reaction papers will help you build a literature review, which will be the final paper.

When you're reading the paper think about the following:

What is the principle theme of the paper? What theories/methods does the author use in making his/her argument? What is his/her argument? How convincing is it? What insights does it provide and what are its limitations (look for contradictions, bias, oversights)? Try to think 'outside the text'. Why is the author writing in this way or about this topic? What does his/her argument tell you about the intellectual or cultural 'location' of the author?

The reaction papers should follow the strict structure below.

- 1. ARGUMENT.** In a few sentences, state the author's explicit or implicit argument. Be sure to include both what the author is arguing for, and what s/he is arguing against (if applicable). Please do not write more than a few sentences and to focus only on the main argument of the text.
- 2. CENTRAL QUOTATION.** Quote a sentence (or excerpts from linked sentences) from the text that you think is central to the author's (or authors') implicit or explicit argument(s). Always cite the page.
- 3. TEXTUAL CONNECTION.** Connect the argument of this text to an argument or point you find in another reading assignment covered in this course or one you have picked up from earlier study at the university or elsewhere.
- 4. EXPERIENTIAL CONNECTION.** Say, in a few lines only, how the argument confirms or contradicts your own experience or common sense. Think about how the argument might apply to other phenomenon you know from other readings or outside university.
- 5. QUESTION.** Raise a question or questions which you think is not fully, or satisfactorily, answered by the text. The question should be a question of interpretation or of inquiry, not simply a question of fact. Use the reading tips above to help you frame your question(s). These questions will be used for class discussion.

Remember: reference the texts (Chicago author-date style) and include your name and the date on your paper.

2. Midterm assignment winter semester

Around 1000 words.

1. Case: 1-2 paragraphs detailing the social phenomenon you wish to analyse.
What is the case you wish to analyse? What are the most interesting, pertinent elements?

2. Context: 1-2 paragraphs explaining why the case is sociologically relevant.
Why is it interesting for us? How can the phenomenon be abstracted and linked to other phenomenon?

3. Reflection: 1-2 paragraphs exploring your personal relationship to the case.
What is your position in regards to the case? What is your personal motivation for exploring the case? What makes it interesting to you?

3. Final assignment winter semester

Around 1000 words

With your case in mind, identify relevant literature that will help you analyse and theorise your case.

You do not need to summarise in depth many different theories – this is not a literature review – but rather:

1. Pick a theory and briefly lay out its most salient features in around one paragraph. *Often the best theories to choose are the ones that make us think about a topic in a new or interesting way so don't be scared to be creative.*
2. Deepen, complicate or extend the theory by using a different theoretical approach(s).
3. Repeat number 2. until you have a coherent position with which to analyse your case.

Important: distinguish between texts that are contextually relevant (about a very similar case) and theoretically relevant (that have abstract argumentation that can be transferred to your case). They are both useful in building your framework, but should probably be kept separate.

The following guide may help:

Writing About Theory¹

Make sure that your paper is carefully organized, and that each paragraph is focused around a single point. One trick is to go back after you have finished the paper and make an outline based on what you have written. This should only take a minute or so. If you find that it is hard for you to pick out the main point of each paragraph, then it's a safe bet that readers will have even more trouble. Don't neglect your introduction, conclusion, and topic sentences. They are important signposts in any paper.

It is important to be as precise as possible with your word choice. This will not only improve the quality of your writing, but also your grasp of the theories. Clear thinking and clear writing go hand-in-hand; if you push yourself to be more specific, you will find that you think about the concepts in more exacting ways.

Draw on aspects of the theory that are the most relevant for the question at hand. You wouldn't use a screwdriver to hammer in a nail. Similarly, you shouldn't use Marx's theory of commodity fetishism to explain alienation when other parts of his theory are better suited to the task.

Part of writing about theory is learning how to summarize it well. This requires a delicate balance. You don't want to leave out crucial details, but you want to avoid redundancies and digressions. Concise summaries are important because (i) they show that you've spent time thinking about the theory, (ii) they reflect the degree to which you have mastered the text, and (iii) they free up space to make additional points. Summarizing theory in a concise manner is one of the most challenging aspects of writing about theory. It takes a time, patience, and practice. Support all of your points with references from the texts. Use quotes and page references. If you do not support your points with evidence from the readings, I will assume that you haven't done the readings and grade accordingly.

Never cite a lecture when the same material has been covered in the reading; this will also lead me to believe that you haven't done the reading.

1 Written by Sarah Quinn in Emery et al eds. (2011) *Instructor's Guide to Writing for Sociology* University of California, Berkeley http://sociology.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/documents/student_services/writing_guide/Instructors.guide.final.corrected.title.page.pdf

4. Midterm assignment spring semester

Around 1000 words

This is the most interesting part of your paper. This is where you will use the theoretical frame that you explicated last semester to analyse your case.