

# **THE TECHNIQUE OF PREPARING SOCIAL SCIENCE PAPERS**

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The technique of preparing social science papers by Emory S. Bogardus

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**EMORY S. BOGARDUS**

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SCIENCE PAPERS**

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Preparing Social Science Papers**

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## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this booklet was prepared for use in the classes in sociology at the University of Southern California. It was designed to assist students in acquiring standard methods of writing term papers in the social science field. An unexpected interest was manifested in the booklet by many teachers of social science in various parts of the United States. There was a specific response to the effect that students in social science are greatly in need of training in the actual technique and practice of preparing written studies.

This revision contains nearly all the material that appeared in the first edition, besides new illustrations of the main points of that treatise. Several types of papers that are often assigned in the social science field, in addition to the term paper, namely, the outline, the digest the summary, the book review, the book critique, the editorial, and the thesis, are discussed in this edition.

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University of Southern California.



**THE TECHNIQUE OF  
PREPARING SOCIAL SCIENCE PAPERS**

One of the chief advantages of a college education is a training in methods. A college course is incomplete that gives the students simply an acquaintance with facts. The other half of a college education is found in the training which a student gains in giving out his ideas and knowledge clearly and effectively to others. A scientific training, or more particularly, a social science training is not more than fifty per cent efficient which is an intaking process only.

There are two ways of giving out ideas: (1) by public speaking, and (2) by writing. We are here concerned with the second avenue of expression. The college student is entitled to become proficient in writing not only English themes, but also scientific papers. To help him in this regard if he is working in the social science field, "The Technique of Preparing Social Science Papers," has been written.

I. **The Outline, or Analysis.** The outline is illustrative of the simplest form of social science papers. The outline is an analysis written out in definite form. An instructor sometimes asks his students to make an outline of a chapter in a specific book. This chapter may deal with a specific subject upon which the instructor is lecturing, or which the class is discussing. The aim of the instructor, usually, is to invite the attention of his students to a splendid presentation of an important theme, and to give them training in preparing an elemental but valuable type of social science paper.

The best method of approach is to read the assigned

chapter first with the purpose of finding out the fundamental ideas which the author has presented. Then, the student seeks the facts and arguments which the author has given in support of each of the main propositions, and arranges them in a logical order. A false tendency is to resort to the use of topical words, because such a procedure is usually a cheap and wasteful way of meeting the requirements of a worthy assignment. If the student will hold himself ordinarily to the use of entire sentences rather than to topical words in preparing an outline, he will be following the better method.

The preparation of a satisfactory outline may become an artistic or a routine task, dependent entirely upon the student's attitude. It is sometimes possible to make an analysis of a chapter in such a way that the outline will be superior in arrangement to the author's treatment. A meritorious outline is not a scaffolding or a skeleton. It is the inner content of a mental production made visible to the reader by the logical arrangement of incisive sentence-thoughts. It is not a hasty copying of the publisher's key sentences on the side of the page or even of the author's sub-headings. It is the student's interpretation and visualization of an author's thought. It is not merely a reproduction; it is a revelation.

The preparation of an outline gives the student a training which he can later use to its full extent in writing original papers or articles. He who can make a correct analysis of the written thought of another person is on the road to analyzing his own thinking on different questions and to the successful projection of his own thought into new mental fields.

**II. The Digest, or Abstract.** A digest, or its equivalent, an abstract, is a condensed statement of another

person's ideas or treatment of a subject in the words so far as possible of that person. A digest is usually made of articles published in journals. The purpose is to give in a brief compass the gist of the specific article.

The difficulties in making a digest are two-fold. (a) An article that is well written already appears in a condensed form. The author presumably has resorted to no circumlocutions; he has not been wordy; he has used as few well-chosen words as possible in correctly expressing his thought. Therefore, how can the maker of a digest, for example, put the author's ideas into one-tenth, or less, of the original number of carefully selected words without doing violence to those ideas. In fact, it is almost impossible to make a satisfactory digest of a carefully written article. However, very few articles are well written, hence, the need of making digests. Of course, even an article in which the author uses terse, condensed sentences usually contains main propositions with explanations, in which case the maker of the digest can give the fundamental statements.

(b) Another difficulty in preparing a digest is involved in the customary rule of writing it in the language, as far as possible, of the author of the article. The constant temptation is to resort to one's own words in writing a digest, or worse still, to alternate between the language of the author and one's own words. A special merit in preparing a digest is the discipline which it affords in being objective, that is, in keeping the personal reflections of one's self out of the digest. As in the case of the outline, the digest is strictly objective. To cut down an author's treatment of a subject so as to present the chief propositions clearly and also not to misrepresent or inadequately present the author's