

source by source but, instead, write an essay and use the literature to support your claim or argument. There will be a lot of citations throughout your literature review. Don't be worried if it seems as though every other sentence has a citation. This section is called a literature review for a reason. Ultimately, the argument you present in your review of the literature demonstrates to your readers, reviewers, and yourself the need for your research.

After you have gone through your various subtopics and referenced the pertinent literature, you will inform your audience of how it led you to your research topic. This is where you will discuss your hypothesis. Again, the purpose of the literature review is to place your research into a particular research area. You should use this section to talk about the ways the holes in the research that has been conducted directed you to take on your project the way you did. What was missing from previous work? What subtopics did you synthesize to develop your hypothesis? This discussion of your hypothesis also serves as a conclusion to your literature review. You want to be certain that you provide enough information in your literature review so that the reader can clearly see how you arrived at your hypothesis.

## ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY

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Encyclopedias are a collection of articles or entries that explain and summarize a particular topic. These entries are not necessarily considered textual analyses, as they are not written to analyze a topic. However, as encyclopedia entries are a presentation of summarized information on a particular topic—like book reviews and annotated bibliographies—we've decided to include a discussion of them here.

There are a variety of different types of encyclopedias, ranging from well-known online publications such as Wikipedia to old classics such as *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of encyclopedias published on cultural and social science topics. Many of these encyclopedias are compiled and edited by sociologists and other social scientists. This section will focus on writing encyclopedia entries for inclusion in social science encyclopedias. As described in Chapter 3, specialized encyclopedia entries can be a great starting point when conducting research on a topic, in particular, one you know little about. Encyclopedia entries are also great writing pieces for beginners and provide a publishing option for sociology graduate students.

The prospect of publishing an entry in an encyclopedia may seem daunting for many, but writing it is actually quite straightforward, significantly more so than much of the writing you may have become accustomed to while in college or graduate school. However, there are still a few steps and things to remember in writing an encyclopedia entry.

### ***Call for Contributors***

As social science encyclopedias can have anywhere from several dozen to a few hundred encyclopedia entry topics, editors usually send out a call for contributors to social science graduate program and department listservs (electronic mailing lists), as well as to listservs consisting of members of sociology associations and groups. The call for contributors will be sent via e-mail or posting and will consist of the name of the editor as well as the publisher (if the encyclopedia is already under contract), the intended name and focus of the encyclopedia, and its target audience. The contact name of the editor is also provided for those interested in contributing to the encyclopedia. If you decide you want to write an entry, you should send the editor your CV as well as a brief paragraph explaining your research and writing interests and what you feel you can contribute to the volume.

### ***Topics***

Some calls for contributors contain a list of available encyclopedia topics that need to be written. Sometimes potential or interested contributors must contact the editor for this list. When you get the list of available entry topics, look through it and make note of the ones you may be interested in writing. Think about how many entries you might want to write and which topics and areas you feel you know a lot about. Some encyclopedia entries may vary considerably in terms of word count. As you review the topics, make sure to note the word counts required for the different entries. Take note if there are any specifications in terms of the entry's due date as well as what to include in it. Depending on the word count of each entry, your time constraints, and your level of expertise on the topic, you may want to select more than one entry to write. This means more publications (and more lines on your CV), and, in the event that the topics you are interested in are already taken, you will have "backup" entries.

### ***Format***

As each entry is part of a larger edited volume, it is important that they all follow a particular format. Editors will send out instructions with the specified word count of your entry. It is vital that you stay within the word count and include all required information. Some entries must include particular subheadings, such as the history of your topic. Others may require you to list a few books or articles for further reading on the topic.

To ensure that you are following the correct format, obtaining a sample entry from the editor could be very helpful. This will give you an idea of the style and format of your entry.

## **Research**

The research you conduct on the topic for your entry should be exhaustive, but it will not be the same level of research you would conduct if you were writing a book or dissertation. As encyclopedia entries are generally short and only introductions to a topic, your research will primarily consist of library research to create an overview of the important facts and issues concerning this topic. For example, if you were to write an entry on political conservatism in the United States, you would start with an overall introduction to the topic itself, followed by a brief history of its rise in the United States, and then discuss any important figures in this movement.

If you would like to include statistics on your topic, obtain them from reputable sources such as government websites or other research or university projects and studies.

