

Independent Work in Anthropology

A Guide to Writing the JP and Senior Thesis

Department of Anthropology
Princeton University

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Introduction

Anthropology is the comprehensive study of human development, culture, and change in the full range of the world's sociocultural systems, past and present. With its emphasis on human variation, anthropology clarifies the dynamics of inter-cultural interaction, communication, and transformation, along with our complex biological heritage. The comprehensiveness of anthropology stems from its four fields: sociocultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology, and archaeology. The Anthropology Department at Princeton offers courses and advising in sociocultural and biological anthropology.

The characteristic methodologies of anthropology inform our understanding of human experiences and practices, illuminating their interconnectedness and interdependence. For sociocultural anthropologists, such connections are discovered mainly through long-term ethnographic research. For biological anthropologists, they are found in the field and in the lab. The discipline of anthropology has influenced other disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and in turn has been influenced by multidisciplinary approaches integrating these modes of inquiry. Thus, anthropologists are often in dialogue with historians, literary critics, psychologists, biologists, and other specialists whose scholarship engages anthropological questions. While anthropologists employ formal social science methods (like the survey) and natural science methods (such as observation and laboratory research), as well as methods associated with the humanities (such as textual and visual studies), our field-based approach to human experience yields distinctive insights into the connections between culture and social life. Understanding such connections is an asset in any large or small-scale endeavor, and anthropology is therefore broadly relevant to contemporary issues such as globalization, human rights, economic development, and political crisis.

In your independent work as an anthropology major, you will learn to practice distinctively anthropological methods of research and writing. Independent work in anthropology may involve field research and archival research as well as library, laboratory, and museum research. Rather than following faculty interests, you are encouraged to pursue research questions of your own design, according to your own interests – and to decide which methodological approaches work best to capture the evidence you need to address your topics. Junior Papers and senior theses are opportunities for you to develop your individual interests in depth outside your regular course work, building on what you have learned about anthropological approaches. The core courses in the major are designed to support your independent work. Thus, as you develop your independent projects, you will work with complex qualitative and/or quantitative data (ANT 301); you will explore connections between theory and evidence (ANT 300), and contextualize these in the history of anthropological concepts and debates (ANT 390). Electives also support your independent research engagements. These courses offer you opportunities to work through key methodological ideas in anthropology like interpretation, reflexivity, experience, objectivity and subjectivity, participant-observation, translation, and comparison. You will learn how to develop a critical perspective on a

body of anthropological literature, and to argue for a point of view using primary data and ethnographic texts. The ultimate goal of independent work in anthropology is to make a contribution to scholarship and debates in the field. This contribution can come in the form of original ethnographic research, the comparison and synthesis of data from multiple sources, and the development or critique of important anthropological concepts, among other possibilities.

Advising

Normally, each anthropology major has one faculty adviser for the Junior Paper and another faculty adviser for the senior thesis. The junior seminar (see below) is a required, ungraded course designed to support students' formulation of project proposals for the JP (in the fall) and JP writing (in the spring). The senior seminar (see below) is, likewise, a required, ungraded course that supports the development and writing of the senior thesis. All students have individual faculty advisers throughout the academic year. Any faculty member can advise any student, but the Department makes every effort to match advisers with students based on the students' interests and the faculty members' areas of expertise. Advisers help you develop and refine your research topics, find relevant literature, conceptualize your approach, and improve your written expression. Advisers also evaluate your work. Every advising relationship is different, and good communication on a regular basis is an important part of the advising process. Some students prefer structured deadlines to motivate their work; others prefer more independence and flexibility. In all cases, independent work demands focus, initiative, and organization. It is your responsibility to schedule advising meetings and to meet each departmental benchmark on time (see below).

Independent Work for Juniors

Overview

Independent work in the junior year involves an original paper based on library research. Normally, field research is not appropriate for this paper. Fall-semester work toward the JP involves independent library research, regular consultation with an adviser, and readings aimed at developing a research proposal and an annotated bibliography. This system gives you a chance to explore your interests with faculty guidance; many anthropology majors are unsure about topics in the fall of their junior year, and need time to investigate several interesting possibilities before settling on one. By the end of the fall semester, you are expected to be making good headway on your reading and to have developed a substantive topic. Spring-semester work toward the JP involves focused writing and revising, in consultation with your adviser.

