

Intelligence and National Security Studies



The University of Texas at El Paso

WRITING IN INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES (INSS)



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INTRODUCTION

This is a basic guide to assist students with the completion of written assignments in the INSS Program. This guide offers constructive suggestions for students, however beware that requirements may slightly differ from one instructor to another. Instructors will always be happy to help you at any stage of the writing process. Whenever you have a question or a doubt about the writing process, you should not hesitate to contact your course instructor.

This guide offers an overview of four types of written assignments that are often encountered by INSS students:

- A) [Academic Essay](#)
- B) [Book Review](#)
- C) [Intelligence Report](#)
- D) [Quantitative and Mixed Methods Writing](#)

A) HOW TO WRITE AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

Most instructors grade essays according to a relatively similar set of criteria, but the importance given to one criteria or another may vary. These criteria include:

- Clarity of the argument
- Coherence of the argument throughout the essay
- Effort to logically structure the essay
- Balance between analysis (explains and interprets facts, their causes and consequences) and description (articulating what happened)
- Evidence of research
- Language and form

There are six basic steps that can be followed to ensure that your essay will satisfy these criteria.

1. The Question

Select the right question: Some instructors provide a choice of essay questions; others will expect you to come up with your own question (in which case you should speak with the instructor to get a better idea of his/her expectations). Most students tend to choose an essay question that corresponds with their interests; while others prefer to select a question that seems easier to answer. If you cannot make up your mind, consider each question and think of how you would answer it by writing down a brief outline or structure for the essay.

Analyze the question (key terms and scope): Carefully consider the key terms, concepts, and/or theories mentioned in the question, and make sure that you understand the question properly. If necessary, look for their definition, either in a textbook or in a dictionary. This process should allow you to determine the scope of the essay question and to provide an answer that focuses on the question and only the question.

Identify key arguments and debates relating to this question in the literature. Drawing a brief outline will help you to identify what you know and do not know about the topic, and will help you to determine where further research is necessary to fill gaps in your knowledge of the subject. Consider how you would answer the question in an original way. Make sure you take into account material that does not agree with the position you have taken on the issue, and consider why you disagree with this material.

2. The Plan

The **structure** of an essay is absolutely essential in determining the strength of an argument. Good arguments are clearly and logically structured. Before you start writing your essay, you should always plan out the argument that you will make. What will you write about exactly and in what order? How many words/sentences/paragraphs will you devote to your key points and ideas?

Example of essay structure (this template should not be mechanically applied)

Title of the essay (make sure to mention the specific essay question)

Introduction (*approximate length 10 to 30 % of the essay*):

- Why is this question important/relevant?
- Clarify your understanding of the key terms in the question/the scope of the essay
- What is your argument/thesis?
- How will the question be answered/the argument be made (small plan of the essay structure)?

Body of the essay (*approximate length 60 to 80% of the essay*):

- Paragraph(s):
 - o Topic sentence (the main point the paragraph is making)
 - o Explanation of this main point in a few sentences
 - o Example
 - o Transition to the next paragraph/section
- Paragraph(s) considering counter-arguments

Conclusion (approximate length 10% of the essay):

- Re-state your argument and explain how you reached it
- Consider the broader implications of your argument

3. Reading and Research

A good place to start your research is the course syllabus, which will usually point to core textbooks and additional readings. When doing these readings, take a look at the references and the bibliography to identify further academic sources. Note that you should not cite from your lectures in essays, as this is generally considered poor practice.

A university-level essay is typically based on a wide range of published sources including books, academic journal articles, and newspapers. It can also include internet sources when they are credible. Many internet sources do not conform to academic standards because they are not peer-reviewed. For more information on how to assess online sources, take a look at this [guide](#). When consulting all of these sources, take notes and make sure to keep all the information necessary for the bibliography.

Many students ask their instructors how many sources are enough. Different instructors will have different expectations. Generally speaking, make sure you have identified the key debate(s), arguments and facts. This applies to undergraduate and graduate students alike.

If you are struggling to find sources on a specific topic, here are some tips:

- Use the INSS library resource guide <http://libguides.utep.edu/inss>
- Make a key word search on <http://scholar.google.com/>
- Contact your instructor
- Contact our library coordinator, Ms. Angela Lucero (ajmartinez5@utep.edu)

4. Writing

The purpose of an essay is to provide a written response with a clear argument to a specific question. A useful way to make the task more manageable is to write an essay section by section, re-working these sections, as necessary, in support of your central argument. Ask yourself during the writing process how each paragraph and section is helping you to answer the question.

