

Anthro 218
The Human Stain (1)

Code: 1 = weak

2= adequate, room for improvement

3=strong

Criteria:

WRITING MECHANICS

Spelling _____

Grammar _____

Punctuation _____

Citation form _____

Bibliography _____

Pages numbered _____

ORGANIZATION OF ESSAY

Introduction

--included a clear and concise statement of purpose/theme _____

--orients the reader to what follows _____

Body of essay

--paragraphs follow logically _____

--paragraphs have a direction, i.e., they lead the reader along
toward the conclusion _____

--use of appropriate transitions linking paragraphs _____

___ use of appropriate logical connectors, e.g. however,
therefore, furthermore _____

Conclusion

--provides a summary of your main points _____

--provides a sense of closure (what would you like the
reader to have learned after reading your essay?) _____

WRITING STYLE

Academic tone

-- appropriate vocabulary, "don't" use contractions, use of
objective, as opposed to personal, voice _____

Structure

--organized substance in understandable and helpful
manner _____

SUBSTANCE

Provided sufficient detail to indicate have read the novel, understood plot
(what happens to whom in the book) _____

Have identified a transformation, crisis overcome, contest, or struggle at
the heart of the novel. _____

Have made an argument displaing the novel's conception of human
identity. _____

Have made effort to use the literature assigned for this course. _____

CRITERIA FOR GRADING PAPERS:

WRITING MECHANICS

See Chapter 7 ("Form") in Cuba, *Writing About Social Science*. Use of correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, citation and bibliographic form is not optional. A single error (a misspelled word, for instance) is understandable. Systematic errors are not acceptable. They usual signal signs of sloppiness and haste. Strunk, and White, *Elements of Style*, I, Elementary Rules of Usage.

ORGANIZATION OF ESSAY

Your narrative should have a clearly defined organization. Every paper (like every good story or proof) should have a beginning, middle and an end. These components of your paper are more technically known as an introduction, body and conclusion. Each component should accomplish something slightly different. Together they should carry the reader along to the culmination of your paper. For a more detailed discussion of organization, see Cuba (1997). Look in the index under "organization." Also look at Strunk, and White, *Elements of Style*.

The **introduction** should inform the reader of the subject of your paper. (I am using the generic term "paper" to refer to either an essay, a research paper, a review, or whatever non-fiction genre you are writing.) In the introductory paragraphs of a longer piece, you should also orient the reader to the overall plan of the paper (in a very short paper, this is probably unnecessary.) In writing the introduction, you should avoid a mechanical and formulaic description (e.g. "In this essay I will first summarize "Crime.... Next I will evaluate." These indexical markers are useful only if you include a summary of what each part of the paper will say in constructing your overall argument. Such organizational information is most useful in very long papers but overly repetitive in short papers. There is no easy formula for deciding how much mapping is necessary up front. You should also avoid using those show-stopping openings that are supposed to entice the reader (see academic tone below). Don't try to interest your reader by exaggerating the scope or seriousness of your subject matter. The most common errors I have found among students is a tendency to be overly dramatic, assign too much importance to a topic, or begin with global generalizations that exaggerate what is known and its importance. For instance, you do not want to write (WARNING: this is a negative example - what you ought not to do)

"People in America live in constant fear of crime." This sentence is both overly dramatic and empirically incorrect. Overstating your case can actually trivialize your subject. You want to interest your reader and, at the same time, maintain a serious tone.

Many experienced scholars write introductions *after* they have written the paper. This is often the way I write. Although writing the introduction after the body of the paper seems to reverse the correct order of tasks, it actually makes sense. Consider an analogy. You have to know someone before you can introduce that person to someone

else. Similarly, you have to know your paper before you can introduce it to your reader. You might start with a sketchy draft of an introduction to get yourself going. But do plan on revising it upon completing the paper so that it will accurately reflect the direction of your argument. (Cuba provides examples of introductions in his text. Look in the index under "Introduction".)

The **body** of your essay consists of a number of paragraphs that collectively build an argument or analysis. An argument moves and an analysis displays the components of the subject you are writing about. Neither wander aimlessly, circling back and forth. The argument moves toward a point; an analysis shows how the parts compose the whole. You might think of each paragraph as carrying the reader along toward that point or whole, contributing whatever we need to get there: definitions, assumptions, logical connections, empirical evidence, or interpretation. (See appropriate use of paragraphs, below.)

The **conclusion** should do more than simply summarize the argument. Although a brief review of the main points of the argument is appropriate, the conclusion needs to do more than that. It needs to move the reader along beyond the body of the paper. If it doesn't, then a careful and attentive reader (one who didn't need a review) could simply stop reading your paper at the end of the body. You would be wasting your time, and the reader's, writing such a conclusion.

