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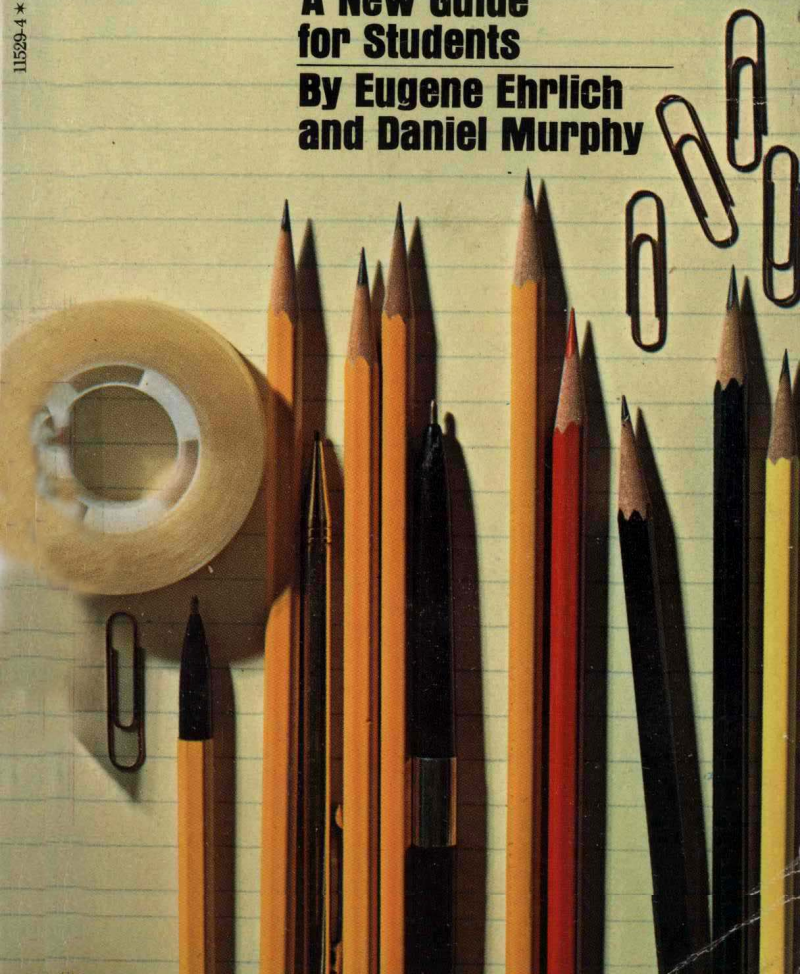
Writing and Researching Term Papers and Reports:

A New Guide for Students

By Eugene Ehrlich and Daniel Murphy



WRITING AND RESEARCHING TERM PAPERS AND REPORTS:

A NEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

BY EUGENE EHRLICH AND DANIEL MURPHY

TO
Annie
Corky
Danny
Deidre
Dick
Jonny
Kate

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FOREWORD

Very early in your education, teachers will require reports from you in various classes. In the sciences the required report may be a description of a simple machine or experiment—a homemade barometer, a doorbell, an electromagnet, the hatching of a few chicks, a bacterial culture, the analysis of a few drops of pond water. In the social sciences the required report may deal with some library research on a historical figure or event, interviews with town officials, or the like. In the English class the report will be of a book or a play, or perhaps a biographical study. As you advance in school, the research tasks you undertake become increasingly complex, and the reports reflect that increasing complexity.

If you ask a teacher why he assigns papers, he probably will answer that a research paper teaches and demonstrates the ability to research, organize, and write a competent and scholarly paper. This explanation may sound a good deal like the catchall "It is good for you" that covers studying Latin and eating oatmeal. In a real sense, however, this explanation is completely correct.

First of all, any student who wants to do well in college and every student who hopes to go on to graduate school will have to be able to write research papers. But the requirement of this kind of scholarship goes beyond academic life. There is not a field of professional or business life in the world today that does not demand the ability to gather information, develop ideas, and write well. In this sense, then, the research paper is a preparation for your future work. The scientist will spend much of his life writing about his experiments—the New York *Times* reported that Dr. William Carlos Williams, the

poet-physician, wrote more than 2000 papers in his long career. The engineer is continually faced by the need for writing report after report. The lawyer has his briefs, which are based on library research.