There are important elements of style that you should be aware of when writing an academic essay. The most important rule is to keep things simple. Here is some basic advice:

- Write short and direct sentences
- Use the active voice (when the subject performs an action)
- Avoid long quotations
- Write in an impersonal way (avoid using personal pronouns such as “I,” “we,” and “you”)
- Avoid jargon and intensifiers (very, really, totally, etc.)
- Pay close attention to the tenses you use and use them consistently. It is good form to utilize the past tense in order to ensure consistent subject-verb agreement
- Do not use contractions (i.e., can’t, don’t, etc.) and colloquialisms/slang

5. Referencing

How?

You must adhere to the rules for proper citation and bibliographic format. There are different referencing systems, and different instructors have different expectations. Make sure you use the required referencing system. Once you have identified and understood this system, use only one style and follow it consistently. Intelligence professionals are also required to use references when conducting their work. It is best to become familiar with this important part of the writing process.

Why reference?

- To avoid plagiarism by identifying the words, ideas, arguments, and conclusions of other writers
- To demonstrate the research you have done on the topic
- To support and strengthen your argument using evidence and findings reached by more experienced scholars
- To enable the instructor to consult the original sources upon which you have drawn

When to reference?

- To quote someone else
- To summarize the ideas/findings of another writer
- To use the statistics and data generated by another author

6. Editing

Editing is often overlooked, but it is a crucial step that can make the difference between a good and an excellent essay.

- Always perform a spell-check
- Proofread your essay to ensure that the language is as clear and concise as possible

- Make sure that your argument is coherent and that each paragraph contains one key point/idea that relates to this argument
- Maintain consistency in the style/form of your essay (page numbering, referencing style, titles and subtitles, etc.)

B) HOW TO WRITE A BOOK REVIEW

Book reviews are very similar in purpose and approach to writing “analytical” essays. The emphasis here is that book reviews are a piece of written analysis, but in this case the analysis is confined to the substance and content of one or more published books. The length can vary from a standard five paragraph essay to a much longer piece of analysis, equivalent to a research article in a peer-reviewed journal.

Like an analytical essay, a book review is often constructed in a similar fashion with:

- An *introduction* containing a thesis or main argument;
- A *body* or main text containing the analysis of the work being examined;
- A *conclusion* reiterating the thesis and any main points made in the body or text of the review.

It must be emphasized that book reviews are **not** “book reports.” A book report is a simple summary of the book. A book report or summary is not analysis, but rather a mere listing of what the author(s) of the book wrote. It does not provide any deeper analysis or insight into what was written in the text.

Your instructors want you to “analyze” books for the *veracity* of their content and expansion of *knowledge*. A book review demands that you “think hard” about the book—thereby requiring key analytical judgments about the text’s main points and conclusions. This is a skill similar to what intelligence professionals must do when analyzing large amounts of qualitative data from a multitude of sources.

Effective book reviews analyze their subject matter by answering as comprehensively as possible the following questions:

1. What is the author’s *purpose*? Is there more than one main point, what is the overarching purpose?
2. What are the *key questions* that the author raises and/or addresses?
3. What *evidence* does the author provide to support his or her argument?
4. What *inferences* does the author make from the evidence?

5. What *underlying concepts* does the author rely on?
6. What does the author take for granted? What *assumptions* does the author make?
7. What are the *implications* of the author's point of view? What are the implications if we adopt/do not adopt the author's recommendations?
8. What is the author's *point of view*? What other points of view are there?

Students should consult book reviews in leading peer-reviewed academic journals like *Intelligence and National Security*, *International Security*, and the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, to name a few, in order to gain a better understanding of book reviews. Book reviews in these journals can serve as useful models or examples in terms of method for students to emulate.

C) HOW TO WRITE AN INTELLIGENCE REPORT

There is a vast array of intelligence products produced daily from different agencies. Some of these sources may be short, factual pieces that are less than a page in length; while others may be lengthy, in-depth studies of a nation, leader, or political phenomenon. Some intelligence reports may be strategic in focus and long-term. Other products may be of immediate tactical value or specifically focused on a narrow and evolving issue. These reports vary according to both *purpose and customer requirements*, with each product having its own distinctive format. However, all reports must be timely, clear, and “actionable” to be beneficial.

Intelligence customers require information that is new, pertinent, and properly contextualized. There is an overwhelming amount of information available to analysts, and it is their job to *pick out the important and relevant details*, whether the author of the report finds them interesting or not. Successful products answer a number of questions in the fewest words possible (CIA CAE Writing Presentation, 2012):

- What's new?
- Why is it happening?
- What does it mean?
- How do we know?
- What might happen next?
- What opportunities are there to shape the future?

