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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

Dear Editor:

Herewith submitted for consideration for the inclusion in MARS is "A Guide to the Perplexed". I don't claim profound originality to the contents, but many students have said that they found it useful.

1. Write as if explaining to your graduate student peers—persons at about your level of preparation (or somewhat lower) but without your knowledge of the particular subject matter. Don't address yourself to your professor, as you will usually assume he is more sophisticated than he is, and you will not enunciate the elementary truths that require to be said.
2. Proceed as if writing a "working paper" or "research report." Try to write clearly, simply, precisely, describing exactly what you are finding out. Or, to put it negatively, do not try to write a brilliant essay and, above all, do not imitate the abominably turgid style characteristic of many social scientists.
3. It is more important to be accurate, precise, and honest, than to be original, creative, or insightful. Tell it like it is. Telling it like it is may prove to be the thing most useful.
4. Experience and thought are multidimensional; writing is linear. Write about one thing at a time, then go on to the next thing. Translating the multidimensional into the linear sequential is one of the most difficult elements to acquire of good writing style.
5. It is easier to refine a written draft than it is to translate inchoate thoughts directly into a finished report. Hence, write—however poorly and disorganizedly—but then rewrite, edit, and rewrite again. . . and rewrite again. . . and again. But you cannot rewrite unless first you write.

6. As you read your draft, ask yourself, "Is this really what I wanted to say? Am I conveying the most important idea?" If you cannot answer an emphatic "Yes," then your structure is poor and you are involving your reader with irrelevancies. Tell him what you want him to know.
7. After you have written a draft, read it for ease and clarity of expression. Especially read it to see if you are talking over and over about the same thing, in which case either you are repeating yourself (which bores the reader) or contradicting yourself (which confuses him). Bring together into one section the ideas that belong together.
8. A paragraph is most effective if it enunciates what it is about and then proceeds to discuss that topic. Bring together into one paragraph the sentences (or phrases) about that topic. One sign that you are writing properly is your ability to use pronouns rather than endlessly repeating a series of nouns; if the sentences about a common topic are brought together and ordered properly, you will be able to substitute pronouns for many of the noun repetitions and you will find your style picking up speed.
9. If you are writing a large paper or thesis or dissertation, keep a working outline before you, but don't let it enslave you. The most important outline is not the original, written beforehand, but that which could be constructed of your final draft; it is this latter which should be neat and orderly. If your paper reads poorly, take the time to outline it and learn where it needs reordering.
10. To those who have helped you acquire the data for your project, you owe a speedy report of your findings. It is immoral to impose upon people for data (opinions, schedules, etc.), and then not utilize it to tell their story. It is also immoral to accept monies for research and then not to produce a report. Regard yourself as a craftsman, whose job it is to collect data, analyze them, and write reports.
11. To your readers, you owe a report as clear, compact, and honest as you can make it. There is so much bad writing that you should not add to it; the cure is not abstinence but good writing.
12. Write what you know. Do not write about what you do not know, except to indicate—where appropriate—that you don't know it. One of the worst blocks to writing is trying to write about what you don't know or trying to conceal that you don't know it. No paper, no monograph, no encyclopedia answers all questions.
13. Don't try to put everything you know into one paper. Save something for the next paper.
14. The natural language (written or spoken) is the basic medium of communication of the social sciences. The natural scientists have their mathematical formulae, so their prose can be slipshod. Unless you have parallel formulae, you must communicate through the natural language: use it with care and precision.
15. Sociological cliches can be terribly misleading; use them only with forethought. Don't use "expectations" if you should be saying, "he expects"; likewise remember that it is people who value, people who reward, people who act. This is not to deny the utility of abstractions, but to suggest that they be restricted to their appropriate context.

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