The JP in anthropology is based on a literature review. Your literature review begins with a set of texts (books, articles, essays, and other written sources) that you have consulted as you have pursued your research question. But you should go beyond a mere description or summary of this literature. The goal is to develop your own sense of problem through critical evaluation, engaging the authors' use of evidence, methods of research, styles of interpretation, persuasiveness, and scope (among other things). An important part of your work as a JP writer is to select, assemble, and read sources in a meaningful way, in the service of a coherent, overarching perspective on the literature as a whole as it relates to your topic. You can find good models for anthropology literature reviews in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*: <http://www.annualreviews.org/journal/anthro>

Topics for JPs in anthropology are extremely variable; your topic should reflect your real interests. Some students use the JP as preparation for their senior thesis research; however, this is neither required nor expected. The JP is meant to be a vehicle for you to implement your developing sense of what makes an analysis anthropological, and to consider how an anthropological perspective might make sense of issues and problems you encounter outside the university, including, perhaps, domains of professional work to which you aspire. You are therefore encouraged to review and re-use sources and ideas you have encountered in your anthropology courses, as well as any other relevant courses you have taken, in developing your paper. While JP topics are completely open to your individual interests – and may even concern phenomena about which professional anthropologists have not already written – you need to find some significant set of anthropological sources as an analytical context for making sense of your topic. Your advisers can help you make these connections. JP titles from past years can be found at: http://www.princeton.edu/anthropology/undergraduate/jp_titles/

Junior Seminar

Anthropology majors in their junior year take the junior seminar as part of their independent work toward the JP. The junior seminar comprises a year-long series of weekly workshops, which run concurrently with ANT 300 and 301 although they do not directly address the themes or materials of these courses. ANT 300 and 301 are open to all Princeton undergraduates, but the junior seminar workshops are open only to anthropology majors. The junior seminar is a required, ungraded course designed to help you develop feasible research problems, relate your core questions to anthropological literatures, and guide your writing process throughout the year. Peer support is an important element of the junior seminar; each workshop group consists of a small group of students, so as to spark productive synergies and foster mutual encouragement.

Although much of the development and writing of JPs takes place in the junior seminar, all junior anthropology majors also have their own faculty advisers. Your faculty adviser will be directly involved in the preparation of your JP, especially as the research dimension of your work advances.

Structure and Format

Junior Papers are somewhat longer than term papers. Whereas anthropology term papers are usually 10-20 pages in length, JPs are expected to be 25-35 pages (excluding notes, bibliography, tables, illustrations, and appendices) – approximately the length of a published journal article. Sub-headings may be used, as appropriate, but JPs normally do not have multiple chapters.

You should consult anthropology journals (like *American Anthropologist*) for guidance on the proper style of footnotes, citations, and bibliographies. Note that the citation of sources is not usually placed in footnotes in anthropological journal articles, but rather placed parenthetically in the text itself; footnotes are reserved for clarifications and other asides. For more detailed guidelines, you can refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, used by the American Anthropological Association (AAA). For your convenience, an external URL link to the AAA's overview of the *Manual* is posted in the Anthropology Concentrators' Blackboard site.

Junior Paper Timeline

Please note that a calendar with specific dates is distributed to students at the beginning of each academic year. The timeline below indicates a standard but general schedule.