But there is more to research and research writing than its practical side. One must almost necessarily begin by stating that research is rewarding. The library contains man's recorded history. Nowhere else can you find so much in so little space. By careful work, you can find in books, manuscripts, newspapers, diaries, and letters any aspect of this history. The enjoyment of the search is great, and the writing itself is also enjoyable if you know how to *think through, organize,* and *describe* what you have found.

Another important reason for doing research papers is that they enable you to go deeper into a field of study than is possible in any other way. When you think of the short time a course runs—fifteen or thirty weeks, a few hours a week—you realize that a teacher can do little more than scratch the surface of his subject. Add to the hours of lecture and discussion the two or three books assigned for reading during a semester, and you can see that the total exposure to a subject is far from adequate. This is especially true if the course is one you find interesting.

A research paper demonstrates your ability to do scholarly work, teaches you how to study and think and write, shows you where your abilities lie, and gives you a chance to enjoy yourself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER
1

USING THE LIBRARY

One of the first things you learn in school is that using the library is one of the most infuriating and enjoyable aspects of school life. You soon learn that you are going to spend much more time in the library than you had anticipated. You will soon find that if you are to keep up with your required reading, forge ahead with innumerable reference papers, and study adequately for examinations, the library will be your home away from home.

Libraries are usually divided into three general types: *technical,* a library devoted to some specialized subject for use in a particular field, such as the medical library in a large hospital; *circulating,* the library whose primary function is to circulate books to a diverse group of readers; and *reference.* It is with the general reference library, or the reference department of a library, that most students will deal throughout their school careers. In many large cities, the branch libraries are both circulating and reference libraries.

A reference library is a work place for scholars and students where they can read, study, and learn. The aim of a reference library is to be as complete in any field as is possible, and the result is an enormous number of books of which frequently only a single copy is in the library. It is simple to imagine what chaos results when many students require that same single copy at the same time for similar research topics. It is imperative, therefore, for you to know what you want in the library and how to find it. The following discussion will help you fulfill these two goals.

