

Second Edition

The Sociology Student Writer's Manual

William A. Johnson, Jr.

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Gregory M. Scott

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*To
Shelby,
Margaret,
Jill,
and Connie*



TO THE STUDENT

This newly revised second edition of *The Sociology Student Writer's Manual* is written to help you become a successful student. Successful students, like successful social scientists, are competent writers. As sociology students, we observe social institutions and behavior. We write to record what we observe, to explain what we record, and to defend what we explain. As citizens, we write to take part in making decisions that direct our nation, our community, and our private lives. From the Declaration of Independence to the Emancipation Proclamation, from the United Nations Charter to President Kennedy's Inaugural Address, writing has brought us the freedom we enjoy today.

The Sociology Student Writer's Manual is designed to help you do two things: (1) learn how to research and write in sociology, and (2) improve your writing ability. These objectives are addressed in the four major sections of this book. The "Introduction" tells you what sociology is all about. Intended for both first-time and experienced sociology students, it offers a basic historical orientation and a challenging account of current theoretical perspectives in the field.

Part I, "A Handbook of Style for Sociology," addresses fundamental concerns of all writers, exploring the reasons we write, describing the writing process itself, and examining those elements of grammar, style, and punctuation that most often cause confusion among writers in general. It also explains the importance of formatting the research paper properly—the title page, table of contents, and so on—along with citing and referencing sources using the American Sociological Association's Style Guide or the new Student Citation System. A vital concern throughout this part, and the rest of the book as well, is the three-way interrelationship among writer, topic, and audience. Our discussion of this relationship aims at building your self-confidence as you clarify

your goals. Writing is not a magical process beyond the control of most people. It is instead a series of interconnected skills that any writer can improve with practice, and the end result of this practice is power. Part I of this manual treats the act of writing not as an empty exercise undertaken only to produce a grade, but as a powerful learning tool, as well as the primary medium by which sociologists accomplish their goals.

Part II, "How to Conduct Research in Sociology," focuses on the research process. The first chapter in this part, Chapter 5, describes the research process in detail, explaining how you can maintain self-confidence by establishing control over your project and assuming the crucial responsibility of every writer to use source material ethically. Chapter 6 lists and describes traditional sources of information for sociology researchers, including libraries, government agencies, and private research organizations that may provide you with information not available in your library. It also includes information about writing and sociology available on the Internet and World Wide Web. It demonstrates how to find and obtain resources that are important to your topic in this burgeoning new territory. Chapter 7 deals with conducting quantitative research in sociology. It examines several common research designs used to conduct quantitative research in sociology, while focusing on the scientific method and critical thinking.

Part III is new to the second edition. It provides a guide to critical thinking that helps students present logical arguments and avoid common fallacies. Part IV is substantially revised in the second edition. Building upon the critical thinking principles described in Part III, it presents four critical thinking exercises for introductory courses: issue reaction papers, social issue analysis papers, book reviews, and article critiques.

The two chapters in Part V, "Sociology Papers for Advanced Courses," explain three different types of papers that are commonly assigned in upper-level undergraduate and graduate sociology classes. Each chapter begins by exploring the purposes and characteristics of the paper covered. Next, the steps for writing a successful paper are spelled out and typical formats are provided. Each chapter encourages you to use your imagination and resourcefulness in confronting the paper's requirements.

Your professor may give you a specific writing assignment from one of these chapters. If your assignment is not specific, you may want to select an assignment and discuss your selection with your instructor before proceeding.

This manual is a reference book. It was written to help you become a better writer. We wish you success as you accept a primary challenge of academic and professional life: to write and write well.

*William A. Johnson, Jr., Richard P. Rettig,
Gregory M. Scott, and Stephen M. Garrison*



TO THE INSTRUCTOR

How many times have you assigned papers in your sociology classes and found yourself teaching the class how to write the paper—not only content but also form and grammar? This newly revised second edition of *The Sociology Student Writer's Manual* may accompany the primary text you assign in any sociology class or it may stand on its own. It allows you to assign one of the papers explained in Part IV or Part V with the understanding that virtually everything the student needs to know—from grammar to sources of information to citing sources—is here within one book.

