GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

College is a precious opportunity to develop our knowledge and skills in a chosen area of study. It allows us to learn more deeply and broadly so that we can become better citizens and professionals. It is still not an opportunity that most people on this planet ever have, and so it is not to be taken lightly. The social sciences are the systematic study of the human condition. They apply the methods of science to help us illuminate enduring questions that have been taken up by humanists for centuries. Whether or not you are a social science major, the information and tools from this class will be useful to you because you *are* human and you must live and succeed in society. I take your education seriously and I expect you to do the same.

For the remainder of this term, this class is your job. And my job is to help you succeed at your job. Learning is work, but it can be the most enjoyable and rewarding of jobs if we let it. Learning requires a high degree of motivation and commitment, and we must all be involved for a successful class. To succeed in this class, you should do what you would to succeed at any job: take your job seriously, work hard, enjoy your work, do your own work, come to work when you're expected and on time, come to work prepared, ask questions when you are unsure of your job, be a good colleague by helping others to do their jobs well and acknowledging others' contributions to your work, and demonstrate your mastery of the job through learning the necessary tools and using them consistently, well, and creatively.

And what is your job in this class? At the most basic, it is to know and understand the facts, issues, perspectives, methods of inquiry, and applications we will study. But it is also much more than that. These are simply the "tools of the trade," and you must then *use* them in your work. Real learning is *not* rote memorization or parroting back the answer you think I will approve. Real learning is an effortful and interactive process that keeps you engaged with the material, your student colleagues, outside sources, and me. Real learning requires you to think rigorously, empirically, critically, and creatively. It demands evidence of your work as you learn to communicate you mastery properly, clearly, directly, and actively to a variety of well-defined audiences. It requires that you impart your *own* contributions by analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, applying, and otherwise using it. And it clearly demonstrates your effort and growth. I will grade you on your evidenced contributions to our job.

I often employ the "Socratic Method" and play "Devil's Advocate" in class discussions, taking contrary positions and pushing you to explore your positions with a variety of questions. I will ask tough questions, and I expect the same from you. I expect you to be able to defend your assertions with sound reason and appropriate evidence. Social science is *not* "opinion." In fact, it is often about getting over what you *thought* you knew. You should be prepared to evidence a positively critical stance toward yourself and positions to which you adhere, other students' perspectives, the readings, and even toward me. But critical thinking does not imply intractability or contrarianism. If you agree with something, you should be able to explain why, and you should still be open to the limitations of *any* perspective. If you disagree, you should also be able to explain why, and be prepared to offer and defend what you feel to be a better alternative. Social science classes often explore emotionally charged topics that generate a great deal of controversy. It is good to remember that others have thought deeply and conscientiously on these matters and reached conclusions with which you will differ. We can respectfully disagree with one another and refrain from personal attacks, but we can and should hold one another to the highest standards of reason and scientific evidence.

Each of us has different strengths and weaknesses, and any one method of assessment will advantage some and disadvantage others. Therefore, I attempt to incorporate several different sources for grades in order to measure different forms of learning and aptitude (as per Gardner, 1983 & 1993, for example). Typically, this means that a class will include several grading opportunities selected from essays, projects, discussion, participation and quizzes or tests.

The social sciences are messy and full of contention and debate. I will not attempt to "clean it up" for you. Instead, I will encourage you to develop the tools necessary to arrive at and defend your own perspectives through the careful application of appropriate reasons and evidence. We will cover a great deal of material in this course. I will relate as much relevant "state of the field" information that I can. But social and demographic facts tend to change over the years and new research is always changing our understanding of self and society. Social scientists often do not agree and it is more honest to present the material as such. It also forces you to wrestle with the material and develop your own positions. And that, I think, is the most important objective of this course: to present you with good data, influential theories, and effective methods through which you can better understand yourself and the changing world around you. The social sciences are useful, no matter what you do for a living. You have the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the very personal and public issues we study, and one goal of this class is to give you the tools and confidence necessary to become better involved in these issues that affect us all.

