Writing in Anthropology

This resource provides a brief introduction to writing in the field of Anthropology through the lens of threshold concepts. It includes:

1. A brief overview of disciplinary writing characteristics valued in Anthropology
2. Examples of what makes “good writing” in Anthropology

What does Anthropology value in writing?

The field of Anthropology values empiricism, holism, comparative analysis, the study of bio-cultural change, relativism, and anti-ethnocentrism. Writers are credible when they use empirical evidence to examine claims; place findings in relevant scholarly or research contexts; accurately cite appropriate sources; and successfully use disciplinary conventions and genres.

The field’s citation practices embody these values, and you can see that in examples of how anthropologists frame research problems; recognize important work in the field; position their original work within established dialogues; and mark secondary sources and primary sources (including research participants).

Effective writers:

- identify the research problem
- contextualize the problem in relevant scholarship
- articulate an original contribution to the problem
- illustrate the contribution with data
- explain the significance of the contribution to the discipline and/or public knowledge
- identify future research directions

Thus, those who expect to write as a major in this department should understand that writing is not simply the act of putting words to paper. Writing is a multi-stage, iterative process that considers audiences, genres, data, and purpose.

What does “good writing” actually look like in Anthropology?

The article attached with this guide (annotated-sample/index.html) provides examples of what “good writing” actually looks like in Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology, specifically, including:

- the use of ethnographic vignettes as empirical evidence
- citation practices
- organization of argument
- use of empirical evidence throughout the article
- strategic and effective use of transitions and subheadings
- treatment of primary texts

This guide was co-created by HCWE graduate assistant Angele Glotfelter and Anthropology faculty James Bielo, Leighton Peterson, Jeb Card, and Yang Jiao.