- **late September-early October:** JP advisers are assigned. Meet with your adviser as soon as possible to discuss ideas for your JP topic, mutual expectations, preferred modes of communication, and the nature and frequency of advising meetings. Schedule a consultation with the Firestone reference librarian after you have met with your adviser. Begin reading literature relevant to your topic.
- **late October (before fall break):** Submit JP Progress Report. This brief form asks you to indicate the extent to which you have met with your adviser, formulated your ideas, prepared a bibliography, and informed yourself about upcoming departmental benchmarks for the JP.
- **November-December:** Prepare for the JP in consultation with your adviser. Preparation should include reading widely, developing your topic into a proposal, and preparing a preliminary annotated bibliography.
- **early January:** Submit Junior Paper proposal to your adviser and the Anthropology Department office. The proposal should be a 3-5 pp sketch of your topic and its anthropological significance, as well as your research goals. Include an annotated bibliography of your main sources and an outline of the entire JP, indicating your progress to date.
- **January-early February:** Get feedback from your adviser on your proposal and develop a plan together for benchmarks, future meetings, and review procedures.
- **February-March:** Write a full draft of your JP. Begin to write early and make use of resources such as the junior seminar, The Writing Center, and self-initiated peer reviews. Consult the reference librarian as needed.
- **late March:** Submit the first draft of your Junior Paper to your adviser. Your draft may include sections that are still in outline form, but it should be substantial enough for your adviser to review and make recommendations. Schedule a meeting with your adviser as soon as possible to discuss the draft and plan next steps.
- **deadline, mid-April:** Submit a hard copy and email copy of the final Junior Paper to the Anthropology Department office.

Evaluation

Your Junior Paper counts for 10% of your departmental grade average, used to determine departmental honors. Your JP will be read and evaluated by your JP adviser, so it is vital that you discuss your adviser's criteria for evaluation well ahead of submitting the final paper. Generally, successful JPs draw from a robust and well-chosen set of sources (readings and other data), present a compelling analysis of those sources, advance an interesting and plausible argument, demonstrate the significance and originality of that argument, and employ clear prose and a logical structure.

Independent Work for Seniors

Overview

All senior anthropology majors write a thesis. The Department encourages innovative and multidisciplinary projects, although all anthropology theses must engage or otherwise incorporate anthropological sources and reflect anthropological studies in some way. The research and critical reading skills that you develop in writing your Junior Paper are just as crucial to writing your senior thesis. Theses take many different forms in anthropology; many styles of writing and interpretation are valid. However you approach it, your thesis should address a clear research question, explain the significance of the question, critically engage literature relevant to the question, and present an analysis of data that bear on the question. Senior theses are expected to be more complex than JPs in their treatment of research topics and therefore are usually longer.

Theses in anthropology have focused on a wide variety of subjects and have been based on field, library, laboratory, and museum research. Some theses have also included creative components – for example, a theater production, photography exhibit, dance performance, or documentary film – but such projects must be accompanied by a substantial written essay. Past anthropology theses have addressed, for example: social change and development in Brazil, France, and Nepal; the cultural ecology of salmon in the American northwest; Japanese and American business cultures; the symbolic and political dimensions of the American feminist spirituality movement; Mexican-American family history; literary and historical interpretations of Japanese gender symbolism; urban AIDS clinics; the history and recognition of the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Indian tribe; the sociocultural dimensions of child abuse; the relation between fiction and anthropological writing; black theater in New York City; a Pentecostal church in New Jersey; North African immigrants in France; a comparison of primary education in China and the United States; and the interpretation of genetic and anatomical data on modern human origins. The titles of senior thesis projects in anthropology from past years can be found at: http://www.princeton.edu/anthropology/undergraduate/senior_thesis_titles/. All anthropology theses are archived in the Department, and students are welcome to come in and take a look at bound copies. In addition, within the Princeton domain, the Mudd Library has made available online reading of all senior theses in its collection, beginning with the Class of 2013.

You are welcome to consult any faculty member, within or outside anthropology, in developing your thesis research. However, barring exceptional circumstances, your thesis adviser will be a member of the Anthropology Department faculty. In the first weeks of the fall semester, you will be assigned a thesis adviser with whom you will consult regularly all year.