GRADING RUBRIC

Written: Written work in this course, including essays, short answers, or comments on exams, quizzes, and the web, will be assessed according to the following standard (portions inspired by Angelo, 1998):

Ltr	avg%	4.0
A*	*1.000*	4.0
A+	*.975*	3.9
A	*.950*	3.8
A –	*.925*	3.7
A/B	*.900*	3.6
B+	*.875*	3.5
B	*.850*	3.4
B –	*.825*	3.3
B/C	*.800*	3.2
C+	*.775*	3.1
C	*.750*	3.0
C –	*.725*	2.9
C/D	*.700*	2.8
D+	*.675*	2.7
D	*.650*	2.6
D –	*.625*	2.5
D/F	*.600*	2.4
F	*.60<*	2.3 –

A = *Following the "this class is your job" analogy, "A" work is the sort that earns you promotions. It realizes 1 through 9 (below) completely, maintains a level of excellence throughout, and demonstrates significant originality, creativity, and special initiative in fulfilling 6 through 9 (below) and going beyond the strictures of the assignment (see the handouts available on the course website for more details). It is work of exceptional excellence. And true excellence goes beyond the strictures of the assignment. It is a rare thing. And to protect the value of an A, I take this seriously. I am delighted to award an A when it is earned. But I believe it is incorrect to start from the presumption of an A because that flies in the face of all experience and evidence. An A is the goal to shoot for, but there is no shame in trying hard and not attaining it.*

B = *"B" work is the sort that earns you significant raises and increased responsibility. It realizes 1 through 9 (below) completely and demonstrates overall excellence, but evidences little or no originality, creativity, or special initiative in fulfilling 6 through 9 (below) or going beyond the strictures of the assignment. Student uses and reacts to course materials comprehensively and with detail. It is praiseworthy work of serious merit. Serious merit means that you have done exceedingly well within the guidelines. You contribution is reasoned, evidenced, critical, reflexive, focused, and thorough. It is something to be really proud of.*

C = *"C" work is the sort that earns you modest raises and bonuses, increased trust and respect for a job well done. It indicates "normal" mastery, amount of work, progress, and the ability to use and apply course materials. Most of us are "normal" at most things most of the time. In this time and in this place, "normal" has become a dirty word. No one wants to be normal. Students have actually told me that a C is like an F. That's silly. If they were the same, there wouldn't need to be two different grades. A C means that you have done perfectly acceptable work that is commensurate with your typical, hard-working peers. It means that you have established competency. And that is something to take heart in. My expectations for "normal" work adequately realizes these nine criteria:*

1 *is free of errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling, structure, and format*

2 *evidences basic literacy, numeracy, and analytical, rhetorical, and information processing skills appropriate to the level of the course*

3 *correctly acknowledges and documents sources (both directly and indirectly used) appropriate to the assignment and in the indicated reference style; ignorance of academic ethics or standards is not an excuse*

4 *responds fully to the assignment using appropriate, direct language and expresses its purpose clearly and persuasively for the needs of a defined audience*

5 *is well-organized, unified, and focused; has good flow; and opens and closes effectively*

6 *demonstrates sufficient command of factual information and/or theoretical perspectives presented in course materials*

7 *uses course materials by reasoning about them analytically and critically, and by applying them personally, socially, and historically, as appropriate*

8 *justifies all arguments through the integrated application of appropriate and sufficiently detailed critical reasoning and scientific evidence*

9 *provides adequate illustration and support of all points through salient and relevant examples, details, and supporting information*

It will also demonstrate overall competence but still contain some relatively minor errors or flaws. A 'C' essay may even show great initiative, creativity, or originality, but those qualities do not excuse poor or careless writing, editing, or organization A 'C' essay usually looks and reads like a penultimate draft.