Typically, the conclusion includes an account of the implications and significance of the argument, thesis, or analysis developed in the body of the paper. It might consider the thesis in a different context, or in relation to a different (but related) problem or situation. For instance, if deviance is socially constructed, varying culturally and historically, does that mean that nothing is deviant, or that we can ignore violations of norms because the norms are just some groups' preferences? For instance, you might think about the consequences of habitual use of proscribed illegal drugs. You might ask whether the legal regulation of the drugs creates costs and opportunities that have variable effects on different sub-groups in society? Or, to consider another example, in describing the structure of Roth's novel, *The Human Stain*, you might want to ask how the organization of the novel privileged and supported some interpretations rather than others. You would not, obviously, begin an entirely new analysis or argument. But you should raise and briefly explore some implication in your conclusion. Since this particular assignment is only a schematic account of the events and organization of Roth's novel to be followed later in the semester with a more thorough analysis, your discussion can remain speculative and brief. You might think, however, of your speculations as a platform for the interpretive paper (that you will write in a few weeks), or for a research paper (that you or one or your scholarly readers might subsequently undertake). In fact, starting off where someone else left off is precisely how scientific research progresses. Once again, you should read the sections on conclusions in Cuba.

WRITING STYLE

Academic tone refers to a degree of formality, neutrality, and objectivity in your writing. We achieve this tone by avoiding colloquialism and contractions. Academic writing often omits references to ourselves as authors, but this now varies within different scholarly communities. There are a few types of writing where you are invited to reflect on personal experiences or reactions to ideas (journals and diaries, for instance). Most academic papers, however, should focus squarely on ideas and not on the author of the paper. This general rule, to which I have already provided one exception, does not mean that you must never use the pronoun "I", but be aware of the purpose of referring to yourself. If it is to explain how you collected data, referencing yourself is appropriate, (e.g. "In order to examine the process of inventing a new safety regime for laboratories, I spent fifteen months observing committees and research laboratories at two universities"). If the pronoun "I" is used to tell something personal and unrelated to the argument or evidence, omit the reference (e.g. "I think this was a fascinating experience," or "I didn't like this reading").

The phrase "Appropriate use of paragraphs" on the checklist refers to the proper bundling of ideas. Paragraphs are not simply ways of spatially organizing words on a page. Each paragraph should have a function in the overall argument. The topic sentence - usually the first sentence - reigns over all the other sentences in the paragraph and summarizes that paragraph's contribution to the argument. Each of the other sentences should "work for" the topic sentence by exemplifying, clarifying, elaborating (contrasting or extending) the idea in the topic sentence. Try the following exercise. After writing a draft of your paper, you might want to highlight what you think is the topic sentence of each paragraph. If you cannot identify a topic sentence, you have to decide whether the problem is that there are two (or three) topics. If that is the case, you must divide your paragraph into two or three paragraphs, elaborating and clarifying each topic sentence within its own paragraph. However, sometimes, you may have written a paragraph where there is no topic sentence, no ways of collecting the sentences into an organized set; they are just a collection of ideas without an inner structure which can be summarized in the topic sentence. Fixing that problem requires serious rewriting and rethinking.

SUBSTANCE

The substance of your paper refers to the ideas you are attempting to convey to your audience. (In this case, you are summarizing and analyzing the organizational structure of Philip Roth's novel, *The Human Stain*.) Did you summarize the plot of the novel succinctly? Or, if you are writing about a piece of non-fiction or research, did you summarize the author's thesis clearly? This part sounds simple. But it is not as easy as it might appear at first. Consider all the thinking that goes into writing a good summary. I have already provided you with examples of how to summarize research articles (see course syllabus).

1. You must understand the author's argument in all of its details and nuance.
2. You must be able to abstract from the wealth of details those that are essential to the argument (or the plot).
3. You must find the right words to convey the author's meaning (or plot).

For Roth's novel, did you get the sequence of actions and their significant (meaning) in the lives of the characters? This is the plot. A novel is often described as a form of narrative (a particular form of representation.) Here is a simple but useful definition of narrative that may help you think about the organization of Roth's novel. The word/concept narrative usually refers to a story that has three features: (a) a set of characters, (b) temporally ordered events, (c) engaged in some form of contest, struggle, development or change. This third feature is sometimes called the plot, the structure, the explanation of what happens; some critics call this the moral meaning or moral of the tale. In effect, the plot is can be understood as the struggle or conflict that is resolved through the sequence of events.