Senior Seminar

Anthropology majors in their senior year take the senior seminar in the fall semester as part of their work toward the senior thesis. The senior seminar builds on work you have undertaken on anthropological inquiry, theory, and research methods in your core anthropology classes (ANT 300, 301, and 390). Like the junior seminar, the senior seminar is a required, ungraded course. It comprises a series of discussions and writing workshops, engaging your own research experiences and helping you with many aspects of thesis writing: choosing and refining a topic, outlining and organizing research material, compiling an annotated bibliography, writing ethnographically, presenting and analyzing evidence, developing a voice, “using” theory, drafting and revising. The format of the seminar is collaborative; students work closely with the other members of their group, helping one another to refine and revise their ideas and their writing as they move through the fall semester.

Thesis Research

A senior thesis in anthropology may be based on field or other research, grounded in anthropological literature. Doing thesis research during the summer between junior and senior years is very helpful but not required for anthropology majors. You might plan your thesis during the spring of your junior year and become fully engaged in thesis research during the summer. Or you might choose to spend your summer engaged in other endeavors, but make plans during the spring to conduct research at the end of the summer or upon your return to campus in the fall. If you plan to begin research after the summer, or plan to continue research that you have initiated during the summer, you may conduct limited fieldwork during the fall semester, winter break, or intersession.

If you have ideas for a thesis topic, the best way to begin is to discuss your ideas with your JP adviser, although other faculty members may also be consulted as appropriate to your specific project. If you are interested in conducting research during the summer between junior and senior years, you should begin planning by the start of the spring semester. Normally, ANT 301 is required as preparation for field research. Fieldwork-based thesis research requires IRB approval; you should consult with your faculty adviser or IRB staff to determine what kind of IRB application to submit. Funding applications will require written support from a faculty member, normally your JP adviser. The timing of summer research planning is partly determined by the deadlines to apply for funding (applicable to both library and field-based research), as well as approval from the IRB for research involving human subjects (applicable to fieldwork only).

Student Activities Funding Engine (SAFE) is a student portal to all University funding opportunities, including support for senior thesis research offered by departments, programs, and centers on campus. One of the funding opportunities you will find in SAFE is the Anthropology Department’s “field-based senior thesis research grant program,” from

which awards are made to anthropology majors to conduct field research. The Anthropology Department's grant program is intended primarily as support for thesis research conducted during the summer, but you may also apply in the spring for Department funding for thesis research that you plan to begin during the fall semester.

If you are considering using JP research or prior course work as the basis for your senior thesis, you will need to get approval from both your thesis adviser and your JP adviser or course instructor, as applicable. Sufficient difference between your senior thesis and your previously graded work will need to be established. If your proposed senior thesis topic appears to be a continuation of the previous work, your thesis must be adequately expansive in comparison, and written approval from advisers and/or course instructors will be required. If a student in this situation is advised by the same faculty member for the Junior Paper and the senior thesis (which happens only in rare cases), the faculty adviser will still need to write a note in the student's file, for the record. You are solely responsible for ensuring that written permissions as described above are completed and filed *before* you proceed with the senior thesis project as planned.

Structure and Format

Anthropology theses are usually multi-part or multi-chapter projects. While length varies greatly, a typical thesis might be between 70-120 double-spaced pages (excluding notes, bibliography, illustrations, tables, and appendices) and contain three or four main sections.

You should consult anthropology journals (like *American Anthropologist*) for guidance on the proper style of footnotes, citations, and bibliographies. Familiarizing yourself with these conventions at the start of your note-taking process can save you a great deal of woe when it comes to finalizing your references as the deadline approaches. Note that the citation of sources is not usually placed in footnotes in anthropological journal articles, but parenthetically in the text itself; footnotes are reserved for clarifications and other asides. For more detailed guidelines, you can refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, used by the American Anthropological Association (AAA). For your convenience, an external URL link to the AAA's overview of the *Manual* is posted in the Anthropology Concentrators' Blackboard site.

Senior Thesis Timeline

Please note that a calendar with specific dates is distributed to students at the beginning of each academic year. The timeline below indicates a standard but general schedule.

- **mid-September:** Thesis advisers are assigned. Meet with your adviser as soon as possible to discuss your thesis, mutual expectations, preferred modes of communication, and the nature and frequency of advising meetings. Schedule a

consultation with the Firestone reference librarian after you have met with your adviser.