D = *"D" work is the sort that gets you "written up" or put on "probation" at your job. It fails to realize any aspect of 1 through 5 fully and/or some elements of 6 through 9 (above) adequately, in addition to either several relatively serious errors or flaws or many minor ones. A 'D' essay usually looks and reads like a first or second draft and often demonstrates insufficient command of course materials. It is passable work, but still a bit unsure or incomplete in content or presentation. It means that you have done well enough that you have succeeded -- not failed. It shows that you have room from improvement, but also demonstrate a partial working command of the material (sometimes with a few glaring errors).*

F = *"F" work doesn't mean you've "failed" — it means "you're fired." Just like getting fired from a job, it usually takes exceptional effort (or exceptional lack of effort) to achieve. It is far easier to modestly succeed at your job that to perform at a level that merits a sacking. "F" work fails to realize any aspect of 1 through 5 fully and/or several elements of 6 through 9 (above) adequately, in addition to many serious errors or flaws. An 'F' essay usually looks and reads like a zero draft and demonstrates little, if any, command of course materials. Think of it this way: for one term, this class is your job. An F means that you have turned in a performance that would likely mean you would (or should) be fired from a "real" job. And college, contrary to popular opinion, is the real world, with real consequences. There can be many reasons for poor performance -- almost all of which can be overcome through solid intellectual work.*

Work failing to adequately address 1 and 2 may not be graded and may instead be returned for the student to redo, any late penalties accruing in the interim. An assignment not meeting 3 is grounds for disciplinary action.

Participation: Oral work, such as in-class presentations and daily class participation, are graded on a similar standard. I consider descriptive mastery of the facts and theories, but I am more interested in your critical analysis of the material and application to both your own particular experiences and to society, in general. I presume that a satisfactory student develops a general command of the course material and look instead to your contributions. Ask yourself, "what is *my* contribution here?" I will evaluate the thoughtfulness of your questions, and whether they reflect engagement with the assigned readings and discussions. And I will take civility and classroom decorum into account, as well. In short, oral grades will consider substance, presentation, analysis and critique, creativity, application, and your ability to handle questions regarding the material from the instructor and your peers. I expect student to be able to ask and respond to well-formed questions, and to actively engage in debate and discussion.

NOTES ON ACADEMIC WRITING

I'm sure you've noticed by now that academic writing seldom communicates well. We rarely have incentive to do so, and often have good reasons to remain confusing and ambiguous. The first among these is that sloppy writing hides sloppy thinking. By hiding deficient ideas behind a mask of dense and cloudy prose, we can defeat even the most determined and discerning reader's attempts to understand. The vanquished audience scratches their heads and retreats from our obviously deep thoughts in wonder — seldom clued into the notion that the fault is not theirs. But good ideas deserve clear communication. Acknowledge your ideas, be confident in them, and humbly present your best case, using careful reason and systematic evidence, without shame.

There are other reasons why academic writing is too often boring: lack of time, training, confidence, or incentive. We are all busy and so do not think enough about the material or our reaction to it, or allow sufficient time to revise and rewrite our work. We can feel as if we are unprepared to tackle the task before us, or for other reasons, fail to feel confident in what we have to say. But your time and effort can cure much of this doubt. Remember, I am grading you as compared with other students at your level of academic experience — so if it is an introductory course with no prerequisites, then your standard is that of the novice college student in the area. We may also feel that there is either not a commensurate reward in the offing for the hard work required to do our best, or that our audience may not apply demanding standards to our output. But your real reward is in mastery of the ideas and facts, and I *will* hold you to a demanding standard of performance because I believe in your ability to achieve at that level.

There is, however, one legitimate reason why academic writing is sometimes a very dense read (although this can be partially overcome with much time and editing): the academic study of the human condition requires us to think about it much more precisely and systematically that in our everyday lives. In order to think this way, we must use our language (whether a natural language, such as English, or a technical one, such as statistics) in an equally precise and systematic manner.

There are two ways of doing this. The first is to take common words and give them technical definitions (such as "conditioned" or "capital," to name but two of many). The problem here is that everyday words come pre-loaded with everyday meanings — some of which vary greatly among times, places, or cultures. It is difficult for an author to be sure that their audience will associate the same meanings to these terms as was originally intended. The second is to make up a new term (which is called a "neologism"). Since no one has seen the new words before, authors can define them as they see fit. The problem with this choice is that too many neologisms (or others' obscure technical terms from equally obscure technical sources) rapidly make the work slow going as readers must frequently reaffirm their understanding of the unfamiliar concepts. Of course, sometimes a technical term gains a great deal of cultural cache and passes into the common parlance (think of "ego," "self-fulfilling prophecy," "significant other," or "paradigm" as examples), where it — as any other word or phrase — evolves with the natural flow of language.

