

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur
Rhode Island College

School District Comparison Paper

In this paper assignment, you will write a paper in the format of a scholarly journal article in which you compare data on four school districts and the state as a whole and connect your findings to theoretical arguments in the sociology of education and stratification. The assignment is designed to help you develop your skills in using and writing about empirical data.

Begin by selecting—from your Data Comparison Table Worksheet—a minimum of nine variables to compare in your paper, since you cannot possibly discuss everything. These variables should connect to theoretical ideas discussed in class and in the reading. At least one and no more than three should be outcome variables (college readiness, test scores, graduation). At least one and no more than two should be school finance variables. At least five should be other measures (not output or school finance variables) that you believe are important based on what you have learned so far this semester.

Note here which variables you will use:

Present at least one hypothesis about how your independent variables might affect your dependent variable(s):

Indicate here which course readings you will utilize in your paper. For each reading, write a brief note explaining what it contributes to your paper's analysis:

See reverse for a detailed breakdown of what will be required in the completed paper.

1. Your name and a title that makes clear what your paper is about
2. An introduction that explains what your paper is about, notes which school districts you are comparing, and presents your hypothesis (about 200-250 words). Remember that your introduction should be written *last*, after the rest of the paper is done.
3. A literature review. Unlike in a “real” scholarly article, you will not be expected to find or use outside sources, but you will need to discuss what social science has to say about the types of issues your paper addresses. This section should include all relevant key ideas and concepts from class discussion as well as reference readings assigned in class (about 500-800 words). Be sure to cite the readings and course sessions you are drawing on.
4. A methods section. In this part of the paper, you need to explain how you collected the data you will use to make your school district comparisons. You should organize this section around your variables—explaining how each one is measured based on the information provided on the website from which it was obtained and making clear whether each variable is an independent (cause) or dependent (effect) variable. You will need to cite the websites from which the data was obtained (about 250-350 words).
5. A data section. In this section, you will present your comparison. You will need to make a table presenting the variables on which your comparisons are based (like a mini version of the comparison worksheet), and the table needs to be captioned and properly formatted. You then need to summarize what the data in the table says about each district and how the districts differ from each other and from the state as a whole (about 800-1000 words, plus the table).
6. A discussion section. Here, you will discuss the consequences of the differences you observed and explain to what extent the data supports your hypothesis (about 400-500 words).
7. A conclusion section. Here, you will summarize what you have learned from conducting your research and writing this paper. You will be sure to connect what you have learned back to theory—what do your findings tell you about the ideas and models from the sociology of education and stratification that you discussed in your literature review? Finally, you should note what the implications of your findings are for education policy. In this last part you might discuss school funding, academic practices, staffing, social services, school locations, or any other issues that seem relevant (about 500-800 words).
8. A works cited with properly-formatted bibliographic citations to all sources you used to write your paper. Be sure your in-text citations are properly formatted as well.

Your complete paper, not including the bibliography, should be at least 2,800 words and not more than 3,500 (longer papers may be acceptable with advance permission, if you wish to discuss additional variables).

Grading Rubric

	Beginning Researcher	Intermediate Researcher	Advanced Researcher
Introduction	Introduction missing key elements or written in a way that does not conform to the expectations of the scholarly genre.	Introduction that presents the focus of the paper and a hypothesis but may have some errors or small omissions.	Clear, succinct introduction summarizing the paper and presenting an appropriate hypothesis.
Literature Review	Does not present a sufficient number of sociological ideas or readings and/or has significant errors or omissions; May rely on inappropriate (popular rather than scholarly sources).	Literature review that summarizes at least one or two important sociological concepts and draws on course readings. Connects these ideas to the study of school districts, but may not tie them closely to the paper and/or may make some errors.	Clear, well-organized literature review that summarizes several key sociological ideas and draws on all relevant course readings. Written in a way that clearly connects to the paper's focus and hypothesis.
Methods	Does not meet minimum variable requirements, does not explain measurement, or contains other significant errors or omissions.	Meets minimum variable requirements and explains measurement, but may have errors or omissions in the discussions of measurement, data sources, and comparisons.	Meets minimum variable requirements and fully explains how each is measured and what the sources of data are, as well as the nature of the comparisons to be made.
Data Table	Data table missing, with omissions or errors, or unclear.	Clear, complete, captioned data table.	Clear, well-formatted and well-designed data table with an appropriately descriptive caption and including all relevant data.
Data	Insufficient summary and/or comparisons, lack of sociological discussions, or significant errors.	Summary discussion and comparisons may have small errors or omissions or may be insufficiently connected to sociological ideas.	Summary discussion of school district data and complete comparisons which are connected to sociological ideas.
Discussion	Summary and/or hypothesis reflection missing or incorrect.	Insufficient summary and/or unclear reflection on hypothesis.	Clear summary of differences observed and reflection on hypothesis.
Conclusion	Summary, reflection, and/or policy discussion absent or with significant errors.	Summary, reflection, and policy discussion present, but with omissions or small errors; policy discussion may be impractical or too simple.	Summary of what you have learned, reflection on sociological ideas, and clear, interesting, practical discussion of policy.
Sources	Bibliography/citations have significant errors and/or paper does not meet minimum source requirements	Complete bibliography and in-text citations but with some formatting errors; meets minimum source requirements	Complete bibliography and in-text citations in ASA or APA format; goes beyond minimum source requirements
Writing & Style	Writing unclear, poorly organized, and/or in need of substantial additional editing and proofreading.	Generally clear, well-organized, and proofread writing with headings, but could use more editing.	Clear, well-organized writing using headings; has been sufficiently proofread and edited.