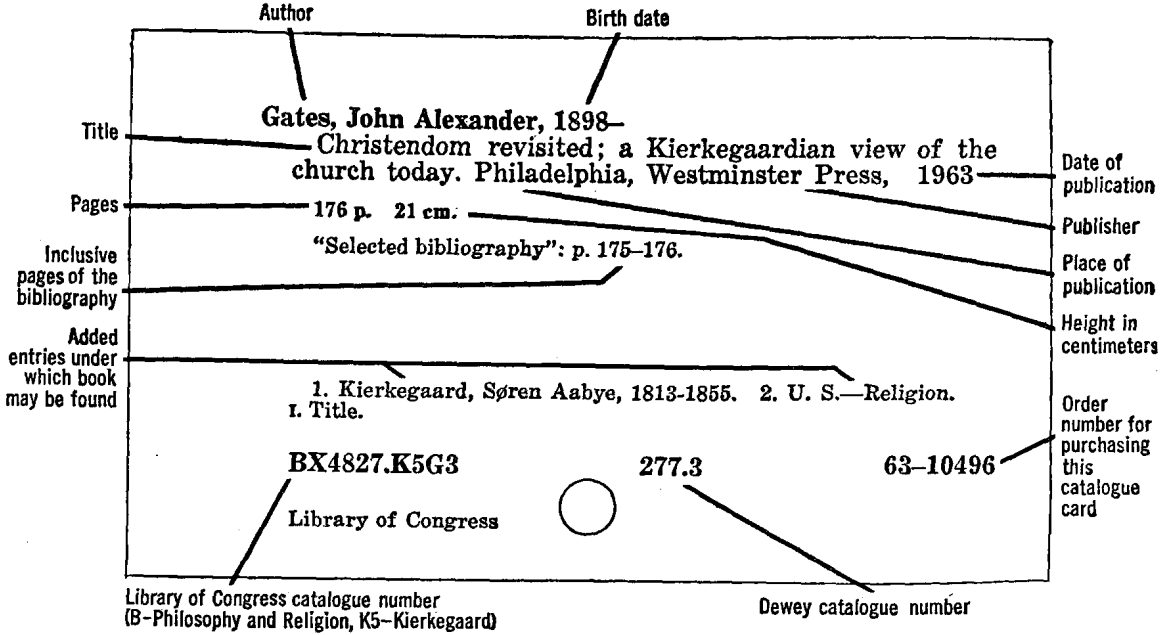
THE REFERENCE COLLECTION

Probably the first section of the library you will have to use is the general reference collection. It houses all the books that are not in such special collections as art, science, medicine, or rare books and manuscripts. In a large library the reference collection is usually serviced by a *Main Reference Room,* which normally contains the card catalogue—an alphabetical author, title, and subject index to all the books in the library's collection, including those in the special collections. The main reference room also contains a selection of basic reference books that are consulted so frequently that they are kept on shelves in the room itself. The call desk, over which books are issued when they are brought from the stacks in answer to a reader's request, is also located here. The great majority of the books in a large reference library are kept in the stacks, apart from the main reference room. The librarian (or librarians) in charge of the reference collection is stationed at the call desk.

The *Card Catalogue* is the key to the library's collection. It is an alphabetical file of 3-x-5 cards that lists all the books the library contains arranged by author, subject, and title. You will have to use the card catalogue throughout your school life, so you should familiarize yourself with the information the card contains. Intelligent use of the card catalogue will save you time and energy. The following is a discussion of how a card gets in the catalogue, and what the card contains.

Cataloguing a Book. When a library receives a book, it is sent to a cataloguer, who examines it, makes out a card that contains the author's name, his birth date, and if deceased, his death date, the title of the book, the publisher, place, and date of publication, the number of pages, and the size of the book in centimeters. The card also contains such information as whether the book contains maps, plates, illustrations, or a bibliography.

It is also the cataloguer's responsibility to determine the subject covered by the book and to give it a classmark that will enable the library to place it on a shelf with other books on the same subject. At the bottom of the



TYPICAL LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUE CARD

card, the cataloguer indicates the subject entries that he believes will help a reader to locate the book if he does not know the author or title. Separate catalogue cards are made out for the author, the title, and the subject headings, and these cards are then inserted alphabetically in the catalogue. Only then is the book made available to readers.

A typical catalogue card, with all the main points indicated is shown on p. 3.

Using the Card Catalogue

The *Main Entry* card is one filed alphabetically by author, or by title if there is no author. From the librarian's viewpoint, whether a book is written by an individual author or by a group acting as author, the issuing body is considered the main entry. Thus Shakespeare, as the author of a play, is a main entry; so is the Government of Japan, as in this main entry card:

JAPAN. Geological survey.
Chemical composition of volcanic rocks in Japan.
[Tokyo?] 1962. xviii, 441 p. (2 fold., col. issued in pocket)
27cm.

In Japanese and English.

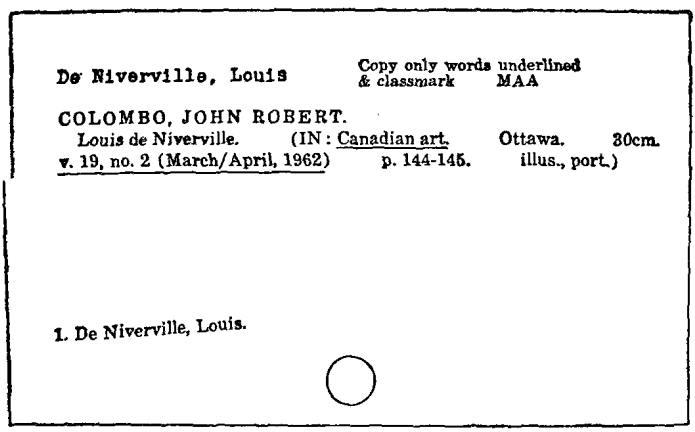
1. Rocks, Igneous—Japan. 2. Rocks—analysis. 3. Japanese literature—Science.

Note that brackets are used to enclose the presumed place of publication, which was not found in the book.

A work having so many authors or collaborators that it can be filed only by title, such as *The New York Times* or the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* would be found under those titles as main entries. Looking under the main entry is the simplest means of finding a book in a card catalogue.

Secondary Entries. In addition to the main entry cards

there are cards filed under a number of secondary entries, or "added" entries. These entries are "added" to the main entry to enable a reader to find the book if he does not know the main entry. The principal "added" entries are for subject, joint author or authors, title, editor, illustrator, translator, or compiler. Here is an added entry card for subject:


De Niverville, Louis

Copy only words underlined & classmark MAA

COLOMBO, JOHN ROBERT.
Louis de Niverville. (IN: Canadian art. Ottawa. 30cm.
v. 19, no. 2 (March/April, 1962) p. 144-145. illus., port.)