## **Writing the Entry**

Entries should be clear, to the point, and jargon free. Remember, most of the people seeking out encyclopedia entries on these topics will have little experience with this topic or field. You should avoid direct quotes or citing other work. Since the purpose of the entry is to give the reader a general idea about the topic, it is appropriate to be general in your writing. You are not analyzing the topic but simply explaining what the topic is and pointing out any important issues concerning the topic.

In selecting the suggested readings you plan to include in your entry, pick the books or articles that provided you with the most insight on the topic and what you found to be the most helpful. List these readings in the appropriate citation format (ASA, APA, or Chicago).

Once the entry is completed, submit it to the editor. Depending on the size of the volume, it may take a few months for the editor to get back to you with any required revisions or edits to your piece. Once the entry is completed, you will receive a contract from the publisher. You are often compensated with a volume or issue of the encyclopedia, or you may receive some other form of financial compensation.

**SUMMARY**

The ability not only to analyze written text but to explain your analysis through your writing is important for emerging sociologists. An analysis of various texts was discussed in this chapter, along with the following topics:

- How to write a literature review
- How to write a book review
- How to write an annotated bibliography
- How to write an encyclopedia entry

The “Writing in Practice” piece for this chapter is written by Richard E. Ocejó. Dr. Ocejó teaches at John Jay College, City University of New York, and has authored a number of encyclopedia entries as well as book reviews. In this essay, Dr. Ocejó explains how he goes about writing both.

**WRITING IN PRACTICE**

*by Richard E. Ocejó*

Book reviews and encyclopedia entries require unique approaches and writing styles that you may not be familiar with from just coursework. They are also great intellectual exercises that challenge you to think about how to address a specific topic while taking into account audience, voice, and concision. Let’s start with book reviews.

A book review was my first publication, when I was a graduate student in 2005. I have since published three others and plan on writing them regularly as my career continues. Probably what most fuels my desire to write book reviews is my love for reading books: academic, nonfiction, and fiction. Like other book aficionados, I lament that there is never enough time to read everything I want, and my literature queue is quite long. I therefore regularly read book reviews—in academic journals as well as more popular sources, such as newspapers and magazines—to see what’s out there, learn a bit about a subject, and get a flavor for a field or genre. When I get a chance to write a book review, I rely a lot on the reviews I read as models and guides. But writing a book review for an academic source is, of course, much different from writing one for a publication such as a magazine.

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First, if I am not familiar with it already, I read up on the journal I am publishing in. This plays an important role in determining your audience. For instance, I have published book reviews in the journals *Contemporary Sociology*, which is a journal of reviews and essays, and *City & Community*, which is a themed journal of mostly articles. Since *Contemporary Sociology* covers a wide range of topics, it has a more general readership that may not be familiar with certain subfields. But *City & Community* is a specific journal with a narrower audience that is likely already familiar with the book's main themes (in this case, urban sociology). I kept these facts about audience in mind as I read these books and wrote the reviews.

It may sound obvious, but how I read the book is also significant when writing a review. My approach to a book differs depending on why I am reading it: for a review, for my own research, or for pleasure. When I read for a review, I focus on the elements that are pertinent to the book's thesis, rather than to my own work or personal interests. This way, I judge the book on its own terms, not mine. I find this to be a difficult task, since we usually review books that are within our field of study, close to our own work, and have the potential to incite intellectual and even emotional reactions in us. I think the worst reviews are the ones by people who are upset that the author did not write the book on the topic they would have written on. I avoid this mistake by carefully locating the author's thesis statement, figuring out how she situates herself in the literature, and learning how she intends to address her problem (sociology books do not always have these basic elements of the research process conveniently laid out in the introduction, but they'll be in there somewhere). From there, I'm ready to determine whether or not the author's data analysis and conclusions work (i.e., fit the theoretical framework, support the concepts, contribute to the literature, etc.).

