Introduction to Sociology
Fall, 2003
Oberlin College

“Sociology is not a spectator sport. There is not you and society. There is you, in which society lives. And there is society, in which you live. If you are concerned about an issue, that produces a reality; if you are unconcerned, that produces another reality. There is no way that you can be ineffectual. You and I are the terms of society.”

– with thanks to M. Ventura

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Course Objectives
Sociology is about windows and mirrors: windows on the worlds of others, which in turn help us to see ourselves in new ways. Through this course, I hope that you may come to see both yourself and others through fresh eyes. We will focus on two frameworks for understanding the social world: the Marxist emphasis on the primacy of the economic and material realm, versus the Durkheimian emphasis on the social influence of cultural forces. We will apply these two frameworks to such topics as class, deviance, race, gender, the family and global stratification. This will be achieved through the practices of the liberal arts – namely, reading and writing, investigation and analysis, lecture and discussion. Through this course, students should become more sensitive, informed, and critical members of the society in which we live.

Required Readings
There are two required textbooks for the course:


These are available in the campus bookstore. Readings from the Reader should be read thoroughly and carefully; readings from the Text should be read to provide background knowledge and information. Additional background readings are provided for students who wish to read further on the week’s topic. Additional readings will be provided in class as noted. Also, be sure to check the class website frequently for announcements.

Attendance/In-Class Presentations
Attendance and participation in lecture is integral to this course. Because there will be discussion of materials not included in the readings, it is essential that you make every class meeting. Lecture notes will not be available. Efforts will be made to encourage participation from students during the lectures – so come prepared.

Journal Assignment/Term Paper
Written assignments for the class consist of one 2-3 page journal and one 6-7 page term paper. For each assignment there will be several topics for students to choose from. They should be
informal and personal, about your experience in a public setting. The research paper requires that you apply concepts from the readings and lectures to an analysis of original empirical data about a particular substantive area. Help with writing is available from a variety of sources on campus, including me. Students are required to read and follow the Paper Writing Guidelines attached to this syllabus. In brief, all written assignments must be typed and double-spaced, and conform to the page length requirements; creativity with margins or font sizes should not be attempted. All pages must be stapled together, without special covers or folders, with your name in the upper right hand corner of the first page. The written assignments will only be accepted on or before the due date. You are expected to complete your work in a timely manner that will allow you to deal with any other plans or unanticipated circumstances ahead of time. No electronic versions will be accepted. I will be happy to discuss your paper, but I will not read preliminary drafts. Further details about the journal and paper assignments will be discussed in class.

**Exams**
There will be two non-cumulative multiple choice exams – one midterm and one final. Exams will be based on lectures and readings from the textbooks. No make-up exams will be given – so you must conform to the times as scheduled for the midterm and final. Further details about the midterm and final exams will be discussed in class.

**Grading Policy**
You will not be graded on a competitive basis, so in theory everyone can do well in the class. However, in order to get a top grade, students will be expected to achieve standards of excellence in their work. If you are dissatisfied with any grade you receive, you must submit a written request for a review of the grade, including a defense, no later than one week after the work is handed back to the class. By requesting a review of the grade you receive, you invite the possibility that the new grade will be lower than the original grade, as well as the possibility that it will be higher. Points will be distributed as follows:

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**Cheating/Plagiarism**
The Oberlin Code of Honor applies for this course and all its assignments. Be sure to write, “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment,” and sign it, or I have the option of withholding your grade.

**Calendar**
Please note that the following schedule is tentative, and may change based on how quickly we cover the material.

**WEEK TWO**
*Introduction: The Sociological Imagination*
Tuesday, September 9th
*Text:* pp. xxix, 1-9 (Chapter 1)
*Reader:* “The Promise” – C. Wright Mills (1)
Thursday, September 11th
The Sociological Imagination, Continued
Reader: “Teenage Wasteland” -- Donna Gaines (2)
       “Intersection of Biography and History” -- Mary Romero (3)

WEEK THREE
Tuesday, September 16th
Method
Text: pp. 129-130; 148-153

Thursday, September 18th
Reader: “Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison”—Haney, Banks and Zimbardo (5)
       “Not our Kind of Girl”—Elaine Bell Kaplan (6)

WEEK FOUR
Theory
Tuesday, September 23rd and Thursday, September 25th
Text: pp. 11-35 (Chapter 1)
Reader: “Manifesto of the Communist Party” -- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (38)
       “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” – Max Weber (41)
       “The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life” -- Emile Durkheim (Provided in class)