1. De Niverville, Louis.

Notice that you would be able to find this biographical sketch by John Robert Colombo, even if you did not know the author, because Louis de Niverville has been added to the card as a subject entry. "Added" entries, such as this subject entry, are indispensable for the use of a library's collection.

Tracing. The "tracing" is a term used for the information placed at the bottom of the card by the cataloguer, which indicates what entries should be added to the main one. Normally the tracing is overlooked by students when they find a card in the catalogue. However, for a student who wants more material on a subject, the tracing contains valuable information. It lists the subject headings under which books on the same or related subjects are filed. Therefore it is a kind of key to the subject headings in the card catalogue.

When using a catalogue card, always look at the tracing. Then make a note of the appropriate subjects that might aid in further research. Go to the subject heading

in the card catalogue and check on the kinds and variety of information available. Subject tracings are a great aid in formulating working bibliographies and in determining the extent of the library's holding in any subject field. Here is a card that has a tracing giving the three "added" entries under which cards for this book will be found:

D-14
1488

PEDERSEN, HOLGER, 1867-
The discovery of language. linguistic science in the nineteenth century; translated by John Webster Spargo. Bloomington, Indiana university press [1962, c1931, 1959] 360 p. illus., ports., maps. 21cm. (Midland books. MB-40)

1. Philology--Hist. 2. Philology, Comparative--Hist. 3. Philologists.

The Card Catalogue Order. In order that catalogue cards may be easily found, they are inserted in a catalogue in a fixed order. Thus, if there is more than one title filed under one author, the cards are arranged alphabetically by title. Individual authors represented by both individual titles and collected works have cards filed in the following order: collected works, individual works, works edited by the author, works about the author, and bibliographies of the author's works (some libraries put the bibliography first). It is worthwhile for a student to remember this cataloguing order, for in the case of authors such as Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, and others very productive and interesting to scholars, there is a great mass of material, and you can spend countless hours searching in the wrong place for works by and about such authors. Get familiar with the card catalogue—it is the most useful and most used reference tool in the library.

Subject Headings. Cards are also filed under selected subject headings. Thus, the catalogue is in a sense a

subject bibliography covering an extraordinary number of fields. As you seek information about a subject, you will usually find that the catalogue can provide more material than you normally want. Since subject headings are often arbitrary and are certainly not all-inclusive, do not become discouraged if there is no entry for the subject you are looking for—ask the librarian for the proper subject entry. Do not waste precious time looking for something you cannot find after a reasonable search in the catalogue. When in doubt, *ask the librarian*—that's what he or she is there for.

Printed Card Catalogues. In addition to the catalogue that indicates the extent of the library's holdings, some libraries have printed catalogues in book form of the holdings of other libraries. These printed catalogues are invaluable as an extension of the library's collection, and should be used to determine what other works in the field, or by a specific author, exist. Often knowledge of the book's existence is the first step in locating it. The most notable and useful of these catalogues is the U. S. Library of Congress *National Union Catalog . . .*, which lists all the books in the vast collection of the Library of Congress and other cooperating libraries. The Library of Congress is one of the largest in the world, and the catalogue of printed cards (over one and a half million entries in 1940) is invaluable for determining whether a book exists, for establishing the correct title, or for other pertinent facts. If the book can be located in the Library of Congress catalogue, there may be information on the card that will enable the student to re-check the work in the catalogue of his own library and locate it. If his own library does not have the work and it is vitally needed for a paper, the student should inquire about inter-library loan (see pp. 11-12).

Another useful library catalogue in English is the printed catalogue of the British Museum, the national library of England.[1] It is similar in nature and intent to the Library of Congress printed catalogue. In general, this catalogue is of use only to graduate students, but all

[1] For a detailed description of both catalogues, see pp. 67-68.

students should be aware that it exists and should use it when other sources fail to produce a sought-after book.

