

I. DISCIPLINARY WRITING

Discipline (n) - A branch of learning or knowledge; a field of study or expertise; a subject. Now also: a subcategory or element of a particular subject or field.

- Instruction or teaching intended to mould the mind and character and instil a sense of proper, orderly conduct and action; training to behave or act in a controlled and effective manner; mental, intellectual, moral, or spiritual training or exercise. Also applied to the effect of an experience or undertaking (as, study, adversity, etc.) considered as imparting such training.

- A system or method for the maintenance of order; a body of rules for conduct or action; a way of doing things.

When writing within a discipline, it is important that you follow the **conventions** of writing within that discipline. For more on disciplinary writing, please see our handout on disciplinary writing.

II. MULTIDISCIPLINARY WRITING

Essentially, multidisciplinary writing is a midway-point between writing within a discipline and writing an interdisciplinary paper. Essentially, the following examples are types of writing that fall short of true interdisciplinary inquiry:

Encyclopedic writing – A topic is approached through a range of disciplines one after another, but no connection is drawn between the knowledge yielded through these approaches. (Ex: The Wikipedia entry on “River Oykil” includes sections on “Geography,” “History,” and “Flora and Fauna” but does little to draw this information together).

Contextualizing writing – A paper written within a dominant discipline is interrupted with a brief inclusion of information or methods drawn from a secondary discipline, but no connections between the two are really drawn. (Ex: An English paper may begin with a historical account of the author’s life without ever drawing on that account or its methods to influence its argument about a text.)

Composite writing – A paper may cover the same topic from multiple disciplines that share methodology, but if there is no cross-communication about how these disciplines affect one another’s findings, then the paper is not yet interdisciplinary. (Ex: The report of the experiments on the human immune system and skin and bone density.)

III. INTERDISCIPLINARY WRITING

Theorists of interdisciplinary study tend to divide these projects into two categories. Although the terms vary (those listed below are adopted from Julie Klein), most theorists define these categories by their purpose. Therefore, when you begin your project, you’ll want to decide:

Do you want to answer a particular question?

If so, you'll want to try a METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.

The goal of methodological interdisciplinary research and writing is to produce new information. There are several ways to do this, but each involves **applying the methodology of one discipline to the field of inquiry of another.**

Do you want to encourage a new way of thinking about a problem?

If so, you'll want to try a THEORETICAL APPROACH

The goal of theoretical interdisciplinary research is to produce new ways of approaching questions, rather than answering particular questions. There are several ways to do this, but the mark of a theoretical interdisciplinary project is that **the core concerns of one discipline help to define the core concerns of another.**

IV. CONVENTIONS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY WRITING

By definition, interdisciplinary writing must lack a set of conventions – if it had them, it would be well on its way to becoming a discipline. However, almost all interdisciplinary writing shares one move in common. **Interdisciplinary projects almost always take the time to explain why they are interdisciplinary.** Because stepping outside of a discipline is almost a rebellious act (you're saying that the existing structure doesn't provide you what you need to get the knowledge or theory you want) you'll need to justify this act within the paper itself. This might happen in your "methods" section, if you're writing up an experiment, or it might happen in your argument for significance or at the end of your lit review ; it's up to you where you tell your readers your reasons for choosing an interdisciplinary approach. What's important is that it's clear to them – and you – that those reasons exist.

SOURCES

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