WEEK FIVE
Tuesday, September 30th and Thursday, October 2nd
Social Class in the United States
Text: pp. 252-254
Reader: “Who Rules America?”—G. William Domhoff (23)
       “When Work Disappears” – William Julius Wilson (39)
       “Positive Functions of the Undeserving Poor” – Herbert J. Gans (25)

WEEK SIX
Tuesday, October 7th
Social Class in the United States, Continued
Text: pp. 275-306 (Chapter 10)
Reader: “The Power Elite” – C. Wright Mills (35)
       “Making it by Faking It” – Robert Granfield (13)
       “Making Ends Meet” – Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (26)

WEEK SEVEN
Thursday, October 9th and Tuesday, October 14th
Culture
Text: pp. 37-64 (Chapter 2)
Reader: “Lovely Hula Hands” -- Haunani-Kay Trask (10)
Provided in Class: “This is the Life” -- Annie Dillard
       “This is Only a Test” – JoAnn Wypijewski
Provided on the day of class: “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema” – Horace Miner
October 16th
Midterm Exam
Film: Merchants of Cool

October 20th-26th: Happy Holiday

WEEK NINE
Tuesday, October 28th and Thursday, October 30th
Deviance, Crime and Social Control
Text: pp. 211-242 (Chapter 8)
“Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia” – Penelope E. McLorg and Diane E. Taub (20)
“In Search of Respect” – Philippe Bourgois (21)

11/7: Journal Assignment Due

WEEK TEN
Tuesday, November 4th and Thursday, November 6th
Race and Ethnicity
Text: pp. 341-378 (Chapter 12)
Reader: “Women of the Klan” -- Kathleen M. Blee (17)
“Blue Dreams” – Nancy Abellmann and John Lie (33)

WEEK ELEVEN
Tuesday, November 11th and Thursday, November 13th
Race and Ethnicity
“Black Wealth/White Wealth” – Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro (24)
“Is this a White Country or What?” -- Lillian B. Rubin (32)

WEEK TWELVE
Tuesday, November 18th and Thursday, November 20th
Sex and Gender
Text: pp. 307-340 (Chapter 11)
Reader: “Gender as Structure” – Barbara Risman (27)
“Night to His Day” -- Judith Lorber (11)
“Fraternities and Rape on Campus” – Patricia Martin (22)
Film: Still Killing Us Softly III

WEEK THIRTEEN
Tuesday, November 25th
Education
Text: pp. 503-530 (Chapter 17)
Reader: “Civilize them with a Stick” – Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes (47)
“Preparing for Power” – Peter W. Cookson, Jr. and Caroline Hodges Persell (48)
“Failing at Fairness” – Myra Sadker and David Sadker (49)
Thursday, November 27th, Holiday

WEEK FOURTEEN
Tuesday, December 2nd and Thursday, December 4th
Power and Politics
Text: pp. 439-466 (Chapter 15)
Reader: "Dollars and Votes"—Clawson, Neustadt, and Weller (36)
    "The Mass Media as a Power Institution"—Martin N. Marger (37)
    "Why the U.S. Health Care System Does Not Respond to People's Needs"—Vicente Navarro (44)

WEEK FIFTEEN
Tuesday, December 9th and Thursday, December 11th
Global Stratification
Text: pp. 243-274; 409-438 (Chapters 9 and 14)
Reader: "One World, Ready or Not"—William Greider (55)
    "The McDoinalidization of Society"—George Ritzer (53)
    "What Can We Do"—Allan G. Johnson (56)

FINAL EXAM: Saturday, December 20th, 9:00 AM

Writing Project #1: Journal
For the journal project in this class, you will be asked to do a simple "breaching experiment." Each of the following exercises is designed to make you more aware of your "self" in social situations and to help you uncover taken-for-granted behavior in public places and/or in everyday interaction. The exercises help turn the ordinary world into a strange place, where we can better see its orderliness as a remarkable accomplishment that is amenable to study. We begin to glimpse the extent to which we have internalized society's rules, and the pervasive nature of domination and conformity. The assignment requires that you closely observe the actions and reactions of others to you, at the same time that you pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings during the exercise. You will be expected to describe both in as much detail as possible.