The point is that precise thinking demands precise communication, but each approach to this challenge has its own unique shortcomings. This challenge can force students, and other academic writers, to throw up their hands in despair. Clear thinking and clear communication are effortful. A commitment to making our works as broadly available as possible is doubly effortful. And these efforts are largely without external or obvious reward.

This is unfortunate, since social science is *useful* in our personal lives and in our public and organizational policies. To be useful, it must be clearly communicated — but to communicate well, we must first think well. Thinking well requires study and practice. And good writing seldom comes on the first draft. It is crafted in the process of rewriting. Good writing demonstrates your clear thinking. It is balanced and persuasive. If your audience does not agree with you, then at the very least, they understand you and respect your thoughtful position. Even if there are no compelling extrinsic rewards, it should be personally satisfying to raise the overall quality of our discourse.

If we want others to take our ideas seriously, then we must present them professionally. This means that your assignments will be tightly focused and topical. They will be well written and appropriately presented. They will be free of basic errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, word choice, etc. They will conform to the standards I have laid out in my syllabus and supporting documents. When I read your assignments, I cannot see you. I cannot hear you. I cannot read your mind. I can only grade you based on what you write. So read what you write out loud — sometimes our ear catches things that our minds alone cannot. Ask someone else you trust to read it and explain to you what *they* think you meant. Did they "get" it? If not, it is probably a shortcoming of your writing and not their understanding. Write your assignments early and set them aside for a day or two. Then re-read them and edit. Good writing is really about re-writing and ruthlessly shaping your text until it says exactly and only what you intend.

The writer and literary critic, Arthur Quiller-Couch, famously said about writing, "murder your darlings" (1916). We too easily fall in love with each word we intend to communicate. But though these words are like our precious children, we must murder them in the editing process to craft a clear, graceful, effective, and persuasive message. Try imagining that you must pay for each word. Is it worth the price? Realize that, if you have been serious about your job of learning, you have far more of substance to share than you believe. Think deeply. Write well. Put in the work now and it will pay dividends for the rest of your life.

I grade you on your evidenced learning. Real learning is effortful. Real learning is demonstrated by what you <u>do</u> with the course material. Analyze it. Synthesize it. Apply it. Critique it. Use it. Make it your own. Be creative and show me your voice. Academics is a "great conversation." It allows us to engage with the ideas of the past and the present. And it is our gift to the future. I do not expect you be professional social scientists. But I do expect you to present the fruits of your mental labors professionally at a level that is appropriate to your stage of learning. I grade you on *your* contribution. If you simply parrot back to me what is in the course material, then that is *not* evidence of real learning. (Read what I have to say about academic honesty, below: Plagiarism is theft.)

The course presents you with ideas and facts that are new to you, so I begin by considering whether you demonstrate an understanding of that material, use it correctly, and show evidence of connecting it with things you already know. Can you accurately and directly communicate it in your own words? But I am also more interested in *your* contributions — after all, *your* grade is about *your* learning. Now, let's say that you have done what every conscientious student or academic should do and meticulously documented other's contributions to your work. Ask yourself, "what is left over?" That is *your* contribution. I look at several things when I grade your work, but these are paramount:

1. Did you make good choices about the pre-existing material you chose to build on? Think of it this way: those who have studied the area before are your guides. But you may choose your guides well or poorly. Choose capable guides. Ideally, this should constitute no more than about a quarter or a third of your submission.
2. What did you *do* with that material? How did you build on it? Did you break things apart and examine how the ideas and the data worked as parts of a whole? Did you draw together different ideas and evidence in interesting, creative, and useful ways? Did you clearly and completely explain and support each assertion? Did you carefully evaluate and support that material and your own conclusions? Did you select and elaborate meaningful and relevant examples that illustrate the ideas well? Once you have chose your guides and reflected upon them, did you use them as a starting point for your own, well-chosen journey?
3. Did you communicate your position effectively? Learning is not useful if you cannot use it and communicate it. Is your contribution integrated and focused? Does it logically flow from one point to the next? Is it well supported through reason and evidence, as appropriate? Do you take a position, even as you present a balanced and fair survey of the viable alternatives you reject? Did you signpost your trail well so that others could follow or even use your path as a place from which to set off on their own?