- **last week of October (before fall break):** Submit senior thesis proposal. This should be a 3-5 pp sketch that describes your proposed topic, why you have chosen it, and any research you have conducted or are planning to conduct on the topic. It should also include an initial outline and a preliminary bibliography.
- **November-December:** Begin writing. Consult with your thesis adviser as needed, and at least once between fall break and winter recess, even if you feel that you are making good progress independently. Begin writing as soon as possible so that you have adequate time for revising and editing. In addition to consulting with your adviser and participating in the senior seminar, you are strongly encouraged to use resources offered by the reference librarian and The Writing Center.
- **mid-January:** Submit at least one thesis chapter along with an outline of the entire thesis to your adviser. Schedule a meeting with your adviser in January-early February to discuss your work.
- **mid-February:** Submit Senior Thesis Progress Report to the Anthropology Department office. This brief form asks you to indicate the extent to which you have met with your adviser, completed and submitted writing to your adviser, participated in the senior seminar, and informed yourself about upcoming departmental benchmarks for the thesis.
- **first week of March:** Submit a full draft of your thesis to your adviser. Schedule an appointment to discuss it. Continue to write, revise, and edit throughout the next month.
- **deadline, mid-April:** Submit two hard-bound print copies of your thesis to the Anthropology Department office. A PDF copy of the thesis must also be submitted by email to the Undergraduate Program Assistant. Only theses submitted by the Department deadline are eligible for prize nominations. Late submissions will be subject to grade penalties.

Evaluation

Your senior thesis counts for 25% of your departmental grade average, used to determine departmental honors. Each thesis in the Anthropology Department is read by two faculty members: your thesis adviser and a second reader chosen by the Departmental Representative in consultation with other faculty. The two readers confer, decide together on a grade, and compose a letter to you, outlining their review and discussing the merits and possible limitations of your project. It is vital that you discuss the criteria for

evaluation with your adviser well ahead of submitting your final work. Second readers are not thesis advisers in this respect; not having worked with you, they provide an “outside” reading and a fresh perspective on the thesis as a written product. For this reason, your second reader does not expect to have an advising role in the development of your thesis. Of course, you are always welcome to consult any member of the faculty as you work on your project.

The following guidelines describe the criteria readers use to evaluate senior theses:

- A+ This grade is not normally given; it indicates work that meets a standard normally expected of professionals (i.e. of publishable quality).
- A to A- A is normally the highest grade for independent work. A thesis in the A range shows intellectual originality beyond a review of literature or a routine use of empirical methods. It should contain an imaginative and well- rounded analytic argument. It should show the work of an innovative and critical mind. It must also be mostly free of errors in fact or logic, and it must be well written.
- B+ A fine critical review of a literature or a well-executed empirical study qualifies for this grade. It should organize a variety of facts and arguments in an enlightening way and be well written. A partially successful attempt at innovative research could also be graded in this category.
- B to B- A thesis evincing a competent but not superior job of research may qualify for one of these grades. A well-conceived but ill-executed effort, attempting any of the goals described for higher grades, might also be in this range.
- C+ to C Theses in this range may give evidence of substantial research but are flawed by faulty arguments or poor organization. They may be written in a mediocre style in need of editing.
- C- As for courses, independent work graded at C- or below may not be counted for the major, as this grade denotes work below the Department’s standards.
- D D is the minimum passing grade. The D grade will be used for theses that add nothing to an understanding of a subject beyond what might be gleaned from superficial reading in the field. This defect may be caused by pervasive faulty logic, by a lack of reference to empirical facts, by very poor presentation, by minimal effort, or by a combination of the above. Even a D thesis, however, should demonstrate that the writer has some knowledge and comprehension of the issues.

Poor grammar, style, and spelling are serious defects and will result in grade reductions. Late submissions (without approved extensions) also result in grade reductions. Excellent writing is a substantial virtue in a thesis, but the quality of the writing remains secondary to the substantive criteria described above. Above all, theses in anthropology are evaluated for the contribution they make to knowledge in the field.

