

## ESSAY WRITING TIPS – SOCL 209

- Try to aim for depth not breadth. Say more numerous and detailed points about fewer things.
- Try to make connections between things. Think about the relationships between ideas, between examples, and between paragraphs.
- What you think is important. Make sure, however, to connect this to and balance it with theory and what other people have said. A sociological argument has to consider more than just your own experience of consumption, and since you can't go out and interview people to find out their experiences, using other studies and theories is the next best way to understand the general implications of your personal experiences. Doing so is also very important because other people's studies can serve as proof that backs up your arguments.

So if you wanted to argue that you think home and work are no longer separated, even though Corrigan suggests they have been separated (1997), then you could find references that talk about home offices, the design of objects for home offices, or teleworking, and use quotations or ideas from these to support your argument. Your essay might then have part that looks a little like this (the quotation and argument is fictional and made up by me in order to give an example of how you might use a reference):

Though Corrigan suggests that historically, home and work have been separated, and those who design consumer goods have tried to make things like the sewing machine less industrial so that it would fit at home (1997, p.97-8), this argument is limited. It doesn't take into account the recent increase in people who have home offices or work from home. <Fictional Author 1> says that "home offices are an increasingly popular way of working, and have been facilitated by the increase in communications technologies" (year, page). Not only are home offices increasingly popular, but they are also linked to new consumer goods. The design of furniture for the home, for example, now includes niche markets specifically addressing the need for products suiting home offices (Fictional Author 2, year, page).

More practical issues:

- Take some time to consider the structure of your essay.
- A good and detailed introduction, for example, is important in order to give the reader a map for what you will be talking about.
- Depending on the essay question you choose, there will be different ways of organizing your essay. Try to keep in mind having a balance of general (theoretical) and particular (example) points. One of many possible structures would be to give a detailed introduction, then some general theory that sets a context, then your argument and the interesting points you have picked out to develop, examples that illustrate these points and an explanation of how they do so, and then perhaps a concluding contrast with what other theories or historical periods or cultural settings would contribute to the issue.
- Try to talk about only one idea per paragraph.
- Be sure to check for spelling and grammar. Try reading your essay out loud – it can help you to spot missed words or long or confusing sentences.
- When using quotations from other authors, try to link them to the other things you are saying, for example by paraphrasing them before or after (and citing of course) or explaining why the point they make compliments what you are saying.
- For the particular details of formatting your essay, see the course handbook (double-spaced, one side of the paper, bibliography preferably in Harvard system, name of tutor on essay)
- More help regarding essay writing, developing your English and other study skills can be found through the Student Learning and Development Centre:

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/sldc/about/about.html>

- If you have specific questions, you can approach your tutor or post questions through the SLDC Ellvis LUVLE forum: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/ellvis>

#### Process:

- If you're stuck thinking about where to start, try some of these things: brainstorm about the question and everything you think of related to it; think of as many examples as you can that support or don't support the arguments; think about different perspectives you could look at the issue from (culture, gender, historical, etc.); brainstorm theories you could use to discuss the question or theories that wouldn't work in addressing the question; use a combinations of these methods to generate ideas and then pinpoint what is most interesting and what you want to look at in more detail; follow up the few main ideas you would like to pursue

#### Evaluation:

- Guidelines of what qualities are found in an essay of various marks are found in the Sociology Part II Handbook, available at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/current/ugp2/pt2handbook.doc>

#### Using Resources:

- Excellent papers will have more than just a few (or even 5 or 6) references  
- If using references to other people's work seems daunting, remember you don't need to cite whole theories. You can pick just one part of something that is interesting.  
- A good way of integrating other people's work into your essay is to think of how other theories have already made arguments that fit your point or analysis, and then put these references in to support what you are trying to say.  
- Keep in mind that some resources are viewed more positively than others – books and articles are highly regarded, but internet sources are often less reliable and treated with scepticism.

#### Finding Sources:

- The course handbook has a great bibliography of sources related to the class. Try here first for good resources.  
- Try looking in the bibliography of articles or books you like. There's a good chance that if you like one author's arguments, you might also like some of the other authors that s/he uses and refers to.  
- Don't worry about looking for books all the time. Articles can be really good sources. Search on MetaLib and try many different combinations of search terms to find relevant material.  
- Remember you don't necessarily need to read entire books to find things to use. Try skimming for relevant chapters or use the index to look for terms you are particularly interested in. Be careful though, that you don't misrepresent what an author is saying because you didn't read the paragraph where s/he acknowledges limitations, etc.  
- There is an online tutorial through the library to help you develop various search and library skills: <http://libweb.lancs.ac.uk/links/index.htm>  
- For more specific inquiries, you can contact the Sociology Subject Librarian, Brian Kirtley: <http://libweb.lancs.ac.uk/ebk.htm>

#### Anti-plagiarism advice:

- You can find explanations and advice about citations and plagiarism in the Sociology Part II Handbook: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/current/ugp2/pt2handbook.doc> or on the CELT website: [http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/anti\\_plag\\_students\\_advice](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/celt/celtweb/anti_plag_students_advice).

- A. Hui, 11/2008