For instance, my most recent book review (2009)<sup>16</sup> was of David Grazian's (2008) *On the Make: The Hustle of Urban Nightlife*.<sup>17</sup> From my reading, I discerned that Grazian's thesis statement was that

downtown entertainment spots . . . function as aggressively competitive environments in which participants are forever *on the make*, challenging each other for social status, self-esteem, and sexual prestige in a series of contests, attacks, and deflections that fill the evening hours. (5)

He used the Chicago school's classic notion of anonymity among urbanites and Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical" approach (1959)<sup>18</sup> to argue that both urban nightspot

owners and consumers engage in a series of “hustles,” or forms of impression management, to put on convincing performances. To support this argument, Grazian primarily relies on the accounts of his University of Pennsylvania undergraduate students. Because his thesis statement and framework set the book up to make a statement on urban nightlife revelers, I found his sample to be problematic and used this observation to make the following assessment in the review:

Relying on Ivy League undergraduates limits the ability to generalize from the data in order to understand the meanings of urban nightlife interactions. . . . It would be interesting to have another social group in nightlife spaces depicted here besides undergraduate students. (2009:723)

In this quote, I wanted to call attention to an issue that I saw in the book while also bringing up a direction the book could have gone in to address some of its central concerns. Without calling attention to the issue, I would have just been talking about a book on urban nightlife consumers that I would have preferred to read (or to have written myself).

If book reviews inform readers of what’s new in the field, encyclopedia entries inform readers of what has already been said about a term, concept, or theory in a short essay. I wrote an encyclopedia entry for my second publication, and I’ve since written one more. I often refer to encyclopedias to refresh myself on a subject or to learn its key literature, and I often refer my students to them when they first start researching a topic. Like book reviews and book review sources in general, encyclopedia entries and encyclopedias vary in size and theme. Academic encyclopedias can be general (e.g., *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*) or specific (e.g., *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*), so knowing who your audience is will be just as important.

But an important point to keep in mind when writing an encyclopedia entry is that you should always assume that the reader is coming to the subject for the first time. Encyclopedias are references that people use to get a basic primer on a topic. Pretend readers are unfamiliar with the subject, the relationships it has to other subfields, and the debates surrounding it. At the same time, you cannot cover everything that has been written about your topic. The key to encyclopedia entries is synthesizing what the literature has said about it—including any arguments and controversies—into a coherent and concise statement while remaining neutral.

I approach writing an encyclopedia entry in a way that may sound like cheating: I look it up in other encyclopedias. Chances are, someone has already discussed your

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topic in a concise way in some publication, and chances are it is in an old encyclopedia. When I do this, I try to find it in a general sociology encyclopedia (if there is an entry on it), as well as in an encyclopedia with a more specific theme, to compare the two. The reason I do this is to see how others have gone about approaching this difficult task, what has been said about this subject since the entry was published, and how I can discuss the subject with a different focus, perhaps a focus that helped me understand it.

For instance, my most recent encyclopedia entry was on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" for the *Concise Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2011).<sup>19</sup> To start, I found the entry in two older encyclopedias, both of which were fairly general. While neither entry required significant updating (i.e., no major "breakthroughs" had radically changed scholars' thinking on the subject), I felt there was an area of the literature I was familiar with that these entries neglected and that could help clarify the term for someone unfamiliar with it. This was the subcultural literature, in particular the work of Sarah Thornton (1996) on subcultural capital.<sup>20</sup> In her book, she makes a nice, clear explanation of cultural capital's relationship to other forms of capital—"High levels of income and property often correlate with high levels of cultural capital, but the two can also conflict" (10)—and cites academics as examples of people with high cultural capital but low economic capital and professional football players as people with low cultural capital but high economic capital. When I first read this, as a graduate student, it really helped me understand what the concept was all about and how it related to a few of Bourdieu's other concepts.

To sum up, book reviews and encyclopedia entries are unique forms of academic writing that are valuable for scholars at all points in their careers. For students and young scholars, they are a great way to learn different writing styles and how to engage with literature and subjects in a clear manner. In addition, they are great additions to one's CV early in a career while also being intellectually stimulating and challenging. Both types of publications are fairly easy to get into. Journals that feature book reviews (most do) usually have a book review editor (if not, the managing editor handles it). I suggest contacting this person, telling him your interests, and asking if he has any books he would like reviewed. The editors I have encountered are usually very willing to give review assignments. Encyclopedia entries work a bit differently. Usually, the editors announce that they are putting together an encyclopedia on sociology or a more specific topic and are searching for contributors (they may send such announcements around through

listservs, academic departments, and sectional websites and newsletters, so keep your eyes open for them). They usually provide a list of available topics, along with their lengths and due dates. If an available topic interests you, simply e-mail the editor and request it.

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## NOTES

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