The Department awards prizes to a small number of outstanding theses every year. Theses written in anthropology may also be eligible for prizes offered by other departments, programs, and centers. In recent years, anthropology theses have been recognized for awards by the Princeton Environmental Institute, the Program in Global Health and Health Policy, the Program in Latin American Studies, the Program in Judaic Studies, the Center for Human Values, and the Community-Based Learning Initiative, among others.

Additional Resources

- **JP Handbook**

<http://www.princeton.edu/writing/center/resources/JPHandbook.pdf>

A general guide to the Junior Paper (*Writing a J.P.: The Handbook*), produced by the Princeton Writing Program, is available at the web address listed above.

- **Firestone Library**

Many Firestone reference librarians have special expertise in particular subject areas. The reference librarian for anthropology is Wayne Bivens-Tatum. He can help you find books, journal articles, databases, and other resources relevant to your research topic, as well as materials from fields outside anthropology that might be useful. You may contact him directly by email (rbivens@princeton.edu) to set up an appointment.

- **The Writing Center**

<http://www.princeton.edu/writing/center/>

Many juniors and seniors find that, even though they have substantial experience with research papers, their independent work poses new writing challenges. You may always consult your JP or thesis adviser about this. In addition, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Princeton Writing Center. Located in Lauritzen Hall, The Writing Center offers student writers free, one-on-one conferences with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. Writing Fellows can help you with any part of the writing process: brainstorming ideas, developing a thesis, structuring an argument, or revising a draft. The goal of each conference is to teach strategies that will encourage you to become an astute reader and critic of your own work. Although The Writing Center is not an editing or proofreading service, Fellows can help you learn techniques for improving sentences and checking mechanics. Writing Center conferences complement, but do not replace, the relationships you have with your teachers and advisers. To get more information or to set up an appointment, go to the web address listed above.

- **Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects**

<http://www.princeton.edu/ria/human-research-protection/committee-information/>

“Above all, I will do no harm” is a pledge that all anthropologists make when starting research into human lives. Members of the Anthropology Department of Princeton University – undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty – must abide by that commitment. This requires vigilance, informed imagining of the social relationships that will make your research project possible, and sincere efforts to foresee the consequences of your research and public revelation of its content, in order to mitigate harmful effects. Careful and explicit discussion of your methods and of the expected end products of your research with everyone involved is necessary so that all participants can give genuinely well-informed consent for their participation.

To aid researchers at Princeton in avoiding harmful practices, a university committee reviews all proposed research with human subjects that is conducted in the university, whether by faculty, graduate students, or undergraduates. This committee is known as the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB). Its members are drawn from all the social sciences, together with community members and a university physician and lawyer. *Approval of your project by the IRB is required before you may start on it.* The Board meets once a month, but you may consult with IRB staff by email before the meeting dates. Once an application is submitted, the Board may ask for further information from the applicant – a process that often takes a second month to complete. You are encouraged to apply early and respond to the IRB’s questions and requests in a timely manner. To see a schedule of IRB meetings, the corresponding deadlines to submit applications, and the application forms themselves, go to the web address listed above. The junior seminar in anthropology includes sessions designed to aid students in making successful applications to the IRB. Comprehensive and step-by-step advice about IRB applications can be found in the Anthropology Department’s IRB memo:

http://www.princeton.edu/anthropology/undergraduate/protection_of_human_subje/IRB_memo.pdf

- **Student Activities Funding Engine (SAFE)**

<http://www.princeton.edu/studentfunding/>

Student Activities Funding Engine (SAFE) is a student portal to all University funding opportunities, including support for senior thesis research offered by departments, programs, and centers on campus.

- **Office of Undergraduate Research**

<http://undergraduateresearch.princeton.edu>

This website provides the most up-to-date and comprehensive list of University resources for conducting research at Princeton, including student-authored research advice, Independent Work Guides, funding, and the central calendar for upcoming events and deadlines.