

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology ANTH 2302

Comments on Essay 2

Spring 2004 / Crowder

Overall the essays were VERY GOOD because most of you followed the instructions and took some time and energy to make sure they were as complete as possible. Below are my comments regarding recurring mistakes I observed with many of your papers. I did not mark these essays like I did the previous time, only the flagrant errors got the ink. This essay is worth 10% of your final grade.

1. Write in the present tense. This is an error nearly all of you make when referring to an article. You may have read it, but others have yet to read it! The prose lives, it is not dead, so you must refer to the article in the present tense, e.g. “the author discusses concepts of marriage...”
2. “A LOT” is a piece of real estate, it is not an amount. Substitute “many” or “greatly” in places where you feel the need to place “a lot”. By doing this simple step your writing will be more polished and demonstrate your understanding of the difference between written language and spoken language. “There were a lot of people at the ritual” sounds different than “Many people gathered at the ritual site...”
3. “I think” and “I believe” are two examples of how many of your sentences begin. You are the author of your paper, so there is NO NEED to reiterate what is already understood. The reader knows it is what you think because you are writing the paper! Instead, begin the sentence with what you think you are going to say—make it a clear statement. For example, “I think that the author does a poor job...” Instead, write, “The author does a poor job...” By regularly using “I think” and “I believe” you chop up your writing into boring, monotonous sentences which distract the reader from your main point.
4. Many of you discuss “proving” an idea, or what the “truth” is about a topic. Please, you cannot prove anything, nor is there really a “truth” to discuss—what you are dealing with are relative terms. Like we discussed in class, theories can only be DISPROVEN, and the TRUTH is a matter of perspective. When you use terms like “it doesn’t prove that polygamy is the only form of marriage...” or “The truth is...”, you demonstrate ethnocentrism. Instead, discuss the different perspectives and support the one you believe in.
5. Most of you write like you speak, which makes for poor writing, especially by the regular use of the second person singular: “you”. People make this error when writing because they are referring to “you” as a third person, instead of a second person. If that is the case, change “you” to “one”—this is more polished, less colloquial. For example, “When you marry someone from a different culture...” should instead read, “when one marries someone from a different culture...”
6. When writing about amounts or numbers do not just type the number, e.g. “22 children between the husband and his 6 wives.” Instead write out the numbers, “Twenty-two children between the husband and his six wives.” Except for dates, like “1984” or “in the 90s”, most numbers should be spelled out. There are exceptions to this, of course. If they are very large numbers or if you are discussing percentages or statistics, then it may be best to write the actual number or place the numbers in a table.
7. For the most part I was much less critical of these essays, and only flagged the flagrant errors. There is very little of my writing in the margins, asking you questions or rewriting the sentence for you. Overall I thought these essays were much stronger; however, I still wondered if some of you even read my comments from the first essay. Proofreading requires you giving your essay to someone else to read for clarity and word choice. In the future, read your paper aloud and listen for the errors, and if you can’t find any, give it to a friend to read. Whatever awkward phrases you find should be ironed out and rewritten. Do not be afraid of rewriting sentences or paragraphs. Writing is a process and requires large amounts of time for polishing. GOOD LUCK!