Procedure. Searching for and locating books in a library of considerable size is no task to be undertaken in a leisurely and haphazard fashion. Consult the catalogue in some logical order—alphabetically by author, title, or subject. Skipping about from one part of the catalogue to another wastes time. If you know the author's name, look first under author, as it is the simplest of all entries to find in the catalogue. If you cannot find a book under the author's name but you know the title, check quickly for that; however, titles that are not distinctive are generally not catalogued, so do not waste too much time on the title. If neither the author nor the title is known, the book will have to be searched for under subject. *Get the correct subject heading*—don't waste time. Once the book has been located in the catalogue, fill out a call slip with the author, title, and classmark. The latter is located in either the upper left-hand or right-hand corner of the card. (See example on p. 6.)

Classmark. Two classmark systems are in general use in American libraries—the Dewey decimal system, used generally by public libraries; and the Library of Congress system, used frequently by college libraries. The Dewey decimal system has set up ten categories under which books are classified:

000 – General Works	500 – Natural Science
100 – Philosophy	600 – Useful Arts
200 – Religion	700 – Fine Arts
300 – Sociology	800 – Literature
400 – Philology	900 – History and Biography

The Library of Congress, by using the letters of the alphabet, divides its material into twenty categories. (I, O, W, X, and Y are not used, and E and F are both used for American History):

A – General Works	G – Geography, Anthropology
B – Philosophy, Religion	H – Social Sciences
C – History	J – Political Science
D – Foreign History	K – Law
E, F – American History	

L – Education
M – Music
N – Fine Arts
P – Language and Literature
Q – Science
R – Medicine
S – Agriculture
T – Technology
U – Military Science
V – Naval Science
Z – Library Science, Bibliography

Open Shelves and Stacks

Although many libraries are not large enough to divide their collections into *open-shelf* books (books located in a room on open shelves where they may be consulted without using a call slip), and *stack* books (books shelved in a space to which access is normally obtained only with permission of the librarian), the great majority of libraries in which research is done do divide their books in this manner. You will soon encounter such libraries. Open-shelf books are those so frequently consulted that they are kept in the Reference Room. In the card catalogue the letter *R* or some other symbol precedes the classmark to designate a book that is on the open shelf. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, biographical indexes, atlases, periodicals, essays, book indexes, and other reference works frequently consulted are usually kept here. A special catalogue to this reference collection, indicating the shelf and press (aisle) where the work may be found, will help you find what you want. Familiarize yourself with this collection, for it will save much time searching the card catalogue for books that are perhaps at your elbow. Almost all basic reference books listed in the chapter on reference books (Chapter 9) will be found here.

Calling for a Book from the Stacks. Since it is both physically impossible and practically inadvisable for a library with a large collection to store all its books on open shelves, the great majority of its books are in the area called the stacks. Most often, in order to obtain a book from the stacks, you must fill out a *call slip*. In addition to your name, the call slip must contain the classmark, author, and title of the book. If there is more than one edition of the work—a specific edition of a play, for example—the publication date also must be given. The completely filled-out slip must then be presented at the

appropriate place in the reference area, usually marked "Present slips here," or the like. Frequently you are given a number, and that number is written on your call slip. When the book arrives from the stacks, your number will be called or will be flashed on a board, and the book will then be delivered to you. Most libraries take from ten to twenty minutes to get a book to you from the stacks, so be prepared to spend that much time waiting for it.

If you have stack privileges, you will be able to go directly to the proper stack shelf and select a book, usually filling out a slip for it on the way out of the stack area. The one great advantage of using the stacks yourself rather than sending for a book is that, since books are shelved by subject, you can locate a number of books that are available on the subject on which you are working. It can be very frustrating to learn that the book or books you have requested by slip are in use, are in the bindery, or simply cannot be found. If your library grants stack privileges, *read the following carefully before entering the stacks.* It will save you many hours of fruitless searching.

Using Your Stack Privileges. Books in the stacks are shelved by classmark, and alphabetically by author within the classmark. *Don't go into the stacks without having first obtained the classmark, author, and title of the work you are looking for.* You won't be able to find anything. Look up the book in the card catalogue and make out a call slip—or a bibliography card—exactly as if you were going to hand it in at the call desk. This may seem a waste of time: you feel sure you can remember such a simple thing as a classmark during the time it takes to walk from the catalogue to the stacks—but *don't trust your memory.* You may meet a friend, decide to go for a coke, invert the numerical order in your mind, or do some other thing that will cause you to forget the correct classmark. Put the classmark, author, and title on a slip.

As soon as you enter the stack area, check the chart indicating the stack arrangement of books and note on your slip the stack and the press number in which the work will be found. Arrange your cards by stack and press number in some logical order that will not require