

Introduction to Social Research

Week 11: Writing Research Reports

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Outline

I. The Audience

II. Good and Bad Habits

III. Two Illustrations, Three Styles

IV. Conclusions

I. The Audience

Audiences and the Meaning

- **“The skill of writing is to get the reader’s circle of meaning to coincide exactly with yours.” (Mills, 1959, p. 220)**
- **Types of audience:**
 1. Academic audience: teach something new and important
 2. Professional audience: applicability of the report – less bounded to conclusive evidence
 3. Commissioned study: diagnoses and recommendations
 4. General reader: insight into the lives of others – information
- **Report and its possible outcome: reports are not neutral**

Writing and Thinking

- **Interplay between writing, thinking, and data:** an ongoing process
- **Organize its thoughts:**
 1. How to start?
 2. A selective process (accuracy)
 3. Most important: be precise, economic & clear
- **The choice of the analytical framework:**
 1. Agency and theory (larger social forces, inexorable social processes)
 2. Society or culture explains everything

Writing as Story Telling

	Level of the concrete	Level of the generalized
Issue-focused analysis	Historical, journalistic account	Mainstream social science
Case-focused analysis	Case study	Typological description

Source: Weiss, 1994, p.152

Expressing One's Thought

- **The use of the pronoun “I”:** impersonality and desubjectivation
- **Attitude towards the subject & people:**
 1. Advocacy: identification with respondents (the problem of crime)
 2. Critic
 3. Reporter: accurate rendition

II. Good and Bad Habits

Writing Styles

- What is a word, a sentence, a paragraph?
Specific way of expressing one's thoughts
- **The use of vocabulary:** Jargon and technical terms are necessary?
 1. Legitimacy
 2. Academic writer and his own status
 3. Authoritative persona (Will Rogers persona: similarity to ordinary people)

Author's Authority

- **Legitimation through style:** a fancy language & the choice of words and the author's status
 1. "He lives at" / "he resides at"
 2. "Couples chose their extra money" / couples chose their surplus income"
 3. "Domestic help" / "third part labor"
- **Legitimation through argumentation:**
 1. The school of thought to which one belongs
 2. Legitimation of the author, legitimation of the ideas

Rhetoric: Is There One Right Way?

- **Rhetoric:** persuasion & manipulation of stylistic devices
- **Realist style & confessional style:** degree of sharing the writer's experience of gathering information
- **Two common mistakes:**
 1. Passive constructions
 2. Abstract nouns (deviants were labeled)
- **Writing and re-writing:** ideas and clarity

Excerpts: Illustration and Evidence

- **Causal statements:** “there is a tendency for them to covary” “they seem to be associated”
- **Income and education:** “A tends to be related to B” or “A might possibly tend to be related to B under some conditions”
- **Selection:** issue of representativeness and reality respondent
- **Editing excerpts:**
 1. preservationist: render the excerpt as it was said
 2. standardized: editing of the original excerpt

III. Two Illustrations, Three Styles

Two Styles to Express the Same Ideas

- **Example of translation by C. Wright Mills from one style to another of Talcott Parson's *The Social System***
- *"There is in turn a two-fold structure of this 'binding in'. In the first place, by virtue of internalization of the standard, conformity with it tends to be of personal, expressive and/or instrumental significance to ego. In the second place, the structuring of the reactions of alter to ego's action as sanctions is a function of his conformity with the standard."* (Parsons, 1951, pp. 38-39).
- *Men act with and against one another. Each takes into account what others expect. When such mutual expectations are sufficiently definite and durable, we call them standards. Each man also expects that others are going to react to what he does. We call these expected reactions sanctions."* (Mills, 1959, p. 29)

Two Styles to Express the Same Ideas

- **A theory of social action:**
 1. Mutual understanding based on mutual interpretation
 2. Outgrowth of “standards” of behaviors following social action
- **How does audience react to both styles?**

Social distinction, Pierre BOURDIEU, 1984

“A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone **who possesses the cultural competences, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.** The conscious or unconscious implementation of **explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation** which constitutes pictorial or musical culture is the hidden condition for recognizing the styles characteristic of a period, a school or an author, and, more generally, for the familiarity with the internal logic of works that aesthetic enjoyment presupposes.” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 2)