Intelligence reports tend to have some common elements. For example, intelligence products normally summarize the “key findings” at the beginning of the report. After that, further elaboration of the findings is contained in the body - often followed by an estimate of future

developments and implications, or a description of the gaps in our knowledge. Intelligence customers also require analysis that is *relevant* and that meets their information needs in a *timely* manner. Intelligence reports must be accurate, concise, contain no personal opinions, be precisely written with grammar and wording following defined rules, and should be free of policy recommendations.

Further direction on how to organize your findings may be found by consulting the [BLUF](#) (Bottom Line Up Front) example. This is sometimes referred to as an “inverted pyramid” style in which the conclusions are stated first, followed by the amplifying information. This format provides the key information up front to the customer, who is normally very busy and often spends less than a minute examining the article to see if it is of any interest and thus deserving of further time and attention.

A compilation of basic guidelines for writing in the intelligence style is included below. Suggested guidelines may differ slightly, depending upon the subject matter.

- The *title* given to the report stands as first key judgment or conveys development
- Answer intelligence questions with appropriate *scope and relevance*—keep the requirements in mind while researching and writing
- Take the time to *research* the topic in an in-depth manner, be discerning about *sources*
- Be *precise* and *clear* – the message must be unambiguous to each reader
- Employ a Bottom Line Up Front (see [BLUF](#) example) style
- Provide *analytic judgments* utilizing a “what” and “so what” perspective – provide the information needed to address issues and make decisions (know your customer)
- *Accuracy* – information is checked for validity and reliability
- *Brevity* – do not provide excessive background information or explanations; get to the point
- Be *objective* – outline your logic and disclose that which is unknown
- Employ *estimative language* and the required documentation style
- Proofread and *edit* your work; use spell-check and grammar-check, read it aloud
- Outline what’s next, *implications*, opportunities and threats as appropriate

As you proceed through the INSS Program you should work towards refining your research and analytical skills in order to improve the quality of your written work. One of the papers you craft for your classes will likely serve as a sample of your writing for future employment applications.

Report examples: Scan the National Intelligence Council publications shown on the [ODNI website](#) for examples of strategic, long-term research available Community wide (unclassified versions). These are coordinated perspectives on national security concerns, often taking months to complete. However, the majority of intelligence products focus on current topics of concern

(such as the latest news in a civil war or terrorists' actions). Many reports are written and disseminated on a daily or as-needed basis. You can also access samples of U.S. Army tactical reports (See the [U.S. Army SALUTE report](#); [Tactical Interrogation Report](#), Appendix E, pp. E-5 - E-10) that are intended for a particular purpose and tailored to a specific customer.

D) QUANTITATIVE AND MIXED METHODS WRITING

This section addresses writing for research papers that discuss quantitative or mixed methods research. Several fields of study that involve quantitative research use the [American Psychology Association \(APA\) writing style](#). According to the APA publication manual, research papers should include the following sections:

1. Introduction

The introduction of a research paper includes a *literature review*. A literature review discusses various studies that have been conducted on the specific issue or theory discussed in the paper. Literature reviews integrate previous studies, criticize them, identify gaps or deficiencies in the existing literature, and build bridges between disparate topics to be addressed in the current research. Such a review typically begins broadly and narrows down as the discussion proceeds toward the current study.

After the literature review, the introduction provides an *overview* of the current study and the *hypotheses* that will be tested in the study. Taken as a whole, the introduction can be viewed as a *justification* for the current study; in other words, the introduction answers the question “Why is this research study being done?”

Mixed-methods research studies combine qualitative and quantitative research in many different ways and the structure of the introduction will vary depending upon which mixed-methods research design is used. The most common design is “convergent parallel,” in which both qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously and analyzed separately in order to determine whether or not the findings converge. For a “convergent parallel” design, the introduction includes the elements discussed above for quantitative research studies, as well as additional elements, including a justification for the mixed-methods design and the incremental value added by combining the two types of data. Other elements for inclusion could be background information about the specific sample and setting used to gather qualitative data, justification for this sample and setting, and a discussion of themes of interest to be examined in relation to the qualitative data.

2. Methods

The methods section of a research paper includes a discussion of the *types of observations* that were made (participants, naturalistic observation, social artifacts, databases, etc.), any *equipment* or other measurement *instrument* that was used (survey, interview protocol, questionnaire, etc.), any *stimulus* presented to participants (video, written materials, etc.), and the *procedure* followed during the data collection portion of the study. The procedure should be written as a narrative, discussing in a sequential manner how each observation was made from beginning to end.