Discourse is essential to being human. Conversation about important issues is how we learn to see beyond our biases and, hopefully, find ways to avoid or correct mistakes of the past. We build on one another to see further than those who have come before.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC HONESTY

Honesty is the foundation of learning. Learning is earned through hard work. If you do not do your own work, then you have not learned — no matter what grade appears on your transcript. An essential part of learning is how you actively and critically engage with the perspectives of others: their ideas, their data, and the arguments they develop in support of their positions. When you share your learning, others will judge you on the quality of your reasons and evidence, and on the choices you've made about building on the works of others. There are three simple rules to remember regarding plagiarism and academic honesty:

1. Plagiarism is theft. When you plagiarize, you steal someone else's words or ideas — and their work that made those worthy ideas possible. You steal from your classmates the honest intellectual labor they committed to produce something tangible. You steal from your readers their ability to also seek out those original sources you found so helpful, and the regard in which they may hold you due to the work you presented as your own. You steal from yourself the precious opportunity to learn and grow as a human being. You also steal from the reputation of this university, which is built and maintained by generations of honest contributors, past, present, and future. And you steal from the shared sense of trust that makes all intellectual inquiry possible.
2. When in doubt, cite! The standard you should apply is straightforward: even if you do not quote the source verbatim, if the idea did not originate with you, its source must be acknowledged.
3. When in doubt, cite! OK, so there are only two rules, but this one is so important I repeated it anyway. It is almost impossible to err on the side of too many citations. You must be above reproach in giving credit where it is due.

To quote Isaac Newton (who was a pretty sharp guy in his own right, and was himself paraphrasing traditional wisdom), "If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Acknowledging the intellectual debts we owe to others does not diminish our own work. It is a mark of intellectual maturity. None of us get where we are on our own. The hallmark of our humanity is that we can choose to become engaged in a great conversation about ourselves and the world we inhabit, a conversation that extends around the globe and through time. Just as you wish to be acknowledged for your contributions, so you should acknowledge the contributions of others. All of us must be able to trust one another for this principle to work.

I will deal swiftly with plagiarism and academic dishonesty. If I have serious concerns about whether you have submitted someone else's work (whether from another student, a published source, or an Internet site), I may even chat with you about it to get a sense of whether it really is yours. I will strictly enforce all relevant policies because they protect the process of learning that we are all here to experience.

If you have any doubts or questions about any of my course policies, then ask! That is what I am here for. I expect that you will have questions. After all, if you knew all of this stuff already, you wouldn't be students. I also expect that you will ask informed questions. So if something is already explained in the syllabus or other course documentation and you ask that question, I will direct you to the appropriate material. If you still have questions, then I will be happy to help clarify as you need. I succeed when you learn. But for you to learn, you need to study all of the course materials carefully and then share your informed questions and insights with me and with your student colleagues.

THINKING & WRITING FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

Studying sociology and social psychology often demands we get over what we *think* we know of ourselves and our society — and perhaps more so, what we *think* we know of others in different times, places, societies, cultures, or even social positions within our own environment. It requires we take many perspectives on personal and social events, compare them, and subject them to the full force of evidence and reason. Sometimes, we reach the happy conclusion that we were correct all along; but through our active and critical engagement, we learn to base those previous and new conclusions alike on firmer foundations. Too often, what we assume to know of the social worlds we inhabit is a tissue of convenient and untested stereotypes, gross innuendoes, second-hand anecdotes, and unsupported opinions.

It doesn't matter whether we choose to become professional students of the human condition, we can all improve the quality of our lives (and the lives of others) through cultivating a "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959). To that end, I will provide a few hints on thinking and writing sociologically. I expect you have heard all of this advice before, but it never hurts any of use to be reminded and to think about these issues again. How we communicate is essential to our "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959); and if we wish to be taken seriously by others, it first requires a great deal of thought and effort on our parts.

As you communicate with me and with your student colleagues in this course, I expect that you will take advantage of this learning opportunity to develop your existing abilities think and to communicate. Here are a few notes on what I am looking for when I assess your contributions.

