

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

You are required to complete **one** writing assignment. All writing assignments are 2500 words (+/- 100 words, strict). In this assignment you will turn in a draft, receive feedback, revise your paper, and then turn it in again for final grading. **The draft is due on October 31st and the final version of the paper on December 14th.** This assignment is worth 30% of your grade. Here you turn in your draft paper.

You can choose between one of the four options below.

1. **Critical review of an empirical publication.** In this assignment you search for and select a recent publication that presents an empirical test of a classic theory. In your assignment you will a) summarize the paper's theory/hypothesis, method, and findings; and b) critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the papers argument(s) and approach.
2. **Apply classic theory to a contemporary case.** In your assignment you will describe a contemporary case (e.g. Black Lives Matter in the US or as broad as global capitalism). You will then analyze the case using a classic theoretical framework from one or more of the readings in this course.
3. **Empirical investigation or analysis.** In this assignment you can either use qualitative or quantitative methods to explore/test a classic theory. For a qualitative project you can choose between doing a) non-participant observation or b) participant observation. For a quantitative project you can either do an a) original analysis or b) replicate a published finding. In either case you have to use a publicly available dataset.
4. **A blog post.** In this assignment you will pick a course "unit" (week of readings) and write an accessible summary and critique. The emphasis here is on taking complex concepts, frameworks, arguments and making them interesting and accessible to a non-academic audience.

Below you can find further details about a) format and guidelines and b) each of the four options.

Your essay/blog post should include the following:

1. Title

2. A brief introductory paragraph, in which you provide an overview of your essay. Here you summarize your topic, question/hypothesis and argument.

3. Main paragraphs, in which you should:

- Summarize what other scholars have said about your topic AND define key concepts used in your argument.
- Describe your data and method (only for option #3)
- Present your main findings/argument/critique.

4. A concluding paragraph, in which you discuss how your findings/arguments relate to what other scholars have said.

5. A reference list.

6. Field notes, code and data (only for option #3). If these are handwritten, take a picture of them and attach at the very end of the document. This will not count toward your word count.

Format and Guidelines (applies to all assignments)

- Word processor format (e.g. .odt/.docx)
- 2500 words (+/- 100 words, strict)
- 12 pt font
- Double spaced
- Page numbers
- In-text citations (examples below)
 - Between 1999 and 2004, there were 21 confirmed sightings of “observers” (Dunham and Bishop, 2011).
 - Dunham and Bishop (2011) report 21 confirmed sightings of “observers” between 1999 and 2004.
- APA or ASA style reference list
- Footnotes if needed (no endnotes)

#1 Critical Review of an Empirical Publication

In this assignment you search for and select one (or more) publications in peer-reviewed academic journals (I suggest the *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, or *Social Forces*) that empirically tests a classic theory. The paper must have been published since the year 2000. In your assignment you will a) summarize the papers theory/hypothesis, method, and findings; and b) critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the papers argument(s). In particular, pay close attention to the authors interpretation of the classic theory and how they operationalize (define/measure) key concepts.

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In writing this review you will improve your skills in (i) succinctly summarizing a peer-reviewed empirical article; (ii) critiquing the theory, argument and/or methodological approach.

#2 Applying theory to a contemporary case

In your assignment you will describe a contemporary case. The case can be something like a social movement (e.g. Black Lives Matter) or a broad social structure like global capitalism. You will then analyze this case using the one (or more) of the theoretical frameworks covered in this class. How does the case fit (or not) the classic theory? How well does the theory predict how things have developed? What is missing, how could it be improved. Make sure to apply the tools and perspectives covered in Units 2 and 3.

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In this assignment you will learn (i) to apply theory to a contemporary case; (ii) gain a deeper understanding of the social structure of contemporary issues; (iii) critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of classic theory.

#3 Empirical Investigation or Analysis

In this assignment you can either use qualitative or quantitative methods to explore/test a classic theory. For a qualitative project you can choose between doing a) non-participant observation or b) participant observation. For a quantitative project you can either do an a) original analysis or b) replicate a published finding. In either case you have to use a publicly available dataset.

Non-Participant Observation

For this option, you must conduct at least 2 hours of observational fieldwork. You can split your observations into parts (e.g., you can conduct two separate hour-long observation sessions). In this assignment, you are a neutral observer, i.e. you do not interact with the people you are studying.

Participant Observation

For this option, you must conduct at least 2 hours of observational fieldwork. You can split your observations into parts (e.g., you can conduct two separate hour-long observation sessions). In this assignment you are a participating observer, i.e. you do interact with the people you are studying.

IMPORTANT NOTES REGARDING QUALITATIVE OPTIONS:

Do **NOT**** do anything illegal or that will get you into trouble OR might spread COVID-19.**

- You should do your best to take field notes during your fieldwork. If that is not feasible, aim to take notes immediately after your work in the field. You need to turn in these notes as part of the assignment.
- You will ultimately need to have IRB approval if you want to consider publishing your data. Talk to your instructor if you are considering this.

Original Quantitative Analysis

For this option, you will select a research question/hypothesis (provided in a classic theory) and use quantitative data to answer/test it. The data must be publicly available. Selecting the appropriate method and data for your question/hypothesis is key. You are free to use whatever statistical software available to you (e.g. R or Stata) but must turn in your code and data with your essay.

Replication

For this option, you will select a published empirical article and attempt to replicate it. Many recent publications require authors to make their code and data publicly available. This assignment has two parts. First, to attempt an exact replication (does not have to replicate in full, minimum one key finding). Second, you have to come up with your own research question/hypothesis and adjust the original analysis such that it answers/tests your own. Finally, discuss the different outcomes.

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In conducting and writing about your own research, you will gain experience and learn (i) to develop a research question/hypothesis based on classic theory; (ii) conduct qualitative or quantitative analysis; (iii) to select the appropriate method and data to answer a research question, i.e. link theory and method.

#4 A Blog Post (for a general audience)

In this assignment you will pick a course “unit” and write an accessible summary and critique. The emphasis here taking complex concepts, frameworks, arguments and making them interesting and accessible to a non-academic audience.

The main purpose of an academic blog post is to make complex ideas and arguments accessible to a broader audience. The format and style of a blog post is more flexible and informal than academic publications. Another key feature of quality blog posts is to make it interesting. Why is this topic important? Lastly, you are expected to not only summarize, but present your own argument that is informed by and builds on academic findings, concepts, and debates (from the course readings).

For this assignment, you will select one of the “units” in this course to summarize and critically engage with. You must also incorporate all of the readings into your blog post.

Examples:

- <https://contexts.org/blog>

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In writing your blog post, you will learn (i) how to develop an original argument/critique about a classic theory; and (ii) how to write about scholarly findings and ideas in a way that is accessible to a public (non-academic) audience.