It is important to be very clear in this section so that other researchers attempting to “replicate” your work can follow in your footsteps. This is a good section to have others proofread for you because what seems clear to you may not seem clear to others.

In a “convergent parallel” design, the above elements should be included for the quantitative portion of the design. Additionally, the writer should include a description of the qualitative data that were collected, who/where it was collected from, and how it was decided what data to collect and from whom.

3. Results

The results section of the paper describes the statistical analyses used to interpret the quantitative data collected. These analyses can either be *descriptive* or *inferential*. When using inferential statistics, descriptive statistics should also be included, either in the text or in a table. For each result of a statistical test reported, a sentence interpreting that finding should be included.

Example:

“Consistent with hypotheses, independent-samples *t* test revealed that the mean age upon entry of Lashkar-e-Taiba militants is statistically significantly lower ($M = 16.5, SD = 2.1$) than that of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militants ($M = 17.3, SD = 1.8$), $t(1623) = 1.7, p < .05$.”

It is important that no broad conclusions be drawn about the data in this section; that should be saved for the discussion section. Additionally, each finding should refer back to the original hypotheses. Any analyses that do not correspond to hypotheses should be *justified* and referred to as “exploratory.”

In a “convergent parallel” design, information about quantitative analyses should be included in the results section, as well as information about qualitative analyses. Qualitative analysis can include coding and identification of themes in the data. Qualitative and quantitative data should

be *compared* and *contrasted* to add depth to the results. Any disparities should be addressed in the discussion section of the paper.

4. Discussion

The discussion section is where the writer draws *broad conclusions based upon the research findings*. The discussion should begin narrow and end broad; it should begin with a description of each individual research *finding*, how it relates to the hypotheses, and how any findings contrary to the hypotheses could be explained in terms of the theory guiding the research. During this description, relevant outside research literature should be cited to either support the research findings or to contradict these findings. After the research findings are addressed, the writer should discuss the *implications* of these findings for the theory (Do they support the theory, indicate the need for a modification of the theory, or discredit the theory?); the *importance* of the findings for research being conducted in the field or (in the case of applied research) for practitioners; *limitations* in the research design; and *future research* that can be done to build on the current study or address questions not addressed in the current study. The discussion section, and the paper, should end with one or two broad conclusion paragraphs.

5. References

Throughout the paper, any other research studies or theories discussed must be cited. In **APA style**, these citations are made by writing the name of the author or authors and the year of publication; these are referred to as *in-text citations*.

Example 1:

For example, professionals who conduct police interviews or child sexual abuse interviews are frequently advised to establish rapport before beginning to question a witness (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Gudjonsson, 2003; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, Horowitz, 2007) and law enforcement officials recognize the importance of building rapport with witnesses and suspects (Vallano, Evans, Kieckhafer, and Schreiber Compo, 2013).

Example 2:

For example, Abbe and Brandon (2012) have delineated several rapport-building behaviors... Full references for all citations should be listed at the end of the paper in the References section.

The following are examples of references in the APA style:

Journal article

→ Name, X.X., & Name, X.X. (Year). Name of article. *Name of Journal*, X, X-X. doi: XXXX

Walsh, D. & Bull, R. (2012b). How do interviewers attempt to overcome suspect denials? *Psychology, Psychiatry, and the Law*, 19(2), 151-168. doi: 10.1080/13218719.2010.543756

Book

→ Name, X.X. (Year). *Name of the book*. City: Publisher. ISBN: XXXXXXXX

Soufan, A. (2011). *The black banners: The inside story of 9/11 and the war against al-Qaeda*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 0393079422

For example of a paper written in APA style, see: Bushman, B.J., Ridge, R.D., Das, E., Key, C.W., & Busath, G.M. (2007). [When God sanctions killing: The effect of scriptural violence on aggression](#). *Psychological Science*, 18, 204-207.

FURTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

Grammar

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [Writer Resources](#)
Capital Community College Foundation's [Guide to Grammar & Writing](#)

Dictionary

[Merriam-Webster Online](#)
[Oxford Dictionaries](#)
[Thesaurus](#)

Academic Writing

Thomas E. Cronin's [The Write Stuff](#)

Intelligence Writing

[The Analyst's Style Manual](#)

Referencing

More on [APA style](#)
More on [Chicago Style](#)
[Refworks](#) (a referencing tool)
[UTEP Writing Center](#)