These exercises must be done with what is called "Beginner's Mind." This is the opposite of expert's mind, which is filled with facts, projections, assumptions, and explanations, and cannot therefore learn anything new or fresh. Beginner's mind doesn't know in advance what is going to happen - it is just there in the moment, open and receptive to experience. It is not involved in the past or the future, and is not trying to occupy or entertain you with distracting thoughts, daydreams, fantasies, plans, or other internal dialogues. It is important that you refrain from anything that takes you out of really "doing" the exercise. Furthermore, you are not supposed to give an "account" of what you are doing to others, nor offer any explanation for your behavior during the time in which you are engaged in the exercise. The exercises must be done alone, not together with anyone else from the class (although you may plan in advance or discuss afterwards). You must also do these exercises someplace other than the Oberlin campus. And, of course, you should not break any laws, or cause any harm to yourself or others.

You may choose any ONE of the exercises listed below. While each of these is different, they should all be similar in terms of time commitment and difficulty. It is not necessary for you to
make any citations from the textbook; however, portions of Chapters 2, 3, and 4 should serve as intellectual resources for this assignment. The style in which you write your journal may be personal and informal, but you should still follow all the applicable rules of structure, spelling, and grammar. Finished journals should be approximately 2-3 double-spaced, typewritten pages (no longer), and stapled together (not clipped, no binders, no cover pages). No electronic versions will be accepted. You may turn them in earlier, but late journals will not be accepted, unless in the case of extremely well documented emergencies.

Your journal will be worth 20% of your course grade. Half of that will be based on how well you actually breached and wrote about it, and the other half will be based on how well you show that you’ve used your experience of breaching to expand on your awareness of sociology. Hence, while you conduct your breach with “beginner’s mind,” you write about it in a way that shows you have used your experience of breaching as a way to reconsider and even to “try out” ideas from the course.

JOURNAL EXERCISES

1. Do Nothing

This exercise requires that you find a relatively busy, public space (for instance a mall, square, plaza, street corner, sidewalk, etc.) and that you go there and, literally, do nothing for at least 10 minutes. That means just stand there and be unoccupied. Don’t be waiting for something, taking a break, people-watching, sight-seeing, looking for someone, or otherwise engaged in the kind of normal activity that might take place there. Don’t whistle, hum, fidget, look in your purse, play with your keys, glance at your watch, take notes, or do anything else that might distract you from just being there and doing nothing.

2. Riding the Elevator (Backwards)

This exercise requires that you find a relatively busy, public, high-rise building, and that you go up and down in the elevator, taking at least three different trips. Make sure that there are also other passengers in the elevator with you. It is better to follow people into the elevator, let them push the buttons for their floors, and then go along to their destination. The important part, once you have entered the elevator, is to remain facing the back wall. Don’t drop your eyes down; just keep looking straight ahead. Remain this way during the entire rest of the ride, until you exit.

3. No Greetings

This exercise requires that you engage in conversations, either face-to-face or over the telephone, without saying "hello" and "goodbye" or using any other words that could serve as a substitute for either (like "hey," "hi," "howzit," "wassup," "later," "see ya," "all right," or "peace out," for instance). You should do this, that is refrain from using these standard opening and closing greetings, in every interaction, whether you initiate it or someone else does, over the course of an entire day.
Term Paper Guidelines

I. The Prompt
In two pages, compare and contrast Marx’s materialist and Durkheim’s (and Weber’s, if you wish) culturalist views of social structure. Then, in one page, describe relevant features of one of the following:

   a) how you have come to recognize your own class position.
   b) racism you have either observed or experienced.
   c) sexism you have either observed or experienced.
   d) a time when your behaviors were labelled as deviant.
   e) a specific, limited event from an historical or contemporary conflict in the world which is of great interest to you. Historical conflicts may include events such as the Russian, French, Chinese, or American Revolutions, while contemporary conflicts could include the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; the India/Pakistan conflict; 9-11, etc.

   NOTE: Only choose this option if you have a high degree of familiarity with a specific event in one of the above conflicts, without having to conduct outside research.

Following this description, use two to three pages to analyze this incident in light of three of the relevant readings of this course. Finally, you may conclude your paper by analyzing this incident in terms of materialist and culturalist insights. Do not use any sources from outside of class for this paper, unless you choose option e, above, in which case you may only use outside sources in your brief description of the event.

II. The Introductory Paragraph
Begin your essay with an introductory paragraph. To borrow from journalism, this paragraph should begin with a lead: a quote, anecdote or insight to capture and guide the reader’s attention. You should then summarize your argument in a thesis statement, in which you state your concluding argument. An analytic essay is not mystery novel; all arguments should be clearly stated at the outset. Also, even though your reader will know the assignment which you will be addressing and the readings you will be using, you should write as if she does not. Below is a rough sample of such a paragraph:

“I ain’t poor, just broke.”