THINKING…

RIGOROUSLY: In order to think well, you must have a clear idea of what you are thinking about. You must understand and describe the concepts (ideas, variables, types, and so forth), data (real world cases, events, and other examples), and how they are all inter-related (theories and perspectives). You must be able to reason about them *logically* and *thoroughly*. Rigorous thinking involves *analysis* (breaking concepts and data into their parts to be examined systematically) and *synthesis* (combining various concepts and data to form a sense of the 'bigger picture'). It also means generalizing — but recognizing the limits to those generalizations to avoid stereotypes — and going beyond surface similarities to achieve a depth in your thinking and avoid superficialities. You must have reasons and justifications for every assertion or conclusion you draw *and* be able to articulate them. Rigorous thinking implies deep consideration of an issue or problem from many perspectives.

EMPIRICALLY: Though social scientists often ask many of the same questions about the human condition as do philosophers, it is not philosophy and there are some important differences. The most significant is that social science is *empirical* — that is, it is grounded in data taken from the real world. When you think empirically, you must concern yourself with linking your ideas to actual people, societies, and events. You must also think about the process or methods used to study the real world: *sampling* (how to best select unbiased and representative cases to study) and *measurement* (to what extent the data collected and studied accurately and completely correspond to the ideas they are supposed to represent). Thinking empirically implies that you do not want to just know something 'in theory,' but that you also want to *use* that knowledge.

CRITICALLY: Since there are many different ways of looking at the same event, issue, or problem, you need to make judgments among these competing perspectives in order to determine which are better or more useful. Every time you evaluate a concept or data set, you should be aware of the process you go through to reach your conclusion. You should be specific and explicit about *how* and *why* one is better or worse than another and share that process with others. Each time you assert that one better, you must discuss *why* that is the case. Likewise, when you think some concept or data is worse, you must also explain *why* — but in this instance, you must also go further: you should offer some constructive suggestions for improvement (again, justifying your contributions). There is no gain in being negatively critical purely to attack another's position. You must also be willing to turn the hard eye of critical scrutiny inward to evaluate your most cherished beliefs for bias and inaccuracy. This is a special form of criticism often called *reflexive* (or *reflective*) thinking. [For more on these points, see my *Brief Guide to Critical Thinking*.]

CREATIVELY: Thinking as a social scientist is a *creative* process. It involves looking at an event, issue, or problem in ways that are new — or, at least, new to you. This means you must practice being open to other perspectives (and give them a fair chance by representing them in their strongest possible forms). It also involves thinking *counterfactually* — that is, conducting mental experiments in which you suppose what would happen if you assumed something else, entertained different relations among events or concepts, or supposed what the world would be like if things were otherwise. Creative thinking invites you to turn existing relations and beliefs upside down and explore new possibilities by asking, "what if…?"

COMMUNICATING…

PROPERLY: Communicating well requires that others take what you have to say seriously, but this will not happen if you do not demonstrate a command of linguistic convention (whether a natural language, such as English, or a technical one, such as statistics). At the most basic level, this means that your writing must demonstrate proper spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation. It also means that you demonstrate sufficient proficiency in structuring your message at all levels: sentences, paragraphs, and the overall essay.

Another critical factor is vocabulary and word choice. First, do not use a more complicated or high-sounding word when a simpler one will do — this is not impressive, it is obscurantist (see what I mean?). Second, when communicating technical ideas (such as those of social science), use the correct terms in their prescribed manners. Participants in technical fields often coin new terms or give common ones more precise meanings. You should know those relevant to your focus and use them properly to demonstrate that you are 'in the know.' If there is any doubt about whether your audience will be unclear with how you are using a word, then define it as you go. These first two principles can be

difficult to balance in technical writing, where some words are given precise definitions and must be used accordingly, but you should strive to make your writing broadly accessible. Finally, "omit needless words" (see Strunk and White, 2000, for more details).

Since you have already accomplished a great deal of education, and this is not an English class, I will assume that you know the basic rules of English language communication and I will not typically make specific corrections. I will, however, note when you evidence these general deficiencies and leave it to you to sort out. Since this is a social science course, I will make specific mention when you seem to misuse technical terms.