In addition to many revisions throughout the text, including an updated chapter on the internet, this second edition contains an entirely new Part III that includes the following new chapters:

Chapter 8, “An Introduction to Logic: Principles of Argument”

Chapter 9, “Avoiding Fallacies”

Part IV now includes an entirely new chapter:

Chapter 10, “Issue Reaction Papers for Introductory Courses”

This manual makes assigning papers easier than ever. For example, you might direct your students in Introductory Sociology to write a social issue analysis paper according to the directions in Chapter 11, following the instructions in Part I for formatting, grammar, and source citations, and those in Part II for organizing the research process and utilizing available resources. Most questions a student could ask about the paper are answered in this book, but the book also allows you to supplement your assignment with special instructions. Examples are included.

Writing a social issue analysis paper following the directions in Chapter 11 is an excellent exercise for beginning students, as social issue analysis papers are exercises in logic and problem solving. Our directions help students do the following:

1. Define an actual existing social issue or problem
2. Identify and evaluate possible theoretical contributions to understanding that issue or problem
3. Formulate a recommendation for solving the problem

By using the guidelines in this manual to complete a social issue analysis paper—or any of the other assignments that are included—your students will learn to define and focus clearly on issues or problems that are germane to their world. They will become more competent problem solvers and develop skills that are important in every profession.

As you know, writing skills are essential to professional success in sociology, as in other professions. By combining the latest sociology research and writing techniques with a broad spectrum of writing activities—based on a total of over eighty-five years of experience teaching courses in sociology, criminal justice, political science, and English—we have written this book to assist you in leading students toward success.

We would like to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments: William M. Cross, *Illinois College*; Larry D. Crawford, *Morehouse College*; Valerie Brown, *Cuyahoga Community College*; Harriett Romo, *Southwest Texas State University*; Steven L. Vassar, *Mankato State University*; Carol Stix, *Pace University*; and Vickie Jensen, *California State University–Northridge*.

*William A. Johnson, Jr., Richard P. Rettig,
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INTRODUCTION

Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

—Ecclesiastes 12:12b

WELCOME TO THE STUDY OF SOCIOLOGY

If you are about to write your first paper in sociology, this introduction is for you. It will enhance your confidence and ability to present ideas and issues at every level of the discipline, from Introductory Sociology to Sociological Theory and Advanced Sociological Research. Reading this section will help you understand what sociology is all about and what sociologists are trying to achieve when they write. It provides a brief overview of the discipline that will help you understand basic sociological concepts, methods, and theories and apply them in your writing. The knowledge it offers can save you time, energy, and confusion.

Sociology is taught under different conditions at different colleges and universities by instructors who have varying amounts and types of resources at their disposal. If you have already studied sociology in some detail, you may choose to skip this introduction and read Chapters 1 through 8 before selecting the chapters in Part III that provide directions for the specific type of paper you have been assigned. However, you may find that reading this introduction will help to refresh your memory and establish your writing efforts more firmly within the broader framework of the discipline. Wherever you are in your progress toward mastering the methods and contributing to the rich tradition of sociology, we encourage you to read this section.

What Is Sociology?

