Writing Social Work Papers

Social Work Papers Should

- Address all parts of the prompt.
- Be concise and clear.

Formatting

- Writing in APA
  - 12 pt, Times New Roman font
  - Double-spaced with 1” margins
  - Header (cover page is different than other pages)
    - Cover page should read: Running Head: TITLE OR ABBREVIATED TITLE
    - All other pages should read: TITLE OR ABBREVIATED TITLE
  - Page numbering starts on the cover page
  - References
    - Double-spaced
    - ½ ” hanging indent from the margin on all lines after the first in an entry
    - See “References” page for examples

Dos and Don’ts

- Do
  - Use active voice instead of passive wherever possible.
    - passive: The experiment was conducted by Roberts.
    - active: Roberts conducted the experiment.
  - Know what type of paper you are writing. “I” and “we” are appropriate and necessary for reflective essays but not for research papers. In research papers, use “I” and “we” sparingly or not at all, and only use “I” and “we” when referring to researchers, not when referring to people in general.
  - Use person-first language. For example, “people with autism” instead of “autistics.”
  - Remember that “data” are always plural.
  - Use the word “participants” instead of “subjects.”
  - Keep your audience in mind.
• Don’t
  - Use direct quotes (they can be used, but should be used sparingly. Paraphrase whenever possible).
  - Use absolutes such as “completely,” “absolutely,” “always,” etc.
  - Use immodest expressions such as “prove”. Use words such as “suggest,” “support,” “show,” or “indicate” instead.
  - Use overly complex sentence structures. The goal is clarity.
  - Use colloquial or informal writing style, especially slang.
  - Use contractions.
  - Use biased language.
    ▪ The male pronoun (he) does not refer to everyone.
  - Define people by what they aren’t. Rather than saying someone is “non-White,” say they are Latino, for example.
  - Assume readers will know what you mean. Define all acronyms, jargon, theories and ideas fully.

Know What is Expected in Common Types of Writing

• Research Papers
  - Abstract
  - Introduction
  - Literature review (past tense: “Roberts showed” or present perfect tense: “researchers have shown”)
  - Methods (past tense (or future tense in the case of a proposal))
  - Results (past tense)
  - Discussion (present tense)
  - References
  - Appendices (if needed)

• Reflective Papers
  - Summarize reactions and feelings regarding an experience
  - Analyze the meaning of the experience
  - Use “I” statements
  - Do not require thesis statements
  - Do have an introduction, body and conclusion
- Social Policy Analysis
  - Goal is to critically evaluate the effectiveness of a social policy
  - Generally includes the following sections:
    - The Issue: Clearly define the social problem the policy addresses.
    - Background: Describe the historical development and original intent of the policy and how it attempts to address the social problem in question.
    - Analysis: Analyze the social policy, focusing on its strengths and limitations in addressing the problem.
    - Recommendation: Propose social policy alternatives that might better address the problem.
    - Conclusion

- Professional Writing Assignments
  - Support all opinions with facts.
  - Are as concise and thorough as possible.
  - Can become part of a client’s record.
    - Case Notes—objective descriptions or observations of a situation. They are accurate, clear, and concise. They represent observations, not personal opinions.
    - Assessments—descriptive compilations of data gathered to present a cohesive view of an individual or family. They describe what a profession thinks professionally, personally, and are descriptive, not diagnostic.
    - Treatment Plans—outline an intervention that includes specific goals and objectives. Goals are usually broad statements while objectives are measurable actions to be taken.

- Personal Statements
  - Answer all questions fully and clearly
  - What to include:
    - Why social work as a profession
    - Student experiences (and how they connect to the field of social work)
    - Work experiences (and how they connect to the field of social work)
    - Why this school
    - The six core values of social work (dignity and worth of a person, competence, integrity, service, social justice, and importance of human relationships)
Other Useful Tips and Tricks

- Proofread.
- Edit.
- Make sure everything is cited, and cited correctly.
- Avoid common grammatical errors.
- Write the paper over time instead of in one sitting, and edit and proofread over time.
- Never be afraid to ask a professor for clarification if something is unclear.
References


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