Communicating properly also means that you build on existing relevant works and that you acknowledge what those are and how they are used, either directly or indirectly. Proper in-text citations and a complete "References" section are therefore mandatory. You should do these according to the latest edition of the *Style Guide of the American Psychological Association* (APA).

CLEARLY: When you speak or write, you should know what contribution you are trying to make. All communication requires a *focus* (in this case, beyond merely completing an assignment and receiving a passing grade). In a formal essay, this focus is identified through a *thesis*, which is a concise statement of what you will contribute. You should make this evident to your reader in the first couple of paragraphs and then may briefly elaborate on the choices you made to establish and justify your focus.

You cannot communicate clearly unless you know your *audience* (those who will receive and evaluate your ideas). Different audiences will require different ways of communicating: they have unique concerns, expectations, agendas, and bring different bodies of knowledge, belief, and experience. All communication has a persuasive element and you cannot persuade unless you project yourself into your audience's place in order to accurately understand how they will process your message.

You also cannot communicate clearly unless you understand the *purpose* of your writing and speaking. In part, this means that you must have a clear idea of your goals. But it also means that you must understand any external parameters imposed on your message (in this case, the assignment instructions and grading criteria).

Finally, communicating clearly requires that you understand your own *perspective*. What is your viewpoint on the object of your focus? What are your assumptions, restrictions, and so forth; and what expectations and events, beliefs and ideologies, shape your point of view? You must introspect and think reflexively to understand *yourself* and how you relate to the concepts and data with which you will work.

DIRECTLY:

We are all busy, and, unless you are writing for recreation, communication is about conveying your ideas *efficiently*. Beyond omitting needless words, we should omit needless clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and even sections that do not further the purpose of your thesis. Good communication occasionally occurs in the act of writing, but great communication happens through relentless and repeated editing. If any part of your writing does not contribute to your focus and further your purpose, it does not belong in your essay.

Beyond mere editing, your written work should be integrated. The concepts, perspectives, and suppositions you introduce should be relevant to your focus and to one another, just as they are relevant to the evaluations to which you subject them and to the individual, social, and historical examples from your own experience, the popular media, and academic studies to which you apply them. When you cite the works of others, you should do so in order to further *your own* purpose — to support, contrast, or otherwise illuminate the ideas you are exploring. You should not include citations merely because they are expected or take up space, but you should integrate them in ways that further your thesis — or incorporate them when someone else has already said it better than you can.

To aid your audience, you should make your path clear. Each point should follow from the next and lead into the one following. Use 'signposts' (brief announcements regarding where you are going, why, and how you will get there) to smooth transitions and stick to the old adage "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them" — I would add that telling them 'why it is important to them' is equally necessary.

You should maintain a consistent voice and tense, as well. Write in the first person, if you are discussing your ideas and your experiences, and write in third person when discussing others. Unless you are giving instructions (such as these), second person rarely works in technical writing. Similarly, in most cases, it is clearest to write in present tense, unless you are discussing events that occurred or will occur outside the timeframe approximate to your writing. For example, when critiquing the classic works of deceased authors, you should refer to them in the past tense; or when projecting the possible consequences of current policy decisions, you should cast your expectations in the future tense.

Each of these techniques will clear the way for your audience to focus on the substance of your contribution without being distracted by jarring inconsistencies.

ACTIVELY:

Most people understand best through action and experience, and not through passive allusion. Likewise, you best evidence your mastery of the material when you *use* it and *interact* with it. To that end, I will pay particular attention to how you evaluate, analyze, synthesize, and otherwise develop the concepts on which you focus, and on how you apply them to personal and social examples in order to achieve a different or better understanding than you had before taking the class and engaging with the material. Take the abstract ideas of social science and breath life into them through concrete examples.

As I said at the beginning, all of this should be familiar to you. You should take this class as an opportunity to think about what it means to be human, living at this time, in this place, and in this society. Question your self and those things you *thought* you knew about your experiences and the social world, at large. You should also use this opportunity to reflect on how you can generalize these concepts and data — and to recognize the limitations of those generalizations.

Learning and teaching are ultimately just about meaningful communication. We communicate through what we say, write, and do. They are also both jobs. They will require work. Together, we will work though this semester and communicate meaningfully about many issues important to the human condition.