Social distinction, Pierre BOURDIEU, 1984

- **Culture can be seen as a “tool”** to distinguish groups and people
- **Culture’s acquisition:** tastes as markers of class through dispositions. **“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier”** (Bourdieu, 1984, p.3)
- **Legitimate culture:** struggle for the definition of cultural nobility
“The antithesis between quantity and quality, substance and form, corresponds to the opposition – linked to different distances from necessity – between the taste of necessity, which favours the most filling and most economic foods, and the taste of liberty – or luxury – which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating, etc.) and tends to use stylized forms to deny function.” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.3)
- **Distinction:** understanding that the familiarity of high culture is a sign of distinction

A Paper and Its Structure

- **Title:** Do State and Politics Matter? The Case of Nissan's Direct Investment in Great Britain and Its Implications for British Leyland
- **Introduction:**
 1. **Shaping the context:** “Foreign direct investment (FDI) and strategies of internationalization by multinational companies are **traditional subjects of research in business history**. But the political and diplomatic negotiations (...) have attracted less attention by the discipline.”
 2. **The aim of the paper:** “The aim of this article is to explore this particular aspect of the business strategies of internationalization by looking at **a very controversial direct investment**.”
 3. **The question formulation:** “Why did the British government want to bring in and support Nissan at the very time it was pumping huge amounts of public money into BL?”

A Paper and Its Structure

3. Some previous statements (lit review): “**Conventional wisdom** tends to explain this contradictory strategy in **two complementary ways**. On the one hand, **the doctrinal industrial policy explanation** claims that the Thatcher government just wanted to replace inefficient (and unionized) British nationalized manufacturers with efficient (and union-free) foreign manufacturers in the name of free market and private enterprise ideology. On the other hand, **the elite insularity explanation** stresses the unusual gulf that lay between political elites and industrial interests in Britain in comparison with other European industrial countries (...)”.

4. The Author’s Stance in the Debate: “The aim of **this article** is to provide, if not an alternative, at least a complementary and a more comprehensive, explanation for this contradiction. In order to do so, **I will approach the question from a different angle: a socio-economic perspective.**”

A Paper and Its Structure

- **The development:**
 - 1. The story telling of the negotiations** between the English government and Nissan: **“The European Fortress and the British Trojan Horse”**
 - 2. European context & British controversy:** “This general EU agreement, which was also endorsed by the European Commission, resulted in 1981 in a first informal European quota, and, ten years later, in an official VRA that lasted until 1999”

A Paper and Its Structure

3. The core of the argument: “**The Rationale behind the Irrational:** National Interest and British Suppliers”

4. Sequence of argumentation: “Yet, this ongoing contradiction was neither the only nor the main reason for following this political strategy.”

5. The raising of the main argument: “**The second reason, and possibly the most important one,** is the influence exerted by the component industry on Whitehall. (...) British suppliers controlled around 75 percent of the aftersale market for non-captive parts for British-made cars.”

6. Reflecting the actor strategy: “In order to deal with this situation, the **CILG (Component Industry Liaison Group)** came up with a lobby strategy articulated on three main points”

7. Epilogue: “The priority was therefore incontestably given to the interests of the British component industry and their demand for high local content, rather than to BL and its chances of recovery.”

A Paper and Its Structure

- **Conclusion:**
 - 1. The story has not ended:** “The question of local content in particular remained prominent throughout the talks.”
 - 2. Some reflections about the implications for Japanese carmakers & BL:** “Yet, the fact that from the early 1980s the survival of this publically owned company was subordinated to the interests of its powerful suppliers appears retrospectively as an even more decisive factor in this story.”
 - 3. One remaining question:** the theoretical implications as introduced in the paper.

IV. Conclusions

Conclusions

- The writing of the report depends first on the audience
- There is not one right way of writing, though the style highly depends on the author's legitimacy
- Theoretical reports do not need to be filled with jargon, & story telling does need strong argumentation

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