--Dick Gregory

In the United States, to be poor is taken by many as synonymous with being a second class citizen. The very term “poor” connotes inferiority, lesser quality, and inadequacy. From a materialist perspective, poverty arises from a lack of access to necessary resources, while culturalists view poverty as a lack of access to cultural capital. This paper will analyze the materialist and culturalist perspectives as they were originally presented by Marx and Durkheim, and then I will describe my experience of realizing that I came of age in circumstances which others would label as “poor.” I will then analyze how my family’s poverty is similar to conditions Katherine S. Newman describes in “Declining Fortunes,” how I have worked to overcome my impoverished background through processes similar to those described by Robert Granfield in “Making it and Faking it,” and the functions my family’s poverty served, as discussed by Herbert Gans in, “The Uses of Poverty.” Finally, I will conclude by arguing that
Marx's perspective is more adequate to understanding my family's position: since both my parents have PhD's, they have no lack of access to cultural capital; however, the constraining economy limited the academic job market in the 1980's when my parents were initially looking for work, and these diminished opportunities were quite difficult for my parents, and many others of their cohort, to overcome.

III. Writing about Theory
When you compare and contrast Marx with Weber or Durkheim, your primary aim is to demonstrate that you have a basic familiarity with Marx as a materialist and Weber or Durkheim as a culturalist. When you discuss Marx, show how he wrote about the economy as a primary, infrastructural basis for social forms, and how cultural forms, as manifested in religion, for example, follow from, and are dependent upon an economic base. Then show how Weber or Durkheim disputed Marx's claims of the primacy of the economic realm, positing that cultural factors, as embodied in religion, for instance, are also vital for understanding what shapes and moves societies. I suggest that you take notes on the readings of those authors whom you will analyze, and be sure to quote them in order to exemplify your points. Write as if your reader has no background knowledge in the authors to whom you are referring. I suggest that you write this section soon after we have covered it in class.

IV. Writing a Personal Experience
This section may be somewhat more informal than your brief analysis of classical theory. The more gripping the experience was for you, the more likely it is to interest your reader. Exemplary examples from previous classes include:

- Maria, who attended an elite, East coast prep school, wrote about how a summer camp experience with less fortunate young women helped her to recognize her privileged class position.
- Sahir, a woman from India, wrote about how her father, a doctor, was refused service and subjected to racial slurs while looking for a BMW. Later, he bought a more expensive car, and made a point of driving by the BMW dealership to demonstrate his class status.
- Adam, who played basketball on a team composed of white suburban players, wrote of how his team was soundly defeated by an inner-city, African-American team. After the game, his coach refused to shake hands with the opposing coach, and remarked to his players, "That's OK, some day they'll all be working for us."

V. Analyzing your Experience in Terms of the Readings
After you take about a page to depict the details of your experience, you should then find three readings from the course help you grapple with this incident sociologically (one of these readings may be Henslin). You may choose readings from Ferguson which are not included on the syllabus, but as in your discussion of classical theorists, you should not assume that your reader has read the articles you cite. Hence, you need to demonstrate your knowledge of each applicable reading, and then briefly discuss how it applies or does not apply to your personal experience. The students in the above examples used the following:

- Maria's primary source was "Preparing for Power," by Cookson and Persell (48). After exploring how aspects of her education were reflected in this article, she then compared this to the deprived, punitive educational experience of Native Americans as depicted by Crow Dog and Erdoes (47). She concluded by exploring ways in which she might overcome her own privilege, as presented by Johnson (56).
• The primary source for Sahir's analysis was Feagin and Sikes' article, "Navigating Public Places" (34). After comparing and contrasting her father's experience with those of Feagin and Sikes' informants, she then used Du Bois's article (31) to discuss the enduring legacy of racism in the United States, and how Rubin discusses working class justifications for racism (32).

• Adam began by explaining his coach's statement as a classic example of racism, as presented by Feagin and Sikes (34). He then explored some of the sad irony of such racism, reflected by the fact that many jobs have disappeared from the inner-city area of the rival team, as analyzed by Wilson (39), leading to wide disparities in black wealth vs white wealth, as shown by Oliver and Shapiro (24).

PLEASE NOTE: These examples from Maria, Sahir and Adam are examples only, and are not to be imitated under any terms. Instead, I encourage you to embark on the same creative process in which they succeeded: to find an engaging personal experience, and then to find the best readings from the course with which to analyze that experience through a sociological lens.

