

**SC2205: SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY
SEMESTER 1 2015/2016**

**Research Paper Outline Instructions:
Marriage and Parenthood in Singapore**

Students are to complete a research paper outline as part of the requirements for this course.

Writing a research paper is a complex, messy, often frustrating process that, nevertheless, can be ordered and managed in several stages.

Analyze and define the topic or question. While a research paper will always have a topic, your first challenge is to identify and then explore the underlying question/debate/problem within that topic that is central to the course. For example, a question such as “What are the causes of the declining total fertility rate in Singapore?” is not asking for a list of causes that you then describe. It is asking: in what way or to what extent did various factors contribute and how were they interrelated? Understanding how the topic is situated within the course is crucial to developing a comprehensive answer.

Identify some key ideas. Remember that any question does not stand alone – its purpose is to assess how well you understand the concepts, theories, and conflicts in the course. Consider these concepts, theories, or conflicts while you are preparing your research paper. Look at the course outline, lecture notes, and assigned readings to identify key themes of the course. Use brainstorming or mind-mapping techniques to identify key ideas.

The first literature search. Search library catalogues, abstracts, and databases for material (the library tutorial will help). However, when you find sources, the amount of reading is often overwhelming. Ask yourself – what is relevant? What is more central and what is less important? Think strategically – who are the main scholars in the field? Do the assigned readings contain useful sources? Start with the main scholars in the field that your lecturer recommends, and then progress to books and journal articles as you narrow your search for more specific or specialized material.

Read. One of the greatest challenges at university and in writing is learning how to read academically. When you read, read for a specific purpose – where are the debates within this topic? What are the key issues of these debates? Are there any main scholars writing on the topic? What evidence is being used to justify each position or interpretation of the topic? Consciously read to obtain an overview of what the main scholars are writing on the topic.

Work towards constructing an argument. Try to express your argument or position in one clear sentence. For example, “I argue...” or “This paper argues...” Select, from your readings, ideas and evidence that might support your argument. Next, consider what things you need to do to persuade the reader of your position. Will you need to define key terms, compare and contrast, critically evaluate the literature, provide background context, analyze a case study, and so on?

Once you have thought of the things you will do, this is called the structure of your argument and it provides a potential outline of the main sections of the research paper.

Develop an outline on the basis of your argument. The first division of your topic into parts represents your view of what is important in these debates – this is your preliminary analysis. Remember this may change as you write, as you read more, and as your research paper evolves. Keeping the required length of the paper in mind, transfer key ideas and supporting ideas from the brainstorm session to an outline. This outline is the bare bones of the paper. Prepare a more detailed outline with a section and sub-section plan. Expand or contract the outline to suit the length required. Add or delete main points, supporting points, the evidence you will use to explain and support them, potential responses to counterarguments or challenges to your position. Remember, you may need to read more in order to flesh out your ideas.

You must use concepts and theories from the course to analyze the issue you have identified. How does it relate to specific concepts and theories from the course, such as ideas about romantic love and courtship, marriage, gender and the division of labor, divorce, and so on? You do not have to discuss *all* the concepts and theories from the course, but you should either discuss one key concept or theory in great depth, or a few different concepts and theories in relation to the issue you have identified. Your outline should be no longer than 1000 words.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the work of others as one's own. For example, cutting-and-pasting or copying text and using it as if it is your original work and not citing the source it comes from. This is a serious academic offense. It will lead to disciplinary action by the university. Do not do it! Always identify your sources!

A soft copy should be submitted to IVLE and a hard copy to your tutor's mailbox by 5pm on Tuesday 15 September.