Sociology, the study of human interaction, attempts to remove the “mystery” from human behavior. Although we, like the Hebrew author of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), often become weary from seeking the answers, we continue nonetheless, for the price of ignorance has far too often proven—not only for the Jews—too costly. Because it deals with the effects of social systems on people’s behavior, there is virtually no topic that sociology does not touch. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to see where sociology is distinct from other disciplines. Perhaps the best way to begin is with an example from everyday life taken from Hess, Markson, and Stein (1988):

Sometime this week you will probably eat at a luncheonette or restaurant. As you pay your bill, you will probably leave a tip. Why do that? Do you have a deep psychological urge to give money to people who provide a service? Is it biological? Do you have a “tipping gene” that programs your actions? Or has some divine power commanded you to do so? The answer to all three questions is, of course, “no.” Then why, in our society, is this behavior almost automatic? Students pondering this question typically give such responses as, “It’s expected,” “I was taught to,” “If you don’t, they’ll spill soup on you the next time you eat there,” or “It’s the way they make a living because their wages are so low.” Regarding the amount of the tip, some students will point to group pressure and to “wanting to be taken as a big shot” by restaurant personnel, other customers, or their dates. And some will point out that if the size of the tip is directly related to the quality of service, it serves to motivate high levels of performance.

Notice that all of these answers involve some form of interaction; they assume that your behavior is linked to that of other people, and that you are acting within expectations and mutual influence. Under some circumstances—when trying to impress someone, or eating in a crowd—we will probably leave larger tips than when dining alone. Tipping also varies according to the eating place—the more expensive the meal, the proportionately higher the tip. In general also, men tend to tip more generously than do women. And if you have traveled across this country or abroad, you will probably have noticed regional and national variations in tipping expectations.

Once you realize that these differences have little to do with how hungry you are or how you were toilet trained, you can begin to grasp the essence of the sociological perspective: Human beings live in groups; these groups are characterized by rules that govern behavior; the rules are learned; and we take other people into account when we choose how to behave. In other words, our thoughts and actions are largely shaped by forces outside ourselves—by the social context and how we interpret it.

But notice also that we can choose not to tip, and that the amount we leave depends on a number of considerations—what we think is customary, a fear of retaliation or of looking like a cheapskate, what we consider a fair reward for service, or a means of adding to the income of low-paid workers. Thus, although there is an outside patterning or structure to which we are reacting, human beings are not robots or puppets; we can choose not to react or we can give varying meanings to our actions. Nevertheless, the raw material on which our choices are based also comes from what we have learned as members of the society. (Pp. 2–3)

From this example, we can see that sociology is the systematic study of the social behavior of individuals. It is the examination of the workings of social groups, organizations, cultures, and societies.

Different Kinds of Sociology

There is no one sociology. Instead, there are several different sociological approaches to the study of human behavior in society. Unlike disciplines more limited in scope, such as economics or political science, sociology can deal with all aspects of society and human behavior, a fact that adds to the excitement of the field. The discipline's diversity virtually ensures that every student will find something of particular interest to study—from urban sociology to the sociology of art.

A sociologist who is asked, "What kind of sociologist are you?" will likely respond by listing his or her specialties; for example, some aspect of human behavior such as deviance, or some characteristic of social life such as politics. Although most sociologists have a theoretical preference, many use several approaches, depending on what is being studied.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS OF SOCIOLOGY

Social Change

Most sociologists agree that it is the actions and behaviors of humans that create social settings and social laws, and that these settings also influence the way people act. For example, consider the widespread use of slavery in developing countries and the widespread abolition of slavery in developed countries. Changes in women's right to vote, in the legal and illegal use of drugs, in the legal custody of minor children, and in the family system itself are just a few of the myriad examples of social change.

Every day people affirm or modify their social settings and thus maintain or change them. Each time a major change occurs, some people resist. Sociology is concerned with the way individuals and groups support or change their social surroundings.

The Sociological Imagination

Some sociologists believe that society can be understood only by looking at both the subjective/personal and the objective/historical side of any given period. The sociological imagination demands that thinking people (1) view their world by locating themselves in their time period, and (2) become conscious of how the broader social structure directly affects their lives (Mills 1959).

People often view their personal lives in narrow frames that tend to exclude the effects of structural transformations like population migration to the sunbelt or evolution of local industries from textile manufacturing to high

technology products. They may feel stifled by an inability to handle society's rapid pace of change. The sociological imagination allows people to envision what happens among them in society. It helps them to distinguish their personal problems from broader social issues and to thereby understand the effect of cultural values and norms on their own lives. In other words, personal problems can be better understood by "seeing" them within the social structure in which they occur.