VI. Concluding by Returning to Classical Theory
To conclude your paper by returning to classical theorists is an option you have, to further demonstrate your knowledge of Marx and Weber or Durkheim. Note that it is only an option. If you feel that your discussion of classical theorists at the outset of your paper is already strong, and if you would like to conclude your paper in another manner, feel free to do so; your paper will not be penalized in any manner.

VII. Grading
Your paper will not be graded on how well it is integrated. Therefore, you should think of each of the above three sections as mini-papers, organized sequentially. Do not be concerned about applying classical theory to your personal experience, and certainly do not worry about applying classical experience to your use of the class readings. You will receive up to 10 percentage points for each section, broken down to the level of ½ of a point.

Paper Writing Guidelines*

Format and Presentation

All papers should be 6-7 pages long, give or take just a few sentences. Page limits are important guidelines within which you should be able to treat a topic thoroughly. If your paper is too short it means that you didn’t address the question properly, if it’s too long it means you are rambling and lack editing skills.

Do not skip lines between paragraphs (like I’m doing here). Use an easily legible font, 12-point size works in most types. Papers must be typewritten, double-spaced with approximately 1” margins. Number all pages. Papers must be stapled. This means no plastic binders, no folding the edges together and no paper clips. Do not use a cover page. The following information should appear on the upper right-hand corner of the first page: Name, student ID#, Date, Paper topic number, and Title. A bibliography is a necessary part of a research paper (see Citation, below), and should be attached at the end. Paper which egregiously fail to follow these guidelines will be returned to the author without a grade.
General Organization

You should make sure that you read the paper assignment instructions and follow them closely. The most important feature of your paper is that you have answered the question you have chosen. No matter how good your ideas are, if you can’t demonstrate your understanding of the question, and give an answer to it in your paper, then you will not do very well.

Academic papers have introductions, bodies, and conclusions. An introduction should be simple and explicit, and describe what you are going to do, and in what order. It should provide a complete "road map" for the rest of the paper. Tell your reader something about the study you are conducting, what you will focus on in the paper, what points you will be making, what you will argue, and what you will conclude. It is perfectly acceptable to use the first person voice and say, "I will focus on ...", after all who is writing this paper, anyway?

The body of the paper must be well organized. You must use paragraphs to divide your thoughts. A paragraph is a set of sentences with one common idea. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence and make one main point. Your argument should flow logically from one paragraph to the next. Please use subheadings if they are appropriate or help the reader navigate through different sections of the paper. I should be able to make sense of your paper, in a general way, by reading the introduction, the first sentence of each paragraph, and the conclusion.

In your analysis, you will need to make explicit links between your "data" and the relevant course material. You will need to organize your paper around a description of the data you are analyzing and a review of the course material that helps to make your points. You should address all of the analytical issues I have proposed in the question. You may find that these do not exhaust the points you need to make, and answering your own additional questions may help further your analysis. Don’t overlook a review of the course material (even though you know that I already know it). That way I can determine how fluent you are with the concepts, and how well you are able to apply them to your subject matter. There are various strategies for integrating the course material with an analysis of your data, but these are indispensable.

For your conclusion, restate the paper's highlights and take the opportunity to tie things up neatly. You may restate ideas from your opening paragraph. Repeat your thesis and briefly summarize the main evidence you have included. After reviewing your main points, you may speculate, include personal reactions, pose additional questions or suggest avenues for future research, and the like. If you have some doubts about whether your format will work effectively for the assignment, please feel free to consult with me about it first.

Citation

This is sometimes tricky, but by this point in your academic career, it is essential that you do it correctly. It is expected that you will use material from the texts and lectures to analyze your subject. Thus, whether you use direct quotes or paraphrases, you must give credit to the authors of those words, when they are not your own.

If you cite a lecture, do it this way: (Lecture, 2/16/01). However, relying solely on lecture citations for material that is also in the readings reveals to me that your familiarity with the
readings is inadequate. So you should be sure to prioritize. Where appropriate, always cite the original source and not my delivery of it in lecture.

In the text, directly quoted course materials from the textbook or reader should be cited in one of the following ways.

"The stereotypes that we learn not only justify prejudice and discrimination but also can produce the behavior depicted in the stereotype" (Henslin, 2001:331).

Or alternately:

James Henslin (2001:331) suggests that, "The stereotypes that we learn not only justify prejudice and discrimination but also can produce the behavior depicted in the stereotype."