Three basic questions frame the classic study of people in particular societies:

- What is the structure of the society in general?
- Where does the society stand in human history?
- What types of men and women prevail in this society and period of time?

Social issues—such as unemployment, divorce, and terrorism—are directly related to personal problems. Linking people to their social surroundings and the historical period in which they live tells us about their individual and social potentials. This linking activity requires sociological imagination, and this book will help you identify and sharpen your own social imagination.

Creating the Person

Socialization refers to the process in which people learn to conform to their society's norms, values, and roles. All social settings influence or constrain our behavior. Primary socialization refers to the process by which the newborn baby is molded into a social being. Secondary socialization occurs later in childhood and adolescence, as the young person is influenced by adults and peers outside the family. Our personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about everything—morality, politics, religion, work, entertainment, and so on—are formed and changed by social settings.

Different stages of our lives instigate the change process, as do educational opportunities, a new job, new surroundings, and new historical times. Moving from one stage to another is often accompanied by a rite of passage, especially if the change is considered very important in that society. Graduation from high school marks a significant shift for some individuals in American society: The graduation ceremony, or ritual, is the traditional rite of passage that illuminates the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

In advanced technological societies like the United States, the movement from one stage of cultural evolution to another is often more subtle than in societies where the current stage is relatively primitive, such as the Aborigines of the Australian outback. Their "walkabout" rite of passage requires that each postpubescent male adolescent be left alone in an unfamiliar place far from the village with only a spear. If he is able to make his way back to the village—a trip, often filled with life-threatening events, that sometimes takes up to two

weeks—he is welcomed home with a ceremony that christens his arrival to adult status within the Aborigine society.

Looking further into understanding the socialization process, we find many unsolved issues that may be of interest to you as a student. One example centers around the relative strength of biological and/or social influences on human development—a critical issue in many areas of sociology, including criminology and social psychology. This discussion is known as the nature versus nurture debate. It questions the impact of heredity on the sense of self, versus the effect of social environments on socialization over time and within social circumstances. As sociologists study human behavior, they often discover that facts run contrary to popular beliefs. For example, within the context of the nature versus nurture debate, popular belief often holds that criminals are “born” with a predisposition to break laws. However, most social scientists agree that criminals are “socially constructed,” or affected by numerous external influences, not “born that way.”

Cultural Relativism

The concept that cultures are “blueprints for living,” drawn from particular environmental and situational conditions, is called cultural relativism. In a now classic study demonstrating cultural eccentricities and underscoring the idea of cultural relativism, Horace Miner (1956) describes the way of life of the Nacirema, a North American group whose chief lives on the banks of the Camotop River. The tribe is obsessed with rituals centered on deforming the human body: changing its color, its smell, and its shape. Under the guidance of “holy mouth men,” whom they seek out once or twice a year, the Nacirema engage in a daily ritual of inserting bundles of hogs’ hair and magical powders into the mouth and “then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.” Nacirema ceremonies can be quite painful, as when the men scrape their faces with sharp instruments and the women bake their heads in small ovens.

Described in this way, such customs appear very strange. Perhaps you’d be tempted to call them “primitive.” Surely a person from the modern industrial world would not behave in this fashion. Yet Miner was simply looking at American (Nacirema backwards) society from a different perspective. Can you see it?

Look at some of our other behaviors. Consider tattooing, a process that is far from painless and is supposed to make the bearer’s body both more attractive and somehow more powerful for having endured the pain. Another painful process, hair transplanting, is a fairly involved procedure designed to counter baldness.

No behavior should be considered out of the context of the culture in which it originates because what is natural to us will not necessarily be so to members of other societies (Hess et al. 1988).

Awareness and understanding of other cultures is important today because we all live in an international and global community. Cross-cultural