Also, be sure to cite any ideas that you borrow, not just quoted text. For instance:

Many analysts have noted how stereotypes may produce the behavior they depict (Henslin, 2001:331).

When citing from the reader, use the author of the particular article, rather than Ferguson, who is the editor, as in the following:


Any direct quotation that is longer than three lines needs to be set off from the body of the paper by indenting and single-spacing. Since your papers will be double-spaced and indented only to begin paragraphs, you will see the contrast. Be careful to differentiate between what the textbook authors are saying themselves, and the other authors that they may in turn quote. Cite accordingly. Do not string quotes together without putting them in context with your own prose. When you use a direct quote, place it in the context of a sentence that includes an explanation of what the quote means and why it is useful in service of the point you are making.

A full reference, including the author's name, book or article title, publishing information and page numbers will appear in a separate, alphabetically organized bibliography at the end of the paper, under the heading, "References". Below is an example of a reference from the reader and from Henslin.


Style

In general, write as simply as possible. Never use a big word, when a little one will do. Big words don't necessarily convey intellectual prowess – especially when they are awkwardly used. Your word choice should be appropriate to formal writing: no slang, and no contractions
("can't", "don't"), unless you are quoting others or it somehow better helps you to make your point. You must use words that actually exist, and words must be used correctly. Look up definitions and spellings if you are unsure. Spell check often misses words.

Avoid using the indefinite "you". You will notice that I am addressing these instructions to you; that is, I am using the second person. That is because I am giving these instructions to a definite person or set of persons. In your papers, unless you mean to address the reader directly, do not use "you" when you mean to use "one" or "we." Refer to yourself as "I" instead of the royal "we." It is perfectly acceptable to use the first person singular in papers — it is not too informal. Use "we" for the author and the reader together: "We have seen how breaching experiments disturb our taken-for-granted notions about reality." Never refer to "society" as an active agent (that's my pet peeve), as in, "Society requires that people follow norms."

Avoid "a lot" (and by the way it's not spelled "alot"), and "very". Hemingway and Morrison do not need them, and neither do you. Don't confuse "their/there/they're" or "it's/its", or "to/two/too", or were/we're/where", etc. Also please differentiate between "suppose" and "supposed" — these are not interchangeable, and are almost always improperly applied. These are sets of words that give students trouble, so please be careful.

Try to avoid using "he", "his", or "mankind" to mean anyone or all in general. If for some reason you have a strong ideological commitment to using "he" as the generic, you may do so, but it is not accurate, and there are other options available.

Make sure that nouns and verbs agree in number. Avoid sentence fragments. Make sure that the sentences you write have subjects and predicates. Verbs are also necessary. Do not leave a clause hanging without these necessary components. Avoid run-on sentences. Make sure that if you link things together in a sentence that you do so by using the proper connective words or punctuation marks. These kinds of mistakes can often be caught by reading your paper aloud. If it sounds wrong, it probably is.

Always follow the parsimony principle. That is, use as few words as possible to make your point.

Process

One way to start is by saying your ideas out loud, and writing them down. Just get the words out of your head and onto the page where you will be able to work with them more easily. I strongly suggest that you write more than one draft of your paper. Most successful papers are begun well in advance of the night before the assignment is due. The best way to start is to just spew out a messy first draft, getting all of your ideas and facts down on paper (if you write long-hand) or your computer screen (if you prefer to word process). Then, a second draft will help you to organize the sections, focus your argument, and refine the content and style.

You must be at this point before you come to see me about your paper. Although we will be unable to read entire drafts, we may be able to discuss with you specific parts of your thesis or analysis, and/or help you with difficulties in transitions between ideas or sections of your
argument. A final draft is useful for correcting spelling and grammatical errors, and for formatting the paper. You must proofread your own paper. It is not acceptable to turn in a paper with typographical errors, misspellings, nouns and verbs that do not agree, misused words, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, etc. You may want to rewrite the beginning or end of your paper in the last draft. Often in composing your paper, you will have changed your focus or ideas somewhat by the time you finish. You will want to make sure that these changes are reflected in a new version of your introduction or conclusion.

Finally, re-read your own paper and imagine that someone else wrote it. Does it make sense? Fix it, if it doesn’t. You may also want to get someone else to read your paper and give you comments. It is often hard to be objective when you are so close in the writing process. If you have trouble with your writing, get help. I am happy to help you in office hours or by appointment, and the campus has a variety of tutoring services available to you.

Good luck, and start writing now!

*This document adapted with thanks from Dr. Kerry Ferris